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MEDIA RESEARCH CENTER®

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BMI Study: 70% of ABC, CBS and NBC Coverage Promoted Obama's Huge Health Care Takeover

Can't Blame Liberal Media for Health Bill Stall

Liberal hopes for a quick health care bill are in collapse, as Senate Democrats push any floor action off until the fall, a move House Democrats may match this week. But if the Obama White House is upset that their plans for a huge expansion of government health care have been delayed, they surely cannot complain about the media coverage.

Last week, a new study by the Media Research Center's Business & Media Institute (BMI) found broadcast coverage during the first six months of 2009 tilted heavily in favor of Barack Obama's big government plan. BMI's analysts looked at 224 health care stories on the ABC, CBS and NBC morning and evening news shows from Obama's January 20 inauguration through his June 24 prime time special on ABC. Among the key findings:

■ Fully 70% of soundbites (243 out of 347 total) supported Obama's liberal health care ideas. Only nine percent of stories (21) suggested the total price tag for Obama's "reform" would top $1 trillion.

■ Reporters exaggerated the number of uninsured Americans. Omitting non-citizens, those capable of paying, or those eligible for assistance programs already in place, a reasonable figure would be between 8 million and 14 million uninsured, not the "50 million Americans" BMI's analysts found touted by the networks.

■ The networks also spent virtually no time investigating states that had experimented with big government health schemes — just one story on how Massachusetts' plan for mandatory health insurance is working out (costs are rising faster than expected), and no stories on Hawaii's already-cancelled program to insure all children.

BMI's study period ended in late June, but the networks' favors for Obama have continued in July, even as public sentiment shifted against both the President and his plan. On July 16, for example, both the *NBC Nightly News* and *CBS Evening News* skipped over how, in the words of ABC White House correspondent Jake Tapper on *World News*, "the President's case was dealt a blow today" when the Congressional Budget Office chief told Congress the health care plans will require massive additional spending.

The next morning, after the House Ways and Means Committee had formally passed an estimated $554 billion tax increase to help pay for the ambitious health plans, CBS skipped that development, too, as ABC and NBC's morning news shows offered only a single sentence. NBC's Natalie Morales, on her network's four-hour *Today*, gave it just 12 seconds: "During the night, the House Ways and Means committee voted to increase taxes on higher income earners as part of a health care reform bill."

If these had been setbacks for a big Bush administration initiative, do you think the network coverage would have been so paltry?

Reporter commentary has also betrayed a lack of objectivity. In a July 22 interview with California's Arnold Schwarzenegger on *Good Morning America*, ABC's Chris Cuomo painted Republicans as endangering Americans' health: "Do you believe that Republicans are playing politics here, at the risk of people's health care....Is this getting to be a little bit of a reckless situation?" That night on MSNBC, after the President's press conference, NBC medical reporter Nancy Snyderman confessed she was "rooting" for him: "As a physician, you know, I felt like I understood the complexity of the problem. As an American citizen, I was rooting for the President to hit a home run."

The public's anxiety seems to have delayed the day of reckoning on health care until at least this fall. The big questions: Will network reporters continue their favors for ObamaCare? And will the tilted media landscape be enough to make liberals' policy dreams come true?

— Rich Noyes and Julia Seymour

Katie Makes the Case for ObamaCare

"President Obama says he wants it done now, as in this summer — universal health care. As he put it today, it's time for us to buck up. And there are a lot of bucks at stake. Since 1999, health insurance premiums have increased 120 percent — four times as much as wages. And about one and a half million American families lose their homes to foreclosure every year because of sky high medical bills."

— CBS anchor Katie Couric leading off the July 15 *Evening News*.

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