A New Promotion for an Old Partisan

Dear MRC Member,

After weeks of speculation, it’s now official. In September, George Stephanopoulos, once a high-ranking mouthpiece for former President Bill Clinton, will become the sole anchor of the ABC news show This Week.

The announcement is another example of the revolving door between Democratic politics and journalism and further proof that the powers-that-be in network news are committed to having a liberal bias dominate their “news” reporting.

A campaign manager and policy adviser to Clinton, and an aide to House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt before that, Stephanopoulos was a fierce political partisan before becoming a “journalist.” That might be fine, except that Stephanopoulos has never learned to temper his partisan instincts. More than any other government official-turned-journalist, he has consistently displayed a proclivity for promoting the liberal agenda of his former Democratic Party colleagues.

Examples? In May, at the height of the senseless media frenzy over what President Bush knew about terrorist plans prior to September 11, Stephanopoulos, an artful dodger and spinner during his time at the White House, damned the Bush administration with faint praise.

“They’ve been very careful with their words and I think, for the most part, the White House has not lied here,” Stephanopoulos said. How reassuring. In February, the former Clintonite responded to President Bush’s State of the Union speech by calling the “axis of evil” remark “deeply incoherent” and little more than an excuse to “spend $238 billion on a missile defense plan that’s not going to work anyway.”

Stephanopoulos’s bias extends well beyond the current administration and covers almost every topic. In March 2001, in response to a Cokie Roberts comment on This Week that most Americans have a gun in the house, Stephanopoulos muttered “unfortunately, yeah.” On a 1999 Good Morning America segment, Stephanopoulos explained Bill Bradley’s position that gays should be allowed to serve openly in the military and added his own opinion. “...He’s right. continued on page 2
Back in his Clinton Days

Stephanopoulos was a skilled spinner and ardent advocate of liberal causes.

DEAR MEMBER

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I would say he’s right,” Stephanopoulos claimed.

Stephanopoulos’s most biased actions and comments, however, came in the heat of the highly partisan, super competitive 2000 presidential election. Whether calling George W. Bush a “kamikaze conservative” or praising the bumbling debate performances of Al Gore, Stephanopoulos left no doubt that he was rooting for liberal Democrat Gore.

The best example was the first presidential debate. Almost every pundit on television believed Bush was the winner. But not Stephanopoulos.

“Gore dominated the debate,” the former Democratic operative claimed in ABC’s post-debate coverage. Later the same night, Stephanopoulos gushed on Nightline that Gore “was strong, he was detailed, he was specific and he posed questions to Bush that Bush left on the table.”

Combine these remarks with Stephanopoulos’s confessions in All Too Human, his memoirs of the Clinton years, and an observer begins to wonder how anyone could ever consider him an objective journalist. In his book, Stephanopoulos readily admits to being a liberal ideologue. “Of course, I still wanted Clinton to win,” he wrote of the 1996 election. “Four more years in the White House would mean more Democratic judges on the federal bench, perhaps another seat on the Supreme Court. It would mean more of our people would be managing the government for more time, making the day-to-day decisions that add up to meaningful change.”

Stephanopoulos also admits to having had the kind of cozy relationship with former colleagues that reporters are supposed to avoid. After the Lewinsky story broke, “the first day felt like old times,” he wrote in his book. “The only difference was that instead of being in the foxhole with my friends, I was calling from behind enemy lines — the headquarters at ABC News. They had a job to do and so did I...From the start, I cautioned Rahm [Emanuel] not to tell me anything that he didn’t want me to report, and our phone conversations had a new code. ‘Just friends’ meant off the record.’”

It’s intellectually dishonest for anyone to claim Stephanopoulos is suddenly objective. I said so in May in a debate with former Clintonites Paul Begala and Dee Dee Myers on CNN’s Crossfire and said so again in a national press release the MRC issued when Stephanopoulos was officially announced on June 18. The man has simply proven himself to be too partisan to have his own “news” show.

An equally troubling development in the Stephanopoulos story is that his rise through the ranks at ABC has been aided and abetted by David Westin, the network’s news president. Yes, he’s the one who said he had “no opinion” as to whether the Pentagon was an appropriate terrorist target during a speech at Columbia University last October, a statement the MRC made sure was heard around the nation and that he later apologized for. Westin has helped guide Stephanopoulos’s news career as the former Clinton aide has gone from news analyst, to correspondent, to morning show host, to anchor. According to Westin, conservative criticism of Stephanopoulos is merely an attempt to make him spin the news favorably for conservatives — as if that could ever be possible.

