NYT, REPUBLICAN OPPOSITION RAG

Clark Hoyt has a really curious final column summarizing his three years as the NYT's public editor. A lot of it is self-congratulation to the NYT for even **having** a public editor. But I'm most fascinated by Hoyt's rebuttal of reader claims that NYT is a "liberal rag."

> For all of my three years, I heard versions of Kevin Keller's accusation: The Times is a "liberal rag," pursuing a partisan agenda in its news columns.
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> [snip]
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> But if The Times were really the Fox News of the left, how could you explain the investigative reporting that brought down Eliot Spitzer, New York's Democratic governor;derailed the election campaign of his Democratic successor, David Paterson; got Charles Rangel, the Harlem Democrat who was chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, in ethics trouble; and exposed the falsehoods that Attorney General Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, another Democrat, was telling about his service record in the Vietnam era?

Hoyt names the Spitzer scandal, certain Paterson allegations, coverage of the Rangel scandal, and its recent Blumenthal attack as proof that the NYT is not a liberal rag.

With the exception of the Rangel coverage, these are all stories for which the source of the story is as much the issue as the story itself. Hoyt must hope we forget, for example, that Linda McMahon (Blumenthal's opponent) boasted she fed the Blumenthal story to the NYT. Their denials that she had done so became even more unconvincing when the AP reported that the NYT

hadn’t posted the full video, which undermined the NYT story.

I have no idea where the Rangel story came from (and in this case, I don’t care, because it’s clearly an important story about real abuse of power).

Then there’s Paterson. With this story, too, there’s a dispute about the NYT’s sources. Paterson says he was the NYT’s original source (they deny that too, and it’s true that this one is more likely to have been a Cuomo hit job). In any case, the NYT story fell far short of the bombshell that was promised for weeks leading up to it. Another political hit job that maybe wasn’t the story it was made out to be.

Which brings us to Eliot Spitzer. There are a number of possible sources the NYT might have relied on, starting with right wing ratfucker Roger Stone, who has bragged about being involved in that take-down. But they all, almost by definition, come down to leaks from inside a politicized DOJ. And those leaks focused not on any of the other elite Johns involved, not on the prostitution ring itself (which was, after all, exceptional only for its price tag), but on Spitzer. While I agree that Spitzer’s hypocrisy invited such a take-down, there wasn’t much **legal** news there, no matter how hard the press tried to invent it to justify the coverage.

But the list doesn’t end there. Elsewhere in Hoyt’s goodbye, he mentions his biggest regret—the Vicki Iseman story.

> But throughout my tenure, Keller was gracious and supportive. When we had what was certainly our disagreement of greatest consequence – over the Times article suggesting that John McCain had had an extramarital affair with a young female lobbyist – Keller showed great equanimity. I said The Times had been off base. Though the story gave ammunition to critics who said the paper was biased, and it was no help to have

> the public editor joining thousands of readers questioning his judgment about it, Keller said mildly that we would just have to disagree on this one.

Say what you will about whether this was a worthwhile story, one with the wrong emphasis, or inappropriate scandal-mongering, it is pretty clear the Iseman part of the story came from disgruntled former **Republican** aides to McCain, probably in the neighborhood of John Weaver. Thus, it fits into this larger list of stories that serve not so much as proof of NYT fair-mindedness, but of its willingness to regurgitate oppo research in the service of powerful—often Republican—political opponents.

Then, finally, there's the story that Hoyt doesn't mention, to his significant discredit—the ACORN Pimp Hoax. As BradBlog has relentlessly documented, the NYT not only reported James O'Keefe's doctored lies as fact, but Clark Hoyt himself scolded the paper for not being more responsive to such tripe. It took six months for the NYT to actually fact check the work of a transparent political propagandist and acknowledge that that propaganda presented a false picture—and they did so with little remorse at the damage they did in the interim.

Clark Hoyt's valedictory defense of the NYT's political balance ends up reading like a laundry list of the number of times the paper has served as a willing mouthpiece for largely GOP oppo research. Given the NYT's history with Judy Miller, this is not a shock. But it is a pity that a once-respectable journalist like Hoyt now clings to NYT's credulous recycling of political hit jobs as proof of the paper's balance.