

CENTER FOR MEDIA AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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

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Contact: Matthew T. Felling 202-223-2942

Campaign 2000—More News, Less Filling

Study Finds More TV Coverage But Less Substance Than In '96

WASHINGTON, DC—Network evening news campaign coverage rose 23 percent this fall, but issue coverage dropped 27 percent from 1996 levels, according to the latest findings from the **Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA) ELECTIONWATCH** report. The study also found a 26 percent rise in stories examining the 'horserace' coverage of the presidential matchup since the 1996 election.

ELECTIONWATCH is published weekly through Election Day by the **Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA)**, a nonpartisan and nonprofit research and educational organization. CMPA conducts scientific content analysis of network election news, measuring the tone of news coverage by examining all broadcast or published statements from reporters and their news sources.

OTHER MAJOR FINDINGS:

News Rise, Substance Demise—During the two weeks since Labor Day, the networks devoted 127 minutes to the presidential campaign, compared to 103 minutes in 1996, an increase of 23 percent. In contrast, the networks' attention to the candidates' political views and records have been featured in only 41 percent of campaign stories, compared to 56 percent at the same point in 1996, a 27 percent drop.

The Week That Wasn't?—In the week ending this past Sunday (September 17th), only 1 in 3 stories (35%) broadcast on the nightly news included discussion of policy issues or the candidate's records.

Network Comparison—The overall rise in airtime this fall is based on a sharp increase at two networks. The coverage rose 45 percent from '96 levels at both CBS (42 minutes compared to 29) and NBC (48 minutes compared to 33). In contrast, ABC's coverage dipped 10 percent, from 41 minutes in '96 to 37 minutes this year.

Issue-Free Zone?—Among all political issues, health care policy received the most coverage (17 stories) since Labor Day. But more stories have featured George W. Bush's foibles on the campaign trail (21 stories) than those discussing economic policy (9), foreign policy (3), education (3) and social security (1) *combined*.

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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' USA Today column.