This comment, and Westin’s defense of Stephanopoulos’s political past, clearly demonstrates an ABC double standard. In late 1998, Westin forced This Week executive producer Dorrance Smith, who had worked in the first Bush White House, off the show. In an interview with Washington Post media critic Howard Kurtz in December 1999, Westin claimed that while no one’s previous employment should be held against him “we shouldn’t have executive producers who have identifiable alliances either way.”

Anchors with identifiable liberal alliances, however, are perfectly acceptable to ABC.

In addition to the national press release, the MRC also issued a Media Reality Check that included several quotes from Stephanopoulos’s book and we set up a special section on our web site dedicated to his many partisan statements.

And, as usual, our efforts made news across the country. Washington Post.com carried an excerpt from an American Prowler article that included several quotes from Stephanopoulos’s book and congratulated us for our web site expose on Stephanopoulos. The National Journal, a widely read Washington, D.C. publication that covers government and politics, carried an excerpt from our press release, and I discussed the issue with Janet Parshall on her nationally syndicated radio show. MRC Director of Media Analysis Rich Noyes also discussed Stephanopoulos and his new job on radio programs in California, Texas, and Ohio.

As always, none of the MRC’s work is possible without you and your support. You truly make it possible for us to fight the good fight against liberal bias day in and day out. On behalf of myself and the entire staff, I want to say thank you.

Until next time,

L. Brent Bozell III
President
The MRC recently released a new report, a five year study that documents — to no one’s surprise — how conservative politicians, groups and activists are identified by their ideology much more often than their liberal counterparts.

Conducted by the MRC’s Director of Media Analysis, Rich Noyes, the study examined the ABC, CBS and NBC evening news shows from January 1, 1997 through December 31, 2001. The study started with a computerized Nexis database search that looked for the words “conservative” and “liberal” in the evening news transcripts.

This initial search found the two labels were used 2,020 times during the five-year time span. Each individual story was then read to determine how the label was used and who applied it. The only labels that counted were those applied by reporters or anchors. Instances where individuals labeled themselves or where political opponents labeled them were not included, nor were instances where reporters quoted a third party applying a label.

This method thinned the list down to 1,239 labels. Of these, 992 — that’s 80 percent — were applied to conservatives.

The disparity in labeling varied by group, although conservatives were always labeled at a much higher rate than liberals. Conservative U.S. Senators, for instance, were labeled 63 times, while liberal Senators were tagged 32 times. Supreme Court justices received 49 conservative labels and only 24 liberal ones.

A much larger disparity took place in the House of Representatives where conservatives received 87 percent of the labels, but even that lopsided statistic doesn’t come close to the unbalanced labeling that was used in the 2000 presidential campaign. Candidates were identified as conservative 71 times during the campaign but as liberal only three times, meaning conservatives received 96 percent of the ideological tags applied by the networks during the election. Perhaps even more astounding was that none of the liberal labels were ever applied to Al Gore!

“It seems unbelievable, but the numbers don’t lie. No network labeled Vice President Al Gore as a liberal during the entire 1999-2000 election cycle, yet they labeled George W. Bush as a conservative 19 times.” President Bozell noted in the national press release that announced the findings. “Network anchors and reporters label conservatives because they think they’re out of the mainstream, but don’t label liberals because they think liberals are completely mainstream.”

The study received prominent air play from Sean Hannity on his daily radio show and from Fox News Channel’s Brit Hume, who highlighted the findings on his June 26 Special Report. Eric Burns, the host of Fox News Watch, included the study as a topic in his discussion show and wrote a column on the Fox News website. The Washington Times and the National Journal’s Hotline also ran articles about the study.

The Florida Times-Union in Jacksonville, Fla. made the most entertaining use of the study, building its July 2 editorial around it and concluding with a paragraph that rang with both humor and truth.

“Network news executives and their staffs should do some serious soul searching on this issue,” the Times-Union said. “Either leave off the labels or dispense them equally. As much as we may wish it were so, conservatives probably do not outnumber liberals 4 to 1.”
An Anchor or a Commentator?

CNN’s Aaron Brown just couldn’t keep his liberal opinion to himself after the government announced the capture of dirty bomber suspect Abdullah al Muhajir, the American citizen formerly known as Jose Padilla.

Brown whined, noting he was especially upset that Muhajir was being held in a military brig as an enemy combatant.

MRC Vice President Brent Baker caught Brown’s impromptu editorial and wrote about it in the June 11 CyberAlert, emphasizing that the anchor was more concerned with the would-be terrorist’s rights than with the deadly crime he was being charged with.

