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Study: Top Democrat Gets Almost No Scrutiny as ABC, CBS, and NBC Let Her Sound Off Against GOP

TV News Gives Free Ride to “Speaker Pelosi”

Back in 1994, the last time Democrats had majorities in the House and Senate, the broadcast networks tried to suffocate the Republican challenge with negative spin. *NBC Nightly News* anchor Tom Brokaw scoffed at the GOP's Contract with America: “It is long on promises, but short on sound premises.”

No Republican got worse press that year than the man who would be Speaker, Newt Gingrich. ABC's Jim Wooten slammed Gingrich as “the national poster boy for the politics of resentment and rage.” CBS's Eric Engberg skewered Gingrich as “bombastic and ruthless....the family values candidate who divorced his ailing first wife.”

Fast forward 12 years, and now Republicans are defending their House and Senate majorities in a tough election. But the broadcast networks have

so far refused to scrutinize the Democrats who wish to lead the next Congress. Case in point: House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, the presumptive Speaker if the Democrats win next month. MRC analysts reviewed all 106 ABC, CBS and NBC evening news stories that have mentioned Pelosi since she was picked to lead House Democrats in 2002:

■ **Labels.** The last time an evening news reporter called Pelosi a “liberal” was November 14, 2002, the day she was elected House Democratic leader. “She is a high-octane San Francisco liberal with a fondness for high-fashion Armani suits,” NBC's Lisa Myers explained that night. Since then, evening news reporters have omitted any ideological labels for Pelosi, who in the past five years has earned a 99% approval rating from the liberal Americans for Democratic Action, compared to a mere 3% approval from the American Conservative Union.

■ **Spin.** Since 2002, Pelosi herself has been the subject of just 16 evening news stories, eight of which were flattering vs. two that cast her in a negative light, a four-to-one tilt in Pelosi's favor. (The remaining six stories were neutral.) In November 2002, ABC's Linda Douglass touted Pelosi as someone who “rose to a leadership job with sheer hard work, raising money for colleagues, spending hours

listening to their problems, providing them dinner during late night votes.” A month later, ABC's *World News Tonight* picked Pelosi as one of five heroes of 2002. Anchor Charles Gibson said ABC wanted to recognize “people whose bravery, resolve, and character really shown through.”

■ **Attack Soundbites.** Most of the time, the evening newscasts gave Pelosi a podium from which she could attack Republicans. Sixty-three stories included anti-GOP soundbites from Pelosi; in another 10, the network reporters simply read Pelosi's attack quotes to viewers.

In 1994, reporters disparaged Republicans as angry extremists. Nancy Pelosi is a hardcore liberal, and her rhetoric is as “angry” as anything from the Class of '94, but the media have given her a free pass.

On May 20, 2004, CBS showed Pelosi bashing President Bush: “The emperor has no clothes. When are people going to face reality?” On December 6, 2005, NBC ran a bite from Pelosi casting all Republicans as crooks: “Republicans believe that they're above the law. Their

hubris, their arrogance is something that the American people are paying a price for.” None of these quotes were termed “harsh,” “angry” or “mean.”

Just two stories showed Pelosi dealing with Democratic embarrassments, including a June 8, 2005 ABC piece on Howard Dean's gaffes (calling the GOP a “white Christian party” and saying “a lot” of Republicans “have never made an honest living”). Pelosi's spin: “I don't think that the statement that the governor made was a helpful statement. But I do think that he's doing a great job of broadening the base of those who are involved in the Democratic Party.”

In 1994, TV news made much of the alleged extremism of GOP candidates and the “rage” of future Speaker Newt Gingrich. Nancy Pelosi is an unabashed, hardcore liberal, and her rhetoric is as negative and “angry” as any member of the Class of '94. The difference in 2006 is that the networks show no interest in the extremism and nastiness of the liberals who want to control Congress. — *Rich Noyes*

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