Good Morning!
Welcome to the Media Research Center’s morning examination of Democratic convention coverage delivered by fax, e-mail and posted on our Web site. This edition concentrates on coverage from Tuesday night.
This afternoon a second daily issue will look at today’s morning shows.
For the complete collection of these issues, including those published during the Republican convention, please go to http://www.mrc.org and click on “Campaign 2000.” You’ll be able to access issues as regular HTML files or view them as Adobe Acrobat PDF files.
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“There’s Not Very Much Talk About Poverty in America”
Lieberman “Too Conservative”?
All but Dan Rather (see page two sidebar) realized the Democrats presented a liberal slate of speakers on Tuesday night, but unlike how they approached the Republicans in Philadelphia, with the exception of FNC, network correspondents never pressed Democrats about whether their hardline liberal positions on many issues might turn off independent voters. Instead, reporters portrayed the party as being led by a “centrist” ticket and spent the night asking liberals if they are distressed by Joseph Lieberman’s supposedly “socially conservative” positions.

“Tonight the proud old stallions of the Democratic Party’s left wing thundered from the podium,” ABC’s Chris Bury pointed out on Nightline. But earlier in prime time when Peter Jennings interviewed Gore campaign chairman Bill Daley he did not pose any question about the convention’s leftward tilt.

On MSNBC Andrea Mitchell hit George Mitchell from the left: “Joe Lieberman...He is a centrist, and there was some concern in the Congressional Black Caucus about his opposition to affirmative action in the past. He tried to clarify it today. Do you think that, that is a problem for him?”

Interviewing Jesse Jackson Jr., Tom Brokaw asked: “Today Joe Lieberman had to go before the Black Caucus because there were members of that caucus, the Congressional Caucus, who had some reservations about his social conservatism. Did he persuade you and the others that he’s the right kind of vice presidential running mate for this ticket?” Brokaw made a plea for liberalism: “But in fact Congressman you don’t hear Al Gore talking very much about the hot button issues for the liberal wing of the party anymore. There’s not very much talk about poverty in America. Not very much talk about affirmative action, not very much talk about the homeless problem.”

Andrea Mitchell later moped to Bill Richardson: “You worry that he might be too conservative? There was concern in the Black Caucus that he had come out against affirmative action in the past. That perhaps he’s not as embracing as the more liberal wing of the party.”

Quote of the Night
“Now center stage, Ted Kennedy, whom before Bill Clinton came on the scene, many thought was the Democratic Party’s best orator.”
— Dan Rather on the Senator known as verb-challenged, just as Kennedy began his speech, during August 15 60 Minutes II convention coverage
MSNBC Snubbed Keynoter

In the ongoing saga that might be dubbed, “I wanted to watch the convention but my TV only gets MSNBC,” Tuesday night just before 11pm ET MSNBC joined the keynote address by Congressman Harold Ford Jr. in progress and carried it for exactly two minutes before going to an interview segment in the booth with Caroline and Ted Kennedy.

ABC and CBS ended coverage at 11 and so also missed Ford, but CNN, FNC and PBS found it worth showing in its entirety.

Rather Saw No Liberals

The word “liberal” never left Dan Rather’s mouth Tuesday night despite the addresses from Jesse Jackson, Kate Michelman, Ted Kennedy and Bill Bradley. Instead, Rather described it as “nostalgia night” and “Kennedy night.”

Just before showing Caroline Kennedy on 60 Minutes II, Rather announced: “This is nostalgia night here at the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles and they’re bringing out two of the party’s biggest names. The names are Kennedy — Caroline and Ted.”

Later, after an unrelated repeat of a 60 Minutes II story, CBS re-joined the convention for a wrap-up from Rather, who told viewers: “We’re back live at the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles. Kennedy night for all intents and purposes.”

Democrats’ Hardline Pro-Abortion Plank Ignored

Only FNC Noticed Extreme Position

While Republicans were pressed about turning off women with their hardline anti-abortion plank, Tuesday night, despite the prime time slot for Kate Michelman of the National Abortion Rights Action League, only FNC noted the Democrats’ hardline on abortion.

Interviewing San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown, Brit Hume observed: “Polls continue to show that a majority of Americans continue to support the general right of an abortion, but they don’t support it quite to the extent that, for example, Kate Michelman does, which is virtually no exceptions and no parental notification, where the public feels differently about that. Is it possible that her role here and the view that she takes alienates people?”

The other networks ignored the subject, or in the case of CNN’s Judy Woodruff, approached from the left. Woodruff asked for reassurance from Hadassah Lieberman that she is pro-choice: “Your husband is seen as a centrist on a number of issues including abortion rights. You have done volunteer work with an organization in Washington called the Best Friends Foundation which promotes abstinence for adolescent girls. Where are you on the question of a woman’s right to choose?”

“Al Gore...Will Lead the Country in the Tradition” of JFK

Rather Swooned Over Kennedys, Tied to Gore

CBS dedicated a Tuesday CBS Evening News interview segment to Dan Rather and Gloria Borger gushing over Caroline Kennedy and then hours later Rather wrapped up prime time coverage by delivering the Gore-scripted spin.

