

Fighting the Frenzy

DEAR MRC MEMBER,

The middle of May provided us with a Washington specialty, the full-blown media feeding frenzy.

At the center of the frenzy was President George W. Bush, and the ugly question on every reporter's tongue was: "What did he know and when did he know it?"

The question referred to a CIA briefing the President had received last August, warning that terrorists might try to hijack American airplanes. That was all the briefing had noted.

It didn't discuss where, when, how, or what terrorists might do once in control of a plane, because no one knew the answers.

CBS News military reporter David Martin filed a story on the May 15 *Evening News* that correctly summarized the CIA brief. Martin said the report was "as close as U.S. intelligence came to alerting the President to an airliner attack."

But within hours, this matter-of-fact story about something every reporter already knew — that our intelligence system did a poor

job of coordinating information and finding terrorists before the attack — suddenly became a stop-the-presses story.

By 10 p.m., reliably liberal Judy Woodruff was reporting a scandal. On CNN's *Newsnight* she said incorrectly that "President Bush knew that al Qaeda was planning to hijack a U.S. airliner and he knew it before September 11."

The next morning, Katie Couric opened NBC's *Today* with the "what did he know and when did he know it" cliche. The media frenzy was officially on.

Over at ABC's *Good Morning America*, Charles

Gibson suggested, incredibly, that Bush had faked the shocked reaction the public saw on September 11. The President's August briefing, Gibson charged, "calls into question what happened when Andy Card...the White House Chief of Staff, that morning went and whispered in the President's ear, as the President was talking to a group of school students in Florida. Was the President really surprised?"

Similar themes headlined the evening news programs. Tom Brokaw mimicked
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Katie Couric fueled the media feeding frenzy on May 16th with the old Watergate question: "What did he know, and when did he know it?"

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Couric almost word for word on the *Nightly News*; Peter Jennings portrayed widespread concern; and Dan Rather described a Bush administration trying to explain its cover-up.

The news magazines also got into the act. Kenneth T. Walsh and Kevin Whitelaw, writing in *U.S. News and World Report*, declared that “every President seems to struggle through a credibility gap at some stage, such as Richard Nixon with Watergate, Ronald Reagan with Iran-Contra and Bill Clinton with the Whitewater affair. What did he know and when did he know it? Now it’s George W. Bush’s turn to answer Washington’s favorite question.”

This media behavior can be defined in one word: atrocious.

The MRC swung into action as soon as these stories were filed. It was clear to us from the beginning that this media frenzy was based on rumor and innuendo, not fact. The MRC’s *CyberAlert* e-mail report made a running critique of the slanted, often baseless, media coverage available to thousands of MRC members and friends across the country. MRC Vice President Brent Baker even posted two *CyberAlerts* on May 16 while I took the media to task for their “what did he know and when did he know it” routine in my nationally syndicated column. MRC Director of Media Analysis Rich Noyes also did several radio interviews and made an appearance on FNC’s *Fox and Friends* to discuss the subject.

In my column, I argued that invoking the great scandals of the past such as Watergate, Iran-Contra, and Whitewater — as *U.S. News and World Report* did — was a complete outrage.

In each of those scandals, a president or his administration was accused of willfully engaging in illegal activity and lying about it in order to achieve a goal. By tying Bush’s intelligence



Charles Gibson suggested, incredibly, that Bush had faked the shocked reaction the public saw on September 11: “Was the President really surprised?”



briefing to these scandals, these reporters and others like them were suggesting — though none of them had the guts to say it — that the President knew something was going to happen and willfully chose to follow a path that killed thousands of Americans.

Charles Gibson’s comment, wondering if the President was “really surprised” on September 11, was despicable. How anyone could believe Bush’s shocked look in the Florida classroom that morning was less than genuine is truly beyond me.

