



Media Reality ✓ Check

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On ABC, CBS and NBC, Every Reporter and 9 Out of 10 Talking Heads Insist Scientific Debate Is Over Spin Wins Over Global Warming Science

That's their story and they're sticking to it: Four weeks after a Media Research Center Special Report detailed the broadcast networks' biased coverage of global warming, ABC, CBS, and NBC treated viewers to more one-sided, inaccurate reporting on the topic.

This time the hook was a report from the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) which detailed many of the scientific uncertainties which surround global warming. In spite of the NAS paper's carefully qualified language and the protestations of some panel members (see box), network reporters insisted that the scientific panel had blessed environmentalists' most pessimistic predictions.

"Sweltering summers, rising sea levels, more droughts, more violent storms," ABC's Terry Moran predicted on Thursday's *World News Tonight*. "Global warming is real, the new report declares, and humans are helping to cause it." That same day, CBS's Dan Rather touted "an expert assessment requested by President Bush found global warming is real and getting worse, and air pollution caused by humans is a factor." NBC's *Nightly News* didn't get to the report until Friday, but reporter David Gregory made it unanimous: "This week's report shows the dramatic climate change caused by the emission of heat-trapping gases like carbon dioxide from cars and industrial sites is worsening."

Since CBS's John Roberts cited an advance copy of the NAS report last Wednesday, the three broadcast evening news programs aired a total of five full field reports on global warming, all of which included assertions from network reporters that warming is a scientific fact. The only hint that the NAS study was not a slam-dunk for environmentalists came from Roberts on June 6: "The President may find some wiggle room in this report because while scientists

confirm levels of greenhouse gases are higher now than at any time in the past 400,000 years, they can't say precisely how much of the warming is man-made and how much might be part of the natural cycle."

The release of the NAS paper gave the networks another excuse to promote activists such as Phillip Clapp of the National Environmental Trust, who bashed Bush on all three networks last week. "This report blows their cover," Clapp proclaimed on ABC. Indeed, nine out of the 10 talking heads who discussed global warming science argued that catastrophic climate change was inevitable. "We need to start cutting global warming pollution today," demanded the Natural Resources Defense Council's David Hawkins on the June 11 *Evening News*. Only one sound bite offered the opposing view: "If we're going to disrupt our economy, if we're going to change our entire energy use pattern, we better have a little better information than what we have right now," GOP Senator Chuck Hagel stated on the June 7 *CBS Evening News*.

According to the Reason Public Policy Institute (RPPI), the real news is that the NAS panel mapped out many of global warming's gray areas. "The NAS report is the first mainstream report that doesn't soft-peddle uncertainty," praised RPPI's Environmental Programs Director Dr. Kenneth Green. But none of that uncertainty made it onto the networks, where the only news was environmentalists' tired spin.

— Rich Noyes

All Three Networks Got It Wrong:

"Our primary conclusion was that despite some knowledge and agreement, the science is by no means settled. We are quite confident (1) that global mean temperature is about 0.5 degrees Celsius higher than it was a century ago; (2) that atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide have risen over the past two centuries; and (3) that carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas whose increase is likely to warm the earth....

"But — and I cannot stress this enough — we are not in a position to confidently attribute past climate change to carbon dioxide or to forecast what the climate will be in the future. That is to say, contrary to media impressions, agreement with the three basic statements tells us almost nothing relevant to policy discussions."

— MIT Professor Richard Lindzen, a member of the National Academy of Sciences expert panel, Wall Street Journal *op-ed*, June 11.

L. Brent Bozell III, Publisher; Brent Baker, Rich Noyes, Editors; Jessica Anderson, Brian Boyd, Geoffrey Dickens, Ken Shepherd, Brad Wilmouth, Media Analysts; Kristina Sewell, Research Associate; Liz Swasey, Director of Communications. To read "Clamoring for Kyoto," MRC's Special Report on global warming bias, go to www.mrc.org.