

Don't Blame the Media For Not Pursuing News Stories... Blame Republicans!

☒ The other day, MSNBC's Karen Finney was on her network discussing the IRS's targeting of conservative groups. After spending some time unsurprisingly downplaying the story's significance, she attempted to validate her cavalier take on the controversy by stating the following:

"Everybody knew about this investigation long before the election. So, if they [Republicans] were that freaked out, why didn't Romney make more of a big deal of it during the election?"

As the National Journal's Ron Fournier quickly pointed out, Finney's premise was false. While Darrell Issa and others in Congress were indeed aware of a potential investigation last year, there were no facts made available from the investigation prior to the 2012 election. The investigation itself wasn't even confirmed until a couple of weeks ago. Thus, it's pretty ridiculous for someone to claim that "everybody" knew about it, when very few people actually did.

This column isn't about Finney's inaccuracy, however. After all, that kind of thing isn't all that surprising coming from an MSNBC host. No, this column is about the mindset Finney seems to share with several of her media colleagues.

Over the past nine months or so, we've seen an odd initiative set forth by journalists and commentators to justify the news media's lack of interest in legitimate stories (specifically those surrounding Obama administration scandals) by criticizing how Republican politicians have reacted to those stories.

This kind of thing was particularly apparent during the early months of the Benghazi story. Initially, presidential candidate Mitt Romney was skewered by the media for having the *nerve* to publicly comment on the attack during the presidential campaign. They deemed his remarks to be shameless and politically-motivated. Disturbingly, Romney's *reaction* to the Benghazi attack invoked more passion from the media than the *actual murder* of four American patriots in Benghazi did. Thus, it was somehow deemed acceptable to let the attack become a secondary story from the onset. The media's loyalty toward President Obama kept it there – largely out of the mainstream headlines until just recently.

Interestingly, *after* Obama won re-election, some liberal commentators (including Fox News Channel's Bob Beckel) began rationalizing the media's *continued* lack of interest in the story by pointing to Romney's failure to bring up the topic during the third and final presidential debate. In other words, if Romney didn't *make* Benghazi a story, it didn't deserve to *be* a story.

Now, I understand the assertion that Romney could have drawn more attention to the Benghazi scandal had he continued to bring up the topic during the presidential campaign. That may be true. But this notion that it was somehow Romney's responsibility to play the role of a news producer and guide reporters through the duties of their jobs is absurd. Aside from the fact that it wouldn't have worked (only Democrats are allowed to create mainstream media narratives), what Romney said or didn't say should have had no bearing whatsoever on how Benghazi was covered.

Comedian Jon Stewart recently blamed *the right* for the media's disinterest in Benghazi as well. On his Comedy Central show, Stewart suggested that the mainstream media would have taken the story seriously earlier on, had it not been the Fox News Channel who was pushing it hard for several months. His implication was that Fox often *cries wolf* when it comes to

criticizing the Obama administration, thus it was understandable for other media outlets not to follow their lead. Translation: Because Fox treated the story with heavy scrutiny, the rest of the media was right to keep its distance.

I know... It's confusing. It's almost as if the media took note of how successful President Obama has been at blaming Republicans for his failures, so they're using the same strategy to explain away their own failures.

But honestly... I don't think they're that self-aware. I think they truly believe they're offering up a valid defense.

Silly me. All this time, I was of the crazy impression that news organizations were supposed to function independently of the will of politicians, political interests, and other media outlets. I realize that in reality, our current media culture doesn't quite work that way. Journalists play favorites, and bias (both subtle and blatant) exists everywhere. But I think we've broken new, disturbing ground when people in the media are actually comfortable *justifying* their omissions of valid news stories by pointing to their displeasure with the people who would prefer those stories be covered.

It should never matter who is fueling (or not fueling) a story. If a story is legitimate, it should be covered. If serious questions aren't being answered by those in power, journalists should remain diligent in pursuing those answers. And if people in the media are using politicians' behavior as a determinate for whether or not they should do their jobs, they have no business being in the profession in the first place.