Fortunately, some television journalists ignored the frenzy and got to the real story. On the May 16 *Nightline* ABC’s Chris Bury reported that there was no smoking gun and the senior members of the Congressional intelligence committees had received the same information as the President. “No one here can remember any of them sounding the kind of alarm that might have foreshadowed or prevented what happened on September 11,” Bury noted.

By the weekend of May 18, the media frenzy had died and we had the pleasure of hearing journalists admit we were right. *Newsweek* editor Evan Thomas appeared on *Inside Washington* and laid the blame for the whole mess squarely at the feet of a scandal-seeking media. “The incredible alarm everybody has about how Bush should have known — all of that is baloney,” Thomas said, adding, “The media beast was so happy to have a scandal here, that we

jumped up and down and waved our arms and got all excited about it.”

NPR’s Nina Totenberg, a fellow *Inside Washington* panelist who has never been confused with a conservative, agreed. “Nobody in the political establishment said



**An MRC first!
Kudos to Nina Totenberg.**

‘what did they know and when did they know it?’ That was us in the media.” Good for her.

Yes, the media had jumped to conclusions without facts. And the MRC was there immediately to explain it. We did our job and did it well. And, with your help, we’ll stand ready to fight the next wave of biased and misleading stories aimed at undermining the war effort.

So once again, thank you for your support.

Until next month,

L. Brent Bozell III

“Thank You, Jesus”? Not at ABC!

Just about anything can be done on network television. The one exception, apparently, is publicly thanking Jesus for something. We're not kidding.

Joy Behar, one of the many co-hosts of the Barbara Walters-created, ABC daytime talk show *The View* explained to the show's cast and viewers on May 28 how the network had deleted an earlier reference she'd made to Jesus.

During a segment on May 23, Behar, who was thrilled that a long diet plan was finally coming to an end, exclaimed: “Thank you, thank you, Jesus, is all I have to say!” Big deal. Right?

Wrong. East Coast and Midwest viewers heard the reference but, amazingly, it was “bleeped” on the West Coast. Neither Behar nor the show's other co-hosts could understand the decision.

“I think it was stupid to beep that,” Star Jones said. “They let us say all kinds of things on TV, but they beep Jesus? That makes no sense.”

Thanks to the MRC, the issue became a national story. MRC Vice President Brent Baker included the item in his daily *CyberAlert* and MRC Communications Director Liz Swasey issued a *Media Bias Alert* to journalists. The Rev. Jerry Falwell wrote about the incident and the MRC's role in it in his *WorldNetDaily* column, and Sean Hannity, in his interview of Falwell on *Hannity & Colmes*, mentioned the MRC as well.

The story grew bigger as more and more journalists

learned about it from the MRC. The Associated Press filed a story that appeared in dozens of papers across the U.S. and Canada, including the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Post*, and *Newsday*. ABC, now on the defensive, tried to explain itself. ABC told the AP they have no problem “with Jesus Christ's name as long as it is used in a prayerful and respectful manner.” The network claimed they were concerned Behar's reference would be offensive to its audience.

Such explanations by the network defy logic. Had it been any religious reference but Jesus — Allah, Buddha, you name it — the ABC censors would never have considered removing it. It's just another example of the double standard applied to the Christian religion by the networks.

Bottom line: at ABC you can say “g—damnit” in a derogatory fashion — that's OK. But don't you dare praise Jesus. No, that's offensive.



From the *Los Angeles Times*, to the *Calgary Herald*, dozens of media outlets cited the MRC's report on ABC bleeping “Jesus.” MRC spokesmen were interviewed on numerous radio talk shows and the issue was discussed on FNC's *Special Report with Brit Hume and Hannity & Colmes*.



Brian Williams: The More Things Change...

Any hope that a less biased anchor would succeed Tom Brokaw at NBC was shattered on May 29 when the network announced Brian Williams as its *Nightly News* anchor-in-waiting.

Williams, currently anchor of *The News with Brian Williams* on CNBC, won't take over until after the fall 2004 elections. Based on his record, however, conservatives don't have much to look forward to. The cable anchor doesn't care much for conservatives or their issues.

