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Network Anchors Tenderly Offer Senators Chance to Rebut and Criticize President's Fort Bragg Speech Going Over Easy for Democrats in the Morning

There was no official Democratic Party reaction to President Bush's speech last night, but the network morning shows did a pretty good job rebutting the President — the TV anchors as well as the Democrats.

■ **NBC.** Katie Couric began *Today* with the DNC spin: "Good morning, Iraq and 9/11. President Bush repeatedly links the two in a primetime address and the Democrats cry foul." Yesterday, Couric suggested to Condoleezza Rice that the war was "unraveling" due to "very powerful, very tenacious insurgents."

Lauer began his interview with Sen. John Kerry by supportively reading his own words back to him: "Let me read you something you put on your Web site in advance of this speech. 'That's what we need from this administration. No more false rosy scenarios. No more happy talk about the Iraq insurgency being in its final throes when our military leadership know that's just spin. The administration's current lack of a coherent strategy is courting disaster instead of doing what's needed for success.' So last night when you listened to the speech did you hear more spin or did you hear a coherent strategy towards success?"

Later, Lauer added: "He's basically saying Iraq's this central front in the war on terrorism. When you voted as part of the Senate in October of 2002 to authorize force were you voting yes for that force because you thought Iraq was the central front in the war on terror?" Kerry replied: "No. Absolutely not. Nor was anybody that I know of in the Senate." But Kerry noted Saddam "supported and harbored terrorist groups" in his floor speech on October 9, 2002.

Lauer ended with this inquiry: "When the administration comes back to Congress in the future seeking more funding for the war in Iraq do you see any circumstances under which you would vote no for that funding?" Kerry said, "No, the troops are there, and we need to be successful."

But Lauer didn't bring up that Kerry voted against new funding for the troops in 2003 as he ran for President.

■ **ABC.** For the second day in a row, ABC's *Good Morning America* pushed the idea Bush had a credibility problem. Yesterday, co-host Charles Gibson cited an ABC poll showing 52 percent believe Bush misled the country to war: "speeches may not matter if people don't believe you."

Co-host Diane Sawyer began her interview with Sen. Joe Biden: "you have said all along the President can't get anything done until he levels with the American people and closes what you've called a credibility chasm...So did he close the credibility gap?" Biden said: "I think he did."

Sawyer added: "He made five references to September 11th in 30 minutes last night. A lot of people have been debating this morning. Is that justified to evoke September 11th about the war in Iraq at this point?" Biden sidestepped and said Iraq's now a terrorist haven due to our "squandered opportunities."

■ **CBS.** On *The Early Show*, co-host Hannah Storm asked Sen. Chris Dodd "do the Democrats have a better plan?" Dodd didn't offer one. Co-host Harry Smith asked John McCain: "Is there a connection between this war and the war on terrorism? There were few if any terrorists in Iraq before the war. Now, it is like a petri dish. It is a terrorist free-zone, I mean, they're all over the place there." McCain said "this is now the war on terror." Smith shot back: "It wasn't when we started." Smith ended: "Moving out is not an option. How do you get the American people to again believe in this fight?" The media don't. — *Tim Graham*

President Bush vs. Brand New Widow

President Bush: "Amid all this violence, I know Americans ask the question, is the sacrifice worth it? It is worth it and it is vital to the future security of our country."

ABC reporter Jessica Yellin, over footage of widow crying: "That was a painful message for 19-year-old Danielle Powell, whose husband died in Iraq last week."

Mrs. Powell: "I just feel like, you know, enough is enough and how many people have to pass before, you know, before it is enough?" — *News story on Good Morning America, June 29.*

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