



Media Reality ✓ Check

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ABC, CBS and NBC Evening News Coverage Favors Those Who Would Stop Feeding Disabled Woman

Slanting the News Against Terri Schiavo

A new Media Research Center study finds the three broadcast network evening newscasts have tilted their recent coverage of the Terri Schiavo case in ways that bolster her husband Michael's arguments that the severely disabled woman is in an irreversible vegetative state and had clearly expressed a desire to die. But network reporters have attempted to debunk arguments made by her parents — namely that some doctors believe she could be helped and that Mrs. Schiavo, a Catholic, would not want her feeding tube disconnected.

MRC analysts looked at all 31 evening news stories aired from Thursday, March 17, when the impending removal of Mrs. Schiavo's feeding tube put her case back in the news, through Monday, March 21. The researchers looked at both weekday and weekend newscasts, although CBS's weekend coverage was pre-empted in Eastern time zones to show college basketball.

■ Condemning Congressional

Activism: A majority of soundbites (59%) repudiated Congress for acting to permit Mrs. Schiavo's parents, Robert and Mary Schindler, to bring their case to a federal court before their daughter starves to death. Nearly all of the supportive comments came from members of Congress such as Rep. Tom DeLay, who was shown on ABC's *World News Tonight* on Saturday: "We're expediting this as fast as we can do it, so that we can get that feeding tube back into her and keep her alive until she's had her day in court."

But the condemnations of Congress did not just come from Michael Schiavo and Democrats; some reporters joined in the castigations. "Whatever your beliefs," ABC's Jake Tapper commented on Friday, "Terri Schiavo and her family deserved better than the way Congress worked this week." On Monday's *CBS Evening News*, reporter Elizabeth Kaledin argued that "this is exactly the kind of scenario doctors are worried about. It's sad enough that this case had to play out in the courts, but to get politics involved now, I think they would say, is just bad medicine."

■ **Rejecting the Schindlers' Case:** Three-fifths (60%) of soundbites (including reporter comments) presented Michael Schiavo's case that Terry Schiavo should die, compared with just two-fifths offering the counter-arguments of her parents. Not a single story was devoted to a skeptical look at Schiavo and whether he was acting in his wife's best interests, but all three networks ran stories rejecting Mr. and Mrs. Schindler's view that their daughter could possibly be helped.

On Friday, a few hours after Terri Schiavo's feeding tube was removed, ABC's Peter Jennings dismissed one of the Schindlers' worries: "They also say that she will die a painful death, though there does not seem to be any support for that

argument in the medical community." On Monday's *World News Tonight*, reporter Jake Tapper rejected the value of videotapes showing Terri Schiavo apparently responding: "In some ways, these tapes are like psychological inkblot tests. You see in them what you want." Then ABC's Dr. Tim Johnson summarized that "the conventional wisdom, by experts in this field, is that after five years in a persistent

vegetative state, there is virtually no chance for recovery." NBC showed Dr. Robert Cranford, who has examined Mrs. Schiavo. He said that in spite of how she appears on videotape, "she's as unconscious as someone who is dead."

None of the broadcast network stories showed even one dissenting expert. But FNC's Sean Hannity and Alan Colmes on Monday interviewed Dr. William Hammersfahr, a neurologist who spent 10 hours observing Terri Schiavo. Hammersfahr said she is "completely aware and conscious and responsive...like a child with cerebral palsy." Is Hammersfahr offering false hope, or did the networks stack the deck against Terri Schiavo? — *Rich Noyes*

Jennings Scolds Pro-Life "Interference"

"We're going to begin tonight with the extraordinary last-minute attempt by members of the Congress to interfere — or to intervene — in the case of Terri Schiavo, the young woman who has been in a vegetative state for seven years....In the last 24 hours, there has been no denying members of the Congress. After seven years, members of the House and of the Senate have decided this is urgent." — Peter Jennings, *World News Tonight*, March 18.

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