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Bustamante May Be Leading, But Networks Stay Focused on Arnold's Raunchy Magazine Comments

Cruising Past Cruz's Racial Controversies

When then-Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott disastrously touted the segregationist presidential candidacy of Strom Thurmond, the media frenzy started slowly, then erupted until the GOP dumped Lott from the leadership. *Newsweek* reporter Martha Brant conceded the media's ardor on CNBC: "We're now, in the media, going to give this thing steam. The Democrats may not even need to fan the flames of this."

Since mid-August, network TV reporters have been touting the leader-of-the-pack status of Lt. Gov. Cruz Bustamante in the California recall, but ABC, CBS, and NBC have shown no interest in the front-runner's racial controversies:

■ At a February 9, 2001 speech to the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, Bustamante said "n-gg-r" when he said he meant to say "Negro" in the title of a black labor organization. None of the Big Three has mentioned that slur during their coverage of this year's recall.

■ As a student at Fresno State University in the 1970s, Bustamante was an active member of MEChA, the Chicano Student Movement of Aztlan whose symbol is an eagle clutching a dynamite stick and a machete-like weapon in its claws. Their motto: "For the Race, everything. For those outside the Race, nothing." The group believes in reclaiming the mythical land of Aztlan, or most of the southwestern United States, for the "bronze race."

Coverage? Neither ABC nor NBC have mentioned Bustamante's MEChA ties, even though both interviewed him at length. When CBS's Bob Schieffer and *Los Angeles Times* reporter Doyle McManus grilled Bustamante on the August 31 *Face the Nation*, they also skipped MEChA, inviting him instead to pile on second-place GOP candidate Arnold Schwarzenegger for his raunchy comments in a 1977 issue of the pornographic magazine *Oui*.

CBS's Hattie Kauffman was the only network reporter to raise the issue, when she questioned Bustamante on the September 3 *Early Show*. After mentioning Schwarzenegger's

26-year-old *Oui* interview, Kauffman added: "There are ghosts in Bustamante's past as well. He was once a member of a radical group called MEChA. This was a Chicano student group that advocated a separate nation for Mexicans in the American Southwest. Did you know that when you joined?"

Bustamante did not disavow the group: "There were a lot of student protest groups in the '60s. It was about running for student government and trying to become part of the mainstream of California." Kauffman insisted: "It doesn't sound like the mainstream of California, if they're talking about a separate nation." Bustamante said: "Well, I know. I surely don't believe in some kind of racial separatist thing."

It's too bad CBS could only manage a brief exchange. They could have brought viewers up to date on MEChA activities in the Golden State:

■ In May 1995, the MEChA newspaper at UC-San Diego published an editorial on the death of a Latino INS agent: "He deserved to die...All the Migra pigs should be killed, every single one."

■ In November 1998, a statewide MEChA student conference at Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo welcomed more than 1,000 students with a program that said "Welcome to Cal Poly State Jew niversity" and a reference to "Jew York." (After protest from the Anti-Defamation League, the campus MEChA chapter threw out the students responsible.)

■ On March 8, 2002, FNC's Bill O'Reilly asked the state MEChA chair Ron Gochez about whether the group wanted American territory back. Gochez said: "We understand that we all sit on stolen land...Mexicano land, stolen from us." When O'Reilly whimsically offered Arizona, Gochez groused: "They took a lot more than Arizona."

— Tim Graham

ABC's Idea of a Better California Controversy

"In the *Oui* magazine interview, the then-29-year-old world-class body-builder admits to drug use, uses a derogatory term for gays, and describes life in Germany, hanging out with hookers and dating a stripper." — ABC reporter Jake Tapper, August 29 *Good Morning America*.

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