

Bozell's Column

Still Tilting The Widow Pictures

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It's not surprising for the liberal media to respond to the election returns by rededicating their column inches and air time to the liberal agenda, which is to say, the usual way of doing business. But if the news media were truly a nonpartisan institution, solicitous and responsive to the will of the majority, they might pay more attention to the viewpoints that actually persuaded the most Americans.

Take the debate over the intelligence reforms emerging from the 9-11 Commission. The media are not treating this as a debate with two credible positions, but instead as a shocking delay by obstreperous House Republicans, who are threatening to make President Bush look like a pitiful lame duck at the expense of unquestionably sound legislation.

On ABC's "Good Morning America," Linda Douglass typified the media's conventional wisdom: "The political stakes are also very high, especially for the President. If he can't persuade his own party to do as he asks on this issue, it will raise questions about whether he's going to be able to persuade them to push through the rest of his agenda in the next term." Even Bush winning the election is now bad news for Bush. They certainly didn't try this lame-duck talk with Bill Clinton at this time in 1996.

A majority of Americans voted for Bush-Cheney. No one did an exit poll of the relatives of those who lost their lives on September 11, 2001, but there were surely many Bush-Cheney supporters in that constituency, too. And yet when ABC's "Good Morning America" wanted to discuss the intelligence-reform debate, they recycled the election-year campaign strategy of using only those mourning relatives who hate President Bush with a passion.

The viewers at home might think no one who lost a loved one in the terror attacks likes a Republican. ABC hostess Diane Sawyer talked to Kristen Breitweiser and Patty Casazza, cueing them up to denounce Republicans with "OUTRAGED 9/11 WIVES" as the on-screen caption.

Sawyer loaded up the sympathy bandwagon as she asked Mrs. Casazza, "After all the years, the time, the hours, the travel, the tears, if this doesn't happen this week, whom or what do you blame?" Casazza replied: "Absolutely, the White House and House Republicans." She even denounced Bush for failing to remake the entire intelligence establishment by executive order. Earth to outraged wife: in America, we involve Congress before we reorganize the entire government. The unspoken point in these interviews is that these widows can throw out all kinds of paranoid, nonsensical ideas and no one questions them. And no one tips the audience that the widows aren't the best impartial arbiters of political or military reality.

Here's what the networks knew but failed to emphasize: Breitweiser and Casazza were fervent Bush-

haters, and then became fervent Kerry-backers. Breitweiser even appeared in Kerry commercials, and ABC couldn't even point that out! Newsday quoted Casazza as dazzled at a Kerry rally: "This was a fabulous speech....On 9/11, my life was in a long, dark tunnel. Now I can seem some light. John Kerry has the answers."

When the election was over, one reporter chronicled Casazza in Boston listening to Kerry concede. She blamed the red states for their ignorance: "I am not sure 3,000 lives lost (in the World Trade Center) and those lost in Iraq have been quite enough for the American states untouched by terror to realize the 'bring it on' mentality only brings on more terrorists and more deaths."

What about the other side of the victims' families, those who support the President in the war on terror, and actually like Republicans? The Washington Times reported on December 1 that a group called 9-11 Families for a Secure America, with more than 300 members, lobbied for the intelligence reform bill to be delayed until strong actions against illegal immigration were included. Joan Molinaro, the mother of a lost New York firefighter, said "No bill should pass the Senate, the House, anywhere, unless it contains immigration reform -- you secure our borders, you keep my girls alive."

There is nothing wrong with giving the angry anti-Bush Kristen Breitweisers a chance to give their opinion on television. But there's everything wrong with giving all the air time to the Breitweisers and turning a deaf ear to the Joan Molinaros. That's not fair. That's not balanced. That's doing a disservice to everyone, including the other victims of 9-11.

The media elite love to belittle Fox News for employing a "fair and balanced" slogan. ABC and the others wouldn't dream of adopting that mantra. Their slogan ought to be "We Know What's Good for You, and It's Not That Objectionable Other Side."