

The Media Can't Bring Themselves to Detach Palin from Giffords

☒ If I had to write a list of the most bone-headed media indictments of my lifetime, toward the top of the list would be Sarah Palin's suggested involvement in the Gabrielle Giffords shooting.

As many will recall, almost immediately after Jared Lee Loughner opened fire at a January event put on by the Democratic congresswoman, the media was desperately looking for a connection to the vocal Tea Party movement. Sarah Palin in particular took heat after left-wing bloggers did a Google search on "Sarah Palin" and "Gabrielle Giffords" and found that Giffords' congressional district had been *targeted* months earlier on one of Palin's websites as part of a *get out the vote* election strategy. Along with several others, Giffords' district was marked on a map of the United States with a cross-hair icon.

Now, it's lame enough when the media speculates on influences to murderers based on who authored the books that sat on their shelves at home, or who sang the songs they enjoyed listening to. But this was far more of a stretch. At the time the Palin connection was being suggested, the media knew practically nothing about the shooter. They had absolutely no idea of his political leanings. They had no idea if he even had access to the internet, let alone had ever visited the website of Palin's political action committee.

And despite the concept of *targeting districts* being used for decades by numerous political strategists (often accompanied with visual representations of cross-hairs, targets, and bulls-eyes), its metaphorical context was selectively

disregarded by many in the mainstream media for the purpose of creating a link to Palin. In their well-documented disdain for the former Alaska governor, many despicably went ahead and suggested that she could have been some sort of spiritual accomplice to the shooter.

In the end of course, Loughner was found to be a complete nut-case who former friends actually described as a "liberal" who regularly welled up in anger at the sight of George W. Bush. His longstanding, dangerous fixation on Congresswoman Giffords predated the Tea Party and Sarah Palin's introduction onto the national scene. Palin was of no influence on him, nor was any coherent political ideology.

One would have thought that the revelation would have put to rest the reckless and politically-motivated media assault on Palin, but as we've found out over the last two weeks, it didn't.

On November 15th, ABC ran a widely praised special on Giffords' inspirational recovery. The special featured the congresswoman's grueling rehabilitation and the strength of her marriage. Gabrielle Giffords' story was a testament to the human spirit, but host, Diane Sawyer chose to cap off the program with these final comments: "After she [Giffords] voted for healthcare, she faced people in her district calling her a traitor, booing her in townhalls. Someone even fired a gun into her office door. And you may remember Sarah Palin targeted her district with an ad that had a gunsight on it."

Unbelievable. What relevance did any of that have to what happened to Giffords? Did ABC decide that Giffords' amazing story of triumph after tragedy couldn't stand on its own? Did they feel the need to concoct a few more villains? A few more hurdles? The answer is no. They just saw another opportunity to take a few political cheap shots (while they had the attention of a large audience) at the supporters of an ideology they abhor.

But it didn't end there. On November 23rd, Piers Morgan brought up Palin again in a CNN interview with Gabrielle Giffords' husband, astronaut Mark Kelly.

"Sarah Palin doesn't come out of this very well, I don't think, because there was a woman who at the time had been putting these cross hair things on her website and stuff, including Gabby", said Morgan. "And in her haste to take responsibility didn't even bother to pick the phone up, to write, do anything."

When Kelly confirmed that he and his wife were indeed not contacted by Palin, Morgan responded, "I find that extraordinary."

Extraordinary? Really? Is it customary for someone falsely accused of a crime to reach out to the victim? If anyone owed the Giffords an apology, wouldn't it be those in the media who used the horrific tragedy to fuel a witch-hunt against those they see as their political opponents?

Sarah Palin didn't contact the Giffords for the same reason that I didn't, Piers Morgan didn't, and hundreds of millions of other Americans didn't: We didn't know her or her family. We kept them in our thoughts and prayers instead. Any notion that it would have been responsible for Palin to contact them is absurd. If she had, fine. But she had no moral responsibility to do so. She had no more to do with the Arizona shootings than the very people who unjustly yanked her into the story in the first place.

I really did have high hopes that the media would have learned something from their knee-jerk reaction to the Gabrielle Giffords shooting. I keep thinking that there has to be some *come to God moment* in their profession when they finally force themselves to look into the mirror after such an episode and self-evaluate their adherence to a journalistic code of ethics. I know... It's a foolish dream on my part.