

Dear Friends,

Let me cut to the chase – I am absolutely outraged with the media coverage of the presidential campaign. This is the most important election in my long lifetime, and to quote one of my favorite movies “I’m mad as hell and I’m not going to take it anymore!”

The stakes are so high – for our security, our economy, our health care, our future and our country. There is too much on the line for the media to ignore important issues while they obsess about Hillary’s hairdo or Barack’s baritone.

Is it in the country’s best interest that voters received far more information about Hillary’s laugh than Obama’s legislative record? Is it good for our nation that more attention is paid to the differences in their speaking style than their healthcare plans?

Our democracy depends upon the fourth estate to fulfill the uniquely critical role of informing voters about the important issues facing our nation – yet far too often, the campaign coverage has been biased, blasé, or baseless.

There have been so many high-profile episodes, including the widespread touting of inaccurate polling, the controversial *New York Times* story on McCain, extensive coverage of a photo of Obama that appeared on the internet, and a recent *Saturday Night Live* skit in which reporters were mocked for fawning over Obama.

Because I’ve been inundated with calls from friends supporting candidates of all parties who are outraged about the swirling questions and controversy regarding the media’s coverage of this election, I have compiled a small selection of the numerous independent studies and examples of blatantly biased and irresponsible journalism that unfortunately has been a hallmark of this campaign. I hope it inspires more people to speak out and demand answers to questions such as:

- Has the media provided sufficient information to voters regarding the candidates and the critical issues facing our country?
- Has there been an unhealthily disproportionate amount of coverage of polls and personalities?
- Has the campaign coverage been biased for or against particular candidates?
- Have there been stories that received significant attention from the mainstream media that deserved less coverage, or should never have been published?
- Have there been stories that received little or no attention from the mainstream media that deserved increased coverage?

I hope you’ll take a careful look at the enclosed information because the American people deserve the straight story. If you agree, I urge you to speak out to voters and reporters and forward this to your friends and contacts.

Sincerely,
Walter H. Shorenstein

Persistent Media Bias in Favor of Barack Obama And Against Hillary Clinton

Independent media watchdog groups have documented a persistent and pervasive media bias in favor of Barack Obama and against Hillary Clinton.

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) took the media to task for writing the obituary of Hillary Clinton prior to the New Hampshire primary. Tellingly, FAIR's report ended with the admonition, "The press corps seems chastened by their misreading of the New Hampshire electorate, and many are vowing to be more cautious in their assumptions. Will they follow through on their own advice?" Events since then—especially in this crucial week leading up to primaries in Texas, Ohio, Rhode Island and Vermont—indicate that the answer to that question is, "No."

Leading up to the New Hampshire primary, the storyline on the Democratic side was the disastrous state of the Clinton campaign. Her loss was a given; it seemed the only considerations were the margin of defeat and whether or not she would even continue running at all. The day of the primary, the Washington Post reported (1/8/08) that a second loss to Obama "would leave the New York senator's candidacy gasping for breath," and declared that Clinton's vow to stay in the race may be more wish than reality. By Wednesday, it may be too late. By then, Obama's campaign may have inflicted enough damage on the woman-who-was-once-inevitable that no amount of readjusting, recalibrating and rearranging will give her the wherewithal to overcome two big losses in the first contests of the 2008 nomination battle. Clinton, of course, won the primary--surprising the pundits and contradicting the polls that journalists unwisely use to set the tone of so much of their coverage. In the aftermath, the media were left asking what went "wrong" with the numbers. As the front page of USA Today declared (1/10/08), "For pollsters, N.H. 'unprecedented.'" But this isn't so; the actual USA Today story included a state pollster who noted that pre-election polls in 2000 vastly underestimated John McCain's victory over George W. Bush. Right before the primary, the New York Times reported (1/30/00) that "a series of polls showed the two Republican front-runners in a dead heat." Given that McCain won by 19 points, journalists and pollsters puzzling over Clinton's showing are ignoring very recent history.