“It's red meat for conservatives, the positions rather strident tonight: anti-gay, pro-Jesus, and anti-abortion and no gray matter in between.” That's how Williams characterized a Republican presidential debate in January 2000.

Five months later, he eulogized former Pennsylvania Governor Bob Casey, an old-line liberal, as an “ultraconservative” simply because he was pro-life. Williams told viewers Casey was “a Democrat, but a devout Catholic and thus was ultraconservative on the topic of abortion.”

The cable anchor's conservative bashing is hardly limited to religion and abortion. When the U.S. announced in December 2001 that it was withdrawing from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty — a move negotiated with the Russians and one provided for in the treaty — Williams described the move as the intentional breaking of the nation's word. “Tonight, why the U.S. is deliberately going back on its word in front of the rest of the world,” he exclaimed.

Williams also has made his pro-environment bias clear. On January 2 of this year he asked “if it was downright unpatriotic to drive an SUV” since the country was dependent on foreign oil. In early March, he was concerned when higher-mileage standards were defeated in Congress and introduced the story with this sensational statement: “Gas-guzzling SUV's and light trucks were big winners on Capitol Hill today, but there's concern tonight the environment could be the big loser.”

As might be expected, the MRC made its voice heard when Williams was announced. A *Media Reality Check* report highlighting Williams' liberal comments over the years was sent across the nation, and MRC Vice President of Research and Publications Brent Baker wrote a guest commentary for *National Review Online*, warning viewers that NBC may be changing anchors, but the liberal bias will remain the same.

Get the *CyberAlert!*

How do Brit Hume, Bill O'Reilly, Rush Limbaugh, Michael Reagan, Janet Parshall, Matt Drudge, *National Review*, the *Washington Times*, *World* magazine, and thousands of others stay on top of the latest liberal media bias? They read the MRC's *CyberAlert*. And you can too...for FREE! As a member of the MRC, you can sign up to receive the MRC's near-daily e-mail report *CyberAlert!*

To subscribe, just e-mail MRC@MediaResearch.org and say you want to get your FREE *CyberAlerts!* Mention that you read about it in *FLASH*.

Selling Photos? Renting the Lincoln Bedroom? Same Thing!

When a Republican fundraising plan that involved selling September 11 photographs of President Bush became public, ABC and NBC went berserk, comparing it to the fundraising excesses of the Clinton years.

NBC's Tom Brokaw opened the May 14 *Nightly News* by noting that President Bush was holding a gala fundraiser that night and



ABC promoted a former Clinton staffer's view that Bush's campaign is something "you'd expect of con men."

then followed with this comment: "The same President Bush who made fundraising in the Clinton White House a major campaign issue. And this White House has come up with a token for contributors that is raising more than eyebrows."

Brokaw's insinuation was that a run-of-the-mill campaign effort aimed at middle-class voters — donors received three pictures for \$150 — was the moral equivalent of a scandalous Clinton operation that rented the Lincoln Bedroom to favor-seekers with million-dollar checkbooks.

ABC followed suit. *World News Tonight* interviewed Democrats opposed to the photograph idea, which was fair enough, but then added a disapproving statement from former Vice President Al Gore, the same man who collected illegal donations at a Buddhist monastery. The next day, *Good Morning America* interviewed former Clinton press secretary Joe Lockhart, who said the photo plan was something "you'd expect from con men."

Apparently no one at ABC found the irony in hearing the Clinton people talk about "con men." While there's no doubt Gore and Lockhart have a great deal of knowledge and expertise in unethical fundraising, they certainly don't possess the moral standing to criticize the Bush administration on these matters.

And ABC knows that.

Still Not Terrorists

Peter Jennings is consistent. The long-time ABC anchor simply refuses to call Middle Eastern groups that murder civilians "terrorists." The U.S. government might brand them terrorists but Jennings tries to avoid it whenever possible.

