



Media Reality Check

A Twice-Daily Analysis of Network Convention Coverage  Friday Morning, August 4, 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 Thursday night.

This issue concludes our analysis of the Republican convention, but we'll return on August 14 to cover the Democratic convention.

For ongoing analysis of campaign coverage, check out the MRC Web page and daily *CyberAlert*: <http://www.mrc.org>

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Media Reality Check Staff:

Editor: Brent H. Baker

Afternoon Editor: Rich Noyes

Media Analysts: Geoffrey Dickens, Jessica Anderson, Paul Smith, Brian Boyd, Brad Wilmouth, Ted King

Web Operations: Andy Szul, Eric Pairel, Brandon Rytting

Interns: Michael Ferguson, Ken Shepherd

In Philadelphia:

Publisher: L. Brent Bozell III

Senior Editor: Tim Graham

Communications Director: Liz Swasey

Intern: Joyce Garczynski

Contacts:

MRC in Alexandria, VA:

(703) 683-9733

e-mail: cyber@mediaresearch.org

If you are in Philadelphia and wish to interview one of our on-scene analysts, call Liz Swasey: (703) 282-6664

e-mail: rightmrc@aol.com

"I'll Tell You the Surprise, I Thought It Was a Very Good Speech"

"Presidential" Bush Won Over Media, But...

George W. Bush earned rave reviews Thursday night for his speech, though some were most impressed with its un-Republican aspects and NBC trotted out the usual liberal mantra about paying for tax cuts.

■ ABC's Cokie Roberts: "I think a very successful speech. Anybody seeing at the beginning George W. Bush's parents watching their child stand up there and accept the nomination was bound to be moved. Even my colleagues here in the press felt that way....And I think that his echoing that Reagan line of 'tear down this wall,' from Berlin, to talk about tearing down the wall between poverty and wealth in America, something you're not used to hearing at a Republican convention."

■ CBS's Bob Schieffer: "Well, I'll tell you the surprise, I thought it was a very good speech. I'm not sure I've ever heard George Bush deliver a speech in quite the way he did this one tonight. I thought he struck just the right tone. It was very presidential. No real cheap shots in it, but some very good lines."

■ CNN's Jeff Greenfield: "The most surprising part of this speech, one I must say I would not have expected necessarily in a Republican convention, was his expression of empathy and sympathy for a 15-year-old juvenile felon."

■ NBC's Tom Brokaw: "This speech, it seemed to me was a pretty skillful weaving of campaign hot buttons, and a higher calling." Tim Russert agreed, with a caveat: "It was an extremely well written speech. George W. Bush tonight was politician, preacher. But I think Democrats, Republicans, independents would acknowledge he was presidential. There is no doubt about that in terms of stepping up and giving an outline, a vision of where he wants to lead the country....He'll have to explain how he can afford to reform or privatize part of Social Security and still afford tax cuts."

A half hour later on MSNBC Jim Miklaszewski demanded of Phil Gramm: "He left himself wide open on one particular issue when he talked about tax breaks or tax cuts for every tax bracket. Nobody should pay more than one third of their income. Doesn't that translate into tax breaks for the rich?" □

Quote of the Night

"One of the things we hear over and over is restoring honesty and integrity to the Oval Office. It fair to tar Vice President Gore with the sins of the President?...So ethics and morality, his, will be an issue in this campaign even though he's not running and even though he's still a popular President?"

— CBS's Ed Bradley to Lindsey Graham

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Rather's Parting Shot: Convention "Excess"

Dan Rather signed off CBS's coverage at 11:10 pm ET with this pontificating:

"When the Founding Fathers met in this city in the late 1700s and wrote the rules for electing the President they could not have foreseen what we have seen here this week and what we will pretty much see again when the Democrats convene in Los Angeles. The process has gone from James Madison to Madison Avenue. Conventions are now political marketing operations, all about big money, power and influence. Just over 200 years ago another George W., George Washington, left Philadelphia after two terms as President. In his farewell address Washington warned about the excesses of political parties. He was not talking about conventions, but he could have been."

"Cheney Attack Speech"

Two more hits Thursday on Dick Cheney's speech. On MSNBC's *Newsfront*, anchor Lester Holt asked Tom Brokaw: "What is the feeling among Republicans today? Any morning after regrets from the tone of the attack?"

Dan Rather introduced a *CBS Evening News* preview of Bush's speech: "It is an opportunity for Bush to define his vision of where he would take the country and say why he should be the one to lead it. The context includes the Dick Cheney attack speech here last night on the Democrats." □

"1st in Capital Punishment, 2nd in the Number of Uninsured Children"

ABC & CBS Run Own Bush Bios

While CNN, FNC, NBC/MSNBC and PBS carried the RNC's Bush biography film, ABC and CBS instead showed viewers their own take. Both raised questions about his military service, stressed the plight of the poor in Texas and resurrected the foreign leader pop quiz.

ABC's Dean Reynolds suggested his lack of interest in a liberal cause demonstrated his lack of leadership abilities: "But is he all handshake and not much else? The same people who recall the friendliness can point to little in the way of leadership qualities they perceived. For example, the 1960s were a turbulent time at Yale. Rebellion and anti-war sentiment were palpable. To many perhaps, but not to Bush." Reynolds soon added: "What about his military obligation in the Texas Air National Guard? He says he fulfilled it, but is hazy in his recollections."

Reynolds soon got to the infamous pop quiz, showing Bush unable to name the President of Chechnya or Prime Minister of India.

