



Campaign 2004

Media Reality Check

Expert Documentation of the Latest Liberal Media Bias  Wednesday, January 21, 2004

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Reporters Rebuke Tone and Substance of State of the Union While Inviting Democrats to Castigate Bush

“Red Meat” Previews “Angry Campaign”

Both last night and this morning, network reporters found much to fault in President Bush’s State of the Union address to Congress. In contrast, the Democrats who were brought in to criticize Bush’s approach were largely spared harsh questions — except for John Kerry, who was badgered by ABC’s Peter Jennings for being too much like the Republican President.

During ABC’s post-speech coverage last night, Jennings hit Kerry with the complaint of a far-left student that the ABC anchor read in an Iowa newspaper. “If you support John Kerry,” Jennings read, “you might as well stay home on Election Day as Bush is already doing a good job of leading America into war and shredding the Constitution.’ Your reaction?”

A number of journalists seemed bothered by Bush’s tone. Appearing on CNN, *Time* columnist Joe Klein found it “a remarkably combative speech.” Jennings detected “a huge number of hot button issues which are going to be the basis of a very, very potentially angry political campaign.” The President “hammered away at a number of issues that are red meat for his conservative constituency,” Ted Koppel deplored on *Nightline*.

This morning, all three broadcast network morning shows challenged White House Chief of Staff Andy Card on Bush’s economic proposals. CBS’s Harry Smith sounded like a Democratic candidate: “The President says the economy is in recovery. Let’s look at the numbers: There’s a \$500 billion deficit, 43 million Americans without health insurance, 12 million American children living in poverty, record numbers of personal bankruptcies. Is that really an economic recovery?”

A few minutes later, questioning former Clinton press secretary Dee Dee Myers, Smith’s co-host Hannah Storm continued pounding the President: “Many described his tone

as defiant. Did he need to be that way?”

Over on ABC, Charles Gibson asked Card if “making the tax cuts permanent” was, “in a sense, making deficits in the hundreds of billions of dollars permanent?” Gibson was just as snarky when it came to Iraq: “In 2003, the last third of [Bush’s State of the Union] was a recitation of all of Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction. Last night, scant mention of the fact that you haven’t found any.”

On *Today*, NBC’s Matt Lauer read a condemnatory *New York Times* editorial to Card: “The President’s domestic policy comes down to one disastrous fact: His insistence on huge tax cuts for the wealthy has robbed

the country of money it needs to address its problems and has threatened its long term security.” Lauer quoted the editorial’s liberal question: “Why would Mr. Bush be so determined to do the wrong thing?”

But when it came to the Democrats, Katie Couric saw lots of “expertise.” After Wesley Clark condemned Bush’s speech, she fawned: “Your big claim to fame has been, so far, your expertise in foreign policy and your military experience....But Senator Kerry is also strong in both of those areas. Is this the worst possible scenario for you, to have John Kerry come out strong out of the Iowa caucuses?”

A few minutes later in an interview with Senate GOP Leader Bill Frist, Couric rued how “the U.S. has lost more than 2 1/4 million jobs since Inauguration Day three years ago....If [new jobs] don’t materialize before November, are voters right to blame the President?” — *Rich Noyes*

Poor Democrats Lost an Hour on CNN

“The rest of year and for the last three years the President has dominated the news. Don’t the Democrats deserve a few days in the sunshine, if you will?” — *CNN’s Judy Woodruff to Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, asking why the State of the Union was scheduled during Democratic primaries, on Inside Politics, January 19.*

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