

[Redacted] Fast and Furious, [Redacted]

[Redacted] Assault on Religious Freedom [Redacted]

Bad Economy [Redacted] Gaffes [Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted] Declining Household Income, [Redacted]

THE CENSORSHIP ELECTION

Solyndra

[Redacted]

[Redacted] Record Numbers on Food Stamps

[Redacted] ObamaCare [Redacted] Green Jobs Failure [Redacted]

[Redacted] Incompetent Record [Redacted]

[Redacted] Rising Healthcare Costs [Redacted]

[Redacted] Keystone Pipeline [Redacted]

[Redacted] Scurrilous Attack Ads [Redacted] National Security Leaks

[Redacted] Gutting Welfare Reform [Redacted]

[Redacted] Failed Promises."

How the Broadcast Networks Buried the Bad News That Threatened Barack Obama's Quest for a Second Term

A Special Report from the



media research center
AMERICA'S MEDIA WATCHDOG™

The Censorship Election

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

President Obama won re-election last November despite handicaps that would have doomed other incumbents: a terrible economy, historic unemployment, a soaring national debt, the unpopularity of ObamaCare, and debacles such as his administration's inept handling of the September 11 attacks in Benghazi, Libya, that left a U.S. ambassador and three other Americans dead.

While there were many contributing factors, important clues to unraveling this political paradox may be found in an examination of how the national media skewed last year's campaign news agenda. While the networks gave intensive coverage to inconsequential mistakes or invented controversies involving GOP candidate Mitt Romney, a Media Research Center review of the ABC, CBS and NBC broadcast evening news coverage from January 1 through Election Day found that the Big Three systematically suppressed factual and important news stories that reflected poorly on Barack Obama's record as President:

- ABC, CBS and NBC evening news viewers in 2012 never once heard the embarrassing prediction by Obama's economic team that passage of the \$787 billion "stimulus" would halt the rise of unemployment at 8%; in reality, the jobless rate stayed above that mark for 44 months, the worst economic performance since the Great Depression.
 - There was just a single network mention last year (on ABC) of Obama's broken promise of cutting the federal budget deficit "by half by the end of my first term in office." Reporters on CBS and NBC never once brought up this inconvenient truth.
 - All three evening newscasts buried official statistics showing record numbers of Americans depending on government handouts for food, and rising poverty more than two years after Team Obama claimed the economy was supposedly recovering.
 - In all of 2012, the network evening newscasts devoted only 61 seconds to talking about how ObamaCare's mandates, regulations and new taxes would hurt small businesses.
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- The evening newscasts never mentioned official CBO reports showing ObamaCare would cost up to 6 million workers their health insurance, belying President Obama's promise that "if you like your health care plan, you can keep your health care plan."
- For 16 days, the network evening news shows refused to report unprecedented HHS regulations that would violate the conscience of religious organizations by insisting they provide free contraception, including abortion-inducing drugs.
- After President Obama unilaterally declared a "compromise" on religious freedom, the networks acted as if all was solved, with ABC and NBC utterly ignoring a massive lawsuit against the administration to overturn the rules (CBS gave it just 19 seconds).
- The networks buried news of how Obama squandered more than \$500 billion of taxpayer money in loans to the solar company Solyndra, whose biggest investor was a major Obama campaign donor and fundraiser.
- None of the Big Three evening newscasts mentioned the Fast and Furious scandal, in which guns were permitted to reach Mexican drug gangs, until June 12, when the House of Representatives was about to approve contempt charges against Attorney General Eric Holder for failing to cooperate with the investigating committee. Instead of treating the administration's stonewalling as a major scandal, the networks abandoned the story after just a couple of days.
- The same networks that ferociously covered a criminal investigation into national security leaks during the Bush years offered virtually no time for the launch of a criminal probe into a string of even-more damaging leaks under President Obama.
- The networks minimized or ignored key information exposing the administration's false narrative about the attacks in Benghazi. And, after the President falsely insisted in a debate that he branded the attack as "an act of terror" the very next day, CBS's *60 Minutes* withheld a key video proving this claim to be untrue.

In a typical presidential election year, most of the media's scrutiny falls on the incumbent, and the campaign becomes referendum on the administration's performance during the previous four years. But in 2012, the networks failed to incorporate critical examinations of Obama's record into their campaign narrative, an editorial approach that neatly dovetailed with the Democrat's strategy of making the election into a referendum on challenger Mitt Romney, not the sitting President.

Instead of covering the news fairly, the networks covered up news that might have hurt Obama's re-election chances. It was an audacious act of media censorship that could well have changed the outcome of the 2012 election.

The Censorship Election

How the Broadcast Networks Buried the Bad News That Threatened Barack Obama's Quest for a Second Term

BY RICH NOYES, MRC'S RESEARCH DIRECTOR
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At the dawn of 2012, President Barack Obama was the most beleaguered incumbent seeking re-election since Jimmy Carter in 1980. The economy was a mess: the unemployment rate was 8.5%, the thirty-fifth consecutive month it had exceeded the politically-toxic 8% level. Four years of trillion-dollar deficits had sent the federal debt soaring to over \$15 trillion. The President's key legislative achievement, ObamaCare, was as unpopular as ever, with a plurality of American voters supporting its repeal, even as Gallup polls showed a slight majority of Americans disapproving of Obama's overall job performance.

Yet, against those odds, the President won his re-election battle on November 6 by a margin of 51% to 47% over GOP challenger Mitt Romney (albeit receiving about 3.5 million fewer votes than he did in 2008). And Obama accomplished this feat without significantly changing the political landscape from the start of the year – unemployment was still bad at 7.9%, the debt and deficits were still shockingly high, ObamaCare was still unpopular, and the President's approval rating, while improved, was barely higher than his disapproval rating.

There were many contributing factors, but this political paradox also may be explained by examining the media's role in sculpting the information environment voters faced last year. Despite all of the money spent on political advertising, the news media play a crucial role in establishing the campaign agenda for voters, particularly those swing voters who are least interested and/or knowledgeable about politics.

And despite massive changes in the media environment over the past several decades, broadcast network television still remains the biggest source of news for the most Americans, with the Big Three evening broadcasts drawing more than 20 million viewers on an average night. It's a safe bet that if the broadcast networks provide intensive coverage of a particular news story, it will penetrate the public consciousness, just as most voters will be left in the dark about whatever the networks choose to ignore.

A Media Research Center review of the ABC, CBS and NBC broadcast evening news coverage from January 1 through Election Day, November 6, 2012, found that the Big Three networks systematically suppressed factual and important news stories that reflected poorly on how Obama handled his first term as President, including: broken promises about the economy; negative reports about the costs of ObamaCare; scandals such as Fast and Furious and the wasting of taxpayer dollars on Solyndra; and false statements about what prompted the September 11 terrorist attack in Benghazi, Libya.

While ignoring or minimizing these important stories, the networks ferociously covered inconsequential mistakes — or even invented controversies — from Romney and hyped them as multi-day media “earthquakes.” Case in point: the GOP candidate’s trip to Europe and Israel in late July. ABC, CBS and NBC aired 21 evening news stories about Romney’s trip and the MRC found that virtually all of them (18, or 86%) emphasized “diplomatic blunders,” “gaffes” or “missteps.”

Similarly, when the left-wing *Mother Jones* magazine in September put out a secretly-recorded video of Romney talking to donors about the 47% of Americans who don't pay income taxes, the networks hyped it like a sensational sex scandal. Over four days, the network evening shows churned out 22 stories on the tape. The tone was hyperbolic — ABC *World News* anchor Diane Sawyer declared it a “political earthquake,” while CBS’s Bob Schieffer lectured: “I cannot imagine what he [Romney] could have said that would have hurt his cause more.”



If the networks were merely attracted by the trivial, then they would have given equal time to the goofs and gaffes which emanated from the Democratic ticket, but none of President Obama’s or Vice President Joe Biden’s blunders garnered anywhere near the same level of coverage.

