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Networks React with Indignation to Bush's Recess Appointment, But Praised Clinton's '97 "Solution"

## "Defiant" Bush Sends "Damaged Goods" to UN

After a minority of Senators for nine weeks blocked a floor vote for John Bolton as UN ambassador, the broadcast networks reacted with indignation to President Bush's decision to directly appoint Bolton during a congressional recess. "President Bush made an end-run around Congress," *World News Tonight* anchor Elizabeth Vargas fussed on ABC Monday night. Later on *Nightline*, host Terry Moran proclaimed: "A defiant President installs that man he couldn't get confirmed....an in-your-face move by the President."

On Tuesday's *Today*, NBC reporter Andrea Mitchell highlighted how "Bolton's critics say he goes to the UN as damaged goods," a phrase repeated on CBS's *Early Show*. The previous morning, NBC's Katie Couric was aghast that the President could directly appoint Bolton: "How can he do that?!"

During the months in which Bolton's nomination languished, network reporters helped hype liberal accusations. Back on May 13, ABC's *Good Morning America* showcased Bolton as an example of "workplace bullying," as news anchor Robin Roberts claimed Bolton was "lightning rod for the question of when does being a tough boss turn into being toxic?" But instead of a fair examination of Bolton's conduct, reporter Bill Weir showcased three office workers — none of whom had any connection to Bolton, but who had been bullied by their own bosses. Weir then sought expert advice from Gary Namie of the "Workplace Bullying and Trauma Institute." Namie proclaimed: "Work shouldn't hurt."

A few weeks later on June 20, hours after the second vote in which a majority of Senators (54) had voted to move Bolton's nomination to the floor so he could be confirmed, CBS's Gloria Borger relayed Democratic innuendo as

justifying the delay. She told the *CBS Evening News* audience: "Democrats are very concerned that John Bolton may have been effectively spying, not only on his subordinates but also on some of his bosses." Of course, no Bolton ally was permitted to respond to the anonymous allegations Borger had just disseminated.

### Recess Appointments: *Today* vs. *Today*

**Katie Couric:** "President Bush is poised to use his recess appointment power and send John Bolton to the UN without a Senate confirmation vote. How can he do that?!"

**Chris Matthews:** "...It will be a recess appointment only good for one Congress. He really won't have the full authority of someone like [former UN Ambassador] Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who spoke for the whole country, not just for the President."  
— *Exchange on the August 1 Today*.

**vs.**

"You seem like a pretty good candidate to be Assistant Attorney General for civil rights, but you've run into a wall in Congress....There's a solution here, albeit a temporary solution. The President could make you what's called a recess nominee. Which he can give you the job for a year, almost a trial run. And that way Republicans can say, 'Hey, he's pretty good at this,' and then vote on you a year from now."

— *Matt Lauer interviewing Clinton nominee Bill Lann Lee on the December 12, 1997 Today*.

The networks apparently don't consider all high-profile recess appointments equally egregious. In December 1997, when it became clear that Bill Lann Lee, an advocate of discriminatory quotas, would lose a Senate vote to become an Assistant Attorney General, Democrats blocked a floor vote and President Clinton named Lee as "acting" head of the civil rights division, a step which allowed Lee to serve for 120 days. But Lee stayed on the job for three years, getting a recess appointment on August 3, 2000. Wasn't that an "end-run around Congress"?

Then, TV presented Lee as a mistreated American hero. ABC's Peter Jennings described him as "a classic example of an American success story" while reporter Linda Douglas touted how Lee "seemed to be the perfect candidate to be the nation's head of civil rights."

NBC's Matt Lauer told Lee that bypassing the Senate was "a solution" that might help him win over Republicans.

Now, President Bush is called "defiant" and Bolton is decried as "damaged goods," further evidence of the media's double standard. — *Brent Baker and Rich Noyes*

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