Over on CBS, Bill Whitaker asked: "Did his father pull strings to get him a coveted spot with the Texas National Guard while less fortunate sons of Texas went off to Vietnam?" Whitaker asserted: "Though Texas air is some of the dirtiest in the country, he allows polluters to voluntarily comply with environmental regulations. Texas is first in capital punishment, second in the number of uninsured children....But the Texas constitution grants the Governor limited power, which raises the question is George W. Bush prepared to lead the most powerful nation on earth? A question compounded when he failed a reporter's pop quiz at the start of the campaign." □

GOP Crossed the Line from Inclusion to Pandering

ABC's Peter Jennings asked Michel Martin if the GOP crossed the line between inclusion and pandering. Martin, who is black, disqualified Republicans: "I'm not sure that the floor of this convention is the place to ask that question because, I mean, Peter, look around. I mean, the fact of the matter is that....the delegations all over the country are still predominantly Caucasian..."

Jennings wondered Thursday night if Martin's friends and colleagues "think that there's been an overreaching this week?" Martin's friends are not impressed with the GOP: "In my unscientific survey of friends, family that I've been talking to, some people really do think that they've crossed the line."

Just before midnight on CNN, Bruce Morton contended conservative views contradict inclusion: "But inclusion is not universal here. On Powell's affirmative action, the GOP platform says 'we will attain equal opportunity without quotas or other forms of preferential treatment.' The platform would ban all abortions, going further than Bush. It opposes sex education in schools except for teaching abstinence and it opposes laws protecting homosexuals from discrimination....For all the black faces on the podium, how inclusive was this convention? The Joint Center for Political Studies, a Washington think tank, says 4.1 percent of the delegates here were black, up from 1996, but about the same as in 1992 when Pat Buchanan made that cultural war speech." □

CBS: Cheney "Rigid-Right" But Kerry Just "Liberal"

"Compassion...Obscures the Conservative"

In airing a story about how Bush's "compassion" image "often obscures the conservative" Bush really is, followed by a piece on Gore's potential VP options, Thursday's *CBS Evening News* not only reflected the liberal view that conservative political positions contradict compassion, but also displayed a double standard on labeling.

■ **Bush's Compassion vs. Conservative Reality.** Previewing Bush's speech, reporter Bill Whitaker noted: "Staffers say he'll make the compassionate conservative case for change he's stressed for months." Viewers saw a clip of Bush: "I'm not running just to say I've held the office. I'm running because I want to lead this country to a more generous day, a more hospitable day for everybody." Whitaker then adopted the liberal line, countering: "It's a feel-good message with something for everybody. The compassion often obscures the conservative, but it's there. When Dick Cheney's rigid-right congressional votes came under attack, Bush embraced the man and his record."

Whitaker listed Bush's supposed areas of conflict: "He's a master of mixed signals. He refused to challenge this platform's call for a total abortion ban, yet he insists he'd allow them for rape and incest. With diversity [video of J.C. Watts] hogging the spotlight here, **hardline conservatives** are almost invisible, but when former Christian Coalition head Ralph Reed endorsed Bush he told CBS News the conservative agenda hadn't changed, just the style....Bush says there should be no confusion. He's both compassionate and conservative."

CBS's Bill Whitaker: "When Dick Cheney's rigid-right congressional votes came under attack, Bush embraced the man and his record."

■ **VP Labeling Contrast.** The networks, especially CBS, haven't hesitated to go beyond just "conservative" and have burdened Dick Cheney with labels which paint him as an extremist, such as "hardline conservative," "far right," and "hard right." So if Al Gore picks Senator John Kerry as his running mate will CBS apply matching tags, such as "hardline liberal" and "hard left"? After all, while Cheney earned a lifetime 91 percent rating from the American Conservative Union, Kerry has a 93 percent lifetime approval rating from the liberal Americans for Democratic Action.

Thursday night CBS demonstrated its bias. A few minutes after Whitaker referred to "Dick Cheney's rigid-right congressional votes," reporter John Roberts looked at how Gore's VP list is "down to four so-called 'new generation' candidates," Senators Evan Bayh, John Kerry, John Edwards and Joe Lieberman. But though Kerry is as liberal as Cheney is conservative, Roberts could only muster the "liberal" label: "What Gore hopes to do is avoid the potshots that the Bush campaign took over George W.'s pick of Dick Cheney for running mate. Bayh is a former Governor of a state that usually votes Republican, but his vote to ban late-term abortion has angered women's groups. Kerry is a Vietnam vet with three purple hearts, but he's a liberal from a state Gore should already win..."

It's the media which took the "potshots" at Cheney and the media which will decide whether to take them at Gore's pick. □

D-PA vs. R-PA

A speaking role at the convention contrasts with how Democrats suppress dissent on abortion, FNC's Brit Hume observed Thursday night:

"It's probably worth noting the contrast here between the two parties on the issue of Pennsylvania Governors who disagree with the party majority on the issue of abortion... Governor Bob Casey...was not allowed to speak at the 1992 Democratic convention in New York, though he very much wanted to. Now we have Tom Ridge...holds a minority position in the Republican Party, being pro-choice, and he's a featured speaker."

Letterman's GOP Top Ten

From the August 2 *Late Show with David Letterman*, the "Top Ten Announcements that Would Cause a Panic at the Republican National Convention."

10. "Stop by the concession area and pick up Barbara Bush's swimsuit calendar"
9. "At the conclusion of his speech, George W. Bush will execute some lucky delegate"
8. "Run for your lives! Dick Cheney's heart's gonna 'splode!"
7. "Because of the convention, 'Becker' will not be seen tonight"
6. "Please welcome a completely naked Jesse Helms"
5. "And now to sing our national anthem, David Letterman"
4. "Former President Bush, your son's head is stuck in the podium again"
3. "Richard Nixon is out in the parking lot and he's pissed"
2. "If anyone finds an appointment book filled with names of prominent Republicans, please return it to the hooker in the lobby"
1. "The caterer forgot the scotch"