

**THE BLOG**

Donate Your Personal Tragedy to the White House

By Marty Kaplan

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Is there a family tragedy you can loan to White House Counselor Dan Bartlett and his colleagues?

Bartlett told Bob Schieffer on CBS's *Face the Nation* that the cause of longtime senior Bush strategist Matthew Dowd's break with the President was the "personal turmoil" in Dowd's life. In recent years, Dowd has lost a child and a marriage, and now his son is being deployed to Iraq. No wonder, says his good friend Bartlett, Dowd no longer toes the Bush line; emotions can cloud your thinking.

Set aside the No Slime Left Behind aspect of this, the signature personal attack on White House critics. And set aside Dowd's repugnant record as Rove Jr., which will require more than one confession to the New York Times to absolve.

The core issue, I think, is Bartlett's contention that good Bushies are unburdened by emotions. They are free to pursue their policies — that is, their politics — unclouded by remorse, anguish, second thoughts, private doubt, or relevant personal experience. What splendid Spartans lead us! What Karls! What Dicks!

I wonder whether the families of our three thousand plus war dead in Iraq, or the loved ones of the tens of thousands maimed, would be willing to donate some of their grief and heartbreak to the White House staff. For most of those families, recovery is not just a matter of walking on the beach with Billy Graham, as it was for nose-candy-addled George W. Bush. Their journey toward peace will last a lifetime, and for many the story of their sacrifice will be forever entangled with the vanity of Bush's war.

If Dan Bartlett is not today experiencing personal turmoil, if he can still equably look himself in the mirror, it is because he and his colleagues have shut themselves off from one of the most terrible, costly, irreparably painful journeys that the rest of the citizens of this country have ever been forced to take.

What's surprising about Matt Dowd's apostasy is not that it happened, nor that Bartlett attributes it to his runaway limbic system; what's surprising is that Colin Powell and George Tenet and the rest of the heavyweights in a position to know have yet failed to come forward to tell the patriotic truth.

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