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Matt Lauer Demands "Guarantee" That People Will Not Get Back More Money Than Bush Promised

Shielding Big Government From Taxpayers

The networks gave President Bush high marks for his capable delivery of last night's budget address, but when it was over reporters continued to press the point that his tax and budget proposals are either controversial or misguided — despite two polls released this morning showing broad support for Bush's policies.

On this morning's *Today*, NBC's Matt Lauer seemed horrified that taxpayers could get too much of their own money back. Lauer demanded of Trent Lott: **"As the leader of the Senate, will you guarantee that that tax cut does not grow larger?"** After Lott said the \$1.6 trillion cut was about the right size, Lauer insisted that **"some Democrats are saying if you add everything in that the President wants and what Congress wants, it could go up to \$2.6 trillion. You'll guarantee that won't happen?"**

But Lauer's co-host, Katie Couric, didn't ask Democrat Tom Daschle to "guarantee" either a minimum tax cut or a limit on new spending. Instead she invited Daschle to present his spin that liberals, because they oppose large tax cuts, are more fiscally responsible than conservatives: **"You have no problem with making this retroactive, you just want a smaller cut to be retroactive, correct?"**

On *The Early Show*, CBS's Bill Plante predicted that the tax rate reductions would be matched by brutal budget cuts. "He's targeted lower amounts of money for the Justice Department, Agriculture, Interior, and Commerce," Plante told host Jim Nantz. **"There are going to be a lot of people screaming here in town when they see the numbers."**

ABC's Charles Gibson faulted Bush allegedly hiding the bad news from his audience. **"The President in his speech talked about those programs that would grow; he didn't talk about the programs that would have to be cut,"** he lectured Republican Senator Don Nickles on *Good Morning America*. **"You would acknowledge that with a \$1.6 trillion tax cut that there are going to be a number of cuts that are going to have to occur?"**

Bush has actually endorsed an even bigger budget than Clinton a year ago, but ABC doesn't seem to believe it.

During the coverage last night, Terry Moran listened to Bush's request for more spending on education, prescription drugs, cancer research and Medicare, then ludicrously claimed **"the core of this speech was hard-core conservatism: fiscal restraint, deep, across-the-board spending and tax cuts, the privatization of Social Security."**

In a post-speech article on *Time.com*, Jessica Reaves pushed Democratic spin to absurd new heights. Daschle and Rep. Dick Gephardt were given "a thankless job" last night, she wrote, since "after all the nearly euphoric back-slapping that met the President's speech, it fell to the Democrats to make a case for boring old frugality."

"As far as numbers and common sense go, the Democrats' response was solid," Reaves endorsed, but she worried that the dumb public wouldn't see it that way: **"The gloom and doom implicit [in] the Democrats' message may, in fact, be more realistic than the goofily optimistic tone Bush likes to set. But it's far less appealing to voters."**

Though condescending, at least Reaves conceded Bush's policies had appeal. On Tuesday's *Today* show, before the speech, NBC's Ann Curry actually cited a poll conducted by rival ABC to show that "most Americans prefer a smaller tax cut targeted to middle and lower income people."

But today, only *The Early Show*'s Nantz reported a CBS poll showing citizens liked Bush's substance, not just his style, as **"88 percent who watched say they approve of the President's proposals. On his centerpiece, 67 percent now favor his tax cut."** A CNN poll taken after the address similarly showed 84 percent agreed Bush is "leading the country in the right direction." But neither ABC nor NBC publicized those inconvenient numbers this morning.

— Rich Noyes, Director
MRC's Free Market Project

Two-thirds of the public want Bush's tax cut, not some flimsy liberal knock-off. But the media want politicians to pledge that they won't send too much money back to those who earned it.

L. Brent Bozell III, Publisher; Brent Baker, Rich Noyes, Editors; Jessica Anderson, Brian Boyd, Geoffrey Dickens, Paul Smith, Brad Wilmouth, Media Analysts; Kristina Sewell, Research Associate; Liz Swasey, Director of Communications. For more on anti-tax cut bias, go to www.mrc.org/fmp/medianomics/2001/mn20010111c.html