Other media watchers and critics were equally incensed with Brown’s action. The June 17 CyberAlert carried this criticism from Jane Hall, a former Los Angeles Times reporter and current media critic for Fox News Watch. The next time Brown wants to express his own view, Hall noted, he might “say, you know, Democrats are questioning the timing, not, ‘I’m not interested in hearing about a lot of arrests.’”

Ethel Rosenberg appeared on the screen. “There were some, of course. But a lot of innocent people had their names blackened and their careers damaged during the hunt.”

Comparing a plan to identify and track foreigners from terrorist-supporting countries to McCarthyism is ridiculous and illustrates the media’s penchant for hysteria. It was only a few weeks ago, remember, that the media were expressing shock because law enforcement agencies — who weren’t tracking foreign nationals at flight schools or anywhere else — had been unable to “connect the dots” provided by the September 11 hijackers.

Liberal Court...Except to ABC and USA Today

The 9th Circuit Court decision that made the “under God” portion of the Pledge of Allegiance unconstitutional in public schools — until the court stayed its own order — was an exercise in creative labeling for a few outlets.

Headquartered in San Francisco, the 9th Circuit Court has a well-deserved reputation of being the most liberal federal court in the country. CBS News, the Washington Post and even the New York Times unabashedly and unashamedly identified the court as liberal in their stories. ABC News, however, chose a different label.

Jackie Judd, reporting on the June 26 World News Tonight, just couldn’t bring herself to use the word “liberal.” “The 9th Circuit has a reputation for unorthodox opinions;” she said.

USA Today’s Martin Kasindorf, as noted in an MRC CyberAlert, demonstrated an even more unique labeling approach, referring to the 9th Circuit as “relatively liberal.”

Avoiding the liberal label...even in the most obvious cases.
Which leaves us wondering: If the 9th Circuit is “relatively” liberal, what in the world is a “real” liberal to Kasindorf and the USA Today editors?

Networks Still Not Listening

Last month’s FLASH carried Andy Rooney’s recent comments from Larry King Live, where the veteran, award-winning journalist called Dan Rather “transparently liberal” and added that he agreed with much of what former CBS correspondent Bernard Goldberg had written in his number one best seller Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News.

Goldberg, in a Wall Street Journal opinion piece several days after Rooney’s comments, noted that CBS and other network news divisions were ignoring the statements of the craggy, curmudgeonly 60 Minutes commentator. That’s a far cry from the wholesale condemnation Goldberg received from such CBS luminaries as Rather and Bob Schieffer when he first addressed liberal bias in a 1996 Wall Street Journal piece or when his book first hit the shelves in late 2001.

Could it be that Rooney, who admitted to a liberal bias and said he was “consistently liberal in my opinions,” has escaped public censure at the hands of CBS because he is a liberal in good standing or simply because his 60-plus years in journalism make him unassailable?

Regardless of the cause, it’s obvious that CBS plans to ignore Rooney’s comments just as it has every other well-founded charge of liberal bias over the last two decades.

Early Fireworks: Katie Couric Interviews Ann Coulter

The first Independence Day fireworks show took place a little early when Katie Couric interviewed conservative author Ann Coulter on NBC’s Today on June 26. The subject was Coulter’s bestselling book, Slander: Liberal Lies About the American Right, which takes the media to task for their comments about conservatives. Coulter’s book makes extensive use of MRC material and her acknowledgements page states “novenas should be said to Brent Bozell and the Media Research Center, who have been on the case long before I was.”

In her book, Coulter accused Couric of calling former President Ronald Reagan an “airhead” during a 1999 segment on Edmund Morris’s biography of Reagan. (Morris had used the term “apparent airhead” in the book). Coulter also said Today had used the term in reference to Reagan on three separate occasions. Couric disagreed with the characterization and claimed Reagan had only been called an airhead once and that she had the transcripts to prove it. (A short clip of the verbal donnybrook is available at www.mrc.org/videobias/vidbias.asp.)

The “transcripts” claim by Couric was too good to pass up, so the MRC conducted a quick search of its archives and found Today had referred to Reagan as an airhead at least twice in September 1999. As the June 26 CyberAlert accurately pointed out, Couric used the airhead term on September 27, 1999 and co-host Matt Lauer repeated the charge the very next day.

