Controversial ABC DiCaprio spot fizzles

NEW YORK (AP) - After all the fuss, Leonardo DiCaprio's debut in a news role was a bit part.

The actor's 20-minute chat in the White House with President Clinton about global warming was edited down to two minutes on ABC's Saturday special, "Planet Earth 2000."

DiCaprio was seen asking the president three questions.

The interview prompted a flood of criticism from people - including some within ABC News - who wondered why the hunky "Titanic" star was being

sent to do a journalist's job.

role of a reporter, he was playing the role of a reporter with a conflict of interest He's chairman of the Earth Day

Not only was DiCaprio playing the

2000 celebration committee and approached ABC with the idea of a special on global warming.

ABC executives, who said they enlisted DiCaprio to entice young viewers to a news show, were embarrassed when they originally said the actor visited Clinton at the White House's request without the understanding of an interview.

But the White House said ABC asked for an interview ahead of time.

"We're trying something different," newswoman Elizabeth Vargas, enlisted as host in the past two weeks to give the show some journalistic heft, said in introducing DiCaprio.

The actor filmed segments in a frog habitat in Los Angeles and a butterfly museum in New York City that were used to begin and end the show, and introduce individual segments.

His interview with Clinton wasn't shown until 52 minutes of the hourlong special had passed.

DiCaprio thanked Clinton for the opportunity to talk about global warming, saying he was "neither a politician or a journalist. It was an opportunity as a concerned citizen I couldn't pass up."

"Why do you think this issue is so constantly overlooked?" he asked Clinton. "Why do you think people don't take it seriously? For you, is it as important as something like health care or education?"

He also asked what Clinton thought was the best course for American citizens over the next 20 years to help the environment.

His final question: "Do you think we can eventually become a role model?"

DiCaprio was reportedly helped by something common to actors but less so to journalists - the opportunity for retakes. New Yorker magazine said this week that ABC filmed DiCaprio later asking again some of his questions after he flubbed his lines, and it was then spliced into the footage.

The news special also had a trendy techno soundtrack, with one odd exception: a brief snippet of '60s rockers Jefferson Airplane.

\$5.25/15 words

\$3.50/15 words (students) \$0.15 each additional word \$0.75 billing charge \$0.75/line headline

Deadline: 3 p.m. weekday prior

Monday, April 24, 2000 Page 11 (402) 472-2588

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