



Media Reality ✓ Check

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MRC Study: Television News Stressed Liberal Themes in Covering Key Economic Issues this Summer

Auditing the Media's Anti-Free Market Bias

Liberals want this year's congressional campaigns to be dominated by economic issues, and no wonder: TV news has covered key economic issues such as tax cuts, prescription drugs, and new regulations on business in ways that aid the liberal cause and give short shrift to conservative arguments. This summer, MRC analysts reviewed TV's economic news and discovered coverage that was almost entirely organized around liberal themes and arguments.

The complete results of that analysis appear in a new MRC Special Report, *A Summer of Skewed News*, which you can read at www.mrc.org. Some of the highlights:

■ **Remember the accounting scandals?** While heavy-hitting experts such as Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan were urging Congress to take a go-slow approach, network reporters insisted that only tough rules would restore confidence. On July 15, ABC, CBS, CNN and NBC sang the same liberal song on new regulations, unfavorably comparing a "weaker" House bill to Senate-passed rules. "Lobbyists are swarming over Capitol Hill to try to get the House to water down what the Senate has done," ABC's Linda Douglass fretted on *World News Tonight*.

■ **When it came to tax policy, reporters were deficit hawks.** NBC's Tim Russert, normally a balanced interviewer, played into the hands of liberal tax cut opponents with tendentious questions pushing a rollback of President Bush's 2001 tax cut. A *Media Reality Check* study back in July found Russert had posed 30 such questions on *Meet the Press* since the start of 2002; the total now stands at 40.

On September 1, for example, he hit Representatives Nita Lowey and Tom Davis with a fusillade of anti-tax cut questions: "Should the Democrats be in favor of freezing the Bush tax cut?...Would it be better to freeze, postpone, the Bush tax cut?...Why not freeze the tax cut rather than spend the Social Security surplus?...As part of a budget summit, would you be in favor of freezing the Bush tax cut?" It's good journalism to force tax cut supporters to defend their

policies, but asking longtime tax cut foes about repeal just validates their liberal talking points.

■ **Russert was hardly alone, however.** CBS's John Roberts lobbied the ultimate softball when, on the September 1 *Face the Nation*, he asked Democratic Party chief Terry McAuliffe: "Is now the time for the President to be proposing new tax cuts, particularly ones that seem to benefit wealthy investors more than they do middle- and lower-income Americans?" That sounds like spin McAuliffe would write himself.

■ **But when it came to a new federal entitlement whose future costs would be hard to control, the deficit hawks became doves.** "Drugs have become so expensive, seniors can go to places like Mexico and buy American-made drugs cheaper than they can buy them at home," CBS's Bob Schieffer argued on July 23's *Evening News*. While the

Senate continued to debate, Schieffer brazenly editorialized, "expect Democrats to blame Republicans, Republicans to blame Democrats, and the White House to blame Congress. Seniors, meanwhile, just get the shaft." Eight days later, when the Senate ended attempts to reach a bill, CNN's Daryn Kagan scolded lawmakers from her anchor desk. "Shame on all of them," she exclaimed.

There were some bright spots, however. Even as Congress debated new rules for corporate accounting, CNN's Jonathan Karl uniquely informed viewers of *NewsNight* on July 22 about the government's own dubious bookkeeping, for example. And CNN's John King was a model of balance in his interviews with key Democrats and Republicans on the August 13 *Inside Politics*. But the presence of a handful of good reports can't undo damage done by the overwhelming bias of the overall coverage. — Rich Noyes

Recommendations for Balanced Coverage

1. Reporters should refrain from presenting liberal spin and liberal assumptions about taxation, spending, and the role of government as unassailable fact.
2. Interviewers must no longer give conservative spokesmen the third degree while liberal policies get a free ride.
3. Reporters need to include the views of free market advocates, not just "victims" in need of more government spending.

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