



Media Reality ✓ Check

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As Economy Booms, Study Finds ABC, CBS and NBC Distort Reality By Hying Hardship and Pessimism

Media Twist Good Economy Into Bad News

Since Election Day 2004, the U.S. economy has added more than 3 million new jobs. The unemployment rate dropped from a healthy 5.5% to an even more impressive 4.6%. Even with energy prices gyrating, the Consumer Price Index shows inflation at a controlled annual rate of 3.4% for both 2005 and the first nine months of 2006. Since the fall of 2004, the overall size of the U.S. economy (GDP) has increased by more than \$1.3 trillion — new wealth that exceeds the total size of the Russian, Saudi Arabian and Hong Kong economies combined.

An ABC News/*Washington Post* poll released October 9 found nearly a fourth of Americans (23%) said the economy will be the “single most important” issue for them on Election Day, nearly twice as many as said Iraq was their most important voting issue (12%). But the same poll also found pessimism: 53% said the economy was “not so good” or “poor,” vs. 47% who said it was “good” or “excellent.”

Why are voters so gloomy when the economic reality is so good? One reason may be the fact that the big broadcast networks have buried the good economic news under an avalanche of bad news stories. A recent study from MRC's Business & Media Institute (BMI) proves the point. Looking at a year's worth of economic coverage on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news (August 1, 2005 to July 31, 2006), the BMI analysts found “more than twice as many stories and briefs focused on negative aspects of the economy (62%) compared to good news (31%).”

While the real world offered good news, the networks presented pain. As gas prices rose in the spring, the networks went hunting for victims. On the April 24 *World News Tonight*, ABC's Jake Tapper showcased a woman who claimed she had to pawn her wedding set to put gas in her husband's truck. A week later, on the May 1 *CBS Evening News*, reporter Sharyn Alfonsi suggested higher pump prices meant the elderly were going to starve: “They're used to living on fixed incomes, but now skyrocketing gas prices are forcing seniors to make difficult

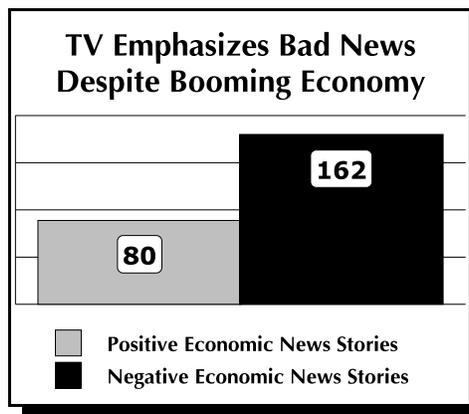
choices. Some are cutting back on gasoline, others say they're eating less.”

When Democrats pushed for an election-year hike in the minimum wage, CBS's Joie Chen obligingly showcased victims on the July 29 *Evening News*: “Sweltering on the streets of Washington just blocks from the Capitol, Americans at the bottom of the pay scale say the current minimum wage simply isn't enough.”

Good news has barely created a ripple. One of the best economic reports of 2006 was a May 25 Commerce Department release showing the economy grew at a robust 5.3% rate in the first quarter. ABC's *World News Tonight* gave the news just 17 seconds; the *CBS Evening News* and *NBC Nightly News* completely skipped it.

On October 6, the Labor Department announced that a previously overlooked 810,000 new jobs had been created since March 2005, a huge positive revision. None of the network evening newscasts said a word about it. A week later (October 11), final numbers showed the much-bemoaned federal budget deficit had been cut nearly in half since 2004, thanks to surging tax revenues credited to strong economic growth. That night, ABC and CBS skipped it, while *NBC Nightly News* gave the story just 22 seconds.

Early this spring, the networks offered frenzied coverage of “Pain at the Pump,” deploring the rise in gasoline prices. As market forces pushed prices back down, the networks denigrated the good news by floating loopy conspiracy theories. On the October 16 *CBS Evening News*, anchor Katie Couric seriously asked: “Is this an election year present from President Bush to fellow Republicans?” The networks' election-year economic coverage has been no gift to voters looking for straight news. — *Rich Noyes*



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