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Networks Pan Bush Social Security Plan

83 Percent of Coverage Critical During “60 Day Push”

WASHINGTON, DC—Television news coverage of President Bush’s social security overhaul was overwhelmingly negative during his two-month nationwide campaign, according to a new study conducted by the **Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA)**. The study also found that networks focused primarily on more substantive issues like private accounts, rather than superficial coverage such as political implications and poll numbers.

These results come from **CMPA’s** ongoing research of the nightly network news on ABC, CBS and NBC—a project begun in 1985. This study reflects the 43 stories that covered the social security story on the newcasts from March 1, 2005 through April 30th, 2005.

Major Findings:

- 83 percent of social security comments by nonpartisan sources (reporters, experts, ordinary citizens) were critical of President Bush’s overhaul plan. ABC’s coverage was the most negative—92 percent of the comments aired were critical of Bush’s plan—while NBC was the least negative (69 percent negative) and CBS in between (89 percent negative).
- When covering whether President Bush was effectively persuading Americans of his plan, 98 percent of the comments broadcast said that he was not succeeding.
- The networks carried 32 stories that brought up the issue of private accounts, 11 more than the coverage (21 stories) they gave to discussing whether the social security system was in crisis. The political implications of the social security plan were featured in 17 stories.

Examples:

“It served our country well and the retirees and older folks in our country well for years. I see no point in changing it.”
Protester, ABC, 3/10/05

“Well, we have seen what happened to the stock market recently, and it’s a little scary to have everything tied to the stock market.”
Retiree, NBC, 3/22/05