



Media Reality ✓ Check **QUICK TAKE**

Thursday, August 14, 2003 ✪ www.mrc.org ✪ Contact: Katie Wright (703) 683-5004

CBS "EARLY SHOW" INTERVIEWED GARY COLEMAN AND THONG-UNDIES CANDIDATE, BUT IGNORED EVERY CANDIDATE FOR GOVERNOR IN 2002

IS TV NEWS MOCKING THE CALIFORNIA RECALL "CIRCUS" – OR MAKING IT?

Since the California recall election was certified on July 23, TV news anchors and pundits have described the race, with its hundreds of potential successors to Gov. Gray Davis, as a "circus." But are the TV news producers only mocking this "circus," or making it?

This morning, CBS *Early Show* co-host Harry Smith suggested "this recalling of a Governor is really serious business." But yesterday morning, he invited on three of the silliest candidates – former child actor Gary Coleman, an inexperienced businessman with the name Robert "Butch" Dole, and Georgy Russell, who sells thong underwear from her campaign Web site with her campaign logo on it. He asked Russell: "Do you think anybody is taking your candidacy seriously?" But CBS is taking her more seriously than Republican establishment candidates like Tom McClintock and Bill Simon, who have not been invited. (*The Early Show* has also interviewed Arnold Schwarzenegger and Arianna Huffington.)

But while *The Early Show* promotes the silly candidates, it punishes the serious ones. A look at their 2002 campaign coverage from January 1 through Election Day revealed:

Number of candidates for Governor interviewed: **Zero.**

Number of candidates for U.S. Senate interviewed: **Zero.**

Number of candidates for the U.S. House interviewed: **One**, Katherine Harris, who was mostly asked about her 2000 fame and received only one question about her House race.

Oh, but the CBS morning show has interviewed a Senate candidate this year: **Jerry Springer.**

They're not alone. ABC's *Good Morning America* also flunked this test, interviewing no House, Senate, or gubernatorial candidates before the 2002 election. Both ABC's and CBS's morning shows interviewed a married couple in Kansas who ran against each other in a local judge's race. By comparison, NBC's *Today* looked like *The Almanac of American Politics* with nine candidate interviews in that time frame – and it perpetually leads the ratings.

By the way, NBC isn't totally innocent of hyping silly candidates. On the August 11 *Nightly News*, anchor Brian Williams devoted a whole story to 100-year-old aspirant Matilda Spak – who did not make the final ballot.