After the President in a June 8 press conference, for example, declared that “the private sector is doing fine,” the ABC, CBS and NBC evening newscasts gave it just one night’s coverage, then basically dropped the story. Neither ABC’s *World News* nor the CBS *Evening News* ever mentioned the gaffe again in the weeks that followed, while the *NBC Nightly News* provided just two passing references. And, when Obama infamously scoffed at the achievements of small business owners — “you didn’t build that” — none of the Big Three

reported the politically damaging remark for four days, and then only after Romney made it the centerpiece of a campaign speech.

Joe Biden’s sleaziest line of the campaign — on August 14, telling a largely African American audience that Republicans were “going to put y’all back in chains” — was quickly dismissed by the networks, with one story that week on ABC’s *World News*, two on the *CBS Evening News*, and three on the *NBC Nightly News*. After that, ABC and CBS never revived the quote on their evening newscasts, while NBC mentioned it in passing in two stories about the vice presidential debate in October.

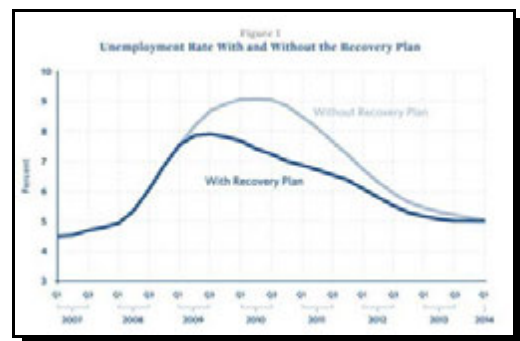
It is impossible to imagine either Romney or his running mate, Congressman Paul Ryan, getting such a pass if either of those men had said anything as offensive.

But elections are supposed to be about more than gaffes or mistakes, so the Media Research Center examined how the broadcast networks in 2012 failed to adequately cover ten important stories encompassing the economic, domestic and foreign policy record of the Obama administration. The results show the networks either ignored or gave inconsequential coverage to these key issues, all of which undoubtedly would have been treated as major news stories if the incumbent president running for re-election was a Republican.

Censored: Obama’s Failed Promises to Create Jobs and Slash the Deficit

The media’s euphoric coverage of President Obama’s first 100 days in office included selling his policy prescriptions as a tonic to both the economic hardship of the country as well as the fiscal mismanagement in Washington, D.C. But as the President ran for re-election in 2012, the broadcast networks refused to remind voters of the heady promises made just three years earlier.

Obama’s first big legislative push was the \$787 billion spending bill styled as economic “stimulus.” A January 2009 report from Obama’s incoming economic team suggested the massive spending would “counter a potential job loss of at least 5 million,” and stem the rising unemployment rate at around 8%. (Chart from “The Job Impact of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan,” page 4.)



Signing the package into law on February 17, 2009, President Obama boasted that it marked “the beginning of the end” of the nation’s unemployment problem, a soundbite dutifully shown that evening on ABC’s *World News* and the *NBC Nightly News*.

But it wasn't the "beginning of the end" at all. In February 2009, the unemployment rate was 8.3%. It rose above 9% by May 2009, peaking at 10.0% in October of that year. The official rate stayed above 9% through October 2011, and above 8.0% until September 2012, making it the worst string of high unemployment since the Great Depression.

Yet during the entire 2012 campaign, *not one network evening news broadcast* mentioned Team Obama's faulty prediction that passing the big spending bill would restrain unemployment below 8%, even though that was a major element of the Republican critique of Obama's economic policies. At the very least, the terrible track record of Team Obama's "8%" prediction showed the faultiness of the economic assumptions that went into developing the most massive spending bill in American history.

In addition, a May 25, 2012 report card on the officially-named "American Recovery and Reinvestment Act" by the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office found that the price tag for the stimulus was tens of billions of dollars more expensive, and the results much worse, than Obama's team had advertised: "CBO now estimates that the total impact over the 2009–2019 period will amount to about \$831 billion....They [the ARRA's policies] increased the number of people employed by between 0.2 million and 1.5 million," which computes to between \$540,000 and \$4.1 million per job.

Network evening news coverage of CBO's report card on the stimulus: Zero.

The networks also protected Obama from another failure from his first 100 days. Soon after the stimulus became law, President Obama held a televised "Fiscal Responsibility Summit" at the White House and flatly promised to "to cut the deficit we inherited by half by the end of my first term in office." He repeated the pledge the next day before a joint session of Congress, adding: "My administration has also begun to go line by line through the federal budget in order to eliminate wasteful and ineffective programs....We have already identified \$2 trillion in savings over the next decade."

All three broadcast network evening newscasts touted this as a major deal. On the February 23, 2009 *NBC Nightly News*, correspondent Savannah Guthrie touted how Obama had "made a big promise, to cut the \$1.3 trillion deficit in half by the end of his first term." Two days later, ABC's Jake Tapper reiterated how: "The President says he intends to cut the \$1.3 trillion deficit in half by the end of his first term. He says first term, knowing that whether or not he gets a second term depends on how he delivers on all of these big ambitious promises."

Thanks to the stimulus law and other spending undertaken by Obama and the liberal Democratic Congress then in power, the federal budget deficit for the 2009 fiscal year was \$1.4 trillion, more than three times *higher* than the FY2008 deficit of \$438 billion. The next year, FY2010, the deficit was \$1.3 trillion. The year after that, FY2011, it was \$1.3 trillion. For

2012, Obama's own budget (proposed in February 2011) predicted a \$1.1 trillion deficit, which turned out to be right on the money when the fiscal year ended on September 30, 2012.

If a Republican president had so flagrantly failed to meet one of his highest profile promises, is there any doubt that the networks would have (correctly) ensured that it was a major issue in that president's re-election campaign? The deficit, after all, was a major concern to voters; a February 29, 2012 Gallup poll found 79% rated the federal budget deficit as a "very" or "extremely" important election-year issue, ranking behind only the economy (92%) and unemployment (82%).

But during the course of their 2012 coverage, the *NBC Nightly News* never once mentioned Obama's promise to cut the deficit in half. No reporter for the *CBS Evening News* brought it up either, but an October 19 story by correspondent Jan Crawford included a soundbite from Mitt Romney from an earlier debate (a clip used to illustrate Crawford's point that Romney was becoming "increasingly aggressive.") Romney: "He said that he'd cut in half the deficit, he hasn't done that, either. In fact, he doubled it."

Only ABC's Jake Tapper — just once, in a February 13, 2012 story about the President's FY2013 budget proposal — bothered to retrieve the Obama soundbite from 2009. Tapper: "The document also represents a broken promise for President Obama, who made this pledge at the beginning of his presidency," followed by this clip from the President: "Today, I'm pledging to cut the deficit we inherited by half by the end of my first term in office."



Jobs and the deficit were two of the biggest issues in last year's campaign. Just as journalists were scrutinizing the Romney campaign's economic proposals, fair reporting would have reminded voters of the big promises Obama had broken during his first term. Omitting them from the 2012 news agenda was a huge favor to the liberal incumbent — unchaining Obama from his own failed record, so he could freely attack his opponent.

Censored: America's Poverty Crisis

In spite of massive government spending, which liberals in 2009 confidently predicted would revive the economy, a record 46.2 million Americans were living in poverty when 2012 began, more than two and a half years after the economic "recovery" supposedly began. That's 6.4 million more impoverished Americans than in 2008, the final year of the Bush administration, an increase of 16 percent.

At the same time, monthly statistics released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture showed increasing numbers of Americans forced to rely on Food Stamps, rising to more than 47 million Americans before Election Day, 15 million more than the highest number recorded during the Bush years (in January 2009), and six million more than in June 2010, when Vice President Biden announced the country was beginning a “summer of recovery.”

