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MRC Study: ABC, CBS, and NBC Aired 26 Segments on Anti-War Rallies, But Just Nine on Abortion

Networks Ignored Massive March for Life

True to the historical pattern and despite the 30th anniversary of the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision, ABC, CBS, and NBC studiously ignored yesterday's March for Life in Washington, a stark contrast with the Bush-bashing anti-war march just four days before.

On broadcast network morning and evening news shows, the anti-war rally drew 26 segments, 14 of them before the rally began. On the same ABC, CBS, and NBC shows, the abortion issue and anniversary (with some oblique references to the March for Life) drew nine segments, four of them Wednesday morning, a few hours before the rally began.

The March for Life count should be considered to be zero. None of the preview stories explored the pro-lifers coming to Washington. Both NBC mentions on *Today* merged the pro-life rally of tens of thousands with pro-abortion rallies of around 100. NBC's Lester Holt said "Rallies are scheduled in many places including Buffalo, New York." CBS's abortion story had no mention of rallies. Only ABC's Robin Roberts noted "President Bush prepares to address an anti-abortion rally." (None of the morning shows touched on abortion today.)

Last night, only *NBC Nightly News* focused on the debate in Washington. ABC's *World News Tonight* went to Pennsylvania. *CBS Evening News* traveled to Buffalo to highlight a handful of protesters cheering the five-year-old killing of abortionist Barnett Slepian. Reporter Jim Axelrod called that shooting "an example of how abortion is redder than any other red-meat social issue in America. It's the one producing the most violence." He meant the violence outside the clinics, not inside.

In contrast to how all the networks featured soundbites from likable marchers in the anti-war protest over the weekend, the ABC, CBS, and NBC stories on Wednesday night did not include a syllable from any participant, on

stage or in the crowd at the massive March for Life. Despite tens of thousands of pro-lifers in Washington and just tens of pro-abortion protesters (a midday Planned Parenthood rally was estimated by Reuters at 150), Dan Rather misled viewers into assuming large crowds on both sides: "Tens of thousands of demonstrators on both sides of the issue filled the streets of Washington today."

ABC and CBS's newscasts also ignored Bush's phone speech to the crowd; NBC and ABC's *Nightline* each ran just a 14-word soundbite of the President's supportive remarks. Reporter Dave Marash suggested America might be better off without an abortion debate: "The year 2003 looks like both a crucial and a cruel one for America's harshest political

debate." Last night's show was mostly on-site reports on the abortion battle in Texas and Minnesota. Pro-life leader Ken Connor and pro-abortion leader Kate Michelman did face off in soundbites. In the last segment, ABC interviewed four female college students, two on each side.

By contrast, on January 16 *Nightline* devoted most of its program to massaging the anti-war movement, and worrying

about how it could broaden its appeal. Ted Koppel interviewed two leftists: Vietnam War protester Tom Hayden and Rep. Dennis Kucinich, head of the House Progressive Caucus. Koppel began: "Thousands of anti-war demonstrators will take to the street this weekend and their message is clear...But is America really listening? Tonight, 'The Movement,' struggling to be heard." If it were up to the networks alone, it's the pro-life movement that would struggle to be heard. — *Tim Graham*

The ABC, CBS, and NBC stories on Wednesday night did not include a syllable from any participant, on stage or in the crowd, at the massive March for Life. There were tens of thousands of pro-lifers in D.C. and just tens at pro-abortion rallies, but Dan Rather misled viewers into assuming large crowds on both sides: "Tens of thousands of demonstrators on both sides of the issue filled the streets of Washington today."

L. Brent Bozell III, Publisher; **Brent Baker, Rich Noyes, Tim Graham**, Editors; **Geoffrey Dickens, Jessica Anderson, Brad Wilmouth, Brian Boyd, Ken Shepherd**, and **Patrick Gregory**, Media Analysts; **Kristina Sewell**, Research Associate; **Liz Swasey**, Director of Communications. For the latest media bias, sign up for *CyberAlerts* at www.mrc.org.