



Campaign 2004

Media Reality ✓ Check

Expert Documentation of the Latest Liberal Media Bias ✪ Thursday, May 20, 2004

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National Media Outlets Piled Publicity on Air America's Launch, But Have Gone Silent On Its Struggles

Hyping Liberal Radio's Rise, But Not Its Fall

After barrels of ink and hours of breathless TV promotion, the Air America radio network has gone from its media boost to a quick bust. After just two weeks, the six-station network went off the air in Chicago and Los Angeles on April 14. By April 27, CEO Mark Walsh had left. On May 7, co-founder Evan Cohen signed off. On May 10, the network disbanded its Chicago and Los Angeles sales offices, laying off 15 to 20 people.

Then, on May 14, the *Chicago Tribune* revealed that one inside source said "Chicago staffers were never enrolled in a health insurance plan, though Air America promised coverage and deducted health insurance premiums from their paychecks." Would that spur a juicy liberal-hypocrisy story in the middle of what big-government lobbies touted as "Cover The Uninsured Week" (May 10-14)? No.

A quick review of the media coverage shows a very biased pattern of boosterism followed by radio silence:

■ **ABC** promoted the launch with two stories from reporter Jake Tapper on the March 11 *Good Morning America* and the March 28 *World News Tonight*. Peter Jennings noted the network's debut in an anchor brief on March 31, and Ted Koppel devoted an entire *Nightline* program to Air America on April 1. (Koppel didn't even devote an entire *Nightline* to the murder of Nicholas Berg.) Network coverage of Air America's troubles? Zero.

■ **NBC** highlighted the launch with a March 31 *Today* interview, and a *Nightly News* story from reporter Carl Quintanilla that night. Network coverage since? Zero.

■ **NPR** promoted the network on the March 30 *All Things Considered*, and a March 31 interview on their afternoon talk show *Talk of the Nation*. On the April 9 *ATC*, radio

expert Michael Harrison panned the network's slate of programming. But later coverage? Zero.

■ **CNN** aired Air America stories in heavy rotation on the weekend before the network debut (March 27 and 28), as well as stories across the prime-time lineup on March 31. Coverage since then? CNN has briefly noted the bad news on its media show *Reliable Sources* and in a few, scattered anchor briefs.

■ **Newsweek** highlighted the debut in a big three-page spread. Newsweek.com also featured an April 12 Al Franken interview with tough questions like "Why are Democrats such wimps? Why don't they fight back?" Coverage since then? Zero.

■ **The New York Times** filed a number of prominent stories, including a front-page story on the network's first day on April 1, and a long cover story in the March 21 *New York Times Magazine*. Coverage of the network's troubles? The Walsh departure made the business section on page C-6, but the Evan Cohen resignation wasn't noticed.

■ **The Washington Post** published a front-page article by Howard Kurtz on April 1, following an even larger Kurtz profile on the front of the "Sunday Style" section on March 21. Coverage since then? Walsh's departure was also on the front page of Style on April 28. Cohen's resignation was a paragraph buried in the business section on page E-2.

These ongoing struggles may not seem like big breaking news. But by that standard, neither was the dinky network's launch, either. What the national media promoted as the roar of a new liberal lion turned out to be the quiet whimper of a sickly kitten.

— Tim Graham

The *Chicago Tribune* reported the network's Chicago staff were never enrolled for health insurance, although the network deducted insurance premiums from their paychecks. Would that spur a juicy liberal hypocrisy story during "Cover the Uninsured Week"? No.

To schedule an interview with an MRC spokesman, please contact Katie Wright at (703) 683-5004