

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, January 12, 2010 8:16 PM
To: H
Subject: Politico - Reid

FYI:

Jan 12, 2010

» Mobile Home » Top Stories

Inside the Reid eruption

By Mike Allen & Glenn Thrush | 1/12/10 @ 12:19 AM EST

Harry Reid isn't talkative. But the Senate majority leader chatted freely with the two disarmingly charming book authors who came to his office at the Capitol shortly after the 2008 election.

They — and their tape recorder — were soaking in his reminiscences about the wild campaign that had turned a backbencher in his caucus into president of the United States.

Reid wasn't on guard — perhaps because he'd been told by his staff that the meeting would be “off the record,” according to a person with knowledge of the exchange.

Although Reid is a master of the Senate's mysterious inside game, he's often botched the outside game because of what one colleague calls a “penchant for saying things without a filter.”

But Jim Manley, Reid's senior communications adviser, wasn't too worried as he and his boss sat down with John Heilemann of New York Magazine and Mark Halperin of Time magazine — two veteran reporters who were working on what their publisher had billed as “a sweeping, novelistic, and ultimately definitive portrait” of the 2008 race.

Like virtually every Washington political insider, Manley had a long and warm relationship with Halperin, the longtime political director for ABC News who once set conventional wisdom in Washington with “The Note.”

Maybe Reid and Manley — thinking back to their many candid exchanges over the years — simply assumed that Halperin wouldn't burn him or his boss. Or maybe he expected that Halperin would check back with him on any quotes he planned to use?

Whatever they were thinking, they were wrong.

Reid was talking about the reasons why, even though he had publicly professed neutrality in the vicious Democratic primaries of 2008, he had secretly encouraged then-Illinois Sen. Barack Obama to challenge another member of his caucus, then-New York Sen. Hillary Clinton. And amid all the talk of Obama's oratorical gifts, he let slip something else: Obama could win the White House because he was a “light-skinned” African-American “with no Negro dialect, unless he wanted to have one.”

The authors write in “Game Change,” published this weekend, that Reid had made the remark “privately.” They did not say he had said it to them.

As a chagrined Reid telephoned political allies in the Senate and civil rights community to shore up his support this weekend, he made it clear that he felt burned by the authors.

In the book's "Authors' Note," they wrote: "All of our interviews — from those with junior staffers to those with the candidates themselves — were conducted on a 'deep background' basis, which means we agreed not to identify the subjects as sources in any way. We believed this was essential to eliciting the level of candor on which a book of this sort depends."

Heilemann said on MSNBC's "Morning Joe": "We had a very clear agreement with all those sources that our interviews would be on deep background. ... Our ground rules are ... that we won't identify any of our sources as the sources of the material. But we said to them all very clearly that if they put themselves in scenes of the book, if they were uttering dialogue to people in the book in part of a scene, that we would identify them as the utterer of those words."

Halperin added: "There's no one we talked to for the book who we burned in any way, or violated any agreement with."

Manley, a Capitol Hill veteran who also had worked for the late Sen. Ted Kennedy, had been responsible for monitoring the interview and dealing with issues arising from it.

But he didn't tell anyone else in Reid's inner circle about the inflammatory remarks their boss had made; because of his good relationship with the authors, he assumed that the quotes would never be made public — at least not without his knowing about it first.

Manley declined comment on this story-- and wouldn't confirm if the interview took place.

On Friday at 10 p.m. — half a year after the interview — The Atlantic's Marc Ambinder e-mailed Reid's staff with questions about a "light-skinned" candidate without a "Negro dialect."

In the second-guessing that followed, Capitol Hill veterans said there was no way that such inflammatory words from a Senate majority leader would remain off the record, even if that had been the arrangement.

But because Manley had not sounded an internal alarm, he and the rest of the damage-control squad were caught flat-footed by Ambinder's e-mail, several people close to the situation told POLITICO.

"They could have had weeks to prepare for this or to try to convince Halperin not to run it," said a Democrat who participated in some of the damage control.

Now the staff had been blindsided with a revelation that, if mishandled, could be politically fatal. Manley and other aides worked until 2 a.m. Saturday to draft Reid's carefully written apology, which emphasized his record on African-American issues.

"I deeply regret using such a poor choice of words," the 90-word statement began.

Later on Saturday, Manley helped lead a counteroffensive, calling White House press secretary Robert Gibbs, a friend from his days as communications director of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, to set up an apology call between Reid, at home in Searchlight, Nev., and Obama back in Washington.

In a stunning "Statement by the President" e-mailed to reporters at 3:55 p.m. Saturday, Obama said: "Harry Reid called me today and apologized for an unfortunate comment reported today. ... As far as I'm concerned, the book is closed."

Relieved to have the president's solid backing, Reid's aides decided that their toughest challenge would be to prevent any prominent African-American Democrats from attacking Reid too harshly — or calling for his resignation.

Reid's team correctly anticipated that Republicans would demand his head. Keeping that criticism from becoming a bipartisan drumbeat was the key. The team calculated that as long as the attacks looked like partisan shouting, Reid would benefit.

Aides say their boss quickly understood the danger and spent much of Saturday working a call list of about 30 prominent African-Americans across the country. On the calls, he apologized for his words and argued that the book's main takeaway should be that he had quietly supported Obama over Clinton, long before those made his feelings public.

Among those he called were the Rev. Al Sharpton; longtime civil rights leader Julian Bond; Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.), chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus; political consultant and talk-show fixture Donna Brazile; House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn (D-S.C.); Wade Henderson, CEO of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights; and Hilary Shelton, director of the NAACP's Washington office.

The extent of the damage to his already shaky reelection chances in Nevada won't be known until November. But by Monday, Reid believed the Washington storm was passing. From his home in New York, Sen. Chuck Schumer telephoned Reid in Nevada and offered to organize a letter of support from all the Democratic senators.

Reid decided that was unnecessary. He had confidently concluded that for now, at least, he had won the inside game.

-----Original Message-----

From: Reines, Philippe I

Sent: Tuesday, January 12, 2010 3:20 PM

To: Mills, Cheryl D

Cc: Klevorick, Caitlin B

Subject: GC

It's one thing to say something that gets reported. Another to make it TO the authors. It's what happens when people sit with reporters for no obvious reason or goal.

<http://mobile.politico.com/story.cfm?id=31384&cat=topnews>