



# Media Reality ✓ Check

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In 21 Days, ABC, CBS and NBC Pump Out 183 Stories Bemoaning "Skyrocketing" Oil and Gas Prices

## Hyping High Gas Prices, Hiding Good News

During the Clinton years, network journalists argued (correctly) that strong economic growth, a rising stock market, low unemployment and low inflation were the benchmark indicators of a good economy. Today, economic growth is a phenomenal 4.8 percent, the stock market has been climbing for three straight years, and inflation and unemployment are both low.

But instead of trumpeting the amazing "Bush economy," TV news has downplayed this recent good news while hyping the bad news of rising fuel costs. Indeed, a new Media Research Center study suggests the broadcast networks are not just noting the discontent about prices but actively stoking public outrage.

To measure the media hype, MRC analysts reviewed ABC, CBS and NBC morning and evening news shows from April 12 through May 2. During those 21 days, the networks collectively aired 183 stories about rising oil and gas prices — 125 full reports or interview segments, plus another 58 brief anchor-read items.

NBC pushed its "Pain at the Pump" theme the hardest, with 48 stories on *Today* and another 31 on the *NBC Nightly News*. ABC's *Good Morning America* aired 30 stories on gas prices, plus another 29 on *World News Tonight*. CBS's *Early Show* had 28 stories, while the *CBS Evening News* aired 17.

In contrast, only four network stories during this period mentioned the low unemployment rate, 4.7 percent. And after the government reported strong economic growth on April 28, ABC and NBC each aired one story, while the *CBS Evening News* has yet to mention that good news.

■ **Adding fuel to the fire:** Apart from heavy coverage within their newscasts, all three networks employed loaded language in the promotional teases they used at the top of each broadcast. Just over half of the news shows (62 out of 122) promoted upcoming gas price stories, with most pushing hard on the idea of economic pain and many pointing the finger at oil companies.

In 21 days, the *NBC Nightly News* opening contained eight recitations of the phrase "Pain at the Pump." Among all shows, ten began by claiming "skyrocketing" or "sky high" gas prices, with "soaring" used seven times.

The oil companies were TV's villain. On *Today* April 24, Katie Couric asked viewers, "Is Big Oil gouging you?" The opening of the April 24 *CBS Evening News* included this indictment: "Gas price gouging. I'm Sharyl Attkisson with what Congress is and is not doing about it." On *Good Morning America* April 24, Diane Sawyer suggested

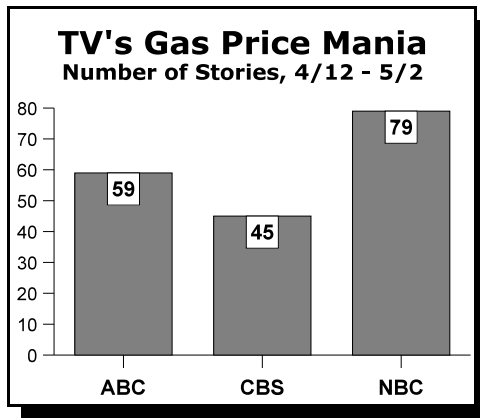
fighting back: "Pain at the pump. Oil companies getting ready to raise prices again. Is it time to turn the tables and tax their record profits?" For more examples, see the posted version of this report at [www.mrc.org](http://www.mrc.org).

■ **Touting angry consumers:** The networks added to the outrage by airing 151 quotes from upset or beleaguered gas buyers. On the April 21 *Nightly News*, Anne Thompson showed a California man filling up his pick-up truck. "\$3.41," he grouched. "They should start handing out knives to cut your arm and leg off." On the

April 24 *World News Tonight*, ABC showcased a woman who claimed she pawned her wedding gifts for gas money.

And on the May 1 *CBS Evening News*, Sharyn Alfonsi cited an outdated poll from the liberal AARP to claim the elderly were going without food or medicine to pay for gas. Alfonsi asked one senior citizen, "What do you think when you fill up your car with gasoline now?" The man replied, "I think, 'Have I got enough money to pay for all this and still get a loaf of bread?'"

Such inane whining makes reporters look foolish, but liberals and Democrats must be rejoicing as the media's gas price mania eclipses good economic news. — *Rich Noyes*



L. Brent Bozell III, Publisher; Brent Baker, Rich Noyes, Tim Graham, Editors; Geoffrey Dickens, Brian Boyd, Brad Wilmouth, Megan McCormack, Mike Rule and Scott Whitlock, Media Analysts; Michelle Humphrey, Research Associate; Michael Chapman, Director of Communications. Sign up for daily *CyberAlerts* at [www.mrc.org](http://www.mrc.org).