

Washington Whispers

By Paul Bedard

Biloxi Puppy Lift Via Air Force One

A clandestine smuggling operation is helping turn a tragic legacy of a natural disaster into a heartwarming Walt Disney tear-jerker. The stars of this thriller: puppies of abandoned dogs. The villain: Hurricane Katrina. The saviors: the president, his staff, and his jet.

On April 27, before **President Bush** toured the Hands On Network crisis volunteer center in Biloxi, Miss., the White House advance team E-mailed home that the prez would see a kennel with 17 abandoned puppies collected by the Humane Society and Triple R Pets. Staffers cooed and asked for pictures. Two secretly agreed to rescue one each when Bush traveled there.

On his visit, Bush told Hands On coordinator **Erika Putinsky** that he sympathized with families who lost dogs in Katrina. "He thought about his dog, **Barney**, and how upset he would have been if he lost his dog," she recalls. He snuggled a few pups. She said he was taking two home. He said no—unaware of the secret rescue mission. That was the cue for the two staffers to seize their dogs, **Biloxi** and **Scrappy**. First stop, Air Force One, where a now informed and supportive president ignored the howls. Then came the motorcade and, finally, the White House, where they were unveiled the next day. Aides swooned. Some pledged to rescue more when Bush visits the area again. "It made the White House a very happy place," says an insider.

A Mexican Mission to Little Rock

Immigrants aren't the only ones south of the border hoping for a piece of the good old U.S. of A. Mexico's outgoing **President Vicente Fox** has dispatched his wife north to collect ideas for his presidential library and museum, the country's first ever. First lady **Marta de Fox** went to the **William J. Clinton** Presidential Center and Park in Little Rock. Sources say the Foxes tried to keep the mission secret. So instead of advertising it as a fact-finding expedition, Fox arrived under the guise of speaking to students at the

Clinton center, then slipped off to quiz center execs and archivists about how to raise money, design a new facility, and operate it. A source who accompanied her says she was very direct, just like a former Arkansas first lady. "She was," says our tipster, "very Hillaryesque."

It Could Have Been Worse for Rummy

If you thought last week was a bad one for the much-heckled Pentagon stallion **Donald Rumsfeld**, consider his namesake, the horse "**Rums-**



feld," who ran at Newbury Racecourse in England last month. In an E-mail to the defense secretary, a friend who bet on the Italian horse to win told this tale. "He threw his jockey before the race began," says the E-mail, "and after the jockey trailed him halfway around the track, Rumsfeld refused to enter the starting gate until he was blindfolded, after which anyone knew he couldn't have much left for the race itself, but he broke away and came in second." Better yet, he beat **Criminal Act** by almost two lengths.

The Lobbying Scandal Workout

There's nothing like a good gym routine to get your mind off pressing issues like, say, whether or not you are going to prison. We hear that lobbying scandal figure **Michael Scanlon** has continued his workouts at the posh Sports Club/LA inside Washington's Ritz-Carlton, the same place where **George Clooney** and first daughter **Jenna Bush** sweat. Scanlon, convicted but not yet sentenced in the Jack Abramoff affair, looks fit, say fellow gym rats, but gets a bit testy with questions like "How is everything?" His answer to

The latest **Whispers** are at www.usnews.com/whispers