These statistics highlighted the social damage being caused by the terrible economy facing Americans in 2012. But on the three broadcast evening newscasts, the poor were practically invisible – hiding a potential public relations problem for a presidential re-election campaign that kept insisting the economic recovery was well underway.

From January 1 through Election Day, no reporter on ABC’s *World News* ever brought up the dire statistics about poverty and food stamps (although two stories included quick soundbites from Mitt Romney mentioning the high percentages of Americans in poverty). On the *CBS Evening News*, five stories included the deplorable statistics, including three profiles of families “struggling to get by,” while the *NBC Nightly News* aired two such stories.

In total, the evening newscasts discussed the depths of America’s poverty crisis just seven times in a little more than ten months – virtual silence, by TV news standards. And not a single one of these stories associated the rising poverty with President Obama, let alone suggested any blame resided in the failure of the policies he and other liberal Democrats had touted as the prescription for economic revival.

In a February 24 *Evening News* report, CBS’s Elaine Quijano, for example, talked about the “record 46 million Americans now on food stamps, an increase of 20 million people since the Great Recession in 2007,” but she, like all of her network cohorts, failed to wonder why the numbers were still rising after three years of expensive “stimulus.”

On September 12, NBC’s Brian Williams introduced a report on new Census statistics by correctly pointing out how the “numbers on the economy and poverty in America are both stunning and sad, especially what they say about the once-great American middle class.” But that story, too, treated the statistics as merely a sociological fact of life after the financial collapse, not an indictment of the liberal policies that promised to improve the situation.

The networks’ shielding of President Obama from blame contrasts with their eagerness to tweak Republican candidate Mitt Romney when he stumbled in an interview with CNN back on February 1, 2012. In a remark designed to show his interest in helping middle class voters, Romney said he was “not concerned with the very poor. We have a safety net there.”

Network reporters pounced on that “gaffe,” which was featured in nine stories on the ABC, CBS and NBC newscasts over the next several weeks, all critical of Romney. NBC’s Peter Alexander claimed the comment “seemed to show indifference to the poor,” while

ABC's David Muir suggested it would help cast "Romney as a wealthy businessman out of touch."

As a campaign issue, Romney's verbal stumble on the topic of poverty was given greater prominence than the real-world poverty crisis which unfolded during the Obama years. The only difference was, network reporters punished Romney for his ineloquence, but failed to ever scrutinize the President whose record included astonishing levels of poverty and record numbers of Americans requiring food assistance from their own government.

Censored: How Obama Squandered \$500 Million on Solar Boondoggle

Running for president in 2008, Barack Obama pledged to "invest" taxpayer dollars to create five million so-called "green jobs" over a ten-year period. Once in office, Obama's Department of Energy began shoveling out "stimulus" cash to companies involved in renewable energy, with \$527 billion in loans guaranteed by U.S. taxpayers going to the California-based solar company Solyndra.

Fast forward to August 31, 2011, when Solyndra declared bankruptcy and suspended all production, laying off 1,100 employees. Aside from the sheer negligence of losing more than \$500 million in taxpayer money, it was also the case that Solyndra's biggest investor, George Kaiser, bundled more than \$50,000 in contributions for the President's 2008 campaign, and visited the White House four times before the loan from the Department of Energy was finalized.

Months before the company failed, the Obama administration agreed to re-structure the loans in order to favor private investors like Kaiser, who would eventually get back roughly 50% of their original investment, vs. less than 5% for taxpayers. This was done against the advice of the career OMB professionals, according to an August 1, 2012 report in the *Washington Post*:

Documents show that in January 2011, when Solyndra was in technical default on its loan, OMB analyst Kelly Colyar concluded that if the company were immediately liquidated, taxpayers would lose \$141 million. If the loan were restructured and more money were released to Solyndra, she estimated, a subsequent default would cost taxpayers \$385 million. The loss was attributable in part to allowing private investors to recover some of their money first.

According to the *Post*, the warnings were ignored, "the restructuring went forward, but within months Solyndra failed anyway, leaving federal taxpayers on the hook for much of the half-billion-dollar federal loan." But the losses were even greater than forecast: the bankruptcy plan Solyndra put forward in the summer of 2012 estimated taxpayers would lose more than 95% of their original investment, recouping just \$24 million.

Despite the odor of both incompetence and corruption, the three broadcast evening newscasts had virtually no time for this embarrassing failure by Team Obama. In the six weeks after Solyndra filed for bankruptcy in 2011, the evening newscasts ran just eight stories (four full reports, plus brief mentions in four additional stories).

Even that puny amount of coverage was too much for the networks in 2012, which saw not a single evening news story devoted exclusively to the case. The *NBC Nightly News* included three brief discussions of Solyndra in longer political reports, while on ABC's *World News* investigative correspondent Brian Ross spent a whopping 29 seconds recounting the case of Obama 2008 mega-fundraiser Steven Spinner, who pushed the Energy Department loans in 2009.

For its part, the *CBS Evening News* aired nothing about the story in 2012 (although other CBS News programs did include brief reports). Total evening news coverage in 2012: four brief mentions, totaling just 1 minute, 43 seconds.

It's not as if Republicans weren't trying to make Solyndra a campaign issue. GOP candidate Mitt Romney went to the company's headquarters in May to make his case that this was a symbol of Obama's failure, yet both ABC and CBS failed to note the trip on their evening newscasts (although CBS briefly covered the trip on *CBS This Morning*, while ABC's token conservative, columnist George Will, mentioned it three days later on *This Week*).



And both Romney and Republican vice presidential candidate Paul Ryan brought up Solyndra in their nationally-televised debates with President Obama and Vice President Joe Biden, yet none of the networks included those exchanges in their subsequent coverage.

Fair campaign coverage would allow time for the major points made by both sides, Republican candidates as well as Democrats. Yet the same networks that provided seemingly endless airtime for Obama's slashing attacks on Romney as an uncompassionate capitalist had virtually no time for Romney's counter-attack on the President as an incompetent steward of taxpayer dollars – another example of how the networks tilted the playing field in 2012.

Censored: Obama's Extremist Rejection of the Keystone Oil Pipeline

In November 2011, the Obama administration thrilled the environmental Left by delaying plans for a major new oil conduit that would run from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, the

Keystone XL pipeline. The decision surprised many observers, given that the project was supported by Democratic-allied labor unions and would be another step toward ending America's dependence on oil from the Middle East, an oft-stated goal of the President.

In December 2011, Republicans and Democrats in Congress passed a measure to compel Obama to make a final decision within 60 days. On January 18, 2012, the President made his decision — and once again sided with the environmental fringe, rejecting the planned pipeline.

As a political matter, the President's decision seemed a sure-fire loser. Gas prices were rising, jobs were in short supply, and support for the pipeline was bipartisan. A March 2012 Gallup poll found Americans supported the project by a nearly 2-to-1 margin (57% vs. 29%), while a study by the Perryman Group (commissioned by the builder) found as many as 119,000 "spin-off" jobs would result from the pipeline construction.

Obama's January 18 decision drew full stories on all three broadcast evening news programs that night, with CBS's Scott Pelley insisting the "election-year politics is far from over," and NBC's Brian Williams promising that "you can be sure, as the campaign season enters the home stretch, we'll be hearing a lot more about this long stretch of pipe."

But after that one night in January, the networks essentially ended their Keystone coverage, burying one of Obama's most unpopular decisions. From January 19 through Election Day, only seven network evening news stories mentioned the Keystone project, with only one full story — a March 22 *CBS Evening News* story about an audacious Obama campaign photo-op advertising his support for the southern leg of the pipeline, an element of the project which needed neither the President's support nor his approval.

The other six stories included only brief references to the issue in broader political reports — and only one of those minor mentions (on CBS) occurred during the fall campaign. For most network news viewers, the Keystone controversy ended after one night in the spotlight.

In their January 18 coverage, all three networks conveyed the White House spin that the President, as CBS's Wyatt Andrews put it, "felt rushed by an arbitrary deadline set by congressional Republicans." But the vote was bipartisan — Democrats also voted for the deadline, included in a broader package extending the temporary payroll tax cut.

