

**THE BLOG**

Karl Rove Will Be Your Graduation Speaker

By Marty Kaplan

01/21/2008 01:14 pm ET | Updated May 25, 2011

Imagine you're a high school senior, or the parent of one. Imagine that the principal of your school — or the headmaster, if it's a prep school, a renowned century-old elite New England boarding school, say, that sends its graduates to all the best colleges — announces that the commencement speaker this June is going to be “somebody who has dedicated a significant portion of his life to service, and has been an extremely influential person,” someone who “played a vital role in the major policy decisions made during the Bush Presidency.” Somebody named Karl Rove.

Imagine how you'd feel.

I suppose you're supposed to feel grateful that Jack Abramoff isn't available.

Scooter Libby, Alberto Gonzales, Donald Rumsfeld, Harriet Miers and Paul Wolfowitz also fit Choate Headmaster Ed Shanahan's description of Karl Rove's credentials for inspiring the class of '08, but I guess Rove, what with his *Newsweek* column and all, is a bigger get.

The job of a commencement speaker, explained Choate's head to his community, is “someone [who] comes in with a message for graduating students about the world that they are about to engage in.” In Rove's case, you don't have to wait until June to figure out his message about the world; all you have to do is tote up the principles that have long guided his career:

No rule of law. No checks and balances. No transparency. No civil liberties. No fair elections. No oversight. No accountability. No common ground. No prisoners. No retreat. No surrender.

With an inspirational yet practical message like that, Choate's graduates will doubtless have a huge advantage, should they choose to pursue a career in Washington, or perhaps the private sector.

What Headmaster Shanahan didn't count on, though, was the courage of the editorial board of Choate's student newspaper. In an editorial about the Rove selection, they pointed out that at Choate's commencement two years ago, Mr. Shanahan himself

“lamented how ‘responsibility to others and for oneself has been all but forgotten in certain circles.’ Mr. Shanahan alluded to various public figures who have been exposed for scandalous activities, noting that in spite of their lack of ethics and sense of responsibility they were all found to be ‘not guilty.’ At that Commencement Mr. Shanahan posed a very important and pressing question: ‘How can so many moral, ethical and legal laws be broken and still no one is guilty, no one assumes public responsibility for having chosen to do wrong?’”

You’ve been nailed, dude.

A man who blew the cover of a CIA secret agent and gamed the First Amendment in order to punish a patriotic whistleblower who revealed a lie in the president’s State of the Union address, a lie moreover that was being used as a principal basis for launching a preemptive war: a public servant with those values might well be the perfect choice to send off into the real world the graduating class at the Vladimir Putin Institute for Leadership or the Ken Lay School of Management, but at a high school whose motto is *Fidelitas et Integritas*? Not so much.

This ain’t about PC. The Choate *News* editorial had no problem with Rove coming to campus to give a special address; the more freedom of speech, the better. But the task of a graduation speaker, as they pointed out, is to “bring the community together,” not to split it into anguished and angry factions. Karl Rove was the principal architect of George W. Bush’s demonization of gays and of Iraq war dissenters, and he was the framer of its Orwellian branding: “A Uniter, Not a Divider.” It’s sad that Choate will offer its reputation and podium as a laundry for Karl Rove’s legacy. But in an age when cable news networks scramble to sign up as “analysts” boldfaced names like Tom DeLay, G. Gordon Liddy, Ralph Reed, Bill Bennett and Dick Morris, I guess it shouldn’t be surprising when marquee value trumps moral values. Maybe that’s the real “message for graduating students about the world that they are about to engage in” that our sons and daughters are intended to learn from the man I have the high privilege and distinct honor to present to the graduates and families of the Class of ‘08 — ladies and gentlemen, faculty and alumni, please join me in giving a warm welcome to a distinguished American public servant, Mr. Karl Christian Rove.

Follow Marty Kaplan on Twitter: www.twitter.com/martykaplan

Do you have information you want to share with HuffPost? Here’s how.



Marty Kaplan 

USC Annenberg professor and Norman Lear Center director