

CENTER FOR MEDIA AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

2100 L Street, N.W. • Suite 300 • Washington, D.C. 20037 • (202) 223-2942

October 30, 2000

Contact: Matthew T. Felling 202-223-2942

Journalists Monopolize TV Election News

Study Finds Less Air Time, Shorter Sound Bites For Candidates

WASHINGTON, DC -- Reporters get seven times as much speaking time as presidential candidates in election news stories, according to the latest report from the Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA) *ELECTIONWATCH*. The study also finds the average length of the candidates' sound bites has shrunk 30% since 1988, reaching an all-time low of 7 seconds this fall.

ELECTIONWATCH is published weekly by the **Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA)**, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research and educational organization. **CMPA's** ongoing scientific content analysis of election news measures the tone and focus of news coverage by examining on-air statements from reporters and other non-partisan news sources. This report is based on all stories broadcast from Labor Day through October 22nd on the ABC, CBS and NBC evening news shows.

MAJOR FINDINGS:

- ❑ On an average night, reporters speak for a total of seven minutes of election news airtime on the three network evening newscasts, compared to only one minute for Al Gore and George Bush combined - just under ten seconds per night for each candidate on each network. All other sources combined for an average of one and a half minutes of airtime per night.
- ❑ Overall, reporters took three quarters (74 percent) of spoken air time while the candidates had a mere 11 percent, and other sources had 15 percent since Labor Day. The three networks were almost identical in their allotment of air time among candidates, journalists, and other sources.
- ❑ The two major party candidates have received almost the same amounts of on-air speaking time this fall - 23 minutes for Gore and 22 minutes for Bush. In addition, Joe Lieberman has spoken for a total of 2 minutes, Dick Cheney 1.5 minutes and Ralph Nader 1 minute.
- ❑ Not only were candidates elbowed aside by reporters, the average length of candidate sound bites continued to slide. It fell from 10 seconds in 1988 to 8 seconds in 1992 and 1996, to the current low of 7 seconds. Gore's soundbites average one second longer than Bush's.
- ❑ Voters must bypass the newscasts for the TV talk shows to hear candidates deliver their messages. George Bush spoke for a total of 13 minutes during his appearance last week (10/19) on the David Letterman Show, compared to only nine minutes on all three network news show so far in the entire month of October. Similarly, Al Gore received more speaking time on his Sept. 14 Letterman appearance than he did during the entire month of September on the evening news shows.

For more information, please contact Matthew T. Felling at 202-223-2942

This study is being done in collaboration with the Brookings Institution. Research results will be posted each week to www.cmpa.com and www.brookings.edu and will be featured the following Monday in Brookings Senior Fellow Stephen Hess's USA Today column.