

Bill O'Reilly Enters the 'Trump Spin Zone'



I wrote a piece last week on how some influential conservative pundits have been making excuses for (and even cheer-leading) Donald Trump's conduct in this presidential campaign, while holding the other GOP candidates to a much higher level of scrutiny. One name I left off that list was Fox News host, Bill O'Reilly.

It's not because I don't think that O'Reilly has been taking it easy on Trump in his interviews and commentary. On the contrary. I feel like he's been fairly accommodating – at least by the “no spin” standards he has long established as a hallmark of his highly successful brand. I just felt that (despite his friendship with Trump) he was putting forth a decent enough effort to challenge the GOP front runner on his provocative rhetoric. Thus, I wasn't comfortable lumping him in with the others.

After listening to him on his show following last night's GOP debate, however, I've decidedly changed my mind. December 15, 2015 will go down as the day Bill O'Reilly closed the door on the *No Spin Zone*, and willfully entered the *Trump Spin Zone* – a place where shameless, political dishonesty and demagoguery are not only acceptable, but also admired. The display put forth was highly uncharacteristic and unexpected of a man who has presented himself for years as straight shooter and a culture warrior. So much so, that Mr. O'Reilly might have quite a bit of trouble rebounding from the incident.

Last night's special airing of *The O'Reilly Factor* featured several guests who were brought on for some post-debate analysis. One of them was syndicated columnist and *Fox News* mainstay, Charles Krauthammer. Krauthammer's conversation with O'Reilly started out fairly uneventful, but that changed when the topic turned to a debate exchange between Donald Trump and Rand Paul.

A debate clip was aired featuring Paul criticizing Trump's proposed anti-terror plan of killing the families of terrorists. Trump's response to Paul was, "So, they can kill us, but we can't kill them?"

"I thought that was a pretty good comeback by Trump," said O'Reilly, commenting on the clip. "What do you think?"

"A pretty good comeback by Trump?" Krauthammer confusedly asked. "On the killing of the brothers and the sisters and the children of terrorists?"

"Yeah, he [Trump] just ignored it," said O'Reilly.

Krauthammer aptly pointed out that Trump had *not* ignored the question, and described Trump's answer of "*they can kill us, but we can't kill them*" as nonsensical.

O'Reilly worked to clarify Trump's position, saying, "You know, Trump never goes and says, '*I'm going to kill the families members.*' He says, '*I'm going to take them out, or treat them rough.*' You know what I'm talking about."

An astonished Krauthammer responded with, "No, I *don't* know what you're talking about. What does '*I'm going to take them out*' mean?"

O'Reilly explained to Krauthammer: "It's designed to get votes. It's designed to get people emotionally allied with him. That's what it's designed to do. You know that."

At that point, Krauthammer felt that O'Reilly needed to a

reminder of what his own “no spin” mantra meant. “Bill, you’re in the business of saying words on television, and writing them. The intent is to convey an idea or a thought. Either you believe that or you don’t. I don’t care what the motivation is – *that I want to elicit an emotion*. He [Trump] says this stuff. *Take them out*. What does that mean? So he was asked about that. He was asked specifically by the moderator: *Do you want to kill them?*”

O’Reilly wasn’t budging. “Do you believe that Donald Trump would murder people, if he were president of the United States?”

“If he doesn’t want to, why would he say it?” Krauthammer asked.

O’Reilly answered, “Because he wants votes. He’s doing all of this. It’s theater to get votes. That’s what he’s doing.”

Note: I’ve put together a partial transcript below to detail the rest of the back and forth, eliminating only some brief sidebar remarks and some cross-talk that was hard to follow:

Krauthammer: “So you’re saying this is a candidate for the presidency of the United States, talking to the American people and the world, saying x, y, and z...and that the words he says are *meaningless*? I have no idea what he would do as president. All I have to go on is what he says.”

O’Reilly: “He wants to win. And he’s going to say, like almost every other politician... He’s going to say whatever he thinks is going to put him over the top to win. But I’m not justifying it. I’m explaining it. And so, people can make their own minds on whether you want to vote for a guy like that, or you don’t. But he’s running as a rogue candidate. He’s getting people whipped up so that they will like him because their emotion and his emotion coincide.”

