CBS News Chief Lauds Obama, predicts stronger newspapers

While conservative commentator Laura Ingraham said yesterday on the *Today Show* that President Obama has accomplished little of worth in his first two months in office, CBS Evening News Producer Rick Kaplan would strongly disagree.

At a seminar held on Tuesday at Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard, Kaplan said that Obama's record so far has been "extraordinary."

The "first 100 days" is a construct that began with FDR (Franklin Delano Roosevelt) and can be a useful time for judging what policies are most important to a president—before Congress and administration insiders have a chance to "carve out turf"… and "start bickering," Kaplan said.

In his view, Obama has used this period well.

The President has frozen all of former President George W. Bush's last minute "midnight regulations," ended the "gag rule" prohibiting mention of abortion in organizations receiving federal funds; put forth ethics and lobbying bills; and passed the $800B TARP (Troubled Asset Relief Program) legislation, Kaplan said.

Equally impressive was Obama's performance at the recent G20 Summit in London. "I've never seen anything like it," Kaplan said. At the meeting of the Group of Twenty Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors, "people listened and were impressed. When he stood up, it was a proud moment for America."

At news conferences, "he let the other guy go first. He grabbed President Sarkosi and the President of China; he huddled with them and [got] them to agree on a contentious set

of…offshore policies. He makes the deal and at the end, both Sarcozy and the Chinese leader are smiling.

“In a meeting with the Russians on an arms deal, he gets a promise for a summit. He meets with the South Koreans to talk about their concerns about [that day’s] North Korean missile launch….”

“And as he’s leaving…in an ‘organized leak,’ he said he would allow Cuban nationals to go and see their families and give them money.

“It was extraordinary to see him work the room in a respectful, aggressive, impressive. way. The leaders didn’t all agree with him, but they liked and respected him.”

“He’s had an extraordinary run in just 60 days. He never shows tension, never seems impacted one way or another or angry. He’s the ‘coolest guy in the room.”

Still, Kaplan said, not all is rosy.

For example, the President had known known for weeks that bonuses were to be paid in Wall Street firms receiving bailout money, which made Obama’s expressed “outrage” seemed hypocritical. The press “let him off the hook a bit… It’s great to have dialogue, and the press corps is nervous about shaking up the relationship” at a time [of economic crisis] where everyone is looking for stability.”

Asked (by me) what he foresees for the future of print media, Kaplan said that papers like *the Boston Globe* must survive, and that the current “unwinding” could turn out to be healthy in the long run. It will likely lead to new models and put an end to newspapers driven by owners who are more concerned about investors’ profits than their own communities, Kaplan said.

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