



# Media Reality ✓ Check

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ABC Censored Bush's Congressional Supporters While CBS and NBC Exaggerated Anti-War Sentiment

## TV's "Congress" Rejected Bush's War Call

In votes held Thursday afternoon and early Friday morning, the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate gave President Bush the legal authority to use military force if Iraq continues defying the United Nations. Congressional support was overwhelming — Bush won by 296 to 133 in the House and by 77 to 23 in the Senate.

Yet during the four weeks leading up to the votes, the three network evening newscasts exaggerated the opposition by disproportionately stressing the views of Bush's anti-war opponents in Congress. The MRC reviewed all 81 soundbites from members of Congress in Iraq stories following the President's September 12 speech to the United Nations through the final day of debate on October 10. Thirty soundbites were neutral comments, but 51 offered clear support or opposition to the President's tough stance. Nearly three in five of these quotes (59%) opposed the use of force, or roughly double the percentage of Senators and Representatives who actually held such views (29%). The network breakdown:

### ■ ABC World News Tonight.

On Peter Jennings's *World News Tonight*, the bias was total, as ABC aired quotes only from Senators and Representatives critical of Bush's Iraq policy. On September 19, for example, Linda Douglass showed Democratic Senator Mark Dayton describing Bush's plan as "a precipitous decision [to] take precipitous actions." On September 27, Terry Moran broadcast Ted Kennedy's conclusion that "the administration has not made a convincing case that we face such an immediate threat to our national security."

But on October 3, when a bipartisan group announced support of Bush's policies, Moran ran no quotes from any member of the group. And, on October 10, Jennings showed no soundbites at all as he relayed news of the House's overwhelming vote of support in a brief 17-second item he read from his anchor desk.

### ■ CBS Evening News.

Unlike on ABC, CBS balanced quotes from Bush supporters with those of congressional critics. Reporter Mark Phillips showed Rep. Nick Rahall (D-WV) in Baghdad, Iraq, on September 14 urging the Bush administration to back off its demands: "I think it's time to cool it, to calm down the rhetoric, to let reasoned minds and dialogue be the course of the day." But a day earlier, CBS's John Roberts showed John McCain advocate the Bush line: "Inevitably, Saddam Hussein will have to be removed."

■ **NBC Nightly News.** NBC covered the congressional angle more than either ABC or CBS, with anti-war quotes outnumbering Bush backers by a slight margin. For instance, NBC producers packaged pro- and anti-war quotes together on October 8, including Democrat Joe Lieberman's argument that "if we do not stop Saddam now, we will look back on some terrible day with a profound sense of remorse and guilt." Two nights later, Lisa Myers showed a mean-spirited ad hominem attack on Bush from Representative Pete Stark (D-CA): "You are giving an inexperienced, desperate young man in the White House the execution lever to kill thousands of Americans."

One reason the networks exaggerated the amount of congressional opposition may have been their strong bias in favor of quoting Democrats and ignoring Republicans. Out of the 81 congressional soundbites, 58 (or 72%) were from Democrats, compared to 19 GOP quotes and two from anti-war Independents. The final vote saw 57 percent of congressional Democrats vote against authorizing force, a near-perfect match of the views of the Congress depicted on TV news. Of course, the real Congress includes more Republicans and turned out to be far more supportive of the President's policies than the one shown on television.

— Rich Noyes

### Hyping Congressional Opposition

Soundbites on Bush's Iraq Policy, 9/12 - 10/10

	Against Force	Pro-Force	Total
ABC	100%	0%	7
CBS	50%	50%	12
NBC	53%	47%	32
Total TV	59% ✓	41%	51
Actual Vote	29%	71% ✓	529

TV news statistics based on soundbites from current members of Congress shown on ABC, CBS and NBC evening newscasts, excluding neutral comments. Actual vote statistics combine the votes of 429 Representatives and 100 Senators on Oct. 10 and 11.

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