None of the networks challenged President Obama's claim that he could not approve the project without further environmental review. "The facts are the pipeline, as proposed, would go through very sensitive land," ABC's Jake Tapper affirmed on the January 18, 2012 *World News*. "The pipeline faced major environmental concerns," CBS's Andrews echoed that night.

But, unstated by the networks, the State Department had already conducted three years of study, concluding in an eight-volume August 26, 2011 environmental impact report that “no significant impacts” would be expected if the project went ahead as planned.

Even the reliably-Democratic *Washington Post*, in a November 13, 2011 editorial, rejected the White House argument that more environmental research was needed: “The world will continue to use oil, with all the dirty realities that entails. Rejecting Keystone XL would not change that fact....More delay after three years of review is insult enough.”

On March 8, eleven Democratic Senators joined 45 Republicans to overrule President Obama’s pipeline decision. As *Politico* pointed out in a report that afternoon, “Only the fact that 60 votes were needed for passage saved the White House from an embarrassing defeat.” Yet, ABC and CBS skipped that bipartisan vote, while NBC anchor Brian Williams – who had weeks earlier promised his viewers would hear “a lot more” about Keystone – gave it just 27 seconds of coverage, the last time his newscast would mention the word “Keystone” before the election.

If a Republican president had broken with one of his own core constituencies to block a project that promised great benefits and enjoyed substantial bipartisan support, network reporters would surely have made it a top issue during his re-election campaign. By keeping the Keystone decision out of their newscasts leading up to Election Day, the Big Three relieved Obama of having to continually justify an anti-jobs decision that, polls showed, most voters rejected.

Censored: ObamaCare’s Rising Costs and Shrinking Promises

No legislation is more associated with President Obama than the gargantuan health care “reform” law of 2010, nicknamed “ObamaCare.” Yet as the President ran for re-election in 2012, the networks were virtually silent about new official estimates detailing the negative consequences Obama’s signature law would have on small businesses and health care consumers – and how the reality of ObamaCare was already proving to be starkly at odds with his past promises.



■ **Harm to small businesses:** Amid the post-recession jobs crisis, ObamaCare is one more obstacle to job growth, as many small businesses will be deterred from expanding past 50 employees, the level at which they would be forced to provide expensive health insurance or pay a fine to the government. Even companies that currently provide health insurance could

be fined if their coverage doesn't meet the more expansive standards set in the ObamaCare law.

Yet the potential damage to small businesses, and the obvious negative consequences for job creation, were all but omitted from network coverage in 2012, garnering just two partial stories on June 28, the day the Supreme Court upheld ObamaCare. ABC's David Muir included three sentences (15 seconds) in a *World News* story, including a soundbite from small business owner Jorge Lozano: "I know for a fact that it's going to be impacting us very badly."

On the *NBC Nightly News*, correspondent Anne Thompson devoted 46 seconds to profiling a small businessman who confessed he'd either delay hiring new employees or shift to more part-time employees to avoid the onerous penalties. It's "a potential unintended consequence of a law aimed at expanding health care," Thompson admitted.

As for the *CBS Evening News*, that program never in 2012 specifically talked about the damaging consequences of ObamaCare for small business, although on Sunday, June 23, anchor Jeff Glor showed a bakery owner in Massachusetts griping about the similar mandate in his state: "If we had to put health insurance into our company, that would totally make us unprofitable....that's just not right. We feel we should be able to make our own decisions to run our business."

Total coverage on the broadcast evening newscasts from January 1 through November 6, 2012: 61 seconds.

■ **Tens of millions Americans still uninsured:** A March 2012 analysis by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated that after ObamaCare is fully implemented in 2016, even with all of the new taxes, subsidies and regulations, about 26-27 million Americans would remain uninsured (about half of what it was when the law was passed).

And, despite President Obama's oft-repeated promise that "if you like your health care plan, you can keep your health care plan," that same CBO report determined that "3 million to 5 million fewer people will have coverage through an employer compared with the number under prior law."

The month that report was issued, there was heavy broadcast evening news coverage of the health care law (then being argued before the Supreme Court), but not one word about the millions who would lose their employer-based health insurance, or the tens of millions who would remain uninsured after the law took full effect.

ABC's *World News* did cite one of CBO's ObamaCare estimates that month — just not the statistics that showed the health care law's deficiencies. Instead, ABC's Terry Moran on March 26 cited the CBO to argue that if the Supreme Court struck down ObamaCare's

individual mandate, “the Congressional Budget Office estimates that 16 million fewer Americans would have health insurance. So the stakes are very high.”

In July, about a month after the Supreme Court decision, CBO revised its forecast again. This time, they predicted that 30 million would remain uninsured after the law took effect, and between 4 and 6 million Americans would lose their employer-based health insurance.

The Big Three evening newscasts let those dour predictions pass without any coverage whatsoever.

■ **Higher premiums for consumers:** Before he won the presidency in 2008, Barack Obama pledged to “sign a universal health care bill into law by the end of my first term as President that will cover every American and cut the cost of a typical family’s premium by up to \$2,500 a year.”

The PR effort surrounding ObamaCare stressed that it would lower costs; indeed, the bill’s official name was the “Affordable Care Act.” Signing it into law on March 23, 2010, the President re-iterated: “This legislation will also lower costs for families and for businesses.”

Yet in September 2012, the Kaiser Family Foundation’s annual health benefits survey showed average premiums rising again. From 2009 through 2012, Kaiser found, health insurance premiums *rose* by an average of \$2,370 per family.

The Big Three evening newscasts had absolutely no time for this news, giving it zero airtime.

But those same newscasts found the annual Kaiser survey worth mentioning in previous years. In 2006, when Republican George W. Bush was in the White House, ABC’s *World News* played it as a crisis. Reporter Lisa Stark: “The Kaiser Family Foundation study finds health insurance premiums, for a family of four, have now hit an average of \$11,480 a year. That’s up 87% since 2000, far outstripping wage increases and inflation.”

And in 2009, when President Obama was lobbying Congress to pass his bill, the CBS *Evening News* relayed that year’s stats as proof of the problem. Correspondent Jim Axelrod: “It’s not getting any easier to provide health insurance. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, the average cost of a family health insurance policy is now more than \$13,000, having more than doubled this decade.”

During the first presidential debate on October 3, President Obama tried to explain away the problem: “The fact of the matter is that, when ObamaCare is fully implemented, we’re going to be in a position to show that costs are going down. And over the last two years, health care premiums have gone up — it’s true — but they’ve gone up slower than any time in the last 50 years.”

But according to PolitiFact, Obama's explanation wasn't true, either. It was incorrect to say health insurance *premiums* were rising at the slowest rate in 50 years; it was overall health care *spending* — which includes both insurance costs and out-of-pocket expenses — that had slowed to a crawl.

And, according to health economist Dr. Bradley Herring (cited by PolitiFact), the credit doesn't go to ObamaCare: "Most health economists attribute much of the slowdown (in) the growth in health care spending to the recession."

That was a mistake all three network evening newscasts let slide by.

Censored: Obama's War on Religious Freedom

On August 1, 2011, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued guidelines insisting health insurance plans provide coverage for sterilization, abortion-inducing drugs and contraception. While churches would be exempt, other religious-affiliated institutions (such as charities, hospitals and universities) would have to comply, even if it violated their religious beliefs.

On January 20, 2012, HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius reiterated the new rule, but postponed its implementation on religious-affiliated organizations for an additional year. Immediately, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops denounced the mandate, with New York's Archbishop Timothy Dolan arguing that the church should not be forced "to act as if pregnancy is a disease to be prevented at all costs."

"Never before has the federal government forced individuals and organizations to go out into the marketplace and buy a product that violates their conscience. This shouldn't happen in a land where free exercise of religion ranks first in the Bill of Rights," Dolan added in a video statement.

