

# GILLESPIE SQUARED

Rove's bed is not even cold and already Ed Gillespie is crawling into it.

Now, with the departure of Karl Rove, the president's closest adviser, Gillespie, 46, a former lobbyist and Republican National Committee chairman, has once again been asked to help fill the void.

White House Chief of Staff Joshua B. Bolten has said that he plans to divide Rove's broad political and policymaking duties – and the 60 or so White House staffers who report to him – among several top aides. But Bolten has yet to decide how to distribute Rove's responsibilities.

Still, it appears that Gillespie will emerge as the first among equals. He is likely to be called on to handle political strategy and message management for the president, becoming the dominant voice in determining where and how often Bush appears and what he says during the final 17 months of his tenure.

Well, that's might curious. After all, this is the second "irreplaceable" long-time Bush associate that Gillespie is replacing; Gillespie took over Dan Bartlett's duties after Bartlett unexpectedly left. That's a whole lot of irreplaceable that Gillespie has replaced.

Which leads me to ask, once again, why Gillespie?

The news reports rehearse several aspects of Gillespie's experience: head of communications for the 2000 recount, support for the Roberts and Alito nomination battles, lie and forgetfulness coach for Alberto Gonzales' appearance before Congress.

Somehow, though, news reports always miss one of the most important things Gillespie has done for the Bush Administration: overseeing the New Hampshire phone-jamming damage control.