



Campaign 2004 Media Reality Check

QUICK TAKE

Monday, Oct. 11, 2004 ☎ www.mrc.org ☎ CONTACT: Tim Scheiderer (703) 683-5004

ABC POLITICAL CHIEF SAYS BUSH IS BIGGEST DISTORTER, URGES STAFF NOT TO "ARTIFICIALLY HOLD BOTH SIDES 'EQUALLY' ACCOUNTABLE"

NO BALANCE UNTIL NOVEMBER 3?

John Kerry's tough-against-terrorism, I'll-be-more-effective-in-Iraq rhetoric is belied by the consistently dovish policies he espoused during 20 years in the Senate. On taxes, candidate Kerry now promises to maintain the same middle-class tax cut that Senator Kerry voted against when President Bush proposed it in 2001. Kerry says he's "never wavered" in his life, but even Democratic rivals like Howard Dean mocked him as a flip-flopper during the primaries.

But to liberal ears, Kerry's distortions are meaningless compared to the rhetoric coming out of the Bush campaign, and some journalists are itching to be free of even the pretense of objectivity so they can begin launching one-sided attack stories in the waning days of the campaign.

Friday morning, just hours before the second presidential debate, the *New York Times* published a "Political Memo" — not an editorial or op-ed — by Adam Nagourney and Richard W. Stevenson arguing that Bush is a bigger liar than Kerry: "Several analysts say Mr. Bush pushed the limits of subjective interpretation and offered exaggerated or what some Democrats said were distorted accounts of Mr. Kerry's positions on health care, tax cuts, the Iraq war and foreign policy."

ABC News Political Director Mark Halperin cited the *Times* report in a memo to staffers on Friday making the exact same claim: "The current Bush attacks on Kerry involve distortions and taking things out of context in a way that goes beyond what Kerry has done."

Halperin told his colleagues: "We have a responsibility to hold both sides accountable to the public interest, but that doesn't mean we reflexively and artificially hold both sides 'equally' accountable when the facts don't warrant that."

Sure enough, ABC's coverage that night reprimanded Bush for two "errors" in the debate, while Kerry was only chastised for one mistake (falsely claiming that Army General Eric Shinseki was forcibly retired for dissenting on Iraq policy).

For more on this topic and other media bias issues, please visit www.mrc.org

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