



Media Reality ✓ Check

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Echoing Daschle, Reporters Assert Bush's Tax Cut Is Lousy Stimulus, Favors Wealthy & Worsens Deficit

Reporters Push Spin of Anti-Tax Cut Liberals

As they set the table for President Bush's State of the Union speech, network reporters have been busy as bees asserting that three liberal Democratic arguments against Bush's tax cut plan aren't just spin — they're facts. A Media Research Center study of all 28 tax cut stories on the ABC, CBS and NBC evening newscasts from January 2 (when coverage of Bush's imminent plan began) through January 15 (after coverage had abated) determined that those liberal points received much more time than conservative counter-arguments — and that journalists themselves often echoed the anti-tax cut talking points:

■ **Liberals argued Bush's plan only comforts the rich.** Viewers heard this point made by news sources 27 times and from reporters themselves another ten times. "The bigger your wallet, the bigger the benefit," CBS reporter Byron Pitts insisted on January 6 as he presented the tax cut as liberals wished, in terms of dollars saved, not the percentage tax reduction each family would receive. Emphasizing percentages shows the benefits would be larger for lower income families, but viewers heard just seven sources (all Republicans) challenge the liberal presentation, and no reporter ever did. That computes to a six-to-one liberal skew on this issue, hardly balance.

It's not as if every expert agreed with Tom Daschle. The Tax Foundation used IRS figures to show how the current tax code punishes the rich — the top 10 percent of Americans (those earning over \$92,114) account for 46 percent of all income earned in the U.S., but pay 67.3 percent of income taxes. As *Washington Post* reporters Dana Milbank and Chris Jenkins noted January 10, "Treasury figures show the share of the tax burden borne by those earning more than \$100,000 would rise from 72.4 percent to 73.3 percent" if Bush's plan was enacted. That's helping the rich?

Two NBC reporters — Campbell Brown and Lisa Myers — did tell viewers (in general terms) that the rich pay a far higher share of current taxes, but ABC and CBS completely omitted even this basic fact. And no network reporter even hinted that the tax burden would fall even more heavily on

the wealthy if Bush's plan became law.

■ **Liberals argued that "costly" tax cuts will worsen the deficit.** Viewers heard this liberal point made a dozen times — three times from reporters, nine times from sources — with only four responses, all from GOP sources, a three-to-one tilt in favor of the liberal argument. "White House officials [are]...confident that the President will get a lot of what he wants," ABC's Terry Moran ominously warned, "but there's a cost to that kind of success — a ballooning deficit."

But economist Steve Moore wrote in the February 10 *National Review* that the media are listening to the wrong experts: "In 1997, when the capital gains tax rate was cut, the crystal-ball gazers predicted a multibillion-dollar 'cost' to the Treasury; in fact, the receipts doubled in four years. These are precisely the same economic models that are now telling us the Bush tax cut will bankrupt America."

Slant of Tax Cut News, Jan. 2-15		
	<u>Liberal Arguments</u>	<u>Conservative Arguments</u>
ABC	83%	17%
CBS	74%	26%
NBC	64%	36%
Total	73%	27%
<i>Based on 102 statements from reporters and sources.</i>		

■ **Liberals also argued it's a lousy stimulus plan.** Overall, viewers heard 22 sources and three reporters denigrate the plan's ability to spur economic growth, vs. 16 comments by sources (mostly Bush himself) and one reporter who saw merit, a nearly three-to-two liberal skew. So who was the lone dissident? CNBC's Ron Insana, who told NBC's John Seigenthaler on January 4 that "there are some elements of this package that could, in fact, encourage business leaders to spend more on new plant and equipment [purchases], and that is what has been missing in this economic recovery."

Overall, the MRC found ABC, CBS and NBC gave three times more airtime to liberal arguments against Bush's tax cut than the conservative arguments for it. (See box.) Who still thinks the media are tilted to the right? — *Rich Noyes*

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.