

O'Dodge Ball

Let me ask you a direct question: Do you get angry at politicians who avoid answering tough questions? Don't dodge now. Does it bother you that President Bush has only held three press conferences in more than three years? Does it grate on you that Hillary Clinton considers Larry King her media guru? Does it drive you nuts that Donald Rumsfeld and Colin Powell and Dick Cheney have sought sympathetic media venues since the war in Iraq started going south?

If none of the above rankle you, then you're in tune with the latest trend in politics: "Forum Shopping." That means whenever a politician is faced with a controversy or a situation whereby he or she is looking bad, they have certain friendly "forums" where their spin will not be challenged.

Thus, a politician can seem accessible to the public because they appear on Oprah or Leno or The Daily Show. But these forums are purely entertainment and rarely is the politician put on the spot. They can pretty much say what they want to say.

Now, there is nothing wrong with our leaders going on entertainment venues. Talking to Jay Leno helped get Arnold elected governor. But if that's all they do—if the only interview deal is a sweetheart deal, then we have a problem in this country.

Here's an example. I would like to ask Defense Secretary Rumsfeld one simple question: Why didn't your department warn the country that the aftermath of the war could be very bloody? Was it another intelligence failure?

I cannot get Rumsfeld to answer that question.

That's simply wrong. All Americans, including the thousands of families who have sons and daughters serving in Iraq, deserve

to know as Rummy might put it, "what the hell is going on."

Speaking before the Hollywood Radio and Television Society, Ted Koppel said: "I have no problem whatsoever with entertainers and comedians pretending to be journalists; my problem is with journalists pretending to be entertainers."

With all due respect to Mr. Koppel, whom I do respect, most electronic journalists must have an entertainment component these days, or they are out of business. We can't all work for PBS. It is the rise of ideological entertainers doing quasi-news programs on cable and talk radio that has changed the playing field. Politicians now have many more sympathetic ears in the media than ever before.

So a calculation is made: Avoid the tough guys and gals who have been trained to ask incisive questions, and meander on over to the cozy little studio on the prairie. All of those seeking power know they can avoid scrutiny and still be "out there" if they choose their conversations wisely.

Dennis Miller, Rush Limbaugh, Bill Maher and Michael Savage all have a perfect right to make a living analyzing current events. None of these guys are deceptive. You know what you're getting when you sign up to listen.

But powerful people making decisions which affect all our lives are being deceptive and cowardly if they avoid answering questions that are sometimes about life and death matters. And that is happening more and more.

This is a big issue for our Republic. Pay attention to it.