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New FMP Study: During Bush's First 10 Weeks, The CBS Evening News Was Most Hostile To Tax Cuts

Dan Rather's Donation to Liberal Tax Lovers

The next time Democrats invite CBS's Dan Rather to star at a partisan fundraiser, as he obligingly did in Texas on March 21, he could remind them just how generously he gives at the office. A new study by MRC's Free Market Project (FMP) documents that, while all three evening newscasts aided liberals' fight against President Bush's tax program, Rather's *CBS Evening News* was by far the most hostile to the concept of tax cuts.

The FMP study looked at 93 tax stories from the ABC, CBS and NBC evening newscasts, January 20 to March 31. For complete results, including details on the other networks, visit www.mrc.org.

■ **Big is Bad:** CBS skewed this debate by showing liberals like Tom Daschle saying the Bush tax cut was dangerously big 29 times, compared with only 4 instances when any source was quoted saying the tax cut was right-sized or even small. A National Taxpayers Union report found Bush's full cut is only about half the size of JFK's 1963 tax cut, and one-third of Ronald Reagan's 1981 cut — but CBS never mentioned that study or its findings.

The bigness battle was plenty partisan, but CBS's on-air correspondents took sides, personally asserting that Bush's proposed cut was "big" or "massive" 14 times. Anchorman Rather accounted for 11 of these instances when CBS's own reporters echoed this argument against the tax cut.

■ **Skewing the Fairness Debate:** The second key liberal argument was that the benefits of Bush's cut were unfairly skewed to the rich. CBS displayed liberal partisans making this point 10 times, but showed only one source, Bush's Chief of Staff Andy Card on January 21, making the point that "this is a tax plan for America. It's going to be a cross-the-board so that every American can benefit."

Only CBS completely excluded data that both ABC and NBC gave viewers, indicating that lower- and middle-income households would get a *larger* percentage tax cut

from the Bush plan than wealthier households. Liberals like Daschle preferred emphasizing the big raw dollar totals that the rich would receive, so that's exactly what CBS did, too.

"One analysis calculated the average giveback for the top one percent of earners at \$46,000," CBS reporter John Roberts lectured viewers on January 25, never even hinting that the source of the "analysis," Citizens for Tax Justice, is a liberal anti-tax cut group.

A Uniquely Antagonistic Anchorman?

Dan Rather referred to Bush's program as "a tax cut gamble" in his introduction to the February 27 *Evening News*. Later in the same show, he dismissively referred to it as Bush's "cut-federal-programs-to-get-a-tax-cut plan." The next night, he told viewers "some independent economists believe the Bush push is risky business" — but he didn't offer a clue as to the identity of these "independent" experts, nor did they show up in the story that followed.

■ **Dreading Tax Cuts:** Bush argued that the tax cuts would help the economy, and both ABC and NBC fairly provided this point of view as well as liberal critics. But not CBS, which by a two-to-one margin, showed sources claiming the tax cut would do no good, or could cause economic harm. For instance, on February 27 Rather called the tax cut "a gamble" (see box), while on February 5, reporter Roberts gave airtime to an unlabeled liberal activist who cited Reagan's cuts as proof that too much tax cutting

was a terrible thing: "Bob McIntyre of Citizens for Tax Justice can't forget the last time Congress went on a tax cut spree in 1981; America is still paying the bill." Once again, Roberts failed to mention the liberal credentials of McIntyre and his group.

While the FMP study found all three networks tilted their coverage in favor of liberal tax cut opponents, the *CBS Evening News* displayed a unique antagonism toward the tax cuts. Small wonder, then, that Texas Democrats roll out the red carpet when Dan Rather comes to town.

— Rich Noyes, Director
MRC's Free Market Project

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