

dience in Buffalo for the new York Senate debate between Hillary Rodham Clinton and Rep. Rick Lazio and saw something different from what television viewers around the state and nation. When Lazio crossed over to Mrs. Clinton's podium and pressed her to sign a pledge not to allow soft money into their campaigns, it looked contrived and phony to me.

But in the tight shot that television viewers saw, it looked invasive and menacing, and women voters especially reacted negatively. Lazio is still struggling to recover the ground he lost.

major events in the presidential hours. It did not ease my aggravation that performances I really wanted to see, like Michael Johnson's 400-meter run, were further delayed until after the 11 p.m. local news, in order to hold the NBC audience as long as possible.

But it was not until I came here late last week on a political story and tuned in the live coverage on CBC that I realized just how much we had been missing. I awoke very early one morning in my hotel room, flipped on the television and found the women runners lining up for the 1,500-meter

happens on so often in campaign coverage, too. The actual events are transformed into neat stories or packages by the media, fitting them into our formats rather than letting them happen as they happen.

Except for C-SPAN, which airs almost all its programs unedited, and the other cable news networks, which often show political events as they occur, almost all our coverage of the campaigns is shaped by reporters and editors or producers who are looking for story lines. Ideology is less of a distorting factor than the sim-

and Pat Buchanan to debate last Sunday — embarrassed itself by its decision that it would not delay its broadcast of a baseball playoff game to carry the debate live. The NBC moguls, eager for ratings, decided the Olympics audience could wait the better part of a day for coverage but could not adjust its baseball broadcast for the first presidential debate.

For shame.

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Vaccine safety research needs shot in the arm

The public health people are right. There is no proof that vaccination causes the debilitating brain disorder called autism. Remember, though, how long it took to prove smoking causes cancer. But they are totally misleading when they say, as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently did in the Daily News (Aug. 22), "The currently available scientific evidence does not support the hypothesis that vaccines cause autism." Because there is published evidence and it is highly credible.

Why would the CDC say such a thing if it were not true? Could it be because, as the chairman of the Congressional Committee on Government Reform recently charged, "the majority of members of both committees (the Food and Drug Administration and CDC vaccine oversight committees) have financial ties to vaccine manufacturers or hold patents on vaccines under development"?

Maybe there's not a lot of research. After all, vaccine manufacturers pay for most vaccine safety research and medical journals are heavily supported by drug/vaccine advertising dollars. (It is a minor miracle that there is any evidence of a connection, given that grim reality.) But there is research, nonetheless.

Among the findings were DNA evidence of a connection between MMR (measles-mumps-rubella vaccine) and autism and MMR being cited as a possible "environmental trigger" of autism. More than one study showed MMR-associated autism symptoms occurring within two weeks or less of exposure to MMR. One of them, published in the prestigious journal *Lancet* in 1998, set off an almost literal firestorm of debate.

And then there are the many hundreds of unpublished, but no less relevant, reports by anguished parents on the disinte-



gration of their once healthy children into autism after being vaccinated. (Just one parent alone has a list of over 1,650 parents who believe their child developed autism because of vaccination, another a list of 387 implicating MMR alone.)

Unfortunately, however, there has not been a lot published on the topic, going all the way back to 1965. Most of it is either letters or editorials. There seem to be plenty of opinions but few facts.

One group of authors even lamented that "only one controlled study of an experimental animal model has been published, in which the possible causal relation between vaccines and autoimmune findings has been examined."

None of this is particularly reassuring.

Why should we care? Autism is increasing at an alarming rate. In Maryland, between 1993 and 1998, there was a 513 percent increase in reports of autism. In one district near London the rate is a mind-boggling one in every 69 young boys.

The CDC was asked publicly over two years ago to look into the connection between vaccinations and the autism epidemic in Brick Township, N.J., where one in 149 children ages 3-10 has been diagnosed with it. The CDC still has done little other than issue a report confirming the epidemic. It has neither financed nor encouraged truly independent research into the possible connection between vaccination and autism.

The current state of the evidence is not proof of the absence of a relationship between vaccines and autism. It is proof

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of the necessity for more research.

That, at least, was the conclusion drawn by the National Academy of Sciences/Institute of Medicine when, in its congressionally mandated review of the safety of all childhood vaccines, it found itself "handicapped" by the absence of sound, meaningful research.

Instead of rushing to rule out vaccines as a cause, Public Health should be leaving no stone unturned in the search for the truth about autism.

That so few objective, rigorously designed research studies are being done on vaccination safety is, I would submit, a scandal of epidemic proportions.

We must stop assuming the best interests of our children are being served. The time has come to demand well-designed, independent research on the short and long-term safety of vaccination.

If we don't protect our children, who will? If not now, when?

Alaska has added five new mandated vaccines. Contact your legislator if you object.

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