

Bernie's Q&A: Rather, Schultz, Stengel, The Sopranos, "Fake News", Palestine, Abortion and More (4/19)

Welcome to this week's Premium Q&A session for *Premium Interactive* members. I appreciate you all signing up and joining me. Thank you.

Let's get to your questions (and my answers):

Really enjoy the weekly Q&A. I have been thinking a lot about the potential impact if H Schultz runs in 2020 as an independent. While it is very unlikely he could garner a majority of the electoral college votes, I have read nothing about the possibility of his winning a few states and thereby depriving the two major party candidates of an electoral college majority. Do you think this could occur, what states are the best targets, and if this were to occur any predictions as to how Speaker Pelosi would deal with the resulting circus that would then take place in the House and the MSM? – Michael F.

I don't believe Howard Schultz will run, Michael. So I think the rest is moot. But ...

It's clear that if he does, Donald Trump almost certainly will win re-election. Schultz would split the Democratic vote opening the door to a Trump second term. I don't believe his candidacy will deprive either major party candidate of the electoral votes they need to win. As you say, "very

unlikely.” Schultz believes in many things, high on the list is that Donald Trump needs to go. He, Schultz, is a smart man and can figure out that he’d be the spoiler. People will convince him not to run. Donald Trump should pray that he does.

Have you read Ilan Pappé’s book “The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine?” It seems to me that until the well documented actions of the Israelis are addressed that there will be no peace in the Middle East. – Thomas W.

I have not read the book, but it seems to me that until the Palestinians decide they love their children more than they hate the Israelis there also will be no peace. We can argue the pros and cons of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. But let’s not forget the Israelis have already tried “land for peace.” They gave back every inch of Gaza and got, not peace, but rockets on a daily basis. The Palestinians a while back had a chance to get 95 percent of what they claim to want, and turned the deal down. As the great Israeli diplomat Abba Eban once said: “The Arabs never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity.”

I have been a fan for many years. I find you to be a consistent and rational source w/ about how the national media operates. W/ regard to FOX News Channel I wonder if you would agree w/ this. While I don’t watch FNC opinion programming I understand why it is there (same w/ MSNBC and CNN). But I find that the ‘news’ division inside FNC to be the most balanced of the national broadcast media. Chris Wallace, Shepard Smith, Bret Baier, and many of the correspondents do a reasonably good job of covering both sides of the news. Far better than any other national organization. But since both ‘news’ and ‘opinion’ programming are rolled up under one brand they get confused. What isn’t confusing – rather blatant – would be MSNBC and Andrea Mitchell. She has/had a daytime opinion program and then would report in the evening for NBC News as their Chief Foreign Affairs Correspondent which breaks the

'golden rule' for a news organization and any journalist. This is where a set of enforceable rules would be handy. W/ regard to FNC maybe they could create another channel (think FBC) called FNC News for their news division and keep their opinion shows on FNC. It could create a revenue opportunity while helping the national media get back on track. – Chuck

I'm with you, Chuck. In terms of straight news reporting, Fox is way ahead of CNN and MSNBC. I also agree that when a hard news reporter has an opinion show then covers foreign affairs for the network it creates problems. We shouldn't know how a hard news reporter feels about any subject she's covering. You're also correct when you say news and opinion get rolled under one brand – and cause confusion. As for creating a news channel and a separate opinion channel: First, FNC would have to do opinion all day long (which some people think already happens) – and then do news all day long on a separate channel. The former would be torture (for me) and the latter wouldn't be interesting enough for a mass audience. Interesting thought, though.

I'm surprised and a bit dismayed to read your words in the last Q&A to the effect that fake "made up" news is a rarity in media journalism today. For the past two and half years we've endured blatantly false news reporting nearly every day by the likes of CNN and others promulgating a preposterous "Trump is Russia" narrative based on a discredited dossier. We saw similar bad faith media reporting on Judge Kavanaugh as possible college serial rapist allowing Michael Avenatti a platform for his clients' ludicrous accusations. So please tell me what difference there is in the media's making up its own false news stories or reporting false news stories—via other sources—such as the FBI leak of the Steele Dossier? – Phillip R.

Fair enough, Phillip. Legitimate question.

