



# Media Reality ✓ Check

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MRC Study: ABC and NBC Haven't Described the Outlawed Horror-Movie Procedure On Air Since 1998

## Censoring the Partial-Birth Abortion Basics

NBC's story on last Tuesday's vote on partial-birth abortion tiptoed around the grisly reality of the procedure. Reporter Chip Reid warned: "The debate, emotional, and at times, graphic." Senator Rick Santorum began: "They place a vacuum hose..." Then Reid jumped in: "Supporters of the ban argued that the procedure, usually done late in pregnancy, has no place in a civilized society." Senator John Ensign then said: "This procedure is so grotesque that when it is described it makes people shudder." But NBC avoided describing it.

Some journalists may want viewers to see bloodied bodies from Iraq and caskets arriving home at Dover Air Force Base, but they don't have the same table-thumping passion for the people's right to know about partial-birth abortion: that a living baby is pulled feet first out of the womb, the base of the skull is punctured with a surgical instrument, and the brain is removed with a powerful suction machine, so the skull is collapsed and the corpse can be removed for disposal.

Partial-birth abortion has been a legislative matter for eight years now, with the first vote on November 1, 1995. But the starting point of the debate — what is a partial-birth abortion? — is rarely mentioned on broadcast TV news.

In an MRC study of 217 stories mentioning the issue of partial-birth abortion on ABC, CBS, and NBC, analysts found **news reports explained the medical basics in only 18 of those stories, and 15 of those descriptions occurred before 1998. Including this week's debate, Big Three reporters have only described the procedure three times in the last five years** — all of them on CBS. Even on June 28, 2000, when the Supreme Court overturned Nebraska's partial-birth ban, only CBS described the procedure in dispute. ABC and NBC have avoided it for five years.

Viewers might not expect every mention of partial-birth abortion to carry 10 or 15 seconds of explanatory journalism. But network reporters routinely skimmed over

the issue as quickly as they could. (The networks all ignored this new law's beginning hearings and votes in the summer of 2002.) **Good journalists wouldn't skip the rudimentary facts in nine out of every ten stories.**

■ **Network breakdown:** ABC aired the most descriptions with ten, compared to CBS with six and NBC with just two. ABC did four in 1995 and four in 1997. One came on February 26, 1997, the day abortion-clinic lobbyist Ron Fitzsimmons admitted to the *New York Times* he'd "lied through his teeth" — about partial-birth abortions being rare and rarely elective — in a taped *Nightline* interview in 1995. (ABC did not air those remarks then.)

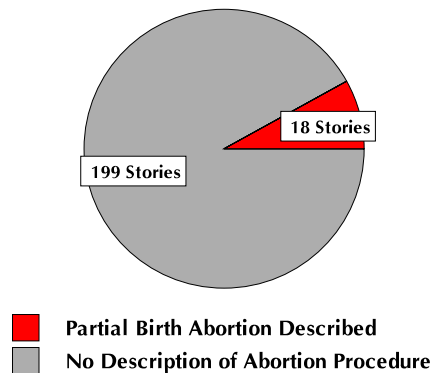
In March, Ted Koppel declared from Iraq: "We'll do our very best to give you the truth in the hope and the belief that you can handle it." But *Nightline* hasn't done a show since 1997 handling the truth on partial-birth abortion.

■ **No morning elaboration:** The partial-birth procedure has never been described by a journalist on the ABC, CBS, or NBC morning shows, although CBS let Rep.

Charles Canady describe it in 1995. Of the other 17 descriptions, ten were on evening newscasts, and seven aired on magazine, late-night, and Sunday news programs.

This egregious self-censorship is only part of the problem. A 1995 survey of elite journalists found **97 percent describe themselves as "pro-choice," and 84 percent said they held this view strongly.** Those journalists frame the abortion issue around the left's sensitivities. Dan Rather summed up last Tuesday: "Abortion rights take a historic hit from Congress. What do women face?" They're not discussing the grisly fate the unborn face. — *Tim Graham and Rich Noyes*

**Most Stories Omitted Gruesome Details**  
ABC, CBS & NBC stories, 1995-2003



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