



Why Didn't the PBS Anchor Balance Questions from the Left with Questions from the Right?

Lehrer Repeated Shaw's Liberal Questions

The media snapshot out of last night's second debate: George W. Bush was "surprisingly sure-footed on foreign policy," as Ted Koppel announced, but Al Gore gained a footing in attacking Bush's record in Texas on health care, "hate crimes," and the environment.

The moderator, PBS anchor Jim Lehrer, asked more liberal questions last night, mostly by repeating the most liberal questions CNN's Bernard Shaw asked at the vice presidential debate last Thursday:

■ Lehrer asked Gore, "would you support or sign as president a federal law banning racial profiling by police and other authorities at all levels of government?"

For balance, Lehrer could have asked about the Department of Justice taking over municipal police departments through consent decrees. The Department is suing Columbus, Ohio, for refusing to accept a decree. (For more, see www.leaf.org/shield/winterspring2000/feds.html)

■ Lehrer asked Bush: "Would you support a national hate crimes law?" and followed up: "Governor, both Senator Lieberman and Secretary Cheney said they were sympathetically rethinking their views on same-sex relationships. What's your position on that?" He then repeated Shaw's question almost verbatim: "Do you believe in general terms that gays and lesbians should have the same rights as other Americans?"

For balance, Lehrer could have asked about municipal governments threatening to deny public facilities to the Boy Scouts of America over their refusal to allow openly gay leaders for boys as young as six.

■ Lehrer also posed his own liberal agenda question: "Both of you have talked much about Medicare and health care for seniors. What about the more than forty million younger Americans who do not have health insurance right now. What would you do about that?"

Media Claims About Liberal America

"They both blurred the distinctions between the two sides, and that may help Bush in a funny way, since the issues tend, according to the polls, to be more on the Democratic side." —

Historian and former Lyndon Johnson aide Doris Kearns Goodwin on NBC's post-debate analysis. (NBC's Tim Russert underlined that point.)

vs.

"Most misleading of all is the conventional wisdom that 'Gore wins on the issues.' A Zogby poll of American values asked respondents to agree or disagree with the views of the two candidates on 25 issues. Voters favored the Bush positions on no fewer than 20." — *Investor's Business Daily* editorial, October 9.

For balance, he could have asked if poor young people are overtaxed to support entitlements for rich elderly people because older people are more reliable voters.

■ Lehrer also set up Gore on gun control: "How do you see the connection between controlling gun sales in this country and the incidence of death by accidental or intentional use of guns?"

For balance, Lehrer could have asked why all the state and federal gun control laws did not prevent Columbine.

■ Lehrer did ask Gore: "In your 1992 book you said, quote, 'We must make the rescue of our environment the central organizing principle for civilization and there must be a wrenching transformation to save the planet.' Do you still feel that way?" That could be seen as a softball for Gore, underlining his vision on the environment, or a softball for Republicans, who feel that freedom, not Gore's vague notions of "saving the planet," should be the central organizing principle of government.

— *Tim Graham*

L. Brent Bozell III, Publisher; Brent Baker, Tim Graham, Editors; Jessica Anderson, Brian Boyd, Geoffrey Dickens, Ted King, Paul Smith, Brad Wilmoth, Media Analysts; Kristina Sewell, Research Associate; Liz Swasey, Director of Communications. For the most complete media bias analysis, see the *CyberAlert* at www.mrc.org