Donald Trump has said, repeatedly, that journalists "make up"

sources and that this constitutes “fake news.” If they did make up sources, he’d be right. But except for the very rare cases, they don’t. Getting things wrong is not “fake news.” I’ve said before that journalists have made mistakes and they seem to go in one direction – the anti-Trump direction, and that this constitutes bias. Bias, while not a good thing, is not “fake news.” If the media believe sources that aren’t telling the truth, the villain first, is the source with an ax to grind and second, the journalist who should have been more skeptical. If you define “fake news” as putting out stories based on speculation that turns out not to be true, Ok, then it’s fake news. That’s not my definition and more importantly, it’s not really Donald Trump’s definition. Again, he has repeatedly said that reporters just make stuff up. Not true. That said, you make good points about the constant drumbeat of negative stories about the Donald Trump and Russia. That tells me that too many journalists have it in for this president. But that’s just not the same as concocting sources out of nothing.

Hello Mr. Goldberg: In your book “100 People Who Are Screwing Up America” you have a chapter on Al Franken. You mentioned that Casey Stengel used to line up his players and talk nonsense to them and “he wasn’t joking.” I’m not much of a sports fan, so I have to ask: what kind of gibberish would Casey Stengel spout at the players, and why did he do it if he wasn’t joking? Was this some kind of head game he was playing? What would be the purpose? And while I’m at it, in “A Slobbering Love Affair” I recall that there were some documents from Barack Obama’s college years that you mentioned were being held under wraps, and you were wondering what is in them. Could you please elaborate? Which documents were you specifically referring to? What do you think would be revealed? Finally, why can’t they be revealed? Mr. Obama is a public figure, so such information (along with Donald Trump’s tax returns) SHOULD be made public, shouldn’t they? What’s the holdup? Best Regards –The Emperor

There's a lot in your question(s), Emperor and I have to be someplace by mid-December, but I'll give it a try.

Casey Stengel would go on and on when chatting with reporters, bouncing from one subject to the next without so much as a breath in between. He was a character. At spring training one year he told his players to line up in alphabetical order – according to height. He must be on Google someplace. You have to listen to him to truly understand how “entertaining” he was.

As for Mr. Obama's records: They're not public records, they were college records. His grades, his term papers, anything he might have put on paper that would give us a clue to his thinking then – and maybe during his presidency.

The holdup is that he's never given Columbia (or any of the other colleges he attended) permission to release whatever they have. And since it's all private, the public has no legal right to know what's there. Why hasn't he released his college info? That's what's so intriguing.

It seems to me, as the news media becomes more and more of an entertainment product, that there's an unprecedented amount of importance placed on the youth and looks of news commentators. Of course, it has long been an advantage in television journalism to be good looking (news organizations and producers strive for an attractive news presentation). But in recent years and especially on cable news (most noticeably on Fox), I feel as if it has become somewhat of an overriding factor on the opinion side – overriding in the sense that if someone has the “right look”, they are not necessarily expected to be able to put forth serious or informed commentary, even when seated at discussion tables alongside individuals who can and do.

Do you feel that today's cable news audiences for the most part even notice this type of thing, or feel insulted by it?

Or do you think they just appreciate the “eye candy,” as long as that person is saying the stuff they want to hear? – Andrew D.

There's plenty of eye candy on cable, most notably at Fox, as you say. But a lot of those attractive people are also pretty smart. Not all, but more than you'd think. Let's not assume that a beautiful woman can't also be a very smart woman. Here's what's not a good thing, especially for women: If you're a good journalist, but not especially attractive, you're going to have a tough time getting an on-air job at places like Fox. That's troubling. But the audience isn't complaining – especially the guys watching the women show leg on Fox shows. They don't call it Infotainment for nothing, Andrew.

