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Press Contact:
Katie Wright
(703) 683-5004
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CBS Picked Style Over Substance, ABC Praised Veep's Mastery, While NBC's Russert Forced Specifics

Do Softballs Help Sell the Master of Detail?

The pre-taped post-debate morning show interviews today revealed dramatic differences in interviewing styles among the three networks.

CBS. On *The Early Show*, Bill Plante stuck to style over substance: "Did you find a happy medium between the first debate and the second debate...Was this the real Al Gore?...Did the format make it easier for you?...Do you get the sense that your opponent is trying to make this a personality contest, as opposed to an issues contest... Why?...He might put it that if you want somebody who is not a career politician, a Washington guy, then he's your guy."

ABC. On *Good Morning America*, reporter Terry Moran started with style: "Did you feel different out there tonight? Because you seemed different...Why did you feel so good out there? Because it seemed like you just wanted to seize the moment tonight...You presented yourself in a couple of different ways in these debates. Are you a moody candidate?...Is there an answer of George Bush's tonight that you want to take onto the campaign trail, that you think Americans should pay attention to?" When Gore charged that Bush would bankrupt Social Security, Moran asked "Isn't that a scare tactic?"

Moran asked more substantive questions: "Is if fair, after these three debates, for a voter to look at you and see that in your heart of hearts, you really believe in a government that is more activist and more interventionist in our economy and society than Gov. Bush? (Gore said: "I wouldn't put it that way. I believe in a smaller government, but a smarter government.") Moran followed up: "But you do believe in a government that does more, has more programs, more policies." Moran noted the word "impeachment" wasn't mentioned, and then ended with a Gore-pumping, Bush-slapping ending (see box).

NBC. On *Today*, Tim Russert had tough interviews with both Gore and Bush. Both were asked about a possible

economic slowdown and school vouchers. Russert asked Gore: "Why not take just a small amount of money, not out of public schools, but separate and above from the surplus,

and let those poor parents, give them a chance." Gore accused Russert of a pro-voucher bias.

Russert protested, "No, I have no view on it...But I went to a private school. You went to a private school. Your children go to private school, mine goes to private school." Gore said his kids attended both public and private schools. Russert

continued: "Why not give, why not, as you said, if I was the parent of a child that went to an inner-city school that was failing I might be for vouchers too. Why not give it a shot?"

Gore said he preferred shutting down failing schools and reopening them with specialists. "Gov. Jim Hunt of North Carolina has put a plan just like that into effect and it works great." Russert replied: "We called his office tonight. He has not shut down any schools." Gore shot back: "Well, he has turned around a bunch of schools that were failing schools, and he has sent specialists in. Whether the terminology used is 'shutdown' or whether it's a 'takeover,' you know, that's just something that you ought to..." Russert pushed: "He says he hasn't had to do that yet."

Gore argued, "Well, he turns around the failing schools by bringing in new personnel and turning them around dramatically and you know, the terminology you use is not important." Gore's stumbling on Gov. Hunt's program raised the question: do soft interviews enable the media to sell Gore as a master of detail? — *Tim Graham*

You're Obviously Smarter Than Bush

"You've spent a quarter-century in public service and have worked a lot on these issues, obviously have mastered a lot of the details of them. When you look across the stage, are you frustrated at all?" — ABC's Terry Moran to Al Gore on today's *Good Morning America*.

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