CBS Evening News: Gloria Borger’s first question to Caroline Kennedy: “Why do you feel particularly that it’s so important for Al Gore to get elected?” Rather followed up: “You care about some things in particular. You mentioned the Supreme Court. Tell me more about that.” Rather got emotional: “It’s been forty years, one month and one day to the day when your father made his acceptance speech here in Los Angeles. Now you were too young to remember that. Did the family talk about it at any time. Anything you remember from your youth?” Rather next wondered: “We all talk about the Kennedy legacy, which began with your father. What is the Kennedy legacy?” Rather ended the interview by pleading: “Forever’s a long time, particularly in politics. Can you ever see a time when you might run for public office?”

Prime time: Rather never wrapped up GOP convention coverage by adopting their spin on the night’s events as his own, but Tuesday night he delivered that gift to Democrats: “The Democrats reached back into the past, trying to rein down the echoes, invoking the memory and legacy of Democratic Party hero John F. Kennedy, nominated here in Los Angeles forty years ago. Ted Kennedy and Caroline Kennedy portrayed Al Gore as a leader who will lead the country in the tradition of the slain President. Gore is hoping this convention will give him a boost, start him back on the comeback trail for a fight-back, come-back win in November. Tonight he hitched his horse to the star power of the Kennedys.”
Joe Lieberman Really “A Conventional Liberal”
Mislabeled as “Moderate” & “Conservative”

Journalists insist on describing Joe Lieberman as a “centrist,” a “moderate” or a “conservative,” but a review of his actual voting record proves otherwise. As columnist Bob Novak wrote last week, “the news media description this week of a centrist, moderate or even conservative misrepresented a party regular who more often than not is a conventional liberal.”

Indeed, Novak pointed out that “while Lieberman’s comments occasionally infuriate the National Education Association, the teachers’ union rated his 1999 voting record at 90 percent. That compares with a 100 percent report card by the National Abortion Rights Action League.”

Lieberman has earned a lifetime “Liberal Quotient” of 77 from Americans for Democratic Action (ADA). As a way of comparison, House Majority Leader Dick Gephardt has 71 percent lifetime approval from the liberal group. In 1999, Lieberman garnered 95 percent from ADA while the American Conservative Union (ACU) gave him a zero. His lifetime ACU: just 19 percent. The National Taxpayers Union found Lieberman is “a card-carrying tax-and-spend liberal” who in 1999 voted for spending and regulation more than “Senate liberals” such as Paul Wellstone and Barbara Boxer.

Nonetheless, when Gore’s selection of Lieberman was revealed on August 7, Terry Moran declared on ABC’s Good Morning America: “He’s known as a moderate Democrat, who has demonstrated fiscal conservatism in the Senate and a kind of hawkishness in foreign policy.” On The Early Show, CBS reporter John Roberts tagged him “a real sort of centrist Democrat.”

That night on ABC’s World News Tonight anchor Charles Gibson dubbed him “a centrist Democrat.” CBS Evening News anchor Steve Kroft maintained “Lieberman is noted for his moderate voting record and high moral standards.” NBC’s Claire Shipman, who on Imus in the Morning called Lieberman a “conservative Democrat,” on NBC Nightly News referred to him as “a political moderate, a hawk on foreign policy, a critic of sex and violence on TV.”

MSNBC anchor Forrest Sawyer tagged him “the socially conservative, politically moderate Senator.” On CNN’s Inside Politics Bill Schneider asserted: “Lieberman is a true centrist, a moderate who can build coalitions.” Jeff Greenfield agreed: “Joe Lieberman is a centrist.”

The next morning the distorted labeling continued. “Politically a centrist,” declared Bryant Gumbel on the Aug. 8 Early Show. “There’s no doubt about it. Joe Lieberman is a centrist, moderate Democrat,” stated Tim Russert on Today.

Newspapers were just as inaccurate. The lead paragraph in the August 8 USA Today front page story by Laurence McQuillan tagged Lieberman “a political centrist.” The subhead over the August 8 Los Angeles Times story declared: “The political moderate is the first Jew on a major U.S. party ticket.” One Washington Post headline announced: “Gore Chooses Centrist Conn. Senator as Running Mate.” Another read: “Lieberman Mixes Moderate Politics, Moral Imperative.”

Democrats Too Far Right for Tim Robbins

Last night during MSNBC’s 5pm ET hour actor Tim Robbins dropped in to tell why he backs Ralph Nader:

“I think what we’ve gotten out of voting for the lesser of two evils in the past eight years has been a farther and farther shift to the right in the Democratic Party and I, for one, am kind of tired of it, so this year I’m going to vote for Nader. As Nader says himself, the really only fundamental difference between the Democratic and Republican Party is the velocity with which their knees hit the floor when corporate donors come knocking.”

LBJ Channels to NBC News Analyst?

Doris Kearns Goodwin, NBC’s omnipresent liberal historian, let MSNBC viewers know late Tuesday afternoon that in a dream the late Lyndon Johnson talked to her about social justice:

“This is the night when the liberal wing of the Democratic Party is getting, finally, its moment in the sun and to the extent that a lot of liberals feel that the Democratic Party has gone too centrist, bringing up John Kennedy is kind of safe. You won’t hear them talking about Lyndon Johnson. You know, I had a dream the other night that Lyndon came to me in a road [robe?] and said, ‘You better talk about me at this convention. I’m the social justice man.’ And he is!”

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