



Campaign 2000

Media Reality ✓ Check

Expert Documentation of the Latest Liberal Media Bias ☆ Tuesday, July 18, 2000

Press Contact:
Dan Gabriel
(703) 683-5004
Vol. 4, No. 32
www.mrc.org

Top Government Officials Were Told the Truth, But Preferred to Attack Big Oil for "Price Gouging"

No Buzz About Baseless Business-Bashing

The broadcast networks had weeks to demand that the Clinton administration show some proof to back their highly-publicized "price gouging" charges against the nation's oil companies. Now, two of the three broadcast networks are burying evidence showing the government's accusations — that Big Oil, not EPA regulations, were responsible for June's huge gas price run-up — were knowingly false.

On July 14, the *Washington Times* reported: "An internal Energy Department memo reveals that the Clinton administration knew its own environmental regulations were a major reason gas prices jumped to record highs in the Midwest last month, even as officials publicly laid blame on 'big oil' companies."

The memo reached top officials on June 5. A week later, EPA official Robert Perciasepe told the press the oil companies were to blame. "Our analysis shows adequate supply and the cost of producing the fuel doesn't, isn't anywhere near the costs, the prices we're seeing at the pump," Perciasepe said on June 12.

Accepting that version of events, *CBS Evening News* correspondent Bob Orr on June 12 favorably portrayed the administration as price cops: "The White House has now put the oil industry on notice. If any evidence of price gouging surfaces, regulators will come down hard."

"Who are the gougers?" Bob Jamieson wondered on ABC's *World News Tonight* on June 21. "Gasoline station operators say they are not. The oil companies say they are not. It is now up to the Federal Trade Commission to decide who's telling the truth."

Trouble is, there wasn't any evidence of "price gouging" except for the price increases themselves, for which the administration shunned all responsibility. But after the EPA's June 12 press conference, ABC, CBS, CNN and NBC ran a total of 16 stories on their evening newscasts repeating the

Clintonites' unverified claim of oil company price manipulation.

How did the networks respond when the Energy Dept. memo surfaced, showing that the administration knew its charges were false? ABC's *Good Morning America*, CBS's *Early Show*, and NBC's *Today* never mentioned the news, though *GMA* found time for a musical tribute to JFK, Jr on Friday morning.

How did the networks respond when the *Washington Times* offered evidence the Clinton administration knew its charges were false? ABC's *Good Morning America*, CBS's *Early Show*, and NBC's *Today* ignored it — though *GMA* found time for a musical tribute to JFK, Jr.

The *CBS Evening News* told viewers about the memo on both Friday and Saturday, though Dan Rather oddly spun it as a case of "Republicans [siding] with the oil companies against the Clinton-Gore administration on the question of who and what is to blame for higher gasoline prices" — even though

correspondent Bill Plante's story reported that the administration's internal memo essentially agreed with the Republicans and the oil companies.

Plante also reported that Gore had read the memo before attacking the oil industry on June 21, but NBC's Tim Russert didn't ask the Vice President to justify his accusations on Sunday's *Meet the Press* when Gore was the guest for the full hour.

World News Tonight and *NBC Nightly News* were silent about the memo, apparently unwilling to confuse viewers with evidence that the oil companies weren't guilty of the baseless and political "price gouging" charges they had so prominently reported the month before.

— Rich Noyes, Director of MRC's Free Market Project

L. Brent Bozell III, Publisher; Brent Baker, Tim Graham, Editors; Jessica Anderson, Brian Boyd, Geoffrey Dickens, Ted King, Paul Smith, Brad Wilmoth, Media Analysts; Kristina Sewell, Research Associate; Liz Swasey, Director of Communications. For more Free Market Project reports, go to www.mrc.org/fmp