



Media Reality ✓ Check

A Regular Report on Major News Stories Distorted or Ignored □ www.mediaresearch.org

TV's Double Standard: Networks Push Bush's Links While Downplaying Clinton's Favors For Enron

Dancing Around Bill Clinton's Enron Deals

The three broadcast networks' evening newscasts — the ones that shrugged their shoulders over Whitewater because it was a complicated business story with a lot of numbers — have pumped out 198 Enron stories since January 9 without any evident boredom. Enron's bankruptcy seems actually to excite reporters like CBS's Bob Schieffer who champion it as a parable about money and politics.

"Reformers say embarrassment over the nearly \$6 million that Enron has lavished on Congress may be what it finally takes to force [campaign finance] reform," Schieffer exulted on the February 13 *CBS Evening News*, inadvertently explaining his network's above average focus on Enron (71 stories on *Evening News*, 10 percent more than *World News Tonight's* 64 and *NBC Nightly News's* 63).

But even as they use the plight of Enron shareholders to lecture about the corrupting nature of campaign dollars, the networks have shown a double standard. While trumpeting the GOP's ties to the bankrupt energy firm, the Big Three have been muted about the benefits Enron bestowed upon former President Bill Clinton and the assistance the company received during his eight years. Indeed, only six of those 198 stories (3%) hinted at Clinton's Enron connection, even as the evidence builds:

■ **Lots of Enron money found its way to Clinton's accounts.** "During the Clinton years, Enron contributed more than \$1 million to the Democratic Party, including \$600,000 to the Democratic National Committee," the *Washington Times's* Patrice Hill recounted on February 21. That's not as much soft money as was given to the GOP (more than \$2 million), but it's more than enough to get corporate chiefs the "access and influence" that self-appointed reformers find so revolting.

■ **Clinton's administration loaned taxpayer money for Enron deals.** Back in the '90s, Clinton officials boasted of a foreign policy which focused on getting deals for select U.S. businesses, including Enron. (See box.) Now bad deals, like

Enron's worthless power plant in Dabhol, India, are plaguing taxpayers. Two federal agencies — the Overseas Private Investment Corporation and the Export-Import Bank loaned campaign contributor Enron \$1.2 billion during the Clinton years, most of which (\$964 million) Enron hasn't paid back yet, according to a February 21 *New York Times* story.

■ **Former Clinton officials pleaded Enron's case.** Clinton's chairman of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Elizabeth Moler, joined Enron's payroll as an anti-regulation lobbyist in 1999. That same year, former Clinton Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin turned down a seat on Enron's board, but he called Bush officials on Enron's behalf last November as the company's financial woes mounted. Treasury under-secretary Peter Fisher turned Rubin down.

■ **Network coverage:** Rubin's role was a secret on ABC and CBS, although NBC mentioned it on January 12, and no newscast covered Moler's trip through the revolving door. Only CBS's Bill Plante on January 18 and NBC's Lisa Myers on February 25 detailed Clinton's use of tax money to back the Dabhol plant, while ABC's Jackie Judd (January 14) merely mentioned Enron's access "to overseas trips with the Clinton administration." As for campaign money, only Plante, Myers, CBS's John Roberts (January 11) and ABC's Linda Douglass (January 10) mentioned Enron's Democratic donations, although Douglass — too busy documenting Bush's ties to Enron — limited herself to a single sentence.

By their own standards, the networks should be salivating at the combination of soft money, rewards for the company and bad deals for taxpayers. Why aren't they interested in the details of Clinton's deals with Enron? — *Rich Noyes*

Clinton Officials Once Proud of Enron Aid

"In years past, American officials would have offered some modest help, but only as a sideshow to bigger foreign policy concerns....But that was another era in American foreign policy, before the Commerce Department built what Jeffrey E. Garten, the under-secretary of commerce for international trade, calls 'our economic war room.' From that Washington war room, the negotiators for the Enron Corporation, the lead bidder in the American consortium, have been shadowed and assisted by a startling array of government agencies." — *David E. Sanger, "How Washington Inc. Makes a Sale," New York Times, Feb. 19, 1995.*

L. Brent Bozell III, Publisher; Brent Baker, Rich Noyes, Editors; Jessica Anderson, Brian Boyd, Geoffrey Dickens, Patrick Gregory, Ken Shepherd, Brad Wilmoth, Media Analysts; Kristina Sewell, Research Associate; Liz Swasey, Director of Communications. For the latest liberal media bias, read the *CyberAlert* at www.mrc.org.