By any chance have you ever watched the *Big Interview with Dan Rather*? It's on AXS TV. Dan has some really interesting guests, which is why i've watched it a few times, but I'm very surprised by how bad of an interviewer he is. The questions are surprisingly bad and he seems quite unprepared. I don't recall what kind of interviewer he was when he was with CBS News. Was he generally good back then? – Beverly

I have watched the show, Beverly, and when the guests are interesting I like it. Regarding Dan: He's not out to grill his guests on a show like this. He's there to be a pal and have a conversation with them. I've long believed that the most important single factor that makes for a good interview ... is the person being interviewed. If he or she is interesting and engaging, the interview will be a success. Yes, the interviewer can screw things up by not asking good questions or not listening and missing a needed follow up question. But for The Big Interview, Dan is fine. As far as how he did at CBS News, he did good work. The problem with Dan – and I've said this before – is that he was either unwilling or unable to take serious criticism seriously.

Years ago I remember you talking to O'Reilly on Fox about The Sopranos. You had some pretty deep thoughts on the show, and you were clearly a fan. Are there any current television series, or series since then, that you really enjoy and would perhaps place in the same league? – Jeff P.

My favorite show is Homeland on Showtime. I'm a HUGE fan! I watch Billions on Showtime but it's not in the same league as the Sopranos or Homeland. I also watch Curb Your Enthusiasm on HBO – and each week root for Larry David to get hit by a bus. Not in real life, of course. It's just that he's so annoying in that role – which I suspect is not that much different from Larry David in real life. I watch almost nothing on network TV – except big sporting events and every now and then Shark Tank. I recently watched the 6 part series The Bodyguard on Netflix and thought it was pretty good – but not great.

Mr. G., In view of the vitriol being tossed back and forth, between AOC and her ilk, and Mr. Trump, do you think we'll ever see real civility in politics ever again? – Terry & Kathi

That's the \$64 million dollar question. My gut answer is ... no. Things have gotten so bad, so uncivil, that I see no path back to reasoned, decent disagreement. All I see is Resistance. I used to think that a national tragedy would bring us together. 9/11 did. For about 10 minutes then it was back to what passes for "normal." Maybe if a charismatic politician comes along who shows "the other side" respect and calls on his team to also show respect ... maybe then things would change. But I must sound like Pollyanna saying that. I don't see that person on the horizon. I'm pessimistic, Terry and Kathi.

With very few journalists such as yourself, it's hard to biased journalists to really make a name for themselves anymore. They just parrot each other. Will it ever become fashionable again to take a more clear and honest approach to

journalism? Unbiased! – Paul M.

For quite a while now, journalism in America has lost the trust and confidence of the American people. And for good reason. As long as bias sells, things won't change. And make no mistake, it does sell. News organizations – and not just cable TV – have made a business decision: give the audience what it wants. Don't challenge its biases. Instead, validate what the viewers already believe, what they already think about Donald Trump or the Democrats. As long as that model continues to bring in money, things won't change. The viewer or the reader is an indicted co-conspirator as far as I'm concerned. They're not asking for change. They like it when CNN, MSNBC, Fox, The NY Times, et al give them what they want. That said, there's some good journalism going on. But too much slanted journalism .

After the David Shaw series in the L.A. Times detailing an abortion-rights bias in the newsrooms, I thought that the media would look at how it reports on these stories and stop giving it a slant. That was 29 years ago. Do you feel that reporting on abortion has changed for the better? – Alex

I once jokingly suggested that we need affirmative action in America's newsrooms for a minority group vastly under-represented in the world of journalism. That minority was conservative journalists. After a while, I stopped joking about it and started pitching it for real. I don't want conservative journalists to bring their opinions and biases into the newsroom – any more than I want liberal journalists to bring their opinions and biases into the newsroom. But with so few conservatives in journalism, abortion coverage – to use the example you mention – is seen through a liberal, pro-abortion rights prism. With more conservatives we'd have a different *perspective* injected into the conversation. A conservative might see how a story on "late term" abortion is being discussed in the newsroom and chime in with a different position. I don't follow abortion coverage closely enough to

answer your question beyond what I've already suggested, but I'm pretty sure some diversity of opinion in the newsroom would make abortion coverage – and a lot more – a lot better.

Have you read Michael Luo's article "The Urgent Quest for Slower, Better News"? What is your take on Slow Media (e.g. Delayed Gratification, Tortoise Media) and its pros and cons? – John M.

Sorry, John, I know nothing about this.

Thanks, everyone! You can send me questions for next week **using the form below!** You can also read previous Q&A sessions by clicking [here](#).

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