An unprecedented attempt by the federal government to force religious institutions to violate their beliefs — in an election year, no less — would normally be big news, but ABC, CBS and NBC initially refused to publicize the outcry against this edict. It took CBS ten days to air one news brief about the mandate (on *CBS This Morning* on January 30), while ABC and NBC waited until their February 5 Sunday morning talk shows — 16 days — to acknowledge the controversy.

It was February 6 when the first broadcast evening newscast finally landed on the story — a brief discussion at the end of an *NBC Nightly News* report on the GOP primaries. The next night, February 7, ABC and CBS caught up, and all three newscasts filed full reports on the

“fiery debate” (ABC), “political battle” (NBC) and “firestorm” (CBS) that had somehow eluded their notice for more than two weeks.

After two days of haphazard coverage (another full story and a passing mention on the *NBC Nightly News*; one more full story on the *CBS Evening News*; and nothing additional on ABC’s *World News*), the networks on Friday, February 10, all led their newscasts with news that President Obama had unilaterally “resolved” the issue with a “compromise” that amounted to a shell game: his administration would continue to insist on the full contraceptive coverage, but the cost would be shifted from the employer to the insurance company (who would, of course, still be paid by the employer).

CBS anchor Scott Pelley touted the decision as “one part Solomon, one part semantics.” ABC’s Jake Tapper heralded how “both the Catholic Health Association and abortion rights groups approved,” without noting that the CHA was an Obama administration ally during the ObamaCare fight. NBC’s Kristen Welker acted as if the President had made a significant concession: “Under fire from Catholic bishops, Republicans, and some members of his own party, President Obama today backtracked on his contraception mandate.”



That night, all three broadcasts noted an early statement from Archbishop Dolan that Obama’s move was “a first step in the right direction.” But later that same day, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops rejected Obama’s “compromise,” a fact that was eventually disclosed on weekend editions of the *CBS Evening News* and ABC’s *World News*, but never mentioned on the *NBC Nightly News*.

“Roman Catholic bishops say President Obama’s revised policy on contraception coverage for employees, quote, ‘continues to involve needless government intrusion on the internal governance of religious institutions,’” CBS weekend anchor Elaine Quijano noted on February 11. “The bishops blasted the White House for needless government intrusion and threatening coercion of religious people,” ABC’s David Kerley noted on February 12.

After that, the continued opposition to Obama’s insurance mandate was never granted more than a passing mention on the evening newscasts, even as the Church, private institutions, state and local officials and religious activists continued to press the case for religious liberty:

- On February 23, Florida, Michigan, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Texas states filed a lawsuit against the Obama administration, saying that the HHS regulations violated the First Amendment and were an “interference with religious liberty.” Coverage on ABC, CBS and NBC: Zero stories.

- On May 21, more than 40 Catholic dioceses and organizations sued the Obama administration, the largest legal action ever undertaken to defend religious liberty in the United States. Coverage: Just 19 seconds on the *CBS Evening News*; nothing on the ABC and NBC evening newscasts.
- On June 8, tens of thousands of Americans participated in 164 separate rallies for religious freedom, a grassroots expression of opposition to the ObamaCare mandate. Coverage on ABC, CBS and NBC: Zero stories.
- On June 15, the Catholic Health Association, whose support of President Obama’s “compromise” was twice touted in February by ABC’s *World News*, withdrew their support for the HHS mandate. A statement from the CHA declared said the narrow exclusion for churches, but not other religious institutions, would create “a false dichotomy between the Catholic Church and the ministries through which the Church lives out the teachings of Jesus Christ.” Coverage on ABC, CBS and NBC: Zero stories.
- On August 1, ObamaCare’s mandate for contraceptive coverage was triggered for most employers. The news was cheered on ABC, where anchor Diane Sawyer called it “an important day for women’s health.” She also incorrectly stated that “religious employers, like Catholic charities and hospitals, do not have to directly include free birth control under their health plans,” when, in fact, the exemption was only for one additional year.

That night, NBC’s coverage included a pair of soundbites from Republican members of Congress decrying the infringement of religious rights, while the *CBS Evening News* skipped the news altogether.

It is impossible to imagine any administration taking equivalent steps to circumscribe other First Amendment freedoms — such as free speech or freedom of the press — without the media serving as a megaphone for opponents of such a move. On February 5, *New York Times* columnist David Brooks suggested on NBC’s *Meet the Press* that media had ignored the story “because we’re too secular, but it’s out in pulpits. In Catholic and Protestant pulpits across America it’s a huge issue.”



Regardless of whether journalists’ judgments were dictated by their secular mindset, or their desire to shield the Obama administration from a potentially disastrous overreach, the networks’ lack of intensive coverage certainly served the interests of the President’s re-election team.

Censored: Obama's "Fast and Furious" Scandal

In 2009, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) launched "Operation Fast and Furious," which permitted thousands of guns to be illegally sold in the hope of tracking the weapons as they made their way up the ranks of Mexican drug cartels. In December 2010, one of those weapons was used to kill U.S. Border Patrol agent Brian Terry.

In early 2011, even as top administration officials were denying the existence of the gunwalking program, CBS's Sharyl Attkisson talked to ATF whistleblowers who exposed the truth. It is "a scandal so large," Attkisson relayed on the February 23, 2011 *Evening News*, "some insiders say it surpasses the shootout at Ruby Ridge and the deadly siege at Waco."

Thanks to Attkisson's work, the *CBS Evening News* ran a dozen full reports in 2011 exposing various elements of the scandal, including how Attorney General Eric Holder eventually admitted in November 2011 that he had earlier in the year provided false information to congressional investigators.

In a Republican administration, such incompetence and stonewalling would likely have been a major story. Yet ABC's *World News* and the *NBC Nightly News* acted as if the scandal did not exist, never once mentioning it on their evening news programs in 2011.

NBC finally arrived on the story on June 12, 2012, 546 days after Brian Terry's murder, and then only after the House of Representatives was about to approve a contempt charge against the Attorney General for failing to produce crucial documents. ABC's *World News* took another eight days, until June 20, to acknowledge the scandal, dallying until President Obama himself stepped in to claim Executive Privilege on behalf of Holder.

"We turn next to the political storm that erupted today over an undercover government operation gone very wrong," ABC anchor Diane Sawyer intoned that night, as if the scandal hadn't been festering for eighteen months, unreported by her. Over on NBC, instead of targeting the administration's lack of transparency, anchor Brian Williams faulted both sides: "Washington has blown up into a caustic partisan fight...And for those not following the complexities of all of it, it just looks like more of our broken politics and vicious fights now out in the open."



CBS, which in 2011 had distinguished itself as the lone broadcast network pursuing this story, also waited until the June 20 *Evening News* to file their first Fast and Furious story of the year.

The House vote against Holder and the President's use of Executive Privilege would ordinarily be the red flare that set the networks to digging deeper on a scandal, but not when it came to Obama's Fast and Furious fiasco. Even with all of the unanswered questions and political drama, ABC's *World News* barely touched the story – just one full report (June 20) and two brief mentions before Election Day. The *CBS Evening News* managed two full reports and two briefs during this same period, while the *NBC Nightly News* produced four reports and two briefs.

Those totals include the September 19 Inspector General's blistering report on how the Justice Department and ATF handled Fast and Furious. As CBS's Attkisson described, "the review revealed a series of misguided strategies, tactics, errors in judgment and management failures." NBC correspondent Pete Williams echoed that "the report calls Operation Fast and Furious 'seriously flawed and supervised irresponsibly.'"

Those reports, plus a quick news brief that night on ABC's *World News*, totaled just 4 minutes, 7 seconds. After that, the networks stayed silent about Fast and Furious for the rest of the campaign. Just as ABC and NBC acted as if the scandal did not exist in 2011, none of the three broadcast networks burdened the Obama re-election effort by digging through the dirt of one of its most mishandled programs.

