



Campaign 2000

# Media Reality ✓ Check

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ABC's Diane Sawyer Challenged Fox's Bill O'Reilly, While NBC Balanced Limbaugh with Begala

## Right-Leaning Talkers Shock Morning TV

Do TV news stars really believe that everything they do is fair and balanced? Two weeks ago, ABC's Diane Sawyer used *Good Morning America* to preen over Winifred Skinner and her sob story of having to scavenge for cans to afford her prescriptions, an imploding story promoted by the Gore campaign. But today Sawyer was shocked Fox News talk show host Bill O'Reilly forwarded opinions on television in an interview to promote his new book *The O'Reilly Factor*. (See box.)

Sawyer explained: "He has said, by the way, that the elite media — you hate us, right, basically? — refuse to put him on, so okay, we put you on. Is your whining going to stop or what?" Sawyer pushed for O'Reilly to recant: "Are you going to eat those words?.... Alright, apologize to us for doubting us. Apologize." O'Reilly said: "Apologize for what?" Sawyer: "Apologize for doubting us. We put you on. Now apologize."

When O'Reilly passed, Sawyer moved on: "Alright, there's no question that you're for George W. Bush in this election." O'Reilly protested, "That's not true." Sawyer insisted: "I've watched you. I have watched you. There is no question." O'Reilly boasted that Gore applauded him for interviewing his supporters and getting the "true story" on the overcrowded school in Sarasota, Florida.

Sawyer shot back: "Well, that's a limited, that's a limited compliment there. Let me just ask you this. The criticism of each candidate is basically that Al Gore embellishes the truth and that George W. Bush doesn't really have a grasp of the facts. Do you disagree with either of those criticisms of the two?"

O'Reilly said "I don't think you want to condemn or denigrate Bush because he's not a real good public speaker." On Gore, he said, "I don't think his embellishments should be a campaign issue." Sawyer

didn't see any balance there: "So we had a small defense of George Bush there and we have a tiny attack on Al Gore there. I heard you."

Then Sawyer moved on to Clinton: "I want to ask you about something else. Bill Clinton. Oh, do you lay into Bill Clinton all the way through. Don't like him, say he's the most corrupt President...in history, and yet the American people say that they would elect him again tomorrow. Do you think the American people are dumb?"

### *Is Diane Clueless or Brazen?*

**"But should you be using the national airwaves to promote your opinions?"** — Diane Sawyer to FNC talk show host Bill O'Reilly on ABC's *Good Morning America* today.

Then Sawyer asked: "But should you be using the national airwaves to promote your opinions?" (This, hours after a Peter Jennings special explored how the NRA has too much influence.)

Talking up balance also came to NBC's *Today*. Matt Lauer promoted a Lisa Myers interview with Rush Limbaugh: "George W. Bush has no better friend than...radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh. Every day, more people listen to his program than any other show in the country and that gives him an enormous platform to carry the conservative torch....this morning, a rare conversation with Limbaugh, who holds nothing back. And before you call or write, the Democrats will get their fair shot this morning." (Paul Begala was interviewed.)

Lisa Myers asked: "Rush, are you saying that in your view, Al Gore is an even bigger liar than Bill Clinton? That's a really harsh statement." (Limbaugh said it's different, but Gore's lying is "pathological.") Myers asked about women voting for Democrats: "Do you think it's a genetic deficiency in these soccer moms?" — *Tim Graham*

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