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As it stands now, the races for the major party nominations are remarkably close. The most valuable service journalists could provide now would be to illustrate the differences between the candidates on the major issues of importance to voters. The press corps seems chastened by their misreading of the New Hampshire electorate, and many are vowing to be more cautious in their assumptions. Will they follow through on their own advice? And will voters ever get campaign reporting that helps them make informed choices about the direction of their democracy?

(FAIR Media Advisory, "Humbled in New Hampshire," January 11, 2008)

As the Center for Media and Public Affairs has noted, "Obama has led the race for good press and Sen. Hillary Clinton has lagged the farthest behind." According to their analysis, 84% of press coverage of Obama has been favorable, compared to just 51% for Clinton.

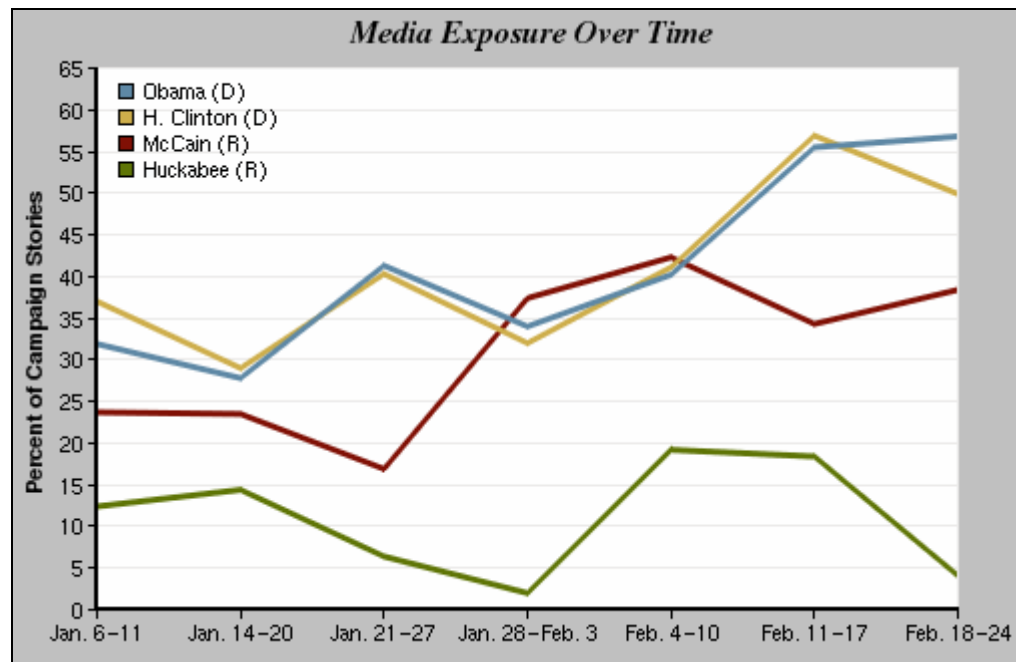
Since mid-December, when the presidential candidates turned their full attention to the Iowa caucuses, **Sen. Barack Obama has led the race for good press and Sen. Hillary Clinton has lagged the farthest behind.** From Dec 16 through Jan 27 five out of six on-air evaluations of Obama (84%) have been favorable, compared to a bare majority (51%) of evaluations of Mrs. Clinton.

The gap in good press has widened since the New Hampshire primary, with Clinton dropping to 47% positive comments and Obama holding steady at 83% positive. NBC's coverage has been the most critical of Clinton – nearly 2 to 1 negative (36% positive and to 64% negative) Conversely, ABC's coverage was most supportive -- nearly 2 to 1 positive (63% v. 37%). CBS and FOX were more balanced – 50% positive comments on FOX and 56% positive on CBS.

(Center for Media and Public Affairs, February 1, 2008)

Pew Research: Quantitative Bias Against Clinton

The Pew Research Center has been tracking quantitative media coverage of the Presidential candidates since the New Hampshire primary. While Clinton and Obama received nearly equal coverage in the six weeks following the New Hampshire Primary, they have documented an alarming divergence at the end of February.