(Sidebar discussion.)

O'Reilly: "It's almost a brilliant strategy. It's almost brilliant, if all you want to do is win. If all you want to do is win, it's brilliant, because he [Trump] marginalizes everybody else around him, because he's so provocative, and tapping into the fear and anger that is pervasive among the Republican adherence. It's brilliant."

Krauthammer: "If you're telling me that demagoguery, untethered to the meanings of the words being used, can be effective... Well, there's a long history in humankind of that kind of demagoguery working. Do you *approve* of it?"

(Keep in mind that this is Bill O'Reilly, a man who has built an entire career off of demanding accountability for the words and actions of powerful people in our country.)

O'Reilly: "Do I approve it? I can't really say whether I approve of it or not."

Krauthammer: "As an American – as a citizen – do you think it's a *good* thing?"

O'Reilly: "I think what Donald Trump is doing is both good and bad. In the sense that he is destroying a corrupt system, it's good. And it's bad in the sense that he goes overboard – that he goes too far. But our system is corrupt, and people know it. He's destroying it."

Krauthammer: "And the cure for corruption is to say things that you are admitting he doesn't really mean?"

O'Reilly: "I don't think he... Some of it he means."

Krauthammer: "That's the way he goes after a corrupt system?"

O'Reilly: "He's going to build a wall. He's not going to be able to deport people, but he doesn't care, because that's what he *wants* to do. He's not going to be able to ban Muslims, but he doesn't care, because that's what he *wants* to do. Look. I don't approve of *all* of this. But I'm just telling you that

its a brilliant strategy, and he's winning with it."

Krauthammer: "Look. There have been a lot of brilliant strategists in the past, and many of who have succeeded, but it doesn't mean that one has to accept it as the only way to go after a corrupt system."

(Some brief back and forth, with Krauthammer pointing out that Ted Cruz also talks about there being a *corrupt system*, without suggesting we kill terrorists' families.)

O'Reilly: "And that's what you have to evaluate. Do you want Ted Cruz, who's not as extreme as Donald Trump, but he's running as a conservative. But I'll tell you this: It's corrupt, Charles. The whole damned system is corrupt. And Trump is blowing it up. You get the last word."

Krauthammer: "I'm not arguing here that the system is not a corrupt system. I'm only arguing that demagoguery works... That when someone says things that *you* admit he doesn't mean, but is doing it entirely for effect, that one ought to go back and say, '*Well that's just politics.*' It *is* politics, that's true. And it's done to some *extent* by other politicians, but I think it ought to be called out for what it is: Demagoguery. And unless you're going to stand behind what you say, and say 'I mean it'... It's rather surprising that you would think it's perfectly okay."

O'Reilly: "I don't say it's perfectly okay. I say it's a brilliant strategy. I say that there's some worthiness to exposing a corrupt system. I have been very tough on Donald Trump and you know it...when I've interviewed him. I've told him flat out he's not going to be able to deport people, in mass, an he's not going to be able to ban Muslims from the United States. He's not going to be able to do it. Alright? Because the legal system would prevent that. I've told him that. But on the other hand, I know what he's doing, and what he's doing is shaking everything up, and maybe these people...something

good will come out of it, because we can't just keep going the way we're going, Charles. We can't . This country's in desperate trouble."

(Segment ends with Krauthammer left essentially speechless.)

So there you have it. In the eyes of Bill O'Reilly (a longtime political watchdog and self-appointed seeker of justice), it's now okay for politicians to engage in blatant dishonesty and demagoguery to achieve power, as long as the motivation is that person's perception of *the greater good*.

This is precisely the type of corrosive, dishonest conduct O'Reilly has (for years) prided himself on exposing and aggressively condemning on national television. And by doing an about-face now, in order to condone (and even promote) Trump's behavior, isn't he guilty of not only shameless hypocrisy, but a level of cronyism so significant that he has called into question his very authority to present himself as an honest broker of news?

