

WELL THEN, WE'LL TAKE AWAY EXECUTIVE PRIVILEGE FOR EVERYONE ELSE

David Shuster (and to a lesser degree Chris Matthews) is the one person in the MSM who recognized Dick Cheney for what he was early on. Which is why Shuster's interview of Cheney-hack Ron Christie is so good. Shuster uses the Libby case to expose the problems with Cheney's method of working around other cabinet members and he smacks Christie down, just as I would have done, by pointing out that Cheney probably ordered Libby to leak Plame's identity.

But I'd like to highlight how Christie justified Cheney's theories of the Fourth Branch of government.

The fact of the matter is that the Vice President of the United States is the one person who is in a position to give candid advice to the President of the United States. He wants to ensure that there are certain barriers that are not overcome by those who just want to poke around and look for the sake of looking. There needs to be a certain amount of candor that that individual can have when advising the President.

This is my transcription, so I could be wrong. But I'm pretty sure that Christie claimed that Cheney was the **only** one who could give Bush candid advice.

Now, I know that accords perfectly with everything we've been reading in the WaPo series—Cheney has inserted himself in almost every decision making process to ensure that, at the very least, he gets the last word, if not the only word, on a particularly policy.

But it used to be that these kind of candid policy deliberations were protected by executive privilege.

Now I'm not sure if Christie is mouthing an organized talking point, but consider the implications. First, Cheney is trying to assert double-secret privilege as a way to protect the role he plays in the deliberative process. Since his conversations with Bush would presumably be covered by executive privilege, I can only assume that Cheney is asserting the Fourth Branch to protect everything else—the sausage that goes into his advice to Bush (such as his kitchen table economic cabinet stacked with privatizers and hacks).

Meanwhile, if Cheney is the only one who gives candid advice to Bush, couldn't we simply do away with all other claims to executive privilege?

Cheney's Fourth Branch theories increasingly look like a desperate attempt to avoid any Congressional oversight. But we ought to follow Rahm's example, and take Cheney at his word. If Cheney's the only one entitled to executive privilege, let's strip it from everyone else, starting with David Addington and Alberto Gonzales.