

CNN's Hypocrisy Exposed

It is unfortunate that the Ted Cruz campaign and Rep. Steve King sent out misleading and even erroneous information about Dr. Ben Carson's campaign plans, for which Cruz and King have apologized. But CNN is also to blame, and its self-righteous, overly indignant condemnation of the Cruz campaign exposes its own hypocrisy.

Here are the salient details, all from Monday night, Feb. 1. If ever the devil was in the details, it is in what follows.

6:43 p.m., CST: CNN's Chris Moody tweets: "Carson won't go to NH/SC, but instead will head home to Florida for some R&R. He'll be in DC Thursday for the National Prayer Breakfast."

This was immediately followed by: "Ben Carson's campaign tells me he plans to stay in the race beyond Iowa no matter what the results are tonight."

6:43-44 p.m., CST: On live TV, CNN's Wolf Blitzer, Jake Tapper and Dana Bash discuss Moody's first tweet, making no reference to the second tweet.

Tapper states that "CNN has learned some news about the man who, at least according to polls, is in fourth place here in Iowa," giving further background before asking Bash, "What have we learned?"

She replies, "We should say that our Chris Moody is breaking this news, that Ben Carson is going to go back to Florida, to his home, regardless of how he does tonight here in Iowa. He's going to go there for several days. And then afterwards, he's not going to go to South Carolina. He's not going to go to New Hampshire."

Both Tapper and Bash then state that this "very unusual," with Bash emphasizing, "Look, if you want to be president of the

United States, you don't go home to Florida. I mean, that's bottom line. That's the end of the story. If you want to signal to your supporters that you want it, that you're hungry for it, that you want them to get out and campaign, you've got to be out there doing it too. And he's not doing it. It's very unusual."

Tapper then states, "Very unusual news that CNN has just learned. CNN's Chris Moody breaking the story. Wolf, back to you in Washington."

Blitzer closes with: "Very significant news indeed, guys. Thanks very much."

Note that for these respected journalists, this was major news, with Carson's actions appearing to be quite unbecoming for someone who wanted to be president. And while they did not explicitly say that Carson was potentially dropping out or suspending his campaign, since their man Moody felt it important to state that this was not the case, it would have been reasonable for Tapper, Bash and Blitzer to clarify this as well.

After all, wouldn't many viewers think that this "breaking ... very unusual ... very significant news" was more than the fact that Carson just wanted to take a couple of days off before resuming his campaign? (Note that "breaking" was used twice and "very unusual" used three times.) Would it be wrong to ask, "Is Carson dropping out?"—especially when we were told he would be making a speech before the caucus results were finalized?

And what does it mean when Bash says, "That's the end of the story"? Does it mean that Dr. Carson will be back on track in a few days, not skipping a beat, refreshed and reinvigorated for the battle ahead? I think not.

The fact that CNN had information from their own journalist and failed to state it explicitly was, at the least, a failure

to gauge the impact of their reporting.

Note also that, at 6:53 p.m., CST, Jason Osborne, Carson's senior communications strategist, felt the need to tweet that Carson "will be going to Florida to get fresh clothes b4 heading back out on the campaign trail. Not standing down."

People were obviously getting the idea that Carson was, in fact, standing down. Where did they get that idea? Wasn't it from CNN's "very significant" news report?

6:56 p.m., CST: The Cruz campaign sends out their first email saying that, "The press is reporting that Dr. Ben Carson is taking time off after Iowa and making a big announcement next week"

While the "big announcement" part was wrong (apparently based on some of Tapper's comments about a speech Carson would give that night), the first part was quite accurate.

And if, in fact, Tapper, Bash and Blitzer were right in saying that this news was "very significant" (even if Carson was not dropping out of the campaign) why shouldn't the caucus goers know about it too? Shouldn't they be informed that, according to some senior CNN journalists, Carson's resolve to be president appeared questionable?

7:01 p.m., CST: The Cruz campaign tweets out that, "CNN is reporting Ben Carson will stop campaigning after Iowa"

This obviously went too far and was incorrect.

