



Campaign 2000

Media Reality ✓ Check

Expert Documentation of the Latest Liberal Media Bias ☆ Friday, May 12, 2000

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Why Must Organizer Donna Dees-Thomases Sell Herself As A Clueless, Unorganized Housewife?

A Million Moms Need a Straight Shooter

Washington protests can't seem too efficiently organized, or they risk looking like just another tool in the lobbyist's toolbox. They need to be portrayed as bubbling up from the innocent springs of suburbia. Otherwise, media skeptics might suggest your event is "Astroturf"—professionally manipulated heartland sentiment—instead of an authentic grass-roots passion.

That would explain the selling of "The Million Mom March," the latest alliterative yet numerically challenged Washington event. The mom leading this parade is Donna Dees-Thomases, portrayed as a suburban homemaker and part-time CBS publicist from Short Hills, New Jersey. But sometimes the hype gets ahead of reality.

Us Weekly repeated the Dees-Thomases mom-in-tennis-shoes public-relations bit, that she came up with the idea after seeing footage of the August 10, 1999 shooting at a California day-care center. "Before that I wasn't politically active," she claimed, "I'd throw my sneaker at the TV, but did I get off my couch? No." NBC's Tom Brokaw began their Dees-Thomases profile: "And Women to Watch, tonight a mother who'd never been politically active until she saw this [shooting footage]."

But the Hillary Clinton for Senate campaign recorded that a Donna Thomases of Short Hills, New Jersey donated \$1,000 on August 9, 1999, the day before the shooting. (She added another \$250 on October 14.) If that seems like nitpicking about "never" being politically active before, consider that she worked as an assistant press secretary to Sen. Bennett Johnston (D-La.) and then Sen. Russell Long (D-La.) from 1979 to 1983. *Us Weekly* mentioned the Long job, but allowed Dees-Thomases to be both a neophyte and well-connected, since her sister-in-law is one of Hillary's best friends, Susan Thomases.

Next to another promotional article, in a *People* magazine caption, came another quote: "At first, I didn't know the Brady bill from *The Brady Bunch*." Is that a credible claim of ignorance for a woman who served as a spokesperson for CBS News from 1987 to 1993?

On September 23, 1987, the *Washington Post* reported, "Donna Dees has been named manager of communications for CBS News. Based in New York, her responsibilities will include the Washington bureau, special events and 'Campaign '88.'" Sarah Brady began pushing a seven-day waiting period for gun purchases in the mid-1980s, which first failed a Senate vote in 1988. Right in the middle of Dees's CBS tenure, on May 23, 1990, Sarah Brady was granted a rare evening news interview with Dan Rather to attack "assault weapons."

Catching Donna at Playing Dumb

"At first, I didn't know the Brady bill from *The Brady Bunch*." — March organizer Donna Dees-Thomases in a *People* caption, May 8 issue.

Vs.

"You know, I've been watching these pictures for years and I've done nothing. I've heard the Sarah Bradys of the world fight our battles and I'm, like, 'Go, Sarah,' but I've done nothing." — Dees-Thomases on CBS *This Morning*, September 6, 1999.

But *People* simply forwarded Rather's praise: "When Donna sets her mind to something, she's tough, powerful, and smart as a bayou tiger." (This would appear to conflict with the *Washington Post*, which quoted the habitually self-deprecating Dees-Thomases as saying "I couldn't organize a class picnic.") She rebutted her own claim when CBS allowed her to promote the march last September [see box].

It shouldn't be disqualifying for a protest leader to be publicity-savvy, organized, and well-connected. But reporters, even at celebrity-studded weeklies, ought to do a better job of keeping protest leaders honest. — *Tim Graham*

L. Brent Bozell III, Publisher; Brent Baker, Tim Graham, Editors; Jessica Anderson, Brian Boyd, Geoffrey Dickens, Ted King, Paul Smith, Brad Wilmouth, Media Analysts; Kristina Sewell, Research Associate; Liz Swasey, Director of Communications. For more network bias on the Million Mom March, see the May 11 Cyber Alert by Brent Baker at www.mrc.org/news/cyberalert/2000/cyb20000511.html