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Networks Celebrated Clinton As Man Who Kept His Word, But Bush's Reverse Order Is "Controversial"

Bush's Tough Line v. Clinton's Promise Kept

Eight years ago, all three of the broadcast evening news anchors gushed that Bill Clinton was proving his trustworthiness when he revoked Ronald Reagan's anti-abortion executive orders. But when new President George W. Bush reversed Clinton yesterday, the networks attacked him for provoking "controversy" by "taking a tough line" on abortion.

While all three networks refused to cast Clinton's pro-abortion move as ideological, Bush's order was portrayed as a payoff to "conservatives" or his "right flank."

■ On ABC, Peter Jennings claimed that "**President Bush begins by taking a tough line on abortion.**" White House reporter Terry Moran alleged that the re-instatement of a ban on U.S. funding of pro-abortion groups overseas "**was designed to appeal to anti-abortion conservatives.**"

But exactly eight years ago, on January 22, 1993, Jennings said the opposite deed by Clinton was the act of a promise-keeper: "In a moment, **President Clinton keeps his word on abortion rights,**" he announced before a commercial break. Introducing the story by Jackie Judd, Jennings repeated, "**President Clinton kept a promise today.**" No one at ABC that day said Clinton was merely trying "to appeal to pro-abortion liberals."

■ CBS's Dan Rather spun the news of Bush's new order as a pay-off: "This was President Bush's first day in office, and he did something to **quickly please the right flank of his party.**" White House correspondent John Roberts stated Bush had "**waded into controversy on his first day....abortion rights activists fear there's more to come.**"

Eight years earlier, Rather told *Evening News* viewers that "on the anniversary of Roe v. Wade, **President Clinton fulfills a promise, supporting abortion rights....** Today, with the stroke of a pen, President Clinton delivered on his campaign promise to cancel several anti-abortion

regulations of the Reagan-Bush years." No one at CBS talked of how that act was geared "to quickly please the left flank of his party."

■ On NBC, Tom Brokaw argued that the abortion order meant Bush's presidency had "**started on a controversial note.**" Reporter David Gregory said "the decision, which aides say is simply the fulfillment of a campaign pledge, came as thousands of abortion foes marched in Washington."

Eight years earlier, no one at NBC felt the need to attribute to "aides" the idea that Clinton was fulfilling a campaign pledge — Brokaw said it straight out as fact: "**President Clinton kept a campaign promise,** and it came on the 20th anniversary of Roe v. Wade legalizing abortion."

"**President Clinton started to undo 12 years of Republican anti-abortion policy here at the White House,**" reporter Jim Miklaszewski added back in '93. "Thousands of anti-abortion

demonstrators staged their annual march past the Supreme Court down to the White House, but for the first time in 12 years, their voice fell on deaf ears. In fact, the significant gains they made in the Reagan and Bush administrations were wiped out with the stroke of a pen. **Keeping a campaign promise, President Clinton lifted restrictions on abortion.**"

The opposing presidential orders are just the latest evidence of the networks' double standard: a conservative President who keeps his word is provoking "controversy," while a liberal who helps his base with equally divisive orders will be showered with good press. — *Brent Baker and Rich Noyes*

Dan Rather's Double Standard

January 22, 1993: "**It was 20 years ago today, the United States Supreme Court handed down its landmark abortion rights ruling and the controversy hasn't stopped since. Today, with the stroke of a pen, President Clinton delivered on his campaign promise to cancel several anti-abortion regulations of the Reagan-Bush years.**"

January 22, 2001: "**This was President Bush's first day at the office and he did something to quickly please the right flank in his party: he re-instituted an anti-abortion policy that had been in place during his father's term and the Reagan presidency, but was lifted during the Clinton years.**"

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. Look for The Best Notable Quotables of 2000 in print and video at www.mrc.org