MRC’s Mini-Bits

George Stephanopoulos told left-wing Tom Paine.com that “I’ve always worked hard to be fair...to make sure I was being analytical without being ideological”...Al Hunt, of the Wall Street Journal and CNN, refers to Newt Gingrich during an interview with Bob Dole: “Is patriotism too often, as Samuel Johnson famously said, the last refuge of scoundrels?”...New York Times reporter Linda Greenhouse appreciates the anti-Pledge of Allegiance ruling: “There was a lot of doctrinal merit in what the majority said”...CNN Pentagon reporter Barbara Starr agreed, claiming “you could say the judge was right in the very strictest sense of the Constitution”...USA Today columnist Walter Shapiro went even further: “Doesn’t it make you proud to pledge allegiance to a nation in which unpopular minorities like atheists can have their day in court?”...
Training the Next Generation of Journalists

By Scott Hogenson
CNSNews.com
Executive Editor

I have written in this space before about the intern program at CNSNews.com, the Internet newswire of the Media Research Center, and for good reason; it is a critical element in fighting liberal media bias.

Tracking and exposing such bias, as the MRC does better than any organization on the planet, is the first step. The next step is providing news and information that isn’t tainted by liberal bias, which is the role of CNSNews.com. Then there’s the third step, which has perhaps the largest impact: grooming the next generation of journalists.

Among this year’s crop of aspiring newshounds is 19-year old Rick Docksa, a rising sophomore at Washington College in Chestertown, Maryland. While attending school, Rick is a reporter for The Elm, the campus newspaper.

Since arriving at CNSNews.com, he’s been toiling in our newsroom and earning bylines assisting with congressional coverage of ‘hate crimes’ legislation and authoring a probing report on whether American prisons might be a breeding ground for homegrown terrorists.

Rick’s reportage of a little known study indicating that marijuana use might lead to symptoms of schizophrenia also caused something of a stir in Cyberspace, being republished on the popular web site Free Republic and prompting an outpouring of responses from across the country.

Seated across from Rick is Jessica Cantelon, a 20-year old junior at the University of Washington in Seattle. Jessica has happily waded into the American culture wars since arriving at CNSNews.com, reporting on the growing efforts to equate homosexual relationships with marriage.

Coming from a hotbed of political correctness, Jessica has also written about the sanitizing of The Hunchback of Notre Dame by a British theatre company that’s serving up its production of The Bellringer of Notre Dame. Victor Hugo’s classic being apparently too intolerant and insensitive to those with spinal deformations.

Rounding out this prodigious team of young journalists is Oubai Shahbandar, a senior at Arizona State University.

Oubai, a native of Syria, was called “an American hero,” in an article published last year by Front Page magazine for taking a stand on the removal of an American flag from his campus cafeteria and demanding it be replaced.

As a college activist involved with student government and the ASU chapter of College Republicans, Oubai has not been shy about confronting controversy.

His continuing coverage of the assault on the Salvation Army of Portland, Maine, under attack for not paying health insurance costs for the live-in lovers of homosexual employees, has resulted in considerable response from readers, many of whom have offered financial and moral support for the charity, which faces large cuts in funding because of its principles.

As a former college newsman myself, I’ve always felt a connection with our interns over the years. It’s nice to see hard working young people add to their credentials and portfolios. But there’s something even nicer that I see in the college kids who comprise the alumni corps of the CNSNews.com intern program. In Jessica, Rick and Oubai, as with our past interns, I see a measure of editorial courage.

I too have reported on topics similar to those tackled by these students, and have been denounced, ridiculed and intimidated by liberals for doing so. I know how hard it is to be held up to public denunciation and the ill-wishes of those who wish we’d simply go away, as illustrated by a letter I received a few weeks ago from a reader who expressed his hope for my arrest, imprisonment and jailhouse gang rape because of an editorial I penned.

It takes guts to put one’s byline above such an article. But these youngsters have skin thick enough to go after the tough stories — the ones you don’t see in the establishment press. With luck, our interns will go on to professional careers in journalism and show the same mettle they do here. It’s the right stuff and, Lord knows, American journalism could use more of it.
A Tribute to Harry G.A. Seggerman

In mid-May, an envelope arrived at the Media Research Center from a Connecticut law firm. Inside was a letter, informing us that a dear friend and supporter, Mr. Harry G.A. Seggerman, who had passed away in May of 2001, had made a special provision in his will for the MRC. Along with that letter was a check for $500,000.

The low-key manner of the donation was in perfect keeping with Harry’s character and the life he lived. Modest and soft-spoken, Harry had provided no hint of the gift, making his generosity both a surprise and a joy. Never was a gift more timely or more appreciated.

A true philanthropist, Harry never sought credit or publicity for the support he gave to his favorite causes. Driven by a deep love of country, he underwrote many different campaigns and organizations in his lifetime and also organized and mobilized the business community in his hometown.

