



## Despite Being Smeared With Democratic Fingerprints, Networks Hype Story of Bush's 1976 Arrest **Media Promote Last-Minute Anti-Bush Hit Job**

**E**rin Fehlau, a reporter at WPXT-TV Channel 51 in Portland, Maine, was last night's featured guest on ABC's *Nightline*. Earlier that evening, she triggered a feeding frenzy by disclosing that George W. Bush was arrested and pleaded guilty to drunk driving in 1976. Ted Koppel asked her to declare that her story wasn't what it obviously was: a late-campaign Democratic smear plot.

"The way you tell the story, it certainly sounds as though you just stumbled into something and were smart enough to follow up on it," Koppel assured Fehlau. "But you also heard Gov. Bush say several times, you know, he's got his suspicions."

"I'm confident I wasn't set up," Fehlau obtusely replied, though she acknowledged her source was a lawyer who also was "a delegate to the Democratic convention." She added that "I feel like if I was being set up, he would probably have just handed me the information right off the bat."

Fehlau refused to name her source, but he quickly stepped forward. Tom Connolly, the Democratic candidate for Governor in Maine's last election, under-mined Fehlau's claim that she wasn't set up. He told Fox News on Friday that he hoped to plant the story with the Associated Press, and told CNN that Fehlau got it only because Gore's fax machine was busy.

Connolly grandly thrust himself into the center of the presidential election, pronouncing on CNN shortly before noon that "My role is to release information that I consider germane to the decision-making process," and spreading the story was "an act of democracy."

The courts had long ago expunged Bush's conviction from his criminal record, but releasing the legally irrelevant information "makes me a good citizen," Connolly crowed to CNN's Daryn Kagan. (See box.)

Before they raised a finger to establish this story's partisan pedigree, reporters were using guilt-by-association tactics to smear Bush further, even as they feigned sympathy. "I never identify with George W. so much as I do tonight. It's like a cheater who gets caught, and then he blames the person who told his wife he was cheating," CNBC's Geraldo Rivera told *Newsweek's* Jonathan Alter last night on *Rivera Live*.

"The Clinton experience is a reminder that the past has a way of catching up with these people and biting them in the ankle," Alter replied. "And I'm not sure the American people want another blind date at this point." Geraldo fantasized about other possibilities: "What if he beat up his girlfriend and he said that was some youthful indiscretion? What if he snorted cocaine? What if he shot up heroin?"

On the same show, MSNBC's Chip Reid related that reporters covering Bush were giddy at the prospect of additional embarrassments. "The reporters were all chattering about this and saying 'Wait a minute! If he's got this skeleton in his closet, what else is there?' And some were saying 'Remember, he never answered those questions about hard drugs?'"

There's been zero evidence to support hard drug use, but the media nevertheless heavily promoted the tale last summer. Now, the gossip is being revived by reporters as they race to cover a last-minute story, peddled by a Democratic activist, that they couldn't resist. — *Rich Noyes*

### **And How Many Would Die Under Gore?**

**"The fact is it allows people who are independent, who are Republican, who are Democrats, to evaluate who should be the next President. And recollect that more than 25,000 Americans a year die from drunk driving, and that's a big deal. If you add that up, four years, that's 100,000 Americans that are going to be dead during this guy's first term." — Democratic activist Tom Connolly, the media's source for new anti-Bush charges, CNN interview, Nov. 3**

**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](http://www.mrc.org)