"In North Carolina," Jennings told viewers on the May 20 *World News Tonight*, "two men went on trial for smuggling cigarettes to allegedly help the group Hezbollah in Lebanon, which the government calls a terrorist organization."

On the March 27 *World News Tonight*, Jennings took the same approach. He noted that the government claimed Hezbollah was a terrorist group. He then interviewed a Hezbollah member who said, "We are not terrorists."

Last December, Jennings avoided uttering the word altogether, calling Hamas, a group that has taken credit for numerous homicide bombings in Israel, a "militant Islamic group."



Recent MRC analysis demonstrates how Jennings continues to avoid using the term "terrorists."

Jennings' problem with the word "terrorist" is not a recent one. Back in 1972, Jennings covered the murder of 11 Israeli athletes by Palestinian terrorists at the Munich, Germany Summer Olympics. The Palestinian gunmen, according to *Washington Post* television critic Tom Shales' review of Jennings' clips in the documentary *One Day in September*, were called "guerrillas" and "commandos" by the future anchor. But not terrorists.

Promoting Lifestyles and Liberal Politics

The *New York Times* also is consistent, especially when it comes to promoting its left-wing cultural and political views. In late May, the *Times* reinforced its worldview when it promoted liberal national political reporter Richard Berke to Washington bureau chief.

Berke is one of many openly gay reporters at the *Times* and is proud of the influence the gay movement has at the paper — as President Bozell has pointed out in his nationally syndicated column. In 2000, Berke told a National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association conference that "...there are times when you look at the front-page meeting [at the *Times*] and...literally three-quarters of the people deciding what's on the front page are not-so-closeted homosexuals."

The inordinate number of influential gay journalists leaves little doubt as to the *Times'* positions on gay issues. And it rightfully raises the question of fairness: Does anyone think for a moment that the *Times* would ever allow three-quarters of its front-page staff to be avowed conservatives?

The same rules don't apply when it comes to the gay agenda, however. The *Times*, like many other major media outlets, made the decision long ago that homosexuality is simply an alternative lifestyle and the issue will never be debated within its pages. And the promotion of Richard Berke is yet another reason why.

Cuba Has Free Health Care and Great Sports!

Cuba is a dictatorship that denies basic human rights to its citizens. Right? Wrong. That assumption is apparently incorrect. It's actually a paradise with free medical care and great athletic programs.

At least that's what CNN's Kate Snow is saying.



CNN's Kate Snow misinformed the viewing audience about what it really means to live under a dictatorship.

MRC's *CyberAlert* tracked Snow's coverage of former President Jimmy Carter's visit to the island nation and caught many of the descriptions of Cuban life she provided.

"Cuba may not have the nicest facilities or equipment, medicine is sometimes in short supply, but everyone has access and the concept of paying is completely foreign," Snow gushed to her viewers on May 13.

Cuban sports teams also are great and the United States doesn't have anything like their regimented youth sports system. "...(T)hey catch these kids when they're so young and they put them in a system unlike anything that exists in the United States, a very regimented system, but it trains them all the way through," Snow exclaimed. "They're still getting school and classwork, but then they're also getting this incredible training." Isn't Marxist control wonderful?

The incredible training and free medical care certainly doesn't seem to keep Cuban athletes from fleeing the country when they get the opportunity. Come to think of it, it doesn't keep thousands of average Cubans from escaping the country either. Could some things actually be more important than a free trip to the doctor and learning how to play ball really, really well?

Spiking the Communist Label

More evidence that you don't always get the whole truth on network news.

During President Bush's trip to Europe in May, both CBS's John Roberts and NBC's Campbell Brown refused to identify the political affiliation of German

parliament members who heckled and protested Bush's speech to the Bundestag.

Roberts simply said "some in the chamber heckled the President." Brown described them as "members of Parliament" who disrupted the President's remarks and unfurled a banner calling for the President and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder to "stop their wars."



