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Today's Matt Lauer Fantasizes How Democrats Could Beat Bush With a Promise to "Increase Taxes"

NBC Pumps Public Demand for Higher Taxes

Much to Tim Russert's delight, since it matches his weekly mantra on *Meet the Press*, a new NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll found that to pay for the \$87 billion needed for Iraq, 56 percent of the public prefers to cancel the recent tax cuts for the "upper income brackets" while only 13 percent want to cut other spending.

Last year, MRC documented how, on his Sunday interview program, Russert had posed at least 44 questions reflecting the liberal desire for a tax cut repeal, compared with just two conservative tax cut questions.

Russert was on both Wednesday's *NBC Nightly News* and Thursday's *Today* to outline how Bush's approval rating has fallen to 49 percent and to tout the public's purported demand to rescind the part of the tax cuts that goes to people other than themselves.

Yet none of the stories on the poll (Russert, MSNBC.com or the *Wall Street Journal*) explained whether the question was open-ended or if respondents were presented with options (i.e., "raise taxes," "cut spending") from which to choose.

Last night, Russert touted how "one-third of Republicans said cancel the tax cut for the top brackets," prompting Tom Brokaw to hope: "That will get the attention of the White House." This morning, Matt Lauer wondered whether voters were poised to choose liberalism: "Maybe one of the few times they [Democrats] get away with saying, 'we can win by saying in crease taxes.'"

Brokaw set up the September 24 *Nightly News* session with Russert: "Tonight the news for the Bush administration in the latest NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll is not very encouraging." Russert outlined how Bush's approval has fallen to 49 percent, observing "we are a 50-50 nation."

Russert soon arrived at the cancel the tax cut response: "When we asked people how do we pay for the \$87 billion for Iraq, 12 percent said borrow, increase the deficit, 56 percent said cancel the tax cut for the upper income and 13

percent said reduce spending. And Tom, one-third of Republicans said cancel the tax cut for the top brackets."

Brokaw emphasized: "That will get the attention of the White House, Tim."

"It sure will," Russert replied, "because they are looking at that Republican base more and more and they're looking for the battle that's going on in Congress to maintain support for the President's policy in Iraq."

Thursday morning on *Today*, MRC analyst Geoffrey Dickens reported, Russert ran through the same approval numbers as he did on *Nightly News* before Matt Lauer raised

the cancel the tax cuts finding: "There's this \$87 billion request the President is making of Congress. Most people think Congress will, of course, vote to approve that for the war on terrorism and the Pentagon. But where the money comes from has some interesting results."

"Fifty-six percent say eliminate the top tax bracket for the wealthiest Americans and others say, 'no, cut spending,' some 13 percent," Russert argued before explaining how Democrats hoped to say, "Mr. President if you want to pay for the war here's a way to do it, reduce, uh, increase taxes on quote, 'your friends,' unquote."

"Maybe one of the few times they get away with saying, 'we can win by saying in crease taxes,'" Lauer imagined.

This morning's *Wall Street Journal* noted that "a senior Bush advisor laughed out loud at the Democrats' positioning on the [tax] issue, citing anti-tax sentiments that in recent weeks have led voters to sink tax-increase referendums in venues as diverse as Seattle and Alabama." Yet each time, the national media rooted for the tax increase to succeed.

— Brent Baker and Rich Noyes

Russert's Redundant Repeal Questions

"Can we afford a war in Afghanistan or in Iraq and the Bush tax cut? Back in 2001 on this program you said we should repeal the Bush tax cut. Do you believe that is now necessary in order to have the money to fight wars?" — Russert to Hillary Clinton on NBC's *Meet the Press*, Sept. 15, 2002, the 40th time he posed such a question last year.

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