



# Media Reality ✓ Check

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Networks, Following Democrats, Insist George W. Bush's Tax Cut Is Big, Massive and Controversial

## Talking Heads Talk Trash About Tax Cuts

If it's conservative, it must be controversial — at least according to the big broadcast networks. Antonio Mora, who reads the news briefs on ABC's *Good Morning America*, distilled the anti-tax cut spin perfectly on Monday, claiming "President Bush is launching a major public relations campaign today [Monday]. He's trying to sell his massive and controversial tax cut to American taxpayers."

Hardly. The public already likes tax cuts. A late January report from Gallup showed that 74% of the public favors "a cut in federal income taxes" and that "over 70% of the public has favored a generic tax cut" for decades.

It's not a "massive" tax cut, either. The National Taxpayers Union crunched the numbers: As a share of the overall U.S. economy, Bush's cut amounts to only 1.2% over the next decade. Ronald Reagan's 1981 tax cut was nearly three times as big — 3.3% — while JFK's tax cut amounted to 2.0% of the overall economy. Both Kennedy's and Reagan's rate cuts also boosted economic growth, created jobs, and ultimately led to higher federal revenues.

But the networks have willingly parroted liberal tax cut opponents who claim Bush's cuts are too big to afford and wrongly skewed to the wealthy. "**Can this country afford \$1.6 trillion in tax cuts?**" ABC's Charles Gibson demanded of Bush advisor Larry Lindsey yesterday morning. "**Isn't it [the case] that a very, very high percentage of this goes to the rich?**"

"President George W. Bush began his big push for a **big tax cut**," NBC's Tom Brokaw claimed on Monday's *Nightly News*, adding that Bush "made the **massive tax cut** a centerpiece of his campaign." Earlier that day on *Today*, Matt Lauer wondered if the President was being pig-headed. "**Is this about what he promised in the campaign,**

or what's best for the economy?" he demanded of Lindsey.

On the *Evening News*, CBS's John Roberts showcased "expert" analysis from Robert McIntyre. Roberts failed to label McIntyre as a liberal but he did promote the view that Reagan's tax cuts were bad for the country. "Bob McIntyre of Citizens for Tax Justice can't forget the last time Congress went on a **tax cut spree** in 1981," Roberts warned. "**America is still paying the bill.**" Some bill — eighteen years of nearly uninterrupted economic growth and 40 million new jobs!

The most bizarre statement came from CBS's Dan Rather, who dramatically announced, "**looking beyond the photo-ops and spin**," CBS's Bob Schieffer has one of what we call his 'Real Deal' analyses for you tonight on how this volatile mix of tax cut numbers and political equations could affect you."

Instead of going "beyond the spin," every single sentence of Schieffer's story recounted the anti-tax cut spin of Tom

Daschle and Dick Gephardt — including the view that the two liberals really want a tax cut, just a smaller one — and he didn't offer viewers even one syllable about how the tax bill would affect them. (See box.) Maybe CBS thinks only Republicans engage in photo-ops and spin.

When it last asked in early January, Gallup found that a majority of Americans (52%) favored Bush's exact tax plan, but far fewer, just 38%, expected it to become law. That just shows how many citizens pessimistically believe that the anti-tax cut crowd in the media will have the final say. — Brent Baker and Rich Noyes

### **CBS: Democratic Spin Isn't Spin At All**

"Well Dan, to put it bluntly, Tom Daschle and Dick Gephardt, the Democratic leaders at the Capitol, see this in a very different way. They told us tonight that when the Bush tax cut is added to the administration's projected spending plans the cost will not only eat up the entire surplus, but even worse, government would have to dip into Social Security surpluses to pay for it....Gephardt and Daschle want a tax cut too, something in the neighborhood of \$800 billion, but they fear anything larger could set off the kind of red ink spending that produced the enormous deficits in the 1980s." — *Beginning and end of Bob Schieffer's "Real Deal" segment, promoted by anchor Dan Rather as going "beyond the photo-ops and spin."*

L. Brent Bozell III, Publisher; Brent Baker, Rich Noyes, Editors; Jessica Anderson, Brian Boyd, Geoffrey Dickens, Ted King, Paul Smith, Brad Wilmouth, Media Analysts; Kristina Sewell, Research Associate; Liz Swasey, Director of Communications. Look For The Best *Notable Quotables* of 2000 in print and video at [www.mrc.org](http://www.mrc.org)