



# Media Reality ✓ Check

A Regular Report on Major News Stories Distorted or Ignored ☐ [www.mediaresearch.org](http://www.mediaresearch.org)

Most Network Morning and Evening Shows Whistled Past Effort to Revoke Clinton's Law License

## Disbarment? What Disbarment?

All of the Big Three networks led Tuesday night with the formal recommendation that President Clinton be disbarred for lying under oath in the Paula Jones case. But how well had TV news covered the story before that? Most network morning and evening shows hadn't. For example:

**September 15, 1998:** The Southeastern Legal Foundation (SLF) filed a complaint with the Arkansas Supreme Court Committee on Professional Conduct regarding Clinton's "willful professional misconduct by lying under oath in a court of law." Coverage? None.

**April 12, 1999:** Judge Susan Webber Wright issued her contempt of court citation against Clinton for lying under oath. Coverage? ABC and NBC gave the news barely a minute that night, less time than they gave to a man rescued by helicopter from a crane above an Atlanta fire. CBS aired a full story and mentioned the possibility of disbarment, as did CNN and FNC. The next morning, NBC's Tim Russert called it a "big deal," but *Today* gave the decision four minutes, compared to 13.5 for the Atlanta fire.

**December 13, 1999:** The SLF filed a request for the Arkansas Supreme Court to order a disbarment review. Coverage? Brit Hume asked reporter Wendell Goler one question on FNC's *Special Report with Brit Hume*.

**January 27, 2000:** The Arkansas Supreme Court granted the SLF request, ordering the Committee on Professional Conduct to proceed with the SLF complaint. Coverage? Brit Hume read an anchor brief on FNC's *Special Report*.

**February 10, 2000:** The Committee serves President Clinton with a formal ethics complaint, giving the President 30 days to respond. Coverage? FNC's Rita Cosby filed a full story for *Special Report*.

**February 16, 2000:** CBS reporters John Roberts and Mark Knoller both asked Clinton at a White House press

conference about whether he would surrender his law license or fight the proceeding. Coverage: Despite quoting from the press conference, ABC, NBC, and even CBS failed to report on the disbarment exchanges. CNN's *Inside Politics* and FNC's *Special Report with Brit Hume* did note them. Knoller did show a snippet three days later on Saturday morning's *The Early Show*.

**March 16, 2000:** Clinton lawyer David Kendall asked for "an application for an extension of time for the president to respond, until 30 days after he leaves office." Coverage? A question to Rita Cosby on *Special Report*, a 50-word anchor

brief on CNN's *Inside Politics*, and a 59-word brief from NBC's Tom Brokaw.

**April 21, 2000:** Kendall filed a formal response. SLF President Matthew Glavin called it "pathetic" but did not release specifics in order to comply with court rules. Coverage? Zero.

**April 28, 2000:** SLF reported that Clinton's response admitted misleading statements in the Jones case. White House spokesman Joe Lockhart declared: "We have no intention of putting the President's response on the public record." Coverage? A Brit Hume question to Wendell Goler on FNC's *Special Report*.

**May 5, 2000:** SLF filed a formal rebuttal. Coverage? FNC's David Shuster reported a full story on the progress to date for FNC's *Special Report*.

PBS's *NewsHour* was the most apathetic, filing only a 59-word brief on disbarment so far this week. — *Tim Graham*

**Tom Brokaw told Clinton that disbarment could be "a stain on your record well outside the political arena," but TV news spent months ignoring the stain's development.**

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. To review the dismissive TV coverage of Wright's contempt ruling in April 1999, see [www.mrc.org/news/reality/1999/fax19990416.html](http://www.mrc.org/news/reality/1999/fax19990416.html)