Censored: Team Obama's Damaging National Security Leaks

In May 2012, on the heels of Team Obama and their media allies celebrating the first anniversary of the killing of Osama bin Laden (NBC News even donated an hour of prime time to an uncritical *Rock Center* special, the centerpiece of which was Brian Williams interviewing the President in the White House Situation Room), a wave of positive stories reached the press about the administration's success in fighting terrorism:

- On May 7, the Associated Press disclosed that the U.S. and allied intelligence agencies had thwarted a new al Qaeda plot to use a sophisticated bomb with no metal parts to attack a jetliner. "American officials are saying tonight that this is a big success story," NBC's Pete Williams celebrated.

That night, ABC's Brian Ross revealed on *Nightline* that "this latest plot was stopped not by technology, but by good spy work, with an apparent undercover operative inside al Qaeda, raising some other questions about today's release of information from the White House."

- On May 29, a massive front-page story in the *New York Times* trumpeted how Obama was personally selecting and approving overseas terror suspects for inclusion on a "kill

list” to be targeted by remote-operated drones. As the *Times*’ Jo Becker and Scott Shane fawningly relayed: “A student of writings on war by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, [the President] believes that he should take moral responsibility for such actions.”

■ Three days later (June 1), the *Times*’ David Sanger was back on the front-page with a scoop about how Obama was leading a U.S. and Israeli cyberwar aimed at delaying Iran’s progress toward a nuclear weapon. “From his first months in office, President Obama secretly ordered increasingly sophisticated attacks on the computer systems that run Iran’s main nuclear enrichment facility, significantly expanding America’s first sustained use of cyberweapons, according to participants in the program,” Sanger wrote in his lede.

Each of these stories was based on anonymous leaks from U.S. officials, potentially from the White House itself. The prevailing suspicion was that Obama administration officials had orchestrated some or all of these stories in order to build on the momentum from the bin Laden anniversary and to bolster the President’s national security credentials going into the fall campaign.

But the leaks were also damaging to U.S. national security, and drew fire from both Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill. “This has to stop,” an angry Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) declared on June 7. “When people say they don’t want to work with the United States because they can’t trust us to keep a secret, that’s serious.”

During the Bush years, the networks pounced on leaks such as the one which disclosed the identity of CIA operative Valerie Plame, revealed in a Robert Novak column in 2003. When the Justice Department announced the start of its criminal investigation into Plame’s case in late September 2003, the three broadcast networks ran a combined 21 stories that week (from Sunday, September 28 through Saturday, October 4) — and that was only the beginning of years of hyperbolic coverage.

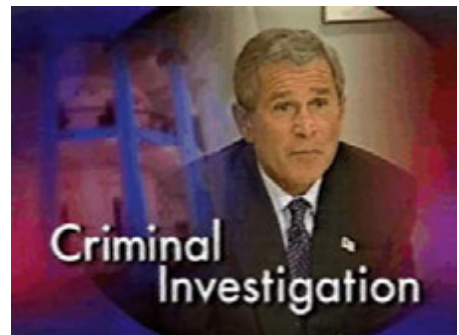
Yet in the case of the Obama administration’s leaks, the networks were profoundly uninterested in investigating whether or not senior officials were guilty of negligence regarding our national security.

Late on Friday, June 8, Attorney General Eric Holder picked two U.S. Attorneys to conduct a criminal investigation of the leaks surrounding the most damaging of these news stories: the revelations in early May about the double agent that had infiltrated al Qaeda; and the *New York Times* report about the “Stuxnet” computer worm deployed against Iran.

The same networks that had pounced on news of a criminal probe of Bush’s top aides yawned at the investigation of Obama’s deputies. ABC’s *World News* (which had run one story about the congressional furor before Holder’s announcement), aired a single story on Saturday, June 9. The *NBC Nightly News* ran just two stories — one on Sunday, June 10, and another on Tuesday, June 12. The *CBS Evening News* never mentioned the Holder probe

(although the information was conveyed on other CBS News broadcasts, including *CBS This Morning* and *Face the Nation*).

In the week in which the criminal investigation into the Bush administration was announced in 2003, ABC placed the story at the top of *World News Tonight* twice that week (on September 29 and 30), while the *CBS Evening News* led off with the investigation on September 30, and the *NBC Nightly News* made it their top story for three consecutive nights (from September 29 through October 1). The prominence conveyed the networks' editorial message that this was a major event, a political "firestorm" in the words of both the ABC and NBC correspondents.



As for the leaks under Team Obama, the networks never placed the story — either the congressional criticism, or the launching of the criminal investigation — at the top of their broadcasts. After June 12, none of the broadcast network evening newscasts mentioned the criminal investigation again for the remaining 146 days of President Obama's re-election campaign.

Indeed, none of the three newscasts would revisit the leak scandal until May 13, 2013, when CBS and NBC both reported that the Justice Department, as part of the investigation, had obtained two months of phone records from the employees of the Associated Press. (It took ABC's *World News* an additional day to find the story.) The expansive seizure of a fellow news organization's records set off alarm bells at the networks, who collectively mentioned the case in 15 evening news stories over the following month — five times more than discussed the start of the criminal probe the previous June.

And virtually none of the stories about the investigation into the AP (just two) actually gave viewers details into the breach of U.S. national security which prompted the inquiry in the first place. In other words, the government seizure of AP's phone records was treated by the networks as a bigger controversy than the original leak which exposed the CIA's operative inside al Qaeda.

Censored: Team Obama's False Talking Points on Benghazi

After the September 11 attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya, which killed Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans, the Obama administration publicly insisted the attack was, in U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice's infamous formulation, "a spontaneous reaction" to an anti-Muslim video released ten weeks earlier on YouTube.

White House spokesman Jay Carney pushed this argument in a September 14 briefing, blaming the Benghazi attack on “protests... in reaction to a video that had spread to the region.” Then, appearing on all five Sunday talk shows on September 16, five days after the attack, Ambassador Rice amplified the administration’s theory. “What happened this week in Cairo, in Benghazi, in many other parts of the region was a result — a direct result — of a heinous and offensive video,” she announced on ABC’s *This Week*.

On NBC’s *Meet the Press*, she repeated: “This is a response to a very offensive video. It’s not the first time that American facilities have come under attack in the Middle East, going back to 1982 in Beirut, going back to the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, or even the attack on our embassy in 2008 in Yemen.”



Subsequent investigation showed U.S. officials never believed this to be true. According to a December 30 report by the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs: “Senior officials from the IC [intelligence community], the Department of State, and the FBI who participated in briefings and interviews with the Committee said they believed the attack on the mission facility in Benghazi to be a terrorist attack *immediately or almost immediately after it occurred*. The ODNI’s [Office of the Director of National Intelligence] spokesman also has publicly said, ‘The intelligence community assessed *from the very beginning* that what happened in Benghazi was a terrorist attack.’” [emphasis added]

According to the official review of the State Department’s Accountability Review Board, there was never a demonstration against the YouTube video that night in Benghazi: “The Board concluded that there was no protest prior to the attacks, which were unanticipated in their scale and intensity.”

If the truth had mattered, Rice or one of her assistants simply could have checked with deputy chief of mission Gregory Hicks, who after Stevens’ death was the highest-ranking American official in Libya. Appearing May 8 at a congressional hearing, Hicks admitted Rice had not reached out to him prior to her Sunday show appearances.

When asked how he reacted when he heard the U.N. Ambassador blame the video for the attack, Hicks bluntly replied: “I was stunned. My jaw dropped, and I was embarrassed.”

Even the networks, in the first hours after the Ambassador’s killing, characterized the attack as likely the work of terrorists, not a demonstration that spun out of control. “There is developing evidence tonight that suggests that the killing of four American diplomats in Libya may have been a terrorist attack, not the mob violence that was first suspected,” anchor Scott Pelley announced on the September 12 *CBS Evening News*, four days before Rice’s round of Sunday interviews.