Presenting them as members of Parliament, NBC and CBS hide the fact that Bush hecklers were communists.

MRC's *CyberAlert* noted that ABC's Terry Moran and Fox News Channel's Jim Angle, however, told viewers that the politicians were members of Germany's far-left party. A *CyberAlert* also took this note from the May 24 *Washington Post* to provide a little more historical perspective. The three legislators were "from the Party of Democratic Socialism, the old East German Communist Party."

In the future, NBC and CBS might want to let viewers in on this sort of background information.

MRC's Mini-Bits

Cheap shot artist Paul Begala on the Bush administration pushing for Cuban elections: "Let's set aside the irony of anybody in the Bush White House talking about free elections"...Andy Rooney tells Larry King that "Dan [Rather] is transparently liberal"... Rooney on Bernard Goldberg's book on liberal media bias: "I thought he made some very good points. There is just no question that I, among others, have a liberal bias"...NBC's Andrea Mitchell claims "no one in Havana's fruit market is demanding free elections"...ABC's Cokie Roberts thinks "anything that makes it easier to get guns is a bad thing." That goes for pilots, too. "Having some pilot who's gone off his nut for some reason running around with a gun does not make me feel safe," Roberts adds...Seymour Hersh of the *New Yorker* says, "We have an Attorney General that is, I don't know, how would you describe him, demented?"



Andy says: "Dan [Rather] is transparently liberal."

Not All Letters Are Created Equal

By Scott Hogenson
CNSNews.com
Executive Editor



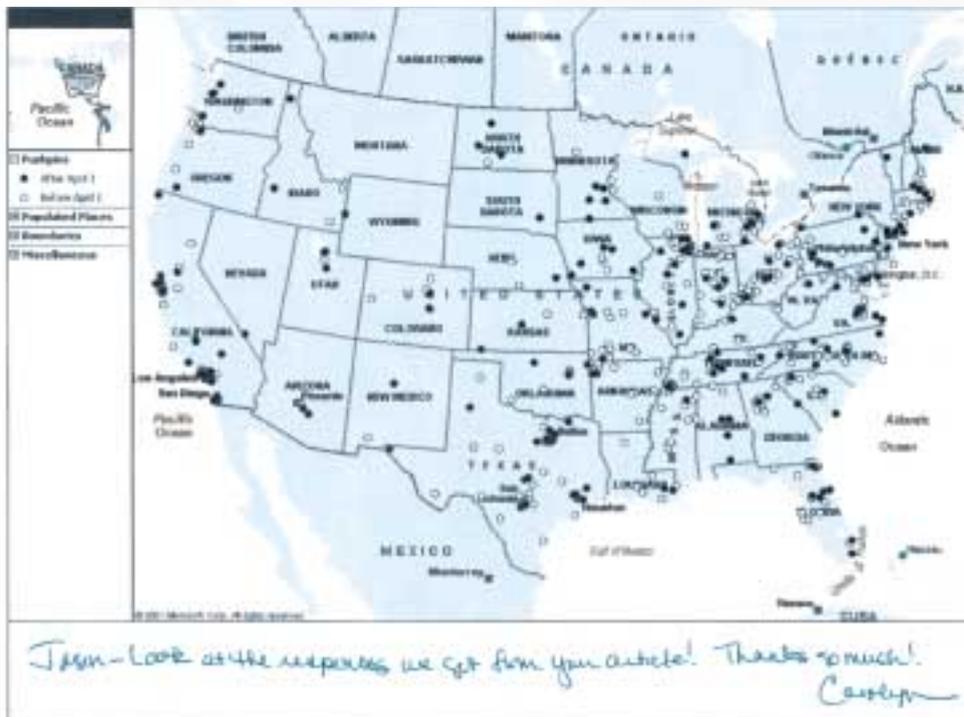
One of my favorite things to do is to dig into the old CNSNews.com Mail Bag from time to time and pull out a few pieces of correspondence to share with you.

