

JOURNALISM IS KILLING AMERICA

Five years ago, the traditional media helped Bush pitch a war that got 4,337 service men and women killed in Iraq (to say nothing of the thousands and thousands of Iraqis killed).

Now, traditional media journalism is back to killing Americans, in this case by deliberately misrepresenting public views on health care reform. EJ Dionne describes how at least one network refused to cover civil, informative town halls.

But what if our media-created impression of the meetings is wrong? What if the highly publicized screamers represented only a fraction of public opinion? What if most of the town halls were populated by citizens who respectfully but firmly expressed a mixture of support, concern and doubt?

There is an overwhelming case that the electronic media went out of their way to cover the noise and ignored the calmer (and from television's point of view "boring") encounters between elected representatives and their constituents.

[snip]

Over the past week, I've spoken with Democratic House members, most from highly contested districts, about what happened in their town halls. None would deny polls showing that the health-reform cause lost ground last month, but little of the probing civility that characterized so many of their forums was ever seen on television.

[snip]

The most disturbing account came from Rep. David Price of North Carolina, who

spoke with a stringer for one of the television networks at a large town-hall meeting he held in Durham.

The stringer said he was one of 10 people around the country assigned to watch such encounters. Price said he was told flatly: "Your meeting doesn't get covered unless it blows up." As it happens, the Durham audience was broadly sympathetic to reform efforts. No "news" there. [my emphasis]

But Dionne is conveniently blaming this on the "electronic" media and ignoring his own paper's complicity. From OmbudAndy, we learn that 85% of the health care reform stories appearing in the WaPo's A section have been about the horserace and the deathers.

In my examination of roughly 80 A-section stories on health-care reform since July 1, all but about a dozen focused on political maneuvering or protests. The Pew Foundation's Project for Excellence in Journalism had a similar finding. Its recent month-long review of Post front pages found 72 percent of health-care stories were about politics, process or protests.

And as a result, Americans are confused and politicians are backing off the reform they know is needed and legislation supported by a huge majority may not get passed.

This will have predictable results. Regardless of what passes Congress, it will lack things that serve an important function: end of life care conversations to give Americans more control over their medical care; school-based health care clinics; subsidies for the working poor. More people will go bankrupt. More people will forgo necessary care.

People will die.

And inevitably the media will complain that it's not responsible for the obvious consequences of its editorial choices.

No wonder traditional media is in such trouble. They're killing their audience.