Yet on September 17, the day after Rice spoke, none of the Big Three “fact-checked” her already-dubious claim of how the attack transpired. Indeed, only the *NBC Nightly News* revisited her statements — but to contradict Rice’s suggestion that (in correspondent Lisa Myer’s wording) “there was a strong security presence at the consulate.”

On the September 19 *Evening News*, correspondent Elizabeth Palmer, reporting from Benghazi, discovered that claims of an anti-video protest were baseless. “Most people we talked to, including neighbors around the consulate, say that there was absolutely no demonstration,” Palmer reported. “In fact, the attack began when a group of armed men, as many as 100, showed up at the same time at both the compound’s main gates and began firing.”

In a September 20 appearance on the Spanish-language Univision network, the President himself claimed that a “natural protest” over the video had precipitated the attack: “What we do know is that the natural protests that arose because of the outrage over the video were used as an excuse by extremists to see if they can also directly harm U.S. interests.” That was the same day that his spokesman Jay Carney reversed his earlier spin and flatly declared the assault on the consulate was a “terrorist attack.”

That night, all three networks noted the administration’s change of position, but only NBC’s Andrea Mitchell pointed out that Obama was still using the old talking points. Amplifying the confusion, Mitchell offered viewers no guidance: “U.S. officials say that this could have been a long-planned attack; taking the opportunity of a protest; or no protest at all. They are now investigating all possibilities....”

As evidence mounted that U.S. officials knew at the start that this was a terrorist attack, the networks lost interest in determining how and why Team Obama got the talking points wrong. On September 26, *Newsweek*/Daily Beast national security reporter Eli Lake cited “U.S. intelligence officials” in determining that “intelligence agencies knew within a day that al Qaeda affiliates were behind the attacks in Benghazi, Libya.”

The network response was slow. ABC waited nearly 40 hours to publicize this news; White House correspondent Jake Tapper confirmed Lake’s story on the September 27 *World News*. NBC waited another 24 hours, until the Obama administration put out a statement from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence accepting responsibility for the changing accounts. Fill-in *Nightly News* anchor Savannah Guthrie led off the Friday night newscast: “Tonight, a rare reversal. Intelligence officials say they originally got it wrong.”

The *CBS Evening News* never aired a full story on these revelations, but the network mentioned it in passing on two other shows.

Then on October 23, the *CBS Evening News* exclusively reported e-mails sent by the State Department during the attack, including one from 6:07pm ET on September 11 referring to

how the terrorist group Ansar al-Sharia had claimed responsibility – more evidence that the Obama administration knew at the earliest stages that this was a terrorist attack.

The next day, *NBC Nightly News* provided a bland two-minute report by Andrea Mitchell on the new e-mail evidence. But ABC's *World News* limited its coverage that night to a 20-second item dismissing the significance of the e-mails. Instead of quoting the messages themselves, anchor Diane Sawyer focused on Team Obama's response: "Secretary of State Hillary Clinton says those e-mails were not hard evidence, and all the incoming information had to be evaluated."

It's one thing for officials to make honest mistakes in the immediate aftermath of an attack such as the one that took place in Benghazi on September 11. But after top administration officials were exposed as spouting a false narrative days after intelligence officials had determined the basic story of what happened during the attacks, professional journalists should have recognized their duty to investigate.

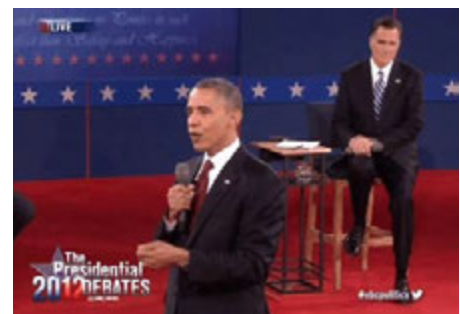
But as longtime ABC News veteran and Fox News anchor Brit Hume observed on the October 28 *Fox News Sunday*, the so-called mainstream media's watchdogs were AWOL when it came to the Benghazi scandal: "It has fallen to this news organization, Fox News and a couple others, to do all the heavy lifting on this story. And the mainstream organs of the media that would be after this like a pack of hounds, if this were a Republican president, have been remarkably reticent."

Censored: How Obama Did Not Call Benghazi Attack an "Act of Terror"

CNN anchor Candy Crowley offered partisan assistance to President Obama when she sided with him during the second presidential debate on October 16, after Obama falsely claimed that "the day after the attack [in Libya], I stood in the Rose Garden and told the American people and the world that we are going to find out exactly what happened, that this was an act of terror...."

After challenger Mitt Romney (correctly) doubted Obama's story, Crowley validated the fabrication, telling Romney: "He did, in fact, sir, call it an act of terror."

But that wasn't true. A careful review shows Obama began his Rose Garden statement by talking about the attack in Benghazi and eulogizing the four Americans who were killed. He implied the attacks were perpetrated by Muslims offended by a YouTube video, declaring: "Since our



founding, the United States has been a nation that respects all faiths. We reject all efforts to denigrate the religious beliefs of others. But there is absolutely no justification to this type of senseless violence. None.”

One minute and 48 seconds later, the President pivoted to the anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks: “Of course, yesterday was already a painful day for our nation, as we marked the solemn memory of the 9/11 attacks....” It was during this section of his statement that he generically remarked how “no acts of terror will ever shake the resolve of this nation.”

Crowley was incorrect; in his September 12 remarks, President Obama did not call the attack in Benghazi an “act of terror.” Indeed, nearly two weeks after the fact, in a September 25 appearance on ABC’s *The View* (taped the previous day), Obama was still refusing to call it terrorism when asked point-blank by co-host Joy Behar: “Is it? What do you say?”

“We’re still doing an investigation,” the President deflected.

Yet for the 65 million viewers watching Crowley’s debate on live television, Obama’s faulty version was scored as the truth.

The networks’ campaign reporters had a duty to correct the record, but the next night ABC’s *World News* offered nothing to suggest that Crowley and Obama were wrong. Instead, ABC correspondent Jake Tapper relayed how “Obama supporters were delighted” with the President’s performance, including how he “asserted himself on Libya.” A subsequent “fact check” by correspondent Jonathan Karl debunked two statements from the debate – one each from Obama and Romney – but did not challenge the “act of terror” statement.

On the *NBC Nightly News*, correspondent Chuck Todd at least mentioned that a factual dispute existed. He showed the clip of Obama speaking in the Rose Garden as if it proved the President’s point, but also added how Obama “earlier in those same remarks appeared to imply that protests sparked the attack.”

Only *CBS Evening News* correspondent Jan Crawford pointed out how Obama’s debate answer was in direct contradiction to the administration’s statements after the Benghazi attacks: “Last night, the President said he did call it an act of terror within 24 hours of the attacks. That is a new explanation.”

“The transcript of the President’s comments in the Rose Garden the day after the attack shows he does use those words,” Crawford continued, “but with that statement, Mr. Obama didn’t directly say the Libya attack qualified as one of those acts of terror....And for two weeks the President declined to call it terrorism....”

But while CBS was the most accurate in pointing how the President (enabled by Crowley) had skirted the truth, they failed to produce their own tape of *60 Minutes* correspondent Steve Kroft interviewing Obama just a couple of hours after his Rose Garden statement on September 12. While much of that interview had already been released, CBS on October 17 was still holding on to this exchange, which was especially relevant after the debate dust-up:

STEVE KROFT: Mr. President, this morning you went out of your way to avoid the use of the word 'terrorism' in connection with the Libya attack. Do you believe that this was a terrorism attack?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Well it's too early to tell exactly how this came about....



In other words, Kroft observed that Obama in his statement was declining to label this attack as terrorism, asked him about it on the spot, and seemed to get agreement from the President. Releasing that exchange the day after the debate would have documented the degree to which Obama was trying to re-write history. Yet CBS would not release that excerpt until the afternoon on Sunday, November 4 – less than two days before the election.

