

Media Research Center Bids Snarky Farewell To 'West Wing'

by *Bill Berkowitz*

Right wing media watchdog group's website catalogues the 'Top Ten Liberal Moments' from the recently cancelled program

The 2,195th CyberAlert, issued on Friday May 12, 2006 was a gift to both current and former fans of "The West Wing," from the resolute media watchers at the Media Research Center (MRC). When the series premiered on NBC in September 1999 -- toward the end of the Clinton years -- it started off with a bang: President Josiah Bartlet, played by Martin Sheen, told a group of conservative religious leaders to "get your fat asses out of my White House."

"The West Wing" -- which ended its seven-year run on Sunday, May 14 -- was smart television and it won scads of Emmys. While critics raved about its fast-paced and intelligent dialogue, its willingness to take on tough political issues, and its magnificent ensemble cast, conservatives seethed.

The show captured the imagination of television viewers across the country, and it soon became a top rated program.

The Media Research Center's crack team of media critics recently characterized the first episode of the series this way: "Viewers saw how the Hollywood Left views conservatives as the show concocted a preposterous plot and series of scenes which portrayed leaders of the Religious Right as anti-Semitic buffoons. The show culminated with an angry Democratic 'President Josiah Bartlet'... indignantly telling some conservative ministers: 'You can all get your fat asses out of my White House.'"

Over the past decade, as the national political landscape changed and Aaron Sorkin, the show's primary creator, left the program, viewers also started drifting away. The plots got thinner, the so-called liberalism got washed out, the characters seemed to lose their bearings and, as shows are wont to do in serial television, "The West Wing" grew stale.

In its final year, however, some critics praised the show for picking it up, aided by an infusion of new blood -- particularly represented by characters played by Jimmy Smits and Alan Alda.

"It's a very short list of dramas that have been at the top of their game creatively, fallen into a fallow period marked by fans watching more from habit and gilded memory than actual merit, then returned to glory," San Francisco Chronicle television critic Tim Goodman wrote in a column bidding farewell to six longtime television series.

The West Wing "...at its finest represented intelligent and passionate network television. It raised the standard on smarts. And it did that after defying the odds -- no programmer wanted to touch a political drama. Sorkin brought together viewers who may have had diverse political opinions. He gave the battered office of the presidency an aura of respect and gravitas; he made politics seem important and noble until, well, he couldn't any longer as the national political mood fractured," Goodman wrote.

Despite the fact that the final episode of the program was aired more than a month ago, thanks to L. Brent Bozell III's Media Research Center, you can relive the "Top Ten Left Wing Scenes on NBC's The West Wing":

"From oldest to newest, this Web compilation provides text and video/audio for a 'Top Ten' presentation of some of the program's most notorious liberal moments and crusades," Team MRC maintained. MRC has included nine scenes "pushing liberal ideas followed by one unusual scene which mocked liberal opposition to tax cuts."

The "Ten Top Left Wing Scenes..." which begins with President's Bartlet's tossing of religious right leaders, also includes Bartlet's "liberal" State of the Union address aired on January 12, 2000, two weeks before President Clinton's State of the Union address; a "rant against guns" on the October 4, 2000 season premiere; a lamely disguised scene during the October 18, 2000 episode where the president quizzes a Dr. Laura-like figure about "misleading listeners about her expertise by calling herself 'Doctor' when she has no medical degree and castigat[ing] her reference to homosexuality as 'an abomination.'" And there's lots more.

America's Media Watchdog

Bozell's Media Research Center bills itself as "America's Media Watchdog." It is undoubtedly one of the most prolific and well-funded groups -- though not necessarily the most respected -- in the media watchdog business.

MRC produced a boatload of regular publications: its near-daily "Cyber Alerts" "document" liberal media bias; its weekly "Media Reality Check" reports on the "major news stories distorted or ignored" by the mainstream media; "Notable Quatables" is "a bi-weekly compilation of the latest outrageous, sometimes humorous, quotes in the liberal media"; there are "Special Reports" that also documenting liberal media bias; a series of "Media Bias Videos"; and a blog launched last summer called "NewsBusters," which is dedicated to?...you guessed it ... "Exposing and Combating Liberal Media Bias."

Want more? There's "MRC Action" -- "Citizens Demanding Truth in Media"; the campaign to "Support Our Troops," which is headed by Major General John Singlaub (U.S.A. Ret.) Singlaub was the Reagan

administration's chief liaison to the 'private' Contra supply effort during the Iran-Contra scandal, and he headed up the notorious World Anti-Communist League, which supported terrorist organizations and paramilitary groups around the world.

"Support Our Troops" informs readers that "The mainstream liberal media want you to believe that U.S. troops in Iraq are guilty of widespread torture ... oppressing civilians ... murdering U.S. journalists ... opposing the war effort ... And losing the war....Our troops in Iraq are winning the war."

The MRC also issues special "Profiles in Bias." Recent reports have focused on the so-called liberal bias of Katie Couric -- published after she was tapped to be CBS' Evening News anchor -- and Meredith Vieira's anti-Bush comments, also published after she was named Couric's Today show replacement.

The MRC also hosts an annual "gala" called the "DisHonors Awards" dinner, a celebration in Washington, D.C. that "roast[s] the most outrageously biased liberal reporters as selected by a distinguished panel of leading [conservative] media observers." This year's "media observers" included Rush Limbaugh, Steve Forbes, Sean Hannity, Laura Ingraham, Robert Novak and Mary Matalin.

Bozell also writes a series of columns, often eviscerating Hollywood or giving his special viewpoint on the news.

He also presides over the Parents Television Council (PTC), which not only tracks "indecent" on television, but does something about it. Founded in 1995, the PTC aims "to ensure that children are not constantly assaulted by sex, violence and profanity on television and in other media." It claims "nearly one million members."

The PTC, which had a field day with Janet Jackson's nipple -- revealed at the Super Bowl half-time show a few years back -- has been largely responsible for the Federal Communications Commission's recent crackdown on indecency on television.

In December 2004, Mediaweek let readers in on the PTC's methodology. It revealed that the organization had been responsible for practically all of the indecency complaints filed in 2003. Bozell maintained that the FCC was guilty of "faulty accounting practices" and called for a Congressional investigation. "While we're pleased that the FCC has calculated that PTC members have filed an overwhelming majority of indecency complaints in the last two years, the FCC's count is utterly deceptive," Bozell said. "The FCC is playing games with their accounting and is being deliberately dishonest with the American people over the number of complaints filed in the last few years. The PTC has documentation to show the FCC's dishonesty."

The organization is also known for its annual survey of television programming called the "Top 10 Best and Worst Network TV Shows for Family Viewing."

If the top ten left wing "West Wing" moments whets your appetite, you can catch reruns of the series on the Bravo cable television network every Monday.

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