We get quite a bit of mail from readers, most of it via the Internet. E-mail is huge, and thousands of people each week use this technology to give us their impressions of our work.

Of course, we still get some mail the old fashioned way, with stamps and return addresses and all the other accouterments of the dying art of letter writing. One such item was a thank you card sent to Staff Writer Jason Pierce regarding his April 17 feature story about the American Heritage Girls, a relatively new organization that provides "a scouting program for girls that supports the traditional values of God, family and country," making it something of a conservative alternative to the increasingly liberal Girl Scouts, if you will.

The simple thank you card, signed by the women who work at AHG headquarters, read, "**Dear Jason — Thanks so much for the great article you did on AHG. It has spurred a tremendous response!**" What I saw next blew my mind.

Accompanying the card was a map of the U.S.



speckled with hundreds of dots denoting areas of the country in which AHG was setting up chapters.

About 250 of those dots were white, indicating AHG troops before April 1, 2002.

I then counted 159 red dots, noted in the map's legend as AHG inquiries received after April 1. A handwritten note across the top of the map read, "Look at the responses we got from your article. Thanks so much!"

I was astonished that one feature article had such an impact, so I placed a call to AHG headquarters just to make sure I didn't misunderstand something.

"You guys got us slammed!" AHG Executive Director Patti Garibay, laughing, told me, happily informing me of the response to our report. "There were over 400 requests from your article," she explained.

Patti then told me how the CNSNews.com article also sparked considerable media interest in the organization, resulting in interviews on nationally syndicated radio shows hosted by the likes of Ken Hamblin, Barry Farber, and others, not to mention innumerable local radio interviews that resulted from the article.

I actually felt a little sheepish speaking with Patti, who offered profuse thanks for our coverage of the group.

We don't make editorial decisions based on whether we

can give a plug to one group or another; we just look for interesting, compelling stories and report the facts.

As it happened, hundreds of readers found our coverage so compelling, they wanted more information on starting AHG troops across the nation. Talk about hitting the nail on the head!

Sometimes, we get so caught up pursuing the news we forget about the impact CNSNews.com has. The American Heritage Girls served to remind the entire staff that our impact is sometimes bigger than we imagine.

(Editor's Note: American Heritage Girls, Inc. is located in Fairfield, OH and can be reached by calling 517-860-4670.)

CNN's Cuba Coverage Doesn't Get the Real Story

A new MRC study of CNN's bureau in Havana has found the network has paid little attention to those who oppose Fidel Castro's dictatorial rule but has found plenty of time to rave about Fidel.

CNN's bureau is the only American television bureau Castro has allowed in Havana, and for good reason, apparently. On May 9, MRC President L. Brent Bozell told a group of reporters at a Cuba Libertad press conference, held at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., that the Havana bureau had failed to live up to its promise. "CNN launched this bureau with fanfare and bold claims about how coverage would be unfettered," Bozell told the crowd. "The story out of Cuba should be: Why do people keep risking their lives to flee that country? Our findings show CNN has all but completely ignored that story."

The MRC Special Report, *Megaphone for a Dictator: CNN's Coverage of Castro's Cuba*, reviewed all 212 CNN prime time news stories on Cuban life or government filed by the Havana bureau from March 1997 through March 2002. *The Miami Herald*, *Washington Times*, and Fox News Channel, among others, ran stories about the study and Rich Noyes, the MRC Director of Media Analysis, appeared on FNC's *Fox and Friends* to discuss the findings.

