

Bernie's Q&A: O'Reilly vs Fox News, Cronkite & Vietnam, Juan Williams, and More (3/15/19)

Welcome to this week's **Premium Q&A** session for *Premium Interactive* members. I appreciate you all signing up and joining me. There were some duplicate questions again this week, so I've condensed a couple. Also, I received multiple questions from a few of the same people. Based on the popularity of these of Q&A sessions, let's try to limit it to one question per person per week. Thank you.

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

I agree with your opinion of Bret Baier's Special Report. Definitely the most balanced of the cable news shows. It is, however, still slanted toward the conservative viewpoint with its content coverage. Which brings me to my question. What is your opinion of PBS News Hour? Their content coverage is good but slanted toward the liberal viewpoint. As with Fox News, this is probably based on playing to their audience. Perhaps a combination of Bret Baier and PBS News Hour may be good for getting a somewhat balanced look at the issues. Your thoughts?
– Bob

Not sure I agree with you, Bob, re conservative content in the news portion of Special Report. Nonetheless, let me try to get to the heart of your question:

Very often producers who put news programs together are blissfully blind to their own biases and so make decisions that result in a slanted newscast. Liberals, for example,

don't believe their views are liberal so much as they believe they're moderate, reasonable, middle of the road.

Conservatives may be guilty of the same delusion, though I suspect to a lesser extent since most news outlets are liberal not conservative.

The way around this is to have a few more conservatives in the newsroom who can point out these biases. I've suggested an affirmative action program for the smallest minority in the American newsroom – conservatives. I was kidding at first, but not so much anymore.

I'm writing a column on some of the above which will be published here shortly. So stay tuned.

What is your opinion of the Bill O'Reilly controversy? Was Bill's termination from Fox News warranted, and do you think he'll come back to national television? – (combined questions from Joseph V., Bill E., and Joe B.)

I can tell you this much: Bill has told me that he doesn't believe his termination was warranted. I obviously have no first hand information on what did or didn't happen in any of the cases. But I suspect if Bill wasn't as popular as he was on Fox, liberal journalists may not have been so intent on unearthing their supposed scoops. Do I think journalists at the New York Times, to use just one example, viscerally do not like Fox and Bill O'Reilly? Yes. And I also think that feeling influences how they cover this or any other story.

I am curious what effect, positive or negative, if any, your O'Reilly Factor appearances had on your efforts to reach a larger audience via your website & weekly column. I ask this because I thought that your back & forth with Bill, often disagreeing & challenging each other, was pretty unparalleled in modern TV journalism. – Joseph R.

It's been my experience, Joseph, that most people who read political columns want to hear from people they, generally

speaking, agree with. That said, I'm certain my appearances on the O'Reilly Factor brought readers to my columns – the same readers who liked Bill's show. If I were a liberal giving my opinions on the show I don't think the viewer would necessarily follow me to my website. I never pandered to the viewer. I never said what I thought would be popular. And I never thought about how that would affect me in terms of reaching a larger audience. As that tired phrase goes: It is what it is. Or in this case, It was what it was. Thank you for noticing that I wasn't Bill's patsy parroting his views.

I have heard some rather disturbing things regarding Walter Cronkite's behavior during the Vietnam War. There are some right wing commentators that claim that the North Vietnamese were ready to surrender to the Americans after the TET Offensive. According to these conservative commentators, Cronkite deliberately slanted his reporting of the TET Offensive to make it look like a huge defeat for the Americans. However, I am not one to necessarily believe something without a reliable source to confirm it. Are you familiar with this story? Is it simply hateful nonsense from bitter conservatives or is there some truth to it? If it IS true, would it be worth it to expose Cronkite as a liar, beyond what the conservative commentators have already done? – The Emperor

I have heard the same stories and don't believe any of it. This will infuriate people who have perpetuated the story. You ask if "Cronkite deliberately slanted his reporting ..." I was a youngster at the Associated Press in New York during the TET offensive, not at CBS. But I worked for the CBS News with Walter Cronkite and emphatically do not believe he deliberately slanted that story. Was Walter a liberal? Yes. But that's not a crime and it certainly doesn't mean a liberal can't cover the news fairly. Same, of course, goes for a conservative.

Your books were very clear with direct examples of media bias.

I'm curious if any journalism professors have reached out to you for advise, or, do you believe they are part of the problem? – Tim H.

Good question, Tim. They use Bias in some college journalism courses. But journalism professors, by and large, are liberal – and so see the world and journalism through a liberal prism. My own alma mater, Rutgers University, has not reached out to me to pick my brain about any facet of journalism. The only time they call is to ask for money. And because they've never reached out to me for advice on the state of journalism, they won't get any cash from me.

I would like to watch alternatives to Fox News but every time I turn-on CNN and MSNBC it is so embarrassingly pathetic I can't abide it more than a few minutes. It's like a shock to the system. Perhaps the best route is to watch Bret Baier's show and read the WSJ and NY Times? Although The NY Times has really gone down hill the past few years – Phil R.

Phil, you're experience is exactly the same as mine. Fox in prime time is way too cozy with the president for my taste, but as you say, CNN and MSNBC are "embarrassingly pathetic."

I too watch Bret Baier's show and read the WSJ and NYT. And I also agree with you that the Times has gone down hill in the past few years. Were we separated at birth?