Harry G.A. Seggerman was a true hero of the conservative movement, making numerous personal sacrifices that have enabled us to fight the good fight on innumerable fronts. He will be remembered with a deep fondness and gratitude. Ultimately, our success is due to Harry, and members like you, who consistently put principle and belief before their own concerns.

There is one other piece to the story, and it’s the richest of ironies. Harry’s last gift to the MRC was his biggest to be sure. But it was his first gift, of $5,000, that was perhaps even more noteworthy. It was the very first contribution to the organization, in the summer of 1987, that allowed us to open our doors for business. Harry will always occupy a special place in our hearts.

L. Brent Bozell III

Thanks a Lot, Ted!

Founder Creates Middle East Havoc for CNN

Ted Turner’s penchant for making outrageous statements has caused several problems for CNN over the years. But nothing quite compares to the anger created when Turner, the AOL Time Warner Vice Chairman and its largest shareholder, accused Israel of terrorism in a June 18 interview with the Guardian, a left-wing British newspaper.

Referring to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Turner told the paper: “I would make the case that both sides are involved in terrorism.” In typical Turner fashion, the CNN founder quickly apologized for his flippant remark, but the damage was already done.

Turner’s comment came at the worst possible moment for CNN. The network was embroiled in an on-going controversy over its Israeli-Palestinian coverage, specifically the unbalanced coverage of homicide bomber families and the families of the victims and Turner’s comments were the verbal equivalent of throwing gasoline on a fire.

CNN, for its part, couldn’t apologize enough. Even though Turner no longer has any ties to the network, anchors read his apology throughout the day on June 18 and the network further distanced itself by placing this disclaimer on the screen: “Ted Turner’s views are his own and they do not in any way reflect the views of CNN.”

A few days after Turner’s comment, Eason Jordan, CNN’s chief news executive, traveled to Israel and apologized for the homicide bomber coverage. “CNN made a mistake. We apologize,” Eason was quoted as saying in the New York Times.

In addition, Jordan issued a memorandum providing guidelines for future coverage. According to the Times, the memorandum states the network “will not televise or report on statements made by suicide bombers or their families unless there seemingly is an extraordinarily compelling reason to do so.”

CNN’s recognition of mistakes and its efforts to focus on victims of terrorism rather than terrorists is commendable. Now, if they could only find a way to muzzle their former owner.

MRC’s Director of Communications, Elizabeth Swasey, appeared on Fox & Friends to discuss yet another outrageous “Turnerism.”
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BC’s Peter Jennings and the producers of the Public Broadcasting System’s “A Capitol Fourth” hit country music fans with a one-two combination just before Independence Day.

Jennings, according to singer Toby Keith, banned Keith’s song “Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American)” from ABC’s July 4th special because the news anchor objected to the lyrics of the combative country tune. One line, referring to the terrorists who attacked America, says “we’ll put a boot in you’re a**”, it’s the American Way.”

A week after the Jennings decision, country legend Charlie Daniels pulled out of PBS’s July 4th concert because the network deemed his patriotic tribute to those fighting the war on terrorism — it’s entitled “The Last Fallen Hero” — to be inappropriate for an Independence Day celebration.

How can patriotic songs be inappropriate for Independence Day celebrations? ABC and PBS apparently felt the songs had a belligerent, red-neck tone and feared their “sophisti- cated viewers” would be offended by lyrics that promise bombings and a boot in the butt or that the moral equilibrium of the “thinking people” might be disturbed by the plainspoken truths in Daniels’s song.

It often appears that the ABC and PBS kingpins, and the other “elite” media managers headquartered in New York City and Washington, D.C., think it’s their duty to protect “Red” America — the geographically dominant, culturally conservative part of the country that voted for George Bush in 2000 — from its own simple passions and violent inclinations. (The network entertainment divisions operate on the exact opposite theory, of course. Violent is good, simple is great, and passion, especially when exhibited by half naked characters, is even better.)

This desire to protect and guide the average American is at the heart of the liberal bias in news coverage and the Independence Day controversy is just an extension of it. These serious, intelligent people in New York and Washington understand the world better than the masses and are more than happy to try to tell the country how to think.

Despite these efforts, or perhaps in spite of them, the media elites often fail to have the desired effect and Keith’s song is the latest example. The controversy generated unprecedented publicity — it’s safe to say that no advertising agency could have generated as much buzz — and the song jumped to number one on the Billboard chart in just a couple of weeks.

So, in the end, what wasn’t good enough to be heard on ABC for three minutes on one day is now heard across the country and around the clock. Could it be that the bigwigs at the networks need someone to tell them how to think, or at the very least, how “Red” America thinks?