



# Media Reality ✓ Check

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Big Three Networks Gloss Over Pro-Life March, But Send Excited Reporters to Boost Anti-War Rally

## “Peace Surge” Trumps Abortion Protest

Obviously, the networks believe some demonstrators are more newsworthy than others. It might just depend on whether the cause is liberal or conservative.

On Monday, January 22, none of the networks sent a Washington reporter a few blocks down to the March for Life. CBS and NBC offered brief anchor snippets noting “both sides” of the abortion debate would protest on the anniversary of the *Roe vs. Wade* Supreme Court decision, ignoring that one side brings tens of thousands to Washington, and the other side numbers in the tens. ABC did nothing.

But over the weekend, the Big Three networks were much more eager to publicize tens of thousands of protesters in Washington just six days later for a different cause: against the war in Iraq and in favor of the impeachment of President Bush. The Big Three networks offered five full reports and six anchor briefs on the Bush-bashing rally. So the contrast in stories was 11 to 2, or if you only count full stories instead of anchor briefs, the contrast was 6 to 0.

That’s not counting mentions of the leftist protests on the Sunday morning talk shows (one on CBS, one on NBC), including *Face the Nation* host Bob Schieffer extravagantly raising the anti-war march numbers to “hundreds of thousands,” far above other national media estimates.

■ ABC made no mention of the March for Life. Its only mention of abortion on January 22 came in a *Good Morning America* interview with author and Supreme Court reporter Jan Crawford Greenburg, who said the current court is more likely to let states restrict abortion.

But ABC aired two stories and an anchor brief on the anti-war protest. ABC offered a sympathetic story on Saturday’s *Good Morning America*, with Laura Marquez reporting how 12-year-old Moriah Vanderwerf would speak. Saturday night’s story on *World News* was welcomed with the on-screen graphic “Peace Surge” as protesters focused on “the steady drumbeat of death.” Anchor Bill Weir introduced the story referring to protesters

who are “newly energized in their struggle to end the war.” Sunday’s *Good Morning America* added an anchor brief.

■ CBS aired one anchor brief on abortion protests on the January 22 *Early Show*. Anchor Russ Mitchell noted: “Today is the 34th anniversary of the Supreme Court’s *Roe v. Wade* decision. Both sides in the abortion rights battle will demonstrate in Washington. Opponents will stage a March for Life while abortion rights supporters will hold a vigil at the Supreme Court.”

**When a pro-life and an anti-war protest occur in the same week, the “news” contrast is stunning.**

By contrast, the anti-Bush march drew three stories and two anchor briefs. Reporter Joie Chen had two *Saturday Early Show* reports and one for the *Saturday Evening News*. She did report organizers were aiming their protest at the Democrats, but

her evening story highlighted an anti-war military family she said could “provide political cover” for Democrats.

■ NBC morning anchor Ann Curry also quickly handled the abortion-protest story on Monday: “People on both sides of the abortion issue are holding rallies today in Washington. Today is the 34th anniversary of the Supreme Court’s *Roe v. Wade* decision that made abortions legal.”

NBC devoted two morning anchor briefs and an evening news story to “peace.” On the morning of the anti-Bush rally, *Today* anchor Allison Stewart touted “thousands of anti-war protesters will gather today for what organizers predict will be one of the largest demonstrations since the war began in 2003.” On *NBC Nightly News*, reporter John Yang touted the rally and a new *Newsweek* poll showing “67 percent of Americans now say the President’s Iraq policy is based on his personal beliefs regardless of facts.” So is the media coverage of protests. — *Tim Graham*

The same protest contrast unfolded on a more dramatic scale just days apart in January 2003, before the Iraq war began. See <http://www.mrc.org/realitycheck/2003/fax20030123.asp>

L. Brent Bozell III, Publisher; Brent Baker, Rich Noyes, Tim Graham, Editors; Geoffrey Dickens, Brad Wilmouth, Mike Rule, Scott Whitlock and Justin McCarthy, Media Analysts; Michelle Humphrey, Research Associate; Michael Chapman, Director of Communications. Sign up for daily *CyberAlerts* at [www.mrc.org](http://www.mrc.org).