



Campaign 2004

Media Reality Check

Press Contact:
Katie Wright
(703) 683-5004
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Expert Documentation of the Latest Liberal Media Bias  Thursday, April 15, 2004

MRC Study: Throughout the Hearings, Networks Favored a Handful of 9/11 Relatives Who Fault Bush

Hyping Bush Bashers, Ignoring Bush Backers

Yesterday, the commission investigating the 9/11 terrorist attacks wrapped up a high-profile series of public hearings that began in Washington on March 23. Throughout these hearings, the TV networks gave a forum to relatives of those who died that day, asking them to judge the hearings and the conduct of the participants.

But the 9/11 relatives invited on to the broadcast networks interview programs were hugely lopsided in favor of those who blame President Bush and his administration for somehow allowing the attacks, while relatives who've publicly backed the administration were shunned by the networks, according to a new Media Research Center study.

MRC analysts reviewed all interview segments on ABC's *Good Morning America*, CBS's *The Early Show* and NBC's *Today* from March 23 through this morning (April 15). Nine guests, with a total of 20 appearances, were critics of the President, compared with only three interviews with two Bush supporters. (None of the relatives were neutral or ambiguous in their comments about the Bush administration's supposed negligence.)

Neither ABC nor CBS featured any morning interviews with pro-Bush relatives, while NBC squeezed in two Bush backers: Jim Boyle, the father of a New York firefighter killed on 9/11, appeared twice on the *Today* show, while Deborah Burlingame, the sister of one of the pilots on American Airlines Flight 77, appeared once. But they were hardly alone in their views; Boyle was one of 40 9/11 relatives who signed a public letter praising Condoleezza Rice and

rejecting the charge the President ignored obvious signs that the horrible terrorist attacks were coming, according to the April 14 *New York Post*.

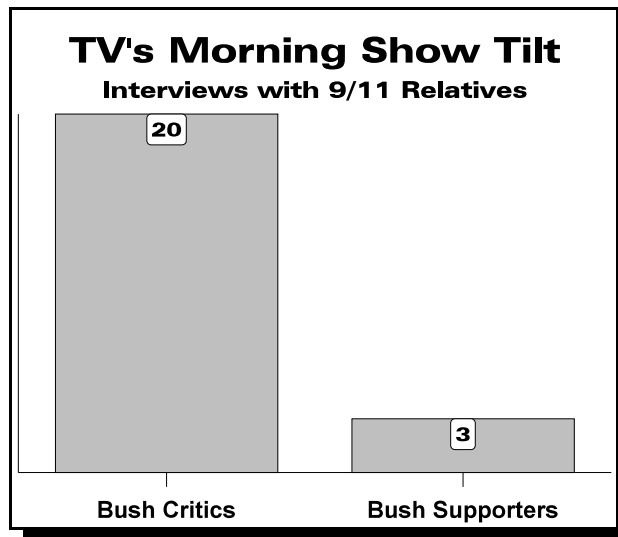
But such views were minimized on the networks, who have preferred to train their cameras on those relatives who blame the Bush administration for not thwarting the attacks.

NBC's *Today* hosted Kristen Breitweiser, whose husband died in the World Trade Center, four times in the past three weeks. Six other anti-Bush relatives appeared a total of seven times on *Today* during the same time period. ABC's *Good Morning America* featured six interviews with relatives, all of whom were Bush critics, while CBS's *Early Show* showcased three anti-Bush relatives who each appeared once.

None of the relatives, pro- or anti-Bush, has received tough questioning, but the imbalance in the guest lists means that the theories of those hostile to Bush have prevailed. On April 9, mother Mary Fetchet told ABC that "if she [Rice] had put the simplest of protocols in place, if the airports were communicating with the buildings, then my son would be alive today." Three days later, widow Patty Casazza was on CBS saying that "if the President had put an emphasis on finding out what the activity was within the United States.... I do believe that we could have thwarted this attack."

These relatives are entitled to their views, of course. But network viewers are entitled to a little balance, too.

— Rich Noyes and Jessica Anderson



To schedule an interview with an MRC spokesman, please contact Katie Wright at (703) 683-5004