



Only ABC Asked About Witt, and Stephanopoulos Found “No Big, Big Lies or Grand Distortions”

Tall-Tale Al Gets Ignored or Excused on TV

Washington Post reporter John F. Harris claimed this morning that in the Bush-Gore debate, “Neither fulfilled the negative stereotypes about himself.” But Harris hadn’t heard of the Al Gore tall tales that emerged within 12 hours of the debate.

Gore’s campaign admitted Gore did not travel to a Texas disaster area with Federal Emergency Management Agency head James Lee Witt as he boasted last night. The Gore camp didn’t return calls for CNSNews.com’s story that Gore was wrong about over crowding in a Sarasota, Florida school (see box).

CBS’s *The Early Show* and NBC’s *Today* failed to raise these stories with Gore or anyone else this morning, although ABC’s Charles Gibson asked Gore about Witt on *Good Morning America*. (The CBS News Election Unit noted the Witt tall tale last night in an “Accuracy Report Card” on CBS.com.)

Gibson blamed the Republicans for the emerging falsehood: **“They’re already indicating that they’re going to go after you today for, for revising history in ways,** saying that you have questioned his qualifications in the past, not just his policies, and also questioning whether you actually went with James Lee Witt down to Texas...?”

Gore looked away and mumbled: “Well, I was there in Texas. I think James Lee went to the same, went to the same, uh, fires, and I’ve made so many trips with James Lee to these disaster sites. I was there, in Texas, in Houston, with the head of the Texas Emergency Management folks, and with all of the Federal Emergency Management folks. If James Lee was there before, or after, then [shrugs shoulders], you know, I got that wrong then, but uh, it was basically a compliment to the way our FEMA team had

handled things, and it was in the context of a compliment to the Governor for the way he handled it for the state of Texas.”

Later, Diane Sawyer and George Stephanopoulos discussed the ABC “truth squad” on the debate. Despite

Bush telling Gibson that Gore was wrong to claim Bush’s tax cut would “spend” more on the top one percent of taxpayers than on health, prescription drugs, education, and national defense combined, Sawyer claimed, “We heard Governor Bush just say that Vice President Gore was right on the amount that he’d be spending for the richest Americans.”

After Stephanopoulos explained how “the facts bear out Vice President Gore” on his claims against Bush’s prescription drug plan, Sawyer asked: “Major issues about truth, then, from our truth squad?” Stephanopoulos claimed Gore’s invented Texas story was no big deal: **“Gore exaggerated a little bit. You saw him backtrack** on whether or not he was really with James Lee Witt in Texas last night. He also misstated when he said that more than half of Bush’s tax cut went to the top one percent in the country, when in fact, the Bush campaign came back and said it was about 44 percent, but **there were no big, big lies, or grand distortions.**”

Exaggerated a *little bit*? How about made up out of whole cloth? How do you “backtrack” on an event that didn’t happen? — *Tim Graham*

Gore’s Vanishing Class Size Crisis

“I would not permit any students to stand. We have 2,480 students on a practically brand-new campus. In my opinion, it’s one of the top high schools in the nation right now. We don’t have any portable classrooms. All of our students are in regular classes and we have 900 computers, 600 Internet sites. We’d never allow a student to have to stand up during class.” — Sarasota, Florida principal Daniel Kennedy refuting Gore’s tale of overcrowding to CNSNews.com.

L. Brent Bozell III, Publisher; Brent Baker, Tim Graham, Editors; Jessica Anderson, Brian Boyd, Geoffrey Dickens, Ted King, Paul Smith, Brad Wilmouth, 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