



Conventions 2000

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# Media Reality ✓ Check

A Twice-Daily Analysis of Network Convention Coverage ★ Friday Morning, August 18, 2000

## Good Morning!

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

This issue completes our daily fax reports on the two conventions. For ongoing campaign coverage analysis, sign-up for the MRC's *CyberAlert* e-mail reports which are posted on the MRC home page.

For the complete collection of these issues, including those published during the Republican convention, please go to <http://www.mrc.org> and click on "Campaign 2000." You'll be able to access issues as regular HTML files or view them as Adobe PDF files.

Don't miss the videoclips posted each day to illustrate the documented bias: Check the MRC home page and the "Campaign 2000" page for the latest.

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## "Al Gore Tonight Rose to the Occasion" & "He Hit a Home Run" Gore's Speech Satisfied Network Analysts

**A**l Gore earned mostly upbeat assessments for his Thursday night acceptance speech, though there were some notable exceptions, such as ABC's Sam Donaldson who suggested Gore looked like he "was on speed tonight." (See page 2 for negative comments.)

**ABC.** George Stephanopoulos: "I think one of the most effective moments in the speech was when he tied those specific promises and those specific values to the faces of people in the crowd....Style? **No stiff Al Gore tonight. He was afire**, he was fierce. I think the question will be will it come off as maybe a little bit too hot for people at home?"

**Cokie Roberts:** "I think those were good bookends for this speech and, as George Stephanopoulos said, to talk about issues through human stories, another very good technique. I think it probably has **put him in the position he needs to be in to go out and really fight** now because it's a real fight."

**Ted Koppel on *Nightline*:** "As George Bush did two weeks ago, **Al Gore tonight rose to the occasion**. He acknowledged the obvious — he is not the most exciting politician, but then he is not running for the post of national orator. **Al Gore had to step out of the shadow of Bill Clinton tonight and he did.**"

**CBS.** Ed Bradley: "**I thought it was a solid speech....**And I thought he had some very good lines in this speech, and unfortunately a lot of them got buried because there was applause on the floor and people wanted to keep applauding and he was just plowing through that speech. I thought it was very effective in one sense, in that he used real people to outline the broad brush strokes of what his policies would be."

**CNN.** Bernard Shaw: "This party's presidential nominee has completed his speech and **he hit a home run.**" Shaw later added: "But think of the elements we have now in Campaign 2000. George W. Bush at that Philadelphia convention two Thursdays ago. He was superb with his speech. **Al Gore tonight for the Democrats, superb with his speech.**" □

## Quote of the Night

"What we witness in public now is less a naked act of history than a flagrant act of hyperbole. Popeil Politics, as in Ron Popeil, king of the TV infomercial."

— **Dan Rather closing CBS News convention coverage Thursday night.**  
(See page 2 sidebar for full quote.)

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## Dan Rather's Inscrutable "Popeil Politics"

Dan Rather did not disappoint Thursday night as he came through again with the wackiest comments of the night. He closed CBS News coverage just before 11pm ET with some remarks in which he oddly linked conventions with a TV infomercial pioneer:

"And so we come to the end of the nominating phase of Campaign 2000. In his landmark book, *The Making of the President, 1960*, the late Theodore White said, 'A convention is frequently a place where the naked act of history and decision takes place in public.' That was 1960. Now forty years later, conventions no longer make decisions, and what we witness in public now is less a naked act of history than a flagrant act of hyperbole. Popeil Politics, as in Ron Popeil, king of the TV infomercial. He invented the infomercial to sell his household gadgets. The Republicans and the Democrats have made it their own to sell their candidates."

Then, as Rather choked up and voiced his last words in barely a whisper, he dramatically concluded: "In 82 days, our beloved America will choose a new President. Let the buyer beware. Let the voter be informed. For CBS News, Dan Rather reporting from the City of Angels, Los Angeles, California. Good night."

**To watch Dan Rather's strange closing, go to the MRC home page after 9am ET Friday to view it via RealPlayer.**

## Sam Donaldson: "The Vice President Was on Speed Tonight" Not All Thrilled With Gore's Speech

Not all were as impressed with Gore's speech as those quoted on page one:

■ ABC's Sam Donaldson was concerned people missed Gore's best stuff: "The Vice President was on speed tonight. He acted like a man who was late catching a plane. Someone must have told him you must not be slow and awkward and methodical. Boy, he was none of those things. But you know, in racing along, he stepped on some of his best lines. When he would introduce the Gutierrez family, you could hear 'em in the background starting to cheer, and he'd go, 'No, no, no,' and he'd go on. I mean, I think people watching at home...said, 'Wait a second, this guy is going too fast, I can't get it.'"

■ CBS's Bob Schieffer observed: "It was totally devoid of humor. I can't ever remember a political speech at any kind of political gathering where there wasn't a little humor in it...Normally a speech like this will sort of start off and like a great plane or something head down the runway and then soar into the sky. This one did not really soar, it seemed to me."

