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BETWEEN
OBAMA

What kind of relationship will the Obama White House have with the media? A lot will depend on Robert Gibbs.

AND THE
PRESS

By Mark Leibovich

ROBERT GIBBS'S HEADY WASHINGTON RISE was certified on a humid day in June when a procession of media and political fancies gathered in tribute to Tim Russert, the "Meet the Press" host who died of a heart attack several days earlier. The memorial service was a sweet, solemn and star-struck occasion that, as these events often do, yielded a neat snapshot of the Celebrity Washington food chain — who was up, who was down, who was winning the week.

In a smiling stampede of congratulations, mourners were wearing out the red-carpeted aisles of the Kennedy Center to get to Gibbs, a journeyman campaign flack who had latched onto Barack Obama's Senate race four years earlier and has been his chief spokesman ever since. By now a senior adviser to Obama, Gibbs was here, along with Obama's chief strategist and message guru, David Axelrod, to represent the soon-to-be Democratic nominee.

"The new It guys," declared Anne Schroeder Mullins, a gossip columnist for Politico.com, noting the shameless run on Gibbs and Axelrod. "I bet they're being inundated with people trying to book Barack on their shows."

The paradox of this scene was that the Obama campaign's communications strategy was predicated in part on an aggressive indifference to this insider set. Staff members were encouraged to ignore new Web sites like The Page, written by Time's Mark Halperin, and Politico, both of which had gained instant cachet among the Washington smarty-pants set. "If Politico and Halperin say we're winning, we're losing," Obama's campaign