What is your professional opinion as to how effective, a President, Mr. Obama was? Can you speak to your direct and/or indirect knowledge as to Mr. Obama's effectiveness in building personal relationships with U.S. and world political leaders? – Matthew Q.

Barack Obama's politics didn't jibe with mine, so – in a political sense – I wasn't a fan. But he had allies in the media, some of whom deified him. Check out the glowing covers on the news magazines. He was effective enough to get the Affordable Care Act through Congress. Not knowledgeable enough

about his personal relationships with world leaders.

I believe I'm not alone in my disappointment with the current state of "journalism". Do you think the time is right for a new news organization that focuses on truth rather than narrative? – Keith M.

It's long past time, Keith, but I hold out next to no hope that it's going to happen anytime soon in places like big city newspapers or cable TV. The web is a big place with unlimited space so it's possible that maybe the news operation you hope for could show up there – in a podcast, for example. But too much journalism, as I've written, has become a business model, not a model of good journalism. So news outlets give the audience what the audience wants. Which, in my opinion, makes the audience part of the problem.

Are there topics you prefer for these questions – such as things you write about like media bias, politics, and culture? And if we would like to see you write about something, are you receptive to suggestions? – Michael E.

I'm receptive to suggestions, Michael, but over the years I've noticed a problem: If I don't do a TV story or a column on a suggested subject, it causes tension. The person who made the suggestion is unhappy. So I'm open to ideas, but am concerned about unintended consequences. As for topics I prefer – or more accurately, feel more comfortable with: Media. Politics. American culture.

I heard the other day from some left-leaning pundit on CNN who claims presidential pardons can be overturned in some capacity? Does you think this is true? – Brian H.

I'm not a lawyer but it's always been my understanding that a president has the absolute right to pardon anyone he want to pardon. Here's what I found from my research:

Under the Constitution, the **president's** clemency power extends

only to federal criminal offenses. A **president** cannot **pardon** someone for state or local crimes. Experts disagree as to whether a **president can pardon** himself, but **pardons** cannot apply to cases of impeachment.

Will the Green New Deal be an Albatross around the necks of the Dems that have endorsed it? – Steve M.

It should be, Steve, but it's a long way to November 2020. Between now and then they'll weasel their way out of what they said after the Green New Deal was rolled out. And they may get away with it.

Do any of the three major networks, ABC, CBS, and NBC, in your opinion cover the news in a fair and balanced way? Also do you feel that David Muir of ABC is fair in his coverage of the news? – George V.

I no longer watch network news. So sorry, George, that I don't have a good answer for you. That said, in 2001 when my first book *Bias* came out, I was documenting liberal bias at the networks. Today, cable news is a far worse offender when it comes to bias than the old networks. The networks had – and probably still do – have a liberal sensibility. Cable news blurs the line between news and commentary, which makes the problem of bias worse. I know next to nothing about David Muir.

Bernie, why aren't you guesting on Bill's new platform? Was it because you were still working for Fox? Will you now be on Bill's show? – Nicholas C.

I've been on a few times but as I told Bill, I don't like being a guest on his show to talk only about the media's biases. I think the president brings a lot of the bad press on himself – and while Bill lets me say whatever I want, I know that he's more interested in media bias than Trump chaos. So I've declined his invitation on more than one occasion. But he's asked if I'll go on his show next week. I'm thinking

about it.

As a long time viewer of FNC I have cut back on my program choices over the last few years. The only commentators I have confidence in now are Chris Wallace, Brett Baier and Harris Faulkner. I'm probably wrong but it seems to me the fair and balanced mantra departed about the time O'Reilly was fired. My question is why Juan Williams allows himself to be embarrassed by being constantly being shouted down by Watters and Gutfeld? When Beckel suffered the same treatment he would just mumble to himself and hang his head. Does Juan need the money that bad? – Lee

You're not wrong, Lee. Chris Wallace, Brett Baier and Harris Faulkner are worth watching. The other opinion people are in the tank for Donald Trump. No problem with them liking the president. But if you want real analysis, Fox prime time isn't the place to go. Neither, for the record, are CNN and MSNBC. As for Juan Williams: He's a good guy. A smart guy. A real journalist. He clearly knows his role as the lone liberal on the show – and very often the only smart one. Let's cut him some slack. We all have reasons for doing what we do, right?

Do journalists have leeway to push their own opinion and political agenda or are they under pressure to report within their network's ideology? – Mike S.

Journalists, Mike, if they're "hard news" reporters, shouldn't push any opinion or political agenda. Their role is to report the facts and keep their own views out of the story. Regarding commentators: Everyone who gives opinions on cable news shows know what their network's ideology is and conforms. (The old networks – ABC, CBS and NBC, for the most part, don't do entire shows based on opinion, which is not to say their journalists don't let bias slip into their stories from time to time.) To my knowledge, there are no memos, no smoking gun telling them what they're supposed to say. Everybody just

knows. If you're on prime time on Fox you don't spend your hour bashing Donald Trump and if you're on MSNBC or CNN you don't spend a lot of time praising him. I've said this before: The business model demands that you give the audience what it wants so that they'll come back for more. Do commentators have leeway to push their own opinion? Technically, yes. But in reality, everyone knows what's acceptable on their channel and what isn't.

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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