

# COMMENTARY

Thursday, April 8, 2004

## EDITORIAL

### Rice's panel appearance could harm privileges

Condoleezza Rice will appear before the Congress' Sept. 11 panel today, and the national security adviser likely won't place any blame for the attacks on her own government, as former counterterrorism chief Richard Clarke did two weeks ago.

Good.

We find it slightly ridiculous that the hearings are taking place at all, because no amount of courtroom time is going to reverse the terrible terrorist attacks of 2001.

But the hearings are absolutely necessary to prevent such a horrid act of terrorism from happening again. If Rice, George W. Bush or anybody else in the government has any information that could lead to the future capture of terrorists or prevention of terrorist acts, the panel has done its job, and then some. That's why Rice's questioning should focus on prevention, not blame.

Underneath the surface of the hearings is another issue, one that hasn't been broached because of its highly sensitive nature. It's the issue of privacy. Rice is only testifying after much public response and uproar that followed her announcement that she wouldn't testify.

Really, Rice doesn't have to testify and shouldn't be forced to do so. It's a similar situation to attorney-client privilege. If President Bush is forced to divulge every conversation between himself and his advisers — especially his national security adviser — then national security itself could be lost. At a certain level, Bush needs to have privacy in his actions.

Some people would say that secrecy in the government is a bad thing. After all, when you allow a certain amount of secrecy, you produce events like Watergate that, thanks to the movie "All the President's Men," we know took years to crack because of the shroud of secrecy around Richard Nixon's White House.

But secrecy can be a good thing if it helps protect our country. If Bush and Rice have a conversation about a new security measure being taken in the war on terrorism, or an ambush that can take out a terrorist leader, well, they shouldn't have to hold a press conference about it.

Of course, Sept. 11 is a very, very special circumstance. So in this case, they're all right in asking Rice to spill her beans. She still shouldn't be forced to do it, but even she realizes her testimony will help national security instead of hurting it.

But it begs the question: Where do we draw the line? When is an event catastrophic enough to warrant a complete loss of privacy? In Watergate, Nixon's closest advisors were never forced to testify. The highest person in his government to testify was presidential counsel John W. Dean. Of course, Watergate was far more mundane than Sept. 11. Nobody died.

So where is that line? What if President Bush went on a killing spree and shot 27 people? It's comical, we know, but we don't think it will happen. Would Rice, his closest advisor in the area of munitions, be forced to testify? Isn't she essentially his lawyer?

We applaud Rice for taking the stand, so to speak, in the Sept. 11 hearings. Hopefully, some good will come of it in the long run. Hopefully her testimony and the testimony of the President will help to prevent any further terrorist attacks.

Hopefully it won't be a slippery slope of privacy, leading to an eventual loss of all attorney-client privileges.



Eric Layton Illustration

## The truth is out there

I love conspiracy theories. They are like junk food for journalists. Did you hear the one last year about the Booth and Bear Butte fires in Central Oregon? Apparently they flared up only days before President Bush was scheduled to deliver a speech at Camp Sherman about — what else — preventing wildfires through forest thinning.

Sweeeet!

Are we really supposed to believe that the administration would set major fires and risk hundreds of lives just to create a background apropos of a policy speech?

All conspiracy theories contain this ridiculous element: They involve complex schemes and extreme acts of evil for relatively little gain. We chuckle at the conspiracy theorists who swear they saw black helicopters in the night sky or men in trench coats on deserted back roads just before the fires flared up. It's just all too "X-Files."

But after our laughter subsides we should remember that the term "conspiracy theorist" has been thrown around in the past for political purposes to try to silence important questions and discredit somebody seeking the truth.

Those seeking the truth about former president Bill Clinton were called conspiracy theorists until they caught him. Furthermore, if the media had cared to look into it, they would have discovered that the GOP was inventing most of the conspiracy theories. Remember Hillary Clinton's claim that a "vast right-wing conspiracy" was attacking herself and her husband? She was ridiculed until David Brock exposed the conspiracy in his book "Blinded by the Right."

Many of the accusations surrounding Election 2000 were called conspiracy theories until investigative journalist Greg Palast proved that Jeb Bush and his associates willfully committed election fraud in Florida (the government's apathy and the media's silence about this revelation is now another subject for so-called conspiracy theorists, a fact that is also being ignored).

And do you remember the name Scott

Ritter? He was the former U.N. Iraqi weapons inspector who said before the war that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and that Bush knew it. He was laughed off the airwaves back then, but who's laughing now?



David Jagernauth  
 Critical mass

We journalists need to take conspiracy theories more seriously.

Even when they turn out to be wild fabrications, they can point us to questions that have not been answered to the public's satisfaction.

Today, there are two major conspiracy theories surrounding the Bush White House. The Sept. 11 conspiracy is getting more press these days, but there is a second conspiracy that has still not reached the mainstream. We are about to witness widespread election fraud just as shocking as in 2000. In fact, I will go so far as to predict that Election 2004 will be stolen for President Bush through the use of electronic voting machine tampering unless something is done to stop it.

When I first heard about this conspiracy theory I rolled my eyes and scoffed. Then I studied the issue of electronic voting machines and discovered just how real this conspiracy is. Here is a very brief summary of the facts so far.

There are three businesses — ES&S, Diebold and Sequoia — that are responsible for counting 80 percent of the electronic votes in this country. The first two companies are tied very closely with the right wing and the Republican Party. Walden O'Dell, chief executive of Diebold Inc., went so far as to write in a Republican

fund-raising letter that he is "committed to helping Ohio deliver its electoral votes to the president next year."

Of course, motive doesn't establish a conspiracy. And perhaps that was an innocent comment. The scary thing is we have no way of knowing. There are laws on the books that keep independent observers from inspecting voting machine code. Somebody could alter it without fear of discovery.

Luckily, activist Bev Harris was able to obtain some of the secret code from Diebold and discovered that the company's electronic voting machines have severe security flaws that appear to have been programmed in on purpose. Changing vote tallies was as easy as pressing a delete key.

Even without tampering, electronic voting machines are notoriously inaccurate and prone to mistakes. There are hundreds of examples of "glitches" that changed the result of elections across the country. I can list them here but you can access them by going to <http://www.blackboxvoting.com> and clicking on Appendix A.

The only reason we know about these mistakes is because of paper trails. If something seems suspicious we can consult the ballots and double-check. It seems obvious: We should be able to audit something as important as an election.

Not everyone thinks so. These companies are pushing for paper-free elections where there would be absolutely no way of auditing elections and discovering fraud. It makes this journalist want to ask a question that the mainstream media has yet to ask: Why?

These are serious concerns that demand immediate answers. If you still think this is conspiratorial nonsense, then I implore you to study the issue in more depth. Start by reading Bev Harris' free book at <http://www.blackboxvoting.com>.

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