(Source: Pew Research Center, Project for Excellence in Journalism, Campaign Coverage Index: February 18 - 24, 2008)

Qualitative Bias Against Clinton

The Pew Research Center has also reported on the stark difference in tone between coverage of the two candidates. They noted that coverage “shifted dramatically” in the latter half of February, “anointing a definite frontrunner [Obama] and underdog

[Clinton].” “When it came to the tone” of the news coverage, Pew reported, Obama “was a big winner.”

After weeks of focusing on the prospect of a deadlocked race with no end in sight, the media narrative for the Democratic presidential race shifted dramatically last week, anointing a definite frontrunner and an underdog.

In a week in which the Democratic candidates thoroughly dominated campaign coverage, Hillary Clinton barely edged Barack Obama in the competition for exposure. But in the period of Feb. 11-17 -- which included three resounding Clinton losses in Virginia, Maryland and Washington D.C. -- the media raised serious questions about her campaign's capabilities and her viability. (In some corners of the punditocracy unfriendly to Clinton, her political obit was being prepared.)

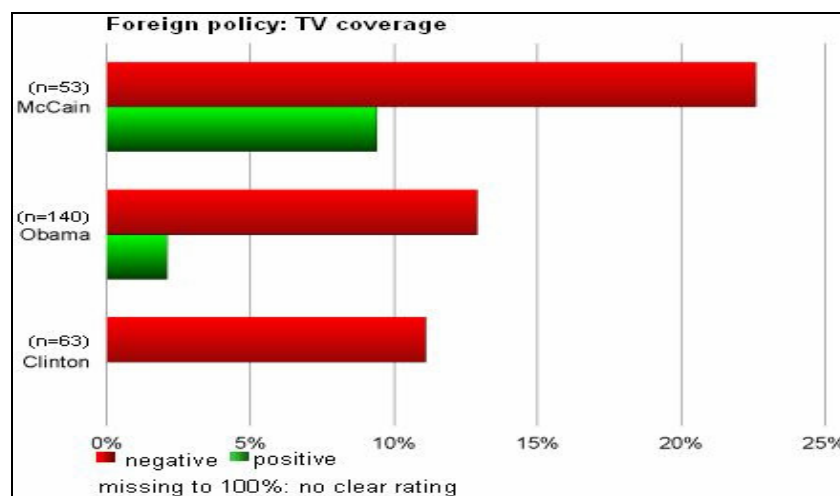
Conversely, Obama -- who ran his post-Super Tuesday winning streak to eight states with the Feb. 12 "Potomac Primary" and established a delegate lead -- rode a wave of positive coverage, depicting him with a real, if not decisive advantage. Obama was a significant or dominant factor in 55.5% of the week's campaign coverage compared with 57% for Clinton -- the highest level of coverage for both since the Campaign Coverage Index began five weeks ago. But when it came to the tone of that coverage, he was a big winner.

Here's one symbolic illustration of those divergent narratives. The front-page Feb. 11 USA Today story began with the news that the Clinton team, after a series of primary and caucus defeats, had replaced campaign manager Patti Solis Doyle. The next day, ABC's Good Morning America reported that the famed wax museum, Madame Tussauds, had just unveiled a statue of Obama standing in the Oval Office of the White House. (A Clinton statue had been created a year ago. But in politics, timing and momentum are everything.)

(Pew Research Center, Project for Excellence in Journalism, “Democratic Race Dominates Presidential Campaign Coverage,” February 20, 2008)

Foreign Policy Bias Against Clinton

When it comes to foreign policy coverage—perhaps the most important issue in the coming general election—the media monitoring group, Media Tenor, found that there was not a single positive story about Hillary Clinton and foreign policy in the month of February.



(Source: “ABC, NBC, CBS evening news candidate coverage, 2/1 – 2/28/2008: foreign policy,” Media Tenor, Presidential Campaign Watch, February 29, 2008)