

KARL ROVE

April 13, 2008

Mr. Dan Abrams
MSNBC
30 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, N.Y. 10112

Dear Mr. Abrams:

On April 7th, you again devoted a substantial part of your show to the claim of former Alabama Governor Don Siegelman that I was behind his prosecution. Your continued coverage of this issue raises questions about your journalistic standards and those of MSNBC and NBC.

During your broadcast, Mr. Siegelman referred to Ms. Dana Jill Simpson as a “respected Republican political operative,” a reference it seems you accept because of the frequent attention you give her in your broadcasts.

Have you, during your coverage of Ms. Simpson, ever actually looked into her claims? For example, have you ever asked her what campaigns she worked as “an operative” with me?

And if so, did you check out what she said by calling the candidates who were my clients or their campaign managers to ask if she was involved in those campaigns? Did you review campaign expenditure reports to see if her name appeared as a paid operative? Or did you check with the DeKalb County Republican chairman or activists (such as the Moore campaign chairman, an effort she told the Judiciary Committee she was active in) to see if she really was a “respected Republican political operative?”

Did you inquire when it was that I first asked her to undertake unnamed campaign tasks, as she alleged happened in the years before 2001? And did you try to ascertain whether she was telling the truth about those requests?

Did you inquire when and where her supposed 2001 meeting with me took place at which she was asked to follow Siegelman and photograph him? If so, did you make any effort to see if she could document her claim?

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And if you were personally convinced by her answers that there was a good likelihood of such a meeting, did you try to figure out if there was any way that I was likely to have been available for such a meeting? Or is it merely enough for her to assert for you to repeat?

Didn't it strike you as foolish for me to ask someone with no particular experience to undertake a task requiring adroit surveillance and shadowing skills, a mission with such potential to blow up in everyone's faces?

Then consider Ms. Simpson's September 14, 2007 interview with the House Judiciary Committee that followed an earlier extensive interview by a Democratic committee lawyer. Did it not bother you Ms. Simpson failed to mention the claim she made to CBS for their February 24, 2008 story that you then repeated on February 25th? After all, wouldn't that be something Congressman John Conyer's people would find interesting?

Don't you find it odd that in 143 pages of testimony in September she said nothing about having worked with me in campaigns, nothing about being asked by me to undertake various tasks, nothing about my supposedly having asked her to follow Governor Siegelman and photograph him in a compromising position, nothing about having had meetings with me? In fact, she never says she knows me or has met me. Don't you find that odd? Or were these considerations that got lost as you attempted to catch-up with CBS on the story? Did the pressure of competition lead you to discard tough questions and sober reflection?

In fact, did you even read the transcript of Dana Jill Simpson's testimony? Did you try to ascertain if there was any evidence that would lead a reasonable person to believe the claims she made to the Judiciary Committee staff about Don Siegelman, Terry Butts, Judge Fuller and others were likely to be accurate? Did it matter to you that following the release of her interview, as one observer has written, that "every single person whose name Simpson invokes as she spins her stories says that she is either lying or deluded?" Are you aware that the list of people denying her claims includes Don Siegelman, whom she claims repeatedly urged her to provide her original affidavit?

Did you try to discover whether there was any evidence she did in fact shadow Don Siegelman? Did you ask for travel records, itineraries, or expense reports that showed Ms. Simpson's travel from Northeastern Alabama matched up with the Governor's schedule?

Did you ever consider that the Governor's security detail might have taken note of an ample-sized, redheaded woman who kept showing up at his events with a camera? Did you talk with the Alabama Department of Public Safety?

In fact, did you ever ask her how she attempted to find him in a compromising position? Was it her practice to follow him from his events and shadow him late at night when he was on the road? Peek through hotel windows? Hang out down the hallway from his hotel room? Were you satisfied she actually did what she was supposedly asked to do?

In your February 25th broadcast, she said she had phone records of calls to "Virginia and Washington" that corroborate her charges. Have you made an effort to review those records and ascertain what they point to? Since I lived and worked in Washington, D.C. in 2001, I can't imagine what her cryptic reference to Virginia could mean. The Bush/Cheney transition office (where I was rarely, working instead in Austin) was in Virginia until late 2000, before the transition was moved to a government building near the White House before year's end. But what number and who was she calling in Virginia (presumably) later in 2001 when she was being asked to shadow Siegelman? And what were those Washington numbers? Did you ask her? Or was it good enough for you that she said had them so you were content to let the matter drop?

In fact, what did you do to ascertain if anything she told you and that you repeated or relied upon was accurate? Or is it good enough for you to simply repeat her charges without examining them personally to satisfy yourself that she is - and has done - what she says she did?

