



Today Co-Hosts Upset at New York Phone Calls, But Blind To Democratic Anti-Bush Calls in Michigan

NBC: Helping Hillary on GOP Cole Calls

NBC's *Today* interviewed Hillary Clinton on Monday and Rick Lazio today. But both New York Senate contenders were asked about outrage over Republican campaign messages.

Yesterday, Katie Couric began with a softball: "I know that you were outraged last week, Mrs. Clinton, about a telephone campaign by the New York Republican party that told voters you took money from quote, 'A Mideast organization, Mideast terrorism group, the same kind of terrorism that killed our sailors on the U.S.S. Cole.' That telephone campaign has ended, a GOP spokesman said, not because of your criticism that it was politicizing a tragedy but because the script had run its course. What's your reaction to that?"

Matt Lauer took up the outrage with Lazio this morning: "There's been accusations going in both directions of negative campaigning. It's gotten a little bit dirty. The gloves have come off. But this week it seems to have gotten out of hand. The Republican state committee has been making phone calls to voters — they say they stopped this now, by the way — in some way insinuating that Mrs. Clinton is accepting support from a group that may, that may, have some connection to the tragic attack to the U.S.S. Cole. Isn't that outrageous?...But it is coming out of the state Republicans' campaign and you know about this." Lauer pounded away:

■ "The group you're talking about is the American Muslim Alliance, is that right? Who also endorsed Governor Bush for President, and he wholeheartedly accepted that endorsement." (Bush returned their money.)

■ "Let me go back to the phone call for a second,

because here's what the callers are saying to voters: 'Mrs. Clinton took money from an organization that openly brags about its support for a Mideast terrorism group.' And here's the part that gets a lot of people: 'The same kind of

terrorism that killed our sailors on the U.S.S. Cole.' Now that's obviously exploiting a national tragedy for political gain."

■ "What you're doing is you're saying that it's not coming out of your campaign. But you're not backing away from it at all!....Mrs. Clinton has demanded an apology. You're not apologizing."

The Early Show on CBS also interviewed both candidates in the last two days. Bryant Gumbel didn't ask Mrs. Clinton about the Cole calls, but Jane Clayson asked Lazio today: "Do you regret that that phone campaign happened?"

While CBS and NBC sharply questioned the tone of the GOP's messages, neither of their morning shows has reported on or questioned recent Hillary Clinton ads (see box). Neither has reported on or questioned Democratic phone calls in Michigan suggesting George W. Bush's policies on nursing homes led to the death of a Texas man in 1995, or the NAACP's ad suggesting Bush killed James Byrd "all over again." While pundits worry about the impact of last-minute negative ads, they also might worry about the impact of selective media coverage that only scrutinizes and finds outrage in Republican messages.

— Tim Graham

Hillary's Ads Distort: Who Cares?

THE SCRIPT: "O.K., let's take a look at Rick Lazio's friends. A [New York] *Daily News* investigation just revealed that the home-building industry has kicked in a million dollars to Lazio's campaign. And Lazio has tried to help them weaken safety and construction standards...."

SCORECARD: "...The breathless tone of the commercial should be enough to give viewers pause. Its review of this part of Mr. Lazio's housing record is a flat-out distortion meant to confuse viewers about Lazio's record in the House at a time when he has increasingly cited it to justify his run for the Senate." — *New York Times* reporter Randal C. Archbold critiquing a Hillary commercial, October 30.

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