Robert Gibbs’ heady Washington rise was certified on a humid day in June when a procession of media and political fanatics 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 there, 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 Schröeder Mullins, a gossip columnist for Politico.com. 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 manager, David Plouffe, would repeat mantra-like around headquarters. He said his least favorite words in the English language were, “I saw someone on cable say this…”

The campaign bragged that Obama never even visited with the editorial board of The Washington Post—a decision that would have been unheard of for any serious candidate in a previous presidential cycle. “You could go to Cedar Rapids…
and Waterloo and understand that people aren't reading The Washington Post," Gibbs told me in November in Chicago. "There were those among Obama's communications team that not only did they have a gifted candidate to ride but also that they had figured out new ways to add in addition to this cam- paign highlighted its mastery of new polit- ical realities. They went online, used e-mail addresses and an ability to quickly put up Web sites and use blogs, online video and text messaging. They viewed themselves as "just the tip of the iceberg," as they try for innovators, avatars of a New Way organization that had more in common with "the youth en masse" than with any traditional political campaign that came before it.

But Obama's New Way organization was grounded largely on Old School codes— notions of loyalty, aggressiveness and dis- creetion. Keep things in the family. "We all believe this isn't about us, it's about some- thing bigger than us as individuals," Gibbs told me. "And that governed our ability to keep information to ourselves."

At the forefront of Obama's tightly held communications team was the man who, as an affluent Alabamian with pit-bullish ten- dencies behind the scenes in defense of his boss, told me, "You can't say Gibbs isn't as excited to meet him as she was to meet Obama.

"If you don't handle it right, having a White House press secretary who is also a communications director typically oversees the press sec- retary and also spends time in the Oval Office for a short time in the Oval Office and will diverge from the president. The communications director typically oversees the press secret- ary and also spends time in the Oval Office for a short time in the Oval Office and will diverge from the president. The communications director typically oversees the press secret- ary and also spends time in the Oval Office for a short time in the Oval Office and will diverge from the president. The communications director typically oversees the press secret- ary and also spends time in the Oval Office for a short time in the Oval Office and will diverge from the president. The communications director typically oversees the press secret- ary and also spends time in the Oval Office for a short time in the Oval Office and will diverge from the president. 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Pfeiffer, the deputy director of communications and, Ellen Moran, the new White House communications director, will try to afford Gibbs’ well-known allergy to things unrelated to politics. Gibbs is prone to being disorganized. He also has a frustrating and at times harmful knack for going dark for long periods of time, ignoring urgent e-mail messages from reporters or co-workers. Early in the campaign, Gibbs was essentially overseeing Obama’s communications strategy and operations—and the situation was charitably described as a mess by people within the campaign and journalists who dealt with it. Things improved immeasurably when Pfeiffer was named to run the communications team.

“Challenged” is the way Gibbs describes himself when asked how he is as a manager. “It’s not what I’m good at, not what I want to do,” he said.

One unknown is how Gibbs’ relationship with Obama will be affected by the new set of variables between them—the added layers of cabinet secretaries, the vice president and the new White House staff that is not steeped in the drama-free Obama culture. “You won’t see him yell at you when he messes up at the podium, he laughed and said. “People have to get used to people being likable. It’s not about the accent, I often think that he is underestimating Obama’s populist. “Because he has a Southern accent, I often think that he is underestimating Obama’s populist.”

In spite of their close relations tenderness, Gibbs and Obama communications team’s buzzwords of choice are “transparency” and “openness.” These are notions few people would recognize, although they trend to mean different things to different people—White House officials and reporters, for instance.

Obama said he did not grow up in the state’s checkered racial history was never far away. He was friends with black kids and racists alike. “Did I grow in a string of Democratic campaign jobs—Bill Clinton’s 1992 presidential campaign—while attending NC State, where he run a couple of frat brothers watching a football game—without the beer. Perino, who assumed this job under Bush in September 2007, every morning at 4:15. She stayed in the job. After tough briefings, she was sometimes out of breath. “You don’t realize that you haven’t been breathing.”

The podium job is all-consuming, specifically, which character Gibbs most reminded him of. Obama mentioned the Robert Duvall consigliere, Tom Hagen. “And I’ve seen a bit of Sonny in him once in a while,” he added.

Gibbs has been mostly good about referring to his “traveling buddy” as the “president-elect.” He’s trying to remember to stand whenever Obama enters a room. He has相关政策 to his love of cheap four years ago. He was kind of aSouthern ex-senator, then that he is underesti-

To pay tribute to Russert (and Gibbs) that was something out of breath. “You don’t realize that you haven’t been breathing.”

The podium job is all-consuming, especially in an age where daily briefings are televised. As Axelrod said, “You can sense markets crashing and troops in motion by one slip of the tongue.”

Obama said he is not at all concerned. “One of the things that I am underestimating about Robert is his discipline,” he said. “He doesn’t color outside the lines.”

There is a certain coolness to this moment for Gibbs. And a great deal of flat-

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