Does it bother you that your coverage asserts, as Governor Siegelman summarized it in his April 7th appearance on your program, that he is the victim of a vast conspiracy involving two U.S. Attorneys, the Alabama Attorney General, unnamed career officials in the Public Integrity Unit at the U.S. Justice Department, unnamed higher-ups in the Justice Department and, oh yes, Karl Rove and that there is not a single piece of paper, not a single email, not a single conversation, not a single disgruntled career employee who's come forward, not one credible witness to the workings of the conspiracy?

And do you really believe such a scheme could be operated so efficiently and effectively that it would manipulate the career prosecutor who brought the case so that he did not understand he was doing the bidding of this vast conspiracy? And that the FBI agents who conducted the investigation could similarly be so easily and subtly subverted?

In fact, it seems you believe that the absence of any concrete evidence is itself evidence of the conspiracy. If you don't have any proof Karl Rove did it, that absence is proof enough. I am that good.

And is it your habit not to challenge a guest, as long as he is following your chosen theme for the night? For example, let's take your December 13, 2007 broadcast.

Scott Horton said “We don’t have all the links in place but we do know that certainly beginning from 2002, Karl Rove out of the White House was deeply involved in the election of Rob [sic] Riley, structuring it, raising money for it, putting together a strategy for it. A part of that strategy involved the criminal justice system nailing charges, landing charging [sic] on Siegelman on some sort. As we know that it involved at some point, consultation with the Justice Department and also two U.S. Attorneys in Alabama...”

Just how does Mr. Horton know all this “certainly”? Did you ask him what proof he had that I was deeply involved in Congressman Riley’s gubernatorial bid? What evidence does he have that I structured it, raised money for it, put together a strategy for it? What evidence does he have that “my” strategy included indicting Siegelman? With whom and when did I consult with the Justice Department about this “strategy?” When did I consult with the two U.S. Attorneys in Alabama about it? He said, “we do know that certainly” this all happened. If you consider yourself a journalist or even a lawyer, wouldn’t this be the point where you should have asked Mr. Horton, how do you know that, what evidence do you have?

What about you? Did you review campaign spending and news report to identify the Riley campaign consultants or ad team and call them to see if I played a role? Did you do some sleuthing of your own, phoning Republicans in Alabama who might have been in a position to know? Did you call any major donors to Congressman Riley’s gubernatorial bid and ask if they were contacted by me and encouraged to give money? Did you talk with your colleagues in NBC covering the White House and ask them how credible the argument might be that I was serving as the political consultant and campaign manager of a candidate for Governor of Alabama in 2002 while also serving as Senior Advisor to the President of the United States? Or because Mr. Horton’s assertions fit your story line for the night, did you think he didn’t need to prove anything he claimed and you didn’t need to do any work?

As a matter of fact, I had other things to occupy my time in the White House in 2002 rather than “structuring” a campaign for an Alabama gubernatorial candidate, calling people to raise money for his race, and going through the arduous task of “putting together a strategy.” And I certainly didn’t meet with anyone at the Justice Department or either of the two U.S. Attorneys in Alabama about investigating or indicting Siegelman. My involvement in the campaign was to approve a request that the President appear at a Riley campaign fundraising event, one of several score fundraising events the President did that election cycle.

It boils down to this: as a journalist, do you feel you have a responsibility to dig into the claims made by your guests, seek out evidence and come to a professional judgment as to the real facts? Or do you feel if a charge is breathtaking enough, thoroughly checking it out isn’t a necessity?

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I know you might be concerned that asking these questions could restrict your ability to make sensational charges on the air, but don't you think you have a responsibility to provide even a shred of supporting evidence before sullyng the journalistic reputations of MSNBC and NBC?

People used to believe journalists were searching for the truth. But your cable show increasingly seems to be focused on wishful thinking, hoping something is one way and diminishing the search for facts and evidence in favor of repeating your fondest desires. For example, while you do ask Siegelman what evidence he had to back up his charges, you did not press him when he said "We don't have the knife with Karl Rove's fingerprints all over it, but we've got the glove, and the glove fits."

The difficulty with your approach is you reduced yourself to the guy in the bar who repeats what the fellow next to him says - "The glove fits! The glove fits!" - only louder, because it suits your pre-selected story line ("Bush Justice") and you don't want the facts to get in the way of a good fable. You have relinquished the central responsibility of an investigative reporter, namely to press everyone in order to get to the facts. You didn't subject the statements of others to skeptical and independent review. You have chosen instead to simply repeat something someone else says because it agrees with the theme line your producers slapped on your segment, created the nifty graphic for and promoted in the ads before your appearances.

Sincerely,

Karl Rove

CC: Jeff Zucker
Steve Capus
Phil Griffin
Tim Russert
Robert Luskin