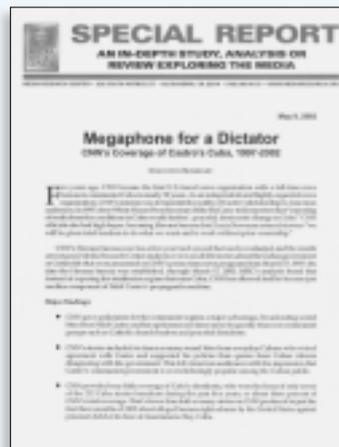
The study found that CNN has barely mentioned Cuba's dissidents — they were only in seven of the 212

stories. As a comparison, that's fewer than half as many stories as CNN produced in the first three months of 2002 about alleged human rights abuses by the United States against prisoners held at its base in Guantanamo Bay.

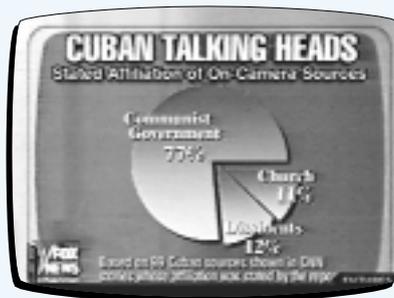
The study found that Communist government spokesmen were interviewed six times more frequently than representatives of non-communist groups and peaceful dissidents. It also documented how Castro has been treated more like a celebrity than a tyrant. CNN reported on Castro's 73rd birthday celebrations and, in February 2000, featured the dictator's office in the "Cool Digs" segment of CNN's *Newsstand*.

The study made four recommendations to CNN, suggesting that they increase the amount of Cuba news;

commit to investigative journalism in Cuba; broadcast reports on the welfare of political prisoners; and report on the efforts of Cuba's independent journalists.



MRC's Director of Media Analysis Rich Noyes discusses the MRC's latest Special Report on the Fox News Channel's *Fox and Friends*.



To read the Special Report in its entirety, log on to www.mrc.org/specialreports/welcome.asp

Notable Quotables

The MRC's popular newsletter *Notable Quotables* exposes reporters' liberal worldview by using their own words against them. *NQ* has become a staple and a must-read for conservative media personalities. Get this great bi-weekly delivered to your door today at the member rate of just \$30 per year and receive our "Term Limits for TV News Anchors" bumper sticker for FREE! Just call Donna at (800) 672-1423 ext. 122 or use the enclosed business reply envelope.

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Editor's Corner

TIM JONES

Giving Balance the Cold Shoulder

When I was a kid the greatest environmental threat facing the world was an imminent Ice Age. Scientists and environmentalists — at least the ones that wrote books and were interviewed everywhere on television — were absolutely certain that the world was getting colder.

I was just as certain the people on TV were right. There had been some brutal winters in Central Kentucky in those years; it had to be proof of an Ice Age. But some local farmers, much to my youthful surprise, were skeptical. They had seen snow drift over the top of fence posts many times, they assured me. It was all part of nature's ebb and flow.

It turned out the farmers were right, of course. Scientists and environmentalists — at least the ones who were media savvy — changed their minds after a decade or so. The world wasn't getting colder; it was getting hotter and their friends in the media made sure everyone knew. Global warming became a household word.

During the first week of June, global warming made headlines again. The Environmental Protection Agency sent a report to the United Nations basically stating that it believed global warming to be real. The media coverage of the report, as noted in MRC's *CyberAlert*, was remark-



able for its lack of balance. None of the major networks interviewed a single scientist who questioned the report and the science it was based on.

That's not a shock, though. The networks long have had a pro-environmentalist bias and have almost totally ignored global warming skeptics within the scientific community. Early last year the MRC

examined four months of network global warming coverage and found that ABC, NBC, and CBS totally excluded global warming skeptics during that time.

There are thousands of skeptical scientists out there — 17,000 have signed an Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine petition stating there's no convincing scientific evidence of global warming or its effects — yet the networks continue to present only one side of the issue to the American public.

This has to stop. For years the networks and other media have promoted an anti-business environmental agenda. Sooner or later, balance has to be restored to network environmental coverage and global warming — with its thousands of scientific doubters — would be a logical place to start.

The media might find, like a certain Kentucky country boy once did, that skeptics sometimes have a point.



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