



# Media Reality Check

A Twice-Daily Analysis of Network Convention Coverage  Monday Morning, July 31, 2000

## Good Morning!

Welcome to the Media Research Center's morning examination of Republican convention coverage delivered by fax, e-mail and posted on our Web site. This edition concentrates on coverage from over the weekend.

This afternoon a second daily edition will look at today's morning shows.

For the latest analysis, check out the MRC Web page:

<http://www.mrc.org>

For the complete collection of these issues as they are published, go to the above address and click on "Campaign 2000" where you'll also find our review of liberal bias at past conventions. Click on "Convention History."

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*Donaldson: Should Someone Who Used Cocaine Be President?*

## Cheney Quizzed on Sunday About Past Votes

The pounding away at VP nominee Dick Cheney over conservative House votes members of the media consider bizarre continued during his Sunday talk show appearances, especially on ABC's *This Week* and CBS's *Face the Nation*. Last week network reporters had tagged Cheney as "hard right" and a "very hardline conservative." Sam Donaldson read off the Democratic tip sheets as he demanded on *This Week* that Cheney explain certain votes:

■ "You were a strong advocate against so-called gun control, and you voted against the armor-piercing bullet measure in 1985. You also voted against a measure which would have required 3.75 ounces of metal in any pistol or weapon, so that if it went through a metal detector it could go off and be stopped. Why would you vote against that?" When Cheney explained his belief in the Second Amendment, Donaldson sarcastically shot back: "Well, I don't mean to be extreme, but a stinger is an arm, an atomic cannon is an arm, a mortar is an arm. Do you think the Founding Fathers meant that we should all have stinger missiles if we wanted?"

■ Moving on, Donaldson demanded: "In 1987, you voted against re-authorizing the Older Americans Act, which calls for health care centers, it calls for Meals on Wheels, it calls for Alzheimer's research. It would have cost \$1.6 billion. You were one of seven members of the House to vote against it. Why?"

Cheney replied: "Probably because I thought that it was excessive in terms of funding." To which Donaldson retorted: "\$1.6 billion for older Americans?"

■ Donaldson quizzed Cheney about how he had given briefings to donors at the Pentagon before slyly raising the issue of Bush and cocaine: "The question of cocaine last year was very much in the public mind, connected with one of the candidates, as you know. My general question to you is if someone has used cocaine — we're not talking about marijuana — do you really think that person ought to be President of the United States?" □

Watch a RealPlayer clip. Go to [www.mrc.org](http://www.mrc.org) and click on Campaign 2000

## Quote of the Day

"If the Republican Party is a party of the big tent, a lot of different views, why not express those views on this divisive issue of abortion instead of that very, very strong, total, against all odds, abortion provision?"

— CNN's Wolf Blitzer to Senator Bill Frist, July 28 *The World Today*.

## Inside

2 Platform Still Too "Anti-Abortion Rights"

3 CNN Distorted Study to Show anti-Gore Bias

3 CBS News Chief: Only "Extremists" See Bias

### Dan Rather Style Welcome

Dan Rather delivered a loaded opening to Sunday's *CBS Evening News*: "The stage is set down below and right behind me for a well-orchestrated, pre-scripted, week-long infomercial designed to sell the Republican presidential ticket and get corporate donors to pony up more for the fall campaign. Expect much the same from the Democrats later in August."

Then in an unprecedented move, Rather cited Newt Gingrich as an authority: "But as George Bush's running mate Richard Cheney arrived here today, he still was dogged by questions about what Newt Gingrich says is his very conservative voting record in the Congress. Cheney says he might vote differently today on some issues. Abortion rights is not among them."

### Marilyn Quayle: "Scowling Face of Conservatism"?

The former Second Lady as symbol of the GOP's dark side?

On Friday's *Washington Week in Review*, *New York Times* reporter Richard Berke made that case. He noted how this year's Republican convention will look "like a Democratic convention, to tell you the truth, more than a Republican convention. You're going to see lots of minorities up there."

But, he asserted: "You're not going to see the scowling faces of conservatism that have been up there before, like Pat Buchanan and Pat Robertson and Marilyn Quayle." □

*Platform: "A Hard-Right Document...Softened This Year"*

### But Still Too "Anti-Abortion Rights"

Network reporters liked how the GOP made some progress in dropping supposedly "harsh" language from the platform over immigration and even abolishing the Department of Education, but as Dan Rather grumbled Friday night, "the Republican platform's hard stand against abortion rights and a woman's right to choose" remains unchanged. Rather approved how "there is some softer language on other issues."

Schieffer explained in his subsequent *CBS Evening News* story: "This year's draft party platform has a more moderate tone. It's much friendlier toward immigrants. Gone is the demand to make English the official language. Gone are the harsh calls to eliminate the Department of Education and the National Endowment for the Arts." Schieffer adopted "pro-choice" language as he added that "women who favor abortion rights urged the platform committee to change the party's anti-abortion rights language and got a polite hearing." But, Schieffer bemoaned, "at Republican conventions, the other side always prevails."

