

# CENTER FOR MEDIA AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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## Quayle Jokes Rise, Media Image Sinks

Vice President Dan Quayle is receiving his worst press since 1988, while the number of "Quayle jokes" on late-night television has tripled, according to a new study by the **Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA)**. By contrast, Democratic vice-presidential nominee Al Gore has received almost unanimous praise on the network evening news shows, the same study finds.

These are the latest findings from CMPA's ongoing study of TV election news. CMPA researchers are tallying all evaluations of candidates for national office that appear on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts during 1992. They also catalogue all jokes about the candidates on the "Tonight Show," "Arsenio Hall Show," and "Late Night with David Letterman." Results reported below go through July 17, the week of the Democratic Convention.

### Major Findings:

Quayle's Bad Press -- Since the end of the presidential primaries, Quayle's evaluations by sources on the network evening news have been 3-to-1 negative (23% positive vs. 77% negative). During the primaries (January 1 to June 2) news sources were 42% positive. During his previous three years in office (1989-1991), Quayle's evaluations were 57% positive.

### Examples:

"Four more years of a heartbeat away from Quayle is ridiculous."  
-voter, CBS, 7/15

"Well, I know he's not an idiot, but..."  
-spelling bee participant, NBC, 7/11

Gore's Good Press -- Since his selection as Bill Clinton's running mate, evaluations of Senator Al Gore on the evening news shows have been 96% positive. (This does not include prime time convention coverage of Gore).

### Examples:

"Al Gore is one of the universally recognized, most able, intelligent, informed members of the Congress."

-Rep. Tom Foley (D-WA), NBC, 7/9

(more)

“He is out in front of the parade. He is sometimes so far above, beyond his Senate colleagues that he is by himself.”

-Spokesperson, League of Conservation Voters, NBC 7/9

Quayle Jokes Jump -- Since May 1, late-night TV comedians have directed 108 jokes at Dan Quayle, more than 10 jokes per week on average. From January through April, Quayle was targeted by only 51 jokes, an average of three jokes per week. There have already been 159 Quayle jokes on late-night TV this year, more than the 150 recorded during all of 1991.

**Examples:**

“Today Dan Quayle demanded that Murphy Brown put her child up for adoption and let the Cosbys raise it.”

-Carson, 5/21

“Vice President Quayle today unveiled his new literacy program. It’s called ‘Just Spell No’.”

-Leno, 6/18

“Gore could spell trouble for a lot of Republicans, which puts him one up on Dan Quayle, who can’t spell nothin’.”

-Arsenio, 7/9

“Reporters asked Dan Quayle what would be the solution to global warming and he replied, ‘central air conditioning’.”

-Letterman, 6/14

“People have said that every comedian’s dream is to poke fun at Vice President Dan Quayle. I think it’s every comedian’s dream to poke fun at ex-Vice President Dan Quayle.”

-Leno, 5/29

According to CMPA Co-Director Dr. S. Robert Lichter, “Quayle said he welcomed the scorn of the ‘cultural elite’, but he may be getting more of it than he bargained for. It’s like a basketball player going up against the Dream Team. Once Dan Quayle gets past Rather and Brokaw, he runs into Leno and Letterman.”

The **Center for Media and Public Affairs** is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that conducts scientific analysis of news and entertainment media. Note: In some cases jokes were altered slightly in transcription for brevity.

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