Special Report's Bret Baier seemed just as taken back by O'Reilly's remarks as I was, and he challenged the host's stance (as Bernie Goldberg did as well) later in the show:

Baier: "I listened to your conversation with Charles earlier, and what you were saying was that Trump is willfully misleading on a couple of key issues. And he's trying to fire people up to get votes – to get in office. But he knows...he knows...that those things are not going to happen..."

O'Reilly: "Here's the deal. He's not willfully misleading, because he *wants* it to happen. He *wants* it to happen."

Baier: "But he *knows* it's not going to."



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O'Reilly: "I don't think he intellectualizes to that degree. And I've talked to him – we have him on tomorrow. He's going to be here tomorrow, okay? And I've talked to him, and you've seen the interviews. And I've said you can't deport 11 million people. The courts will stop you. And his reply is, '*No they won't,*' and then he leaves the room. You're not going to get any more than that. So what he's doing in saying, '*Look, it's enough for me to voice what Americans want, and if it doesn't happen down the lane, it's not my fault. It's the corrupt system's fault.*'"

In other words, according to Bill O'Reilly, when Trump lies, it's not *really* a lie because Trump *wants* that lie to be true.

Are you as confused as I am? And have you *ever* seen O'Reilly go to such lengths to spin (yes, *spin*) for any public figure (let alone a politician), as he did for Trump?

The truth is that O'Reilly deeply degraded himself last night, and it was a shame to watch. In addition to the hypocrisy, any sense of objectivity he's tried to bring to his coverage of this presidential race was essentially forfeited.

I hope whatever personal relationship he has with Trump was worth it.

Gingrich Wins SC ... Media Help Big Time

✘ You might figure Newt Gingrich was in a heap of trouble in South Carolina when his ex-wife Marianne told ABC News that he once said he wanted an open marriage.

After all, South Carolina is a conservative state with a lot of evangelical Christian voters, who don't go for that kind of thing.

And he might have been in trouble, except CNN's John King came to the rescue.

King, you'll recall, moderated the GOP presidential debate two days before the primary and right out of the box brought up Gingrich's messy former marital life.

The conservative in-house audience booed – and then Gingrich took over.

"I think the destructive, vicious, negative nature of much of the news media makes it harder to govern this country," Gingrich fired back., "harder to attract decent people to run for public office. And I am appalled that you would begin a presidential debate on a topic like that."

Cue the wild, enthusiastic applause coming from the audience that rose to its feet. Politico said, "It was, simply put, Gingrich's best single moment in any 2012 debate, and he's had many good ones."

Two days later, Gingrich won the South Carolina primary – and it wasn't close.

Whatever else these results tell us, one thing is clear: social conservative Christians may find open marriage repugnant, but not as repugnant as they find the so-called mainstream news media.

The news media should take notice, but if history is any indication, they won't. They'll write the CNN debate episode off as just one more example of those nutty right-wingers bashing the liberal media – which they deny are liberal. They continue to fiddle while their institution burns.

According to a CBS News poll, 53 percent of South Carolina voters made up their minds in the last few days before the election. Several things happened in those last few days, and I think Rick Perry's decision to leave the race and throw his support to Gingrich was the least of them. More important was the Nightline interview with the former Mrs. Gingrich, which stunk to high heaven, and Gingrich's put-down of John King.

Marianne Gingrich didn't come off as a victim so much as a vengeful woman telling stories on TV about something she says happened (and he denies) more than 10 years earlier. What kind of woman, I'm guessing a lot of voters wondered, reveals conversations that took place inside a marriage – not to her sister or her best friend, but to millions of total strangers watching TV.

And the debate: Gingrich showed passion, something conservatives desperately want in their candidate and something Mitt Romney seems genetically incapable of showing.

Still, even though conservatives never felt at ease with Romney, he nonetheless had been the odds-on favorite to win South Carolina, mainly because voters thought he had the best chance to defeat Barack Obama. That was before the Nightline interview and the CNN debate.

A few days ago it came out that Romney lost Iowa after he had apparently won it. So as things stand now, there have been

three GOP contests and the only thing Romney has won is the New Hampshire primary; not such a big deal since New Hampshire is practically his home state. The candidacy that once seemed inevitable now seems anything but.

Yogi was right: It ain't over 'til it's over.