And the *CBS Evening News* did not report this on television until November 16 – ten days *after* the election. During a story about ex-CIA Director David Petraeus testifying that he never doubted that the Benghazi attack was an act of terrorism, correspondent David Martin added: “Yet President Obama refrained from calling it a terrorist attack when he spoke with Steve Kroft of *60 Minutes* that afternoon.”

In the aftermath of President Obama's false statement – validated by moderator Candy Crowley – during the second debate, this tape would have been huge news, and bad news for the Obama campaign. Instead, CBS sat on it for another two weeks, while ABC and NBC also refused to call the President out for his misstatement.

As then-President Gerald Ford learned after the media jumped on a misstatement he made during a 1976 debate, a vigorous reaction by journalists could have changed the dynamic of the presidential race. Instead, their non-reaction was just another favor on behalf of Team Obama.

Conclusion: The Censorship Continues

In a typical presidential election year, most of the media's scrutiny falls on the incumbent, and the campaign becomes a judgment on whether voters approve or disapprove of the previous four years. Liberal political scientist Michael Robinson found the networks were *ten times* tougher on Ronald Reagan than Walter Mondale in 1984; he blamed the media's

inclination to “always hold incumbents to a tougher standard, especially when they happen to be winning big in the race.”

Eight years later, a review by the Center for Media and Public Affairs found the networks tilted their Campaign '92 coverage by a nearly two-to-one margin against President George H. W. Bush in favor of challenger Bill Clinton. In an appearance on PBS's *NewsHour* that year, veteran CBS and NBC newsman Roger Mudd explained: “I think the bias is anti-incumbency bias. And I think you'll find because the press so enjoys a story, an exciting story, particularly one in which one in power is about to fall from power, that that is reflected in the coverage.”

And in 2004, the same group found that challenger John Kerry “received the most positive press of any candidate since CMPA began monitoring election coverage in 1988,” while incumbent President George W. Bush was treated to mostly (63%) negative coverage.

In 2012, however, Barack Obama enjoyed both the advantages of incumbency and a persistent, if slight, lead in most public opinion polls — ingredients that, history would have suggested, constitute a recipe for a year-long bout of bad press. But the networks refused to incorporate critical examinations of Obama's record into their campaign narrative, an editorial approach that neatly dovetailed with the Democrat's strategy of making the election a referendum on challenger Mitt Romney, not the sitting President.

In an increasingly fractured and fragmented media landscape, the three networks' power to choose which topics are (or are not) atop the nation's news agenda may be more important than the spin they impart in discussing those topics. As radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh declared in March 2013, “in all the criticisms you can offer or make about the media, one of the biggest, and one of the most important, one of the most telling, is to point out what they don't cover as much as the bias in what they do cover. What they ignore and what they don't report is just as important.”

The networks' penchant for omitting negative stories about President Obama has continued in the early months of his second term, giving him valuable public relations help as multiple scandals threatened to overwhelm his liberal agenda. A few examples from early 2013:

■ **Obama's Sequester Veto Flip-Flop:** Back in November 2011, President Obama defiantly proclaimed that he would not permit Congress to escape the automatic budget cuts known as the sequester. “I will veto any effort to get rid of those automatic spending cuts to domestic and defense spending,” Obama insisted. “There will be no easy off-ramps on this one.”

But on January 1, 2013, Obama signed a congressional compromise pushing those cuts off for two months, until March 1. He spent much of February claiming that the sequester was “dumb” and would “hurt individual people, and it's going to hurt the economy overall.”

During this entire period in which the President led the effort to escape the sequester, none of the three broadcast networks reminded viewers of Obama's 2011 declaration of "no easy off-ramps," let alone suggested his earlier pledge was hollow re-election rhetoric.

■ **Obama's September 11 Vanishing Act:** On February 7, outgoing Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta told Congress that, after a 5:00pm ET pre-scheduled meeting with the President just as the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi was in its opening stages, he heard from neither the President nor "anyone else at the White House" for the rest of the night — even though the fighting in Benghazi continued for more than six additional hours. Panetta also admitted: "We did not have any conversations with Secretary Clinton," even though it was a State Department facility that was being attacked.

Instead of demanding answers to what occupied the President's time (and his staff's interest) during this attack on one of our ambassadors, none of the three network evening newscasts bothered to even mention this bit of testimony. That night, the *CBS Evening News* ran a short item on Panetta testifying about possibly arming Syrian rebels, but ignored his Benghazi revelation. None of the evening newscasts ever revisited the issue, either — although CBS and NBC ran items on their February 8 morning shows.

■ **Obama's Big Money Hypocrisy:** A front-page *New York Times* story on February 23 warned of the "potential for influence peddling" in Obama's new "Organizing for Action" tax-exempt advocacy network, which, according to the *Times*, would not be "bound by federal contribution limits, laws that bar White House officials from soliciting contributions, or the stringent requirements for campaigns. In their place, the new group will self-regulate."

The next Monday, NBC's Chuck Todd declared on MSNBC's *Daily Rundown* that "this just looks bad. It looks like the White House is selling access." He pointed out the hypocrisy, recalling: "Offering this kind of access to big donors was precisely what Obama was campaigning against in 2007 and 2008." Yet, though Todd is NBC's chief White House correspondent, nothing about the controversy aired on the *NBC Nightly News*, or the other broadcast evening newscasts (although both NBC and CBS eventually aired a single story on their March 8 morning newscasts).

■ **ObamaCare Shakedown Scandal:** On May 10, the *Washington Post* disclosed that HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius had solicited several health care-related companies seeking donations for Enroll America, a non-governmental group campaigning to boost the numbers of people signing up for health insurance; the *New York Times* later reported she had secured as much as \$10,500,000 in funds for the group. According to the *Post*, "at least one official in the health-care industry felt pressure" to give money to Enroll America, whose president is Anne Filipic, an ex-Obama campaign and White House staffer.

Despite the outcry from congressional Republicans — Senator Lamar Alexander wondered whether Sebelius had violated "federal laws prohibiting raising private funds

from those she regulates,” while Senator Orrin Hatch tagged Sebelius’s actions as “bullying” that “promotes a ‘pay to play’ environment” — the network evening newscasts had zero airtime for this possible malfeasance. In fact, the only broadcast network mention of Sebelius’s potential wrongdoing came on CBS’s *Face the Nation* on May 19, when host Bob Schieffer gently suggested her scheme could be a “conflict of interest.”

■ **State Department Cover-Ups?** On June 10, *CBS This Morning* broke news that an internal report from the State Department’s Diplomatic Security Service (DSS) alleged that eight investigations of serious wrongdoing within the department were “influenced, manipulated or simply called off” by higher-ups. Among the cases affected: allegations Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s own security detail solicited prostitutes (the report called it “endemic”) and that the U.S. Ambassador to Belgium, Howard Gutman, “routinely ditched his protective security detail in order to solicit sexual favors from both prostitutes and minor children.” (Gutman, a major Obama campaign contributor in 2008, publicly denied the allegations.)

None of the three network evening newscasts picked up *This Morning*’s scoop that night, but the next night, June 11, both ABC’s *World News* and the *CBS Evening News* ran full reports which included on-camera denials of wrongdoing from the State Department spokeswoman. The *Evening News* followed up two nights later, June 13, with a brief item on criticism from Representative Ed Royce, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. *NBC Nightly News* skipped the entire story, although NBC’s *Today* did air a single report on the morning of June 11. The final tally: just two full evening news stories, and one brief mention.

The issue is the media’s credibility and identity. The broadcast networks continue to wrap themselves in the cloak of neutral and nonpartisan campaign umpires, denying any political agenda at all. But the record of Campaign ’12 shows the Big Three acting more like MSNBC, downplaying or hiding news that failed to fit their partisan liberal narrative. If this pattern of political censorship continues, the networks will assuredly lose whatever credibility they still have among ordinary viewers who expect journalists to maintain political neutrality.

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