



**Martin Kaplan - Opening Statement
Press Conference with Senator John McCain – Washington, D.C. - Feb 15, 2005**

I'm Martin Kaplan, associate dean of the USC Annenberg School for Communication. I want to thank Senator McCain for his leadership on media issues and for this chance to present our research. Every two years since 1998, my colleagues and I have studied how the nation's local news stations cover politics. To date we've analyzed about 25,000 hours of local news aired on 150 stations in 60 media markets. Today we release our findings about local news coverage of 2004. Here are some highlights:

- Ninety-two percent of the news broadcasts we studied contained no stories about races for the House, state senate or assembly, mayor, city council, law-enforcement posts, judgeships, education offices, or regional or county offices.
- Eight times more coverage went to stories about accidental injuries, and 12 more coverage to sports and weather, than to coverage of all local races combined.
- In Seattle, where there was an extremely close gubernatorial race, 95 percent of the news broadcasts on network affiliates in the month before the election contained no stories at all about that race. In Denver, 88 percent of the broadcasts we captured contained no stories about the highly competitive Senate race.
- Political advertising swamped political news. There were five times more hours of ads about House races than coverage of House races. In some Senate races, ad time was more than 15 times greater than news time.
- Only one in three political stories was about issues. Coverage of strategy and the horserace dominated. Despite all the political advertising, less than one percent of the political stories we found fact-checked campaign ads.

Last summer, Senator McCain and FCC Chairman Michael Powell challenged America's broadcasters to live up to the promise in their licenses to provide significant coverage of local races. Based on our findings, it looks like that challenge pretty much fell on deaf ears. Coverage of local politics on local news is an endangered species.