

CBS Denies Forcing FBI To Rush Arrest

Peter S. Canellos

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CBS News Friday denied a report that its decision to run a story about the FBI's closing in on Unabomber suspect Theodore J. Kaczynski forced the agency to detain Kaczynski earlier than agents had intended.

Sandy Genelius, a spokeswoman for CBS News, said the network conferred closely with FBI officials, agreeing to delay its report on Kaczynski for two days, and did not force the agency's hand. The network broadcast the first news of Kaczynski's possible link to the case at 3 p.m. EST Wednesday, one hour after the FBI executed a search warrant at Kaczynski's cabin.

"We conferred with the FBI and held it for two days," Genelius said. "They were concerned about interference with their investigation, something we had no intention of doing and something we did not do."

CBS News President Andrew Heyward said the network held the story to avoid jeopardizing the investigation. "We consider ourselves citizens first and journalists second," Heyward said.

The FBI spokesman in Montana, George Grotz, confirmed CBS's account, saying the discussions with CBS had no bearing on the timing of Kaczynski's arrest. Late in the day, the FBI issued a statement praising CBS for temporarily withholding the story at the agency's request.

The issue was raised by an unidentified FBI agent who told the Associated Press Friday that "there was a great deal of consternation about CBS breaking that story. This was a case of the news driving the investigation rather than the investigation driving the news."

Whatever the truth, CBS's involvement in the case raises age-old questions about the role of the media in cooperating with federal authorities - questions raised most recently over the media's early arrival on the scene of a 1993 raid at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas.

Some journalists maintain that news organizations should report stories as soon as they learn of them, regardless of the consequences. Others share Heyward's view that national interest sometimes supersedes news interest.

The most famous decision to delay reporting of a major news story occurred in 1961, when the New York Times declined to reveal its knowledge of the planned Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. After the invasion went forward, with disastrous consequences, some people both in the media and the Kennedy Administration speculated that national interest might have been better served if the story had been published.

CBS spokesmen refused to reveal whether CBS news anchor Dan Rather was consulted on the decision to delay the report.

The Ted K Archive

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