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ABC, CBS and NBC Health Care Reporters: Democratic Donors & Proponents of Government Health Care

For Top TV News Docs, the Diagnosis Is Bias

ABC was embarrassed last week by the MRC's exposure of how their new senior medical editor, Dr. Richard Besser of the federal Centers for Disease Control, donated \$400 to Barack Obama's presidential campaign in 2008, presumably an indication of his political sympathies. An ABC News spokeswoman, Cathie Levin, defended Besser to the Associated Press, arguing that he's a doctor "whose job it is to give impartial and unvarnished advice, and he'll be able to do the same for a television audience."

Maybe Besser can indeed separate his political views from his reporting on health care, but a review of campaign finance records at OpenSecrets.org finds that CBS's Dr. Jon LaPook and NBC's Dr. Nancy Snyderman have also chipped in their own cash to Democratic — but never Republican — candidates. And both correspondents, along with Besser's future ABC colleague, Dr. Tim Johnson, have showered the liberal Obama health care plan with fawning press. Details:

■ **CBS's Dr. Jon LaPook:** Before joining CBS, LaPook gave \$4,000 to Democratic presidential candidates Al Gore, John Kerry and Wesley Clark, plus a hefty \$20,000 donation to the DNC. LaPook's wife, liberal TV producer Norman Lear's daughter Kate, has doled out more than \$100,000 to Democrats, including the maximum \$4,600 to Obama.

Interviewing Obama for the July 15 *Evening News*, LaPook opened the door for Obama to pontificate: "Do you believe that each individual American should be required to have health insurance?" Later, LaPook empathetically invited Obama to refute charges his plan is socialistic: "Mr. President, when people hear you talk about a national insurance plan, there are fears of socialized medicine, rationed care, limited choice. How do you handle this?"

■ **NBC's Dr. Nancy Snyderman:** The records show two contributions totalling \$800 to Democratic congressional candidates when Snyderman worked at the health care giant Johnson & Johnson after her stint at ABC News and before joining NBC. When she worked at ABC, Snyderman was a

Lincoln Bedroom guest of Bill and Hillary Clinton. On the May 1, 2000 *Good Morning America*, Snyderman revealed Hillary was the lawyer who handled her 1988 divorce. "What did she say to you about a philandering husband?" host Charlie Gibson wondered. Snyderman wouldn't say.

Snyderman pressed Obama from the left in an interview for the July 15 *NBC Nightly News*, beseeching him to push for higher taxes: "What I haven't heard anyone ask is for the American public to pony up, too, that this is going to require some give for all the stakeholders involved." After Obama's

July 22 press conference, Snyderman announced on MSNBC: "I was rooting for the President to hit a home run."

■ **ABC's Dr. Tim Johnson:** No Democratic donations in Johnson's file (he's been with ABC News since 1975), but he's been a steady advocate for universal health care. In 1993, he called the Clintons "heroes" for pushing their health care scheme; a year later, he

saluted Hillary on the July 19, 1994 *Good Morning America*: "At least from the physicians represented here, you get a 100 percent vote, including mine, for universal coverage."

This year, Johnson has kept arguing that the lack of universal coverage is America's "national shame." (See box.) After spending the day as a participant in President Obama's heavily-hyped health care forum on March 5, Johnson gushed on *World News*: "I was blown away by President Obama's grasp of the subject, how he connected the dots, how he answered the questions without any script."

Network health reporters are supposed to ask the tough questions before ObamaCare becomes the law of the land. Can't the networks find at least one independent voice to apply a little scrutiny, before it's too late?

— Rich Noyes

Ruining America's "National Shame"
"There is just one fact I want to let everybody hear: We spend more than twice as much, per person, on health care in this country as the average of all other industrialized countries, yet we're the only one that doesn't have universal coverage. That's a national shame and I think, ultimately, that's what's going to unite Democrats and Republicans."
— ABC's Dr. Tim Johnson, March 1 *World News*.

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