



Claire Shipman Applauded Effective Gore Scare Ad, But Bush's Defense Spun As "Harsh Attack Ad"

NBC's Slavish Social Security Spin Specialists

NBC's Claire Shipman marveled this morning at the effectiveness of Al Gore's misleading, fear-pushing, anti-free market Social Security TV spots. "Who would have thought it, Katie?" Shipman chirpily exulted to *Today's* Katie Couric. "[His aides] now believe that Florida could be the centerpiece of a Gore win. They think that's largely because of message: heavy on Social Security, heavy on ads on Social Security."

To let viewers know why she was so damed impressed, Shipman showed a clip of what she touted as a "very effective" ad: "So what happens when Bush promises the same money to young workers and to seniors? Answer: One promise gets broken," the Gore announcer darkly intoned.

"Now, they're gonna keep hitting Social Security hard," Shipman promised, never once criticizing or otherwise even attempting to balance the Democratic ad's message.

More than the other broadcast networks, NBC made a big deal out of its post-debate "Truth Squads." Now with just six days left, all that seems to matter is whether a commercial moves voters. Gore's ad charges that the Republican plan jeopardizes "current" benefits, as if pension checks will stop the moment Bush is inaugurated. But Nobel-prize winning economist Milton Friedman, writing in the same *Wall Street Journal* whose independence was recently blessed by the Democrats (see box), demonstrated that the claim that Bush jeopardizes old folks' retirement checks is bogus.

"Under the Bush plan, \$1 trillion of those assets will instead be held in the form of securities in personal retirement accounts. Does replacing government IOUs with private securities weaken Social Security? Quite the opposite," Friedman explained. "The Bush plan does not affect the benefits of current retirees," he continued. "In effect, the establishment of personal retirement accounts

would convert an unfunded liability of \$1 trillion into a fully funded liability, which strengthens rather than weakens Social Security."

The media's applause for Gore's scare-the-hell-out-of-senior-citizens campaign drowns out questions about the ethics and accuracy of his TV ads. When Bush slides in one of those ubiquitous tracking polls, the spin is that deficiencies in Bush's plan, not Gore scare tactics, are at work. "Governor, it does appear that your plan to privatize Social Security, in part, is beginning to perhaps hurt you in states like Florida and Pennsylvania," NBC's Tom Brokaw lectured Bush last night.

So far this year, none of the three broadcast networks have informed audiences that several other countries have already implemented even bolder privatization programs. In Chile, which fully privatized its version of Social Security 20 years ago, the result has been higher pensions, a higher savings rate, the increased availability of private investment capital, and much higher economic growth. But that's apparently not news as the networks understand the term.

NBC's Campbell Brown offered still more "fairness" last night on MSNBC's *News with Brian Williams*: "In stark contrast to the warm and compassionate message on the road, on the air the Bush campaign today released this harsh new attack ad that accuses Vice President Gore of lying about Bush's Social Security plan." But scaring the elderly into thinking their checks will disappear isn't harsh at all? — *Rich Noyes, MRC's Free Market Project*

Where Are the Network Fact Checkers?

"The independent *Wall Street Journal* shows that the Bush plan drains money that is needed now to pay our current benefits." — Liberal actor Ed Asner, in a Democratic taped campaign phone message.

"We believe no such thing and no story we've published has asserted it." — *Wall Street Journal* editorial, October 25.

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