The next morning on NBC's *Today*, David Bloom grilled Governor Tommy Thompson about how the platform remained too conservative. His "questions" in the form of contentions on the July 29 program:

■ "First off, abortion. The platform as it stands calls for a ban on all abortion, no exceptions. Abortion right supporters wanted to insert this language in, which would say: 'We welcome people on all sides of this complex issue and encourage their active participation as we work together on those issues upon which we agree.' Seemingly, innocuous language voted down. Why?"

Thompson answered: "I think it was voted down because the Republican Party is very pro-life, and we want to establish the principles of pro-life in the Republican Party." Bloom argued: "But Governor Bush says it's a big tent, everyone's welcome. Isn't that what that language states?"

■ "Let me ask you about gay rights. Conservatives reinserted the following language which states, 'We do not believe that sexual preference should be given special legal protection or standing in the law.' So the Republican Party is also against any form of rights for homosexuals and lesbians?"

■ "Let me ask you a final question. We heard in David Gregory's report a moment ago about both Governor Bush and Dick Cheney talking about attacking President Clinton. President Clinton came out last night and said, about the Bush campaign message, he said it as follows, quote, 'I've been Governor of Texas, my daddy was President, I own a baseball team, they like me down there.' Is that the Governor's message, do you think?"

Saturday night *NBC Nightly News* anchor John Seigenthaler hit Thompson again from the left: "Is there room in the Republican Party for people who believe in abortion rights?"

If CBS and NBC are balanced, in Los Angeles they'll pursue the Democratic Party's lack of embrace of pro-lifers just as aggressively and bring just as much scorn upon parts of that party's platform. □

## CNN Distorted Study to Show Media as Pro-Bush & Anti-Gore Us Biased? Conservatives Must Be Crazy

On Friday's *Inside Politics*, CNN's Judy Woodruff claimed a new study of this year's election coverage showed the media aren't liberally biased. But the actual study, produced by groups funded by the liberal Pew Charitable Trusts, made no such claim — nor did it offer any evidence that would substantiate such a conclusion.

"A common complaint among conservatives [in 1992 was] that the news media are biased against Republicans," Woodruff told viewers, "but this year's GOP standard bearer has little to complain about."

"According to a study by the Project for Excellence in Journalism and the Committee of Concerned Journalists, Democrat Al Gore was far more likely to be the subject of negative news stories this year...When the media reported on Bush, it was more likely to deal with positive themes," Woodruff claimed.

"There was just a media study that shows actually the festival has been on George Bush's side, as far as favorable coverage by the press," chimed in Margaret Carlson on CNN's *Capital Gang* the next evening.

Judy Woodruff: "According to a study...Al Gore was far more likely to be the subject of negative news stories this year."

Nice try. The PEJ study ignored four-fifths of this year's campaign news (it looked at one sample week from five of the six months), and the research team only counted comments about six pre-selected "themes," and no other positive or negative references to Bush, Gore or

the two parties.

The three Bush themes the researchers chose were a) his family ties, b) his alleged lack of intelligence, and c) his being a "different kind of Republican." That means none of stories about Bush and the death penalty, Bush's tax cut, or Bush's Social Security plan were included — even though the media delivered mostly bad press on each.

The three Gore themes were a) his exaggerations, b) his links to scandals, and c) "Gore is competent and experienced." No other Gore issues were considered, nor was the study equipped to deal with "bias by omission" — episodes when the media skipped embarrassing stories like the trial of Gore's fundraiser, Maria Hsia. (Woodruff's show, *Inside Politics*, ignored the trial until March 2, when Hsia was convicted of five felony counts.)

The study, "A Question of Character," was actually designed to critique the way the press generally covers the "character issue," not serve as yet another score sheet on the campaign horse race. So, according to the study, (available at [www.journalism.org](http://www.journalism.org)) how good a job have the media been doing?

In the section entitled "Evidence," the authors write, "Journalists offering either their analysis or opinion were the most common source for every theme....Journalists' assertions about Bush's character were more than twice as likely to be unsupported by any evidence. In other words, they were pure opinion, rather than journalistic analysis."

But you didn't hear a word about *that* from CNN. □

## CBS News President: MRC "Extremists of the Right"

"Well, I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I do deny that we have a bias, and I'm familiar with the work that [Brent] Bozell and [Reed] Irvine do. They are activists and extremists of the Right," declared CBS News President Andrew Heyward Sunday afternoon on C-SPAN in dismissing a caller who asked about liberal media bias on CBS documented by the Media Research Center and Accuracy in Media.

After denigrating the work of the heads of the two groups, Heyward proceeded to claim "the people I work with, many of them are surprisingly conservative."

As for why people see a liberal bias, Heyward maintained it's only because "as journalists we're always holding the establishment up to scrutiny, whether it's a Republican or a Democratic administration, a Republican or a Democratic Congress."

"It's our job to ask tough questions and to shine a light in corners that might otherwise remain dark. And if you tend to be conservative, by definition somebody who's constantly challenging the status quo, even though that's how we see our jobs, is seen potentially as unpatriotic or they're anti-government, anti-American."

He ended his answer by insisting: "Our job is to communicate the truth to people." □