■ Past midnight ET on MSNBC, guest analyst Peggy Noonan insisted: "It was the most boring, boilerplate garbage! Excuse me, it was boring!" Howard Fineman of *Newsweek* chirped up with the liberal take: "I don't know. To the people who think that the government can help guarantee that they get prescription drugs it's not boring, you know. It's not boring." □

## Rather's Mantra: "The Republican-Backed Special Prosecutor" CBS Suggested GOP Dirty Tricks

Near the top of CBS's prime time coverage last night Dan Rather charged: "In an apparent attempt to embarrass Al Gore on this his big night, someone, for whatever reason, has leaked the story that the Republican-backed special prosecutor, Ken Starr's successor, has convened a new grand jury to investigate President Clinton and accusations related to the President's sex life."

Earlier on the *CBS Evening News* he employed the same language which incorporated the liberal spin about an unfair partisan attack in a personal matter: "Al Gore must stand and deliver here tonight as the Democratic Party's presidential nominee. And now Gore must do so against the backdrop of a potentially damaging, carefully orchestrated story leak about President Clinton. The story is that Republican-backed special prosecutor Robert Ray, Ken Starr's successor, has a new grand jury looking into possible criminal charges against the President growing out of Mr. Clinton's sex life."

In prime time and on the *Evening News* Gloria Borger then passed along the Gore spin with a warning about Ken Starr: "One top Gore adviser portrayed it as what he called a quote 'grand Republican strategy to tie Al Gore to President Clinton.'" She added: "The hope of the Gore campaign is that this leak will fire up their troops and backfire against the Republicans. How? By tying George W. Bush to Kenneth Starr."

A fact skipped by CBS News: Last year the AP reported, "Until January 1998, Ray was a registered Democrat in New York City." □

## ***CBS Hit Bush's Policy Failures & Inconsistencies from the Left But Gore's Liberal Positions Not Scrutinized***

Reviewing George Bush's acceptance speech two weeks ago, the *CBS Evening News* warned that his "compassion often obscures the conservative," and in profiling his life in prime time CBS criticized his record as would a liberal. But last night CBS listed Al Gore's policy agenda without critical comment and in prime time didn't utter a word about his policy record.

■ *CBS Evening News* previews. Back on August 3, Bill Whitaker previewed Bush's acceptance speech by countering his "compassionate conservative" theme: "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 cited as evidence how Bush "refused to challenge this platform's call for a total abortion ban."

Last night John Roberts previewed Gore, but refrained from any negative comments on liberal ideas: "In a speech that could be the most important of his life Gore will touch on favorite themes of Social Security, health care, education and the economy. He'll also propose bi-weekly town meetings..."

■ Prime time profiles. In place of the official Bush bio film, CBS aired a piece by Bill Whitaker who came at Bush's Texas record from the left: "Like most Texas governors, he's been a friend to big business. He pushed tort reform, which limits business liability from lawsuits. 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...."

Thursday night John Roberts handled the Gore profile, but did not relay conservative criticisms of Gore's policy record. □

## ***Media Defined "Inclusiveness" as Backing Pro-Choice Position FNC Picked Up On Tribute to Bob Casey***

Fox News Channel separated itself from the other networks last night by picking up on the pre-prime time film tribute to the late pro-life Penn. Gov. Bob Casey, who was denied the right to speak at the '92 convention. Just before 9pm ET Brit Hume introduced a film clip and then went to Jim Angle on the floor who interviewed pro-life Congressman Ron Klink about how he's treated.

Brian Wilson learned from a delegate that all 435 of them from California are "pro-choice," prompting him to query: "There are so many efforts made to try to make the California delegates very reflective of what's going on in the state, and not everybody in the state is pro-choice, are they?"

Brit Hume noted the contrast with the media attitude toward Republicans: "There was kind of a working media definition of inclusiveness in Philadelphia, and that meant toleration, or possibly even support for, the pro-choice position." A few hours earlier, Carl Cameron had recalled remarks the night before by Karenna Gore-Schiff and pointed out how "in a speech billed as about a loving dad, hailed his inclusive open-mindedness — except on abortion." Same could be said for the other networks. □

## **Lieberman's Liberalism Over Conscience**

Wednesday night in prime time Fox News Channel addressed the claim that Joe Lieberman really isn't liberal. Fred Barnes suggested he doesn't do much more than flirt with conservative ideas, asking Bill Bennett:

"For many conservatives the critique of Joe Lieberman is that he talks the talk, but he doesn't walk the walk. You know, he wrestles with the decision whether to vote for or against Clarence Thomas, partial birth abortion, he wrestles with, you know, his conscience and so on. Impeachment, whether to convict the President or not, he wrestles with that. But he always seems to wind up on the side—" Brit Hume jumped in: "Yeah, his conscience loses." Barnes stressed: "His conscience loses, and Democrats, the Democratic leadership wins. He always votes with them, anyway."

## **Third Clinton Term**

The Hollywood Left remains infatuated with Bill Clinton. Early Thursday night on MSNBC Chris Matthews asked actress Whoopi Goldberg: "In the ideal universe, the next President of the United States — forget popularity, forget political do-ability and practicality and all that stuff — who would you most like to see as President taking the oath next January 20th: Ralph Nader, Al Gore or Bill Clinton?" Without hesitation, Goldberg picked "Bill Clinton."