7:05 p.m., CST: Jason Osborne tweets again that Carson is "not suspending" his campaign. The "breaking news" story from CNN now had legs (also thanks to the Cruz campaign), and Osborne was trying to put out the fire.

7:07 p.m., CST: A Cruz campaigner calls caucus volunteers reporting that Carson is dropping out of the race, encouraging them to inform voters.

This, again, was inexcusable, and while we can understand how the story spread, Sen. Cruz rightly took responsibility for this and apologized.

But there's more.

At 7:08 p.m., CST, a full 24 minutes after the CNN TV report—meaning 25 minutes after Moody's second tweet and 15 minutes after Osborne's first tweet, both of which made clear that Carson was not suspending his campaign—@CNN tweeted: "After the #IAcaucus, @RealBenCarson plans to take a break from campaigning "

Why in the world was @CNN sending this out?

By this time, it was abundantly clear that the bigger news was, "No big news here! Dr. Carson is getting a little rest then resuming his campaign."

Why didn't CNN follow up immediately with, "But Carson's camp makes clear that he is continuing his campaign"?

Bill O'Reilly blasted CNN's Tapper-Bash-Blitzer "breaking news" report, calling it "false" and "flat out untrue," also stating that the "news agency screwed up big time and apparently doesn't care" (He also rebuked the Cruz campaign.)

While O'Reilly's criticism of CNN is clearly exaggerated, it is certainly deserved, as Mark Levin and others have pointed out.

To repeat: Jake Tapper, Dana Bash, and Wolf Blitzer (or, at the least, their people) had access to Chris Moody's tweets (after all, they credited him with "breaking" this story), yet they didn't feel the need to tell the whole world, "While we find this hiatus highly significant, we want to underscore that our man Chris Moody also reports that Dr. Carson is not suspending his campaign and that he plans to be in New

Hampshire later this week.”

Why, then, were the actions of the Cruz people so deplorable while CNN has no culpability at all?

More importantly, how long was it before CNN trumpeted on TV, “We have another breaking news story, this time from Dr. Carson’s senior communications strategist, Jason Osborne, who wants to make clear that Dr. Carson is not suspending his campaign”?

To say it once again, Osborne apparently felt the need to send this out because of CNN’s report, and still, CNN feels it did absolutely nothing wrong.

In fact, CNN’s Brooke Baldwin (on Feb. 3) and Erin Burnett (on Feb. 4) have been absolutely indignant at the thought that their network’s initial report was misleading in even the slightest way, with Baldwin labeling the Cruz camp’s explanation “B.S.”

CNN also issued this official statement: “Senator Cruz’s claims about CNN are false [namely, that their people simply shared the breaking news CNN reported]. At no point did the network indicate Dr. Carson would suspend his campaign.

“Our correspondent [meaning Chris Moody] reported the information provided to him by the Carson campaign. Dr. Carson’s staff informed CNN that he would return home to take a ‘deep breath’ before resuming his activities on the trail. That information was reported accurately by CNN across TV and digital.”

So, the Cruz campaign is guilty of not taking into account Moody’s clarifying tweet whereas the entire CNN TV network is guiltless for not referring to their own reporter’s clarification.

And the Cruz campaign is guilty of sending out notices that

Dr. Carson was taking a break from campaigning (which, again, was true) while @CNN is not guilty of tweeting, "After the #IAcaucus, @RealBenCarson plans to take a break from campaigning " (And remember: This CNN tweet was sent out minutes after the Cruz campaign communications were sent out.)

CNN could have really helped its brand by saying, "We regret that our initial report, which was accurate in specific content, was stated in such a way that some misunderstood it, and we are sorry that we did not make clear immediately that Dr. Carson was not suspending his campaign."

Instead, CNN has protested its innocence vigorously.

Consequently, the next time CNN tells us that there is breaking news—did I say "breaking"?—news that is very unusual, yes, very unusual—did I say "very unusual"?—indeed, "very significant news," we should simply yawn and say to ourselves, "Obviously no big deal. Probably just a presidential candidate going home to rest for a few days before resuming his aggressive campaign."