

What if Limbaugh or Rove Anchored Fox's Presidential Coverage



Let's imagine that Rush Limbaugh gives up his radio job and is hired by Fox News as a political commentator.

No problem here. Rush is a smart guy and his opinions would be interesting and provocative.

Now let's imagine that Roger Ailes, who runs Fox News, decides that since Rush is immensely popular with viewers he ought to move on to bigger things beyond simply giving his opinions. So Ailes makes Limbaugh the anchor of Fox's lucrative morning news show, and has him do political interviews, and moderate debates, and anchor the channel's Sunday news program.

Anything big and political goes to Limbaugh. And a presidential election is looming, so Rush is going to be pretty busy deciding all sorts of things, like what gets covered and what doesn't and how stories are played on TV.

And when liberals complain, as they surely would, Limbaugh defends himself, saying: "I'm not a radio talk show host anymore. That's what I used to be. Now, I'm a serious journalist who is no longer a partisan."

After they stop laughing, it comes out that Mr. Non Partisan Honest Journalist gave \$75,000 to a foundation run by the conservative Koch brothers – a contribution to help further good causes, of course.

Except, Rush never told Fox News about the contribution and he never shared the information with his viewers – even after he grilled the liberal author of a book that was critical of the Koch brother's foundation. In that interview, Rush claimed that the author, who had worked in politics, was a partisan. What Rush *didn't* point out was that in addition to the hefty contribution he was still serving on various Koch Foundation panels. Oh yeah, the wife of one of the Koch brothers was running for president.

Rush's boss, Fox News, says what he did was nothing more than an "honest mistake." He apologized, Fox explained, so let's move along, nothing to see here. And yes, Rush would still be heading up Fox's presidential campaign coverage despite the fact that he's close to Mrs. Koch, who's running for president.

That, of course, would not satisfy liberals who would be calling for Limbaugh's head on a platter. They would accuse Fox of crimes against humanity. They wouldn't be satisfied to simply point out that what Limbaugh did violated fundamental journalistic ethics. They'd question not only his contribution, but also his very role as a journalist. On being a pundit, they'd grudgingly say, OK; objective journalist, never.

But even if Rush really did undergo some major transformation since he left radio, and somehow, miraculously, got rid of every last drop of his partisanship, he'd still make us wonder: Could this man who bludgeoned liberals day in and day out in his past life, could he really be fair to politicians who hold views with which he with passionately disagrees?

Who knows? Maybe he could be fair. But perceptions matter. And liberals, understandably, would perceive Limbaugh to be – at some level – what he always was – a take-no-prisoners political warrior.



And that's just how many of us perceive George Stephanopoulos.

He would always be the guy who ran the "War Room" and who would throw his own grandmother under the bus if it would benefit his boss, Bill Clinton.

If you think the Limbaugh analogy is a bridge too far, then consider this instead: Would ABC News have hired Karl Rove – who also was a political warrior who helped elect a president two times – to be its chief political reporter? Would ABC News allow him to moderate presidential debates and give him the job of anchor on its politically oriented Sunday news show? Would ABC let him lead the network's presidential campaign coverage if he not only worked for President Bush, but also gave big money to the former president's foundation? *Would they allow it if Laura Bush was running for president?*



Of course ABC News wouldn't. But why not? Like Stephanopoulos, Rove is smart. He also understands the intricacies of politics at the highest levels. The only significant difference between the two is that one is liberal and the other is conservative.

Or to put it another way: At ABC News (and the other networks) one is trusted to play fair and the other isn't.

If you're a liberal in the mainstream media, you fit right in. You're considered reasonable and moderate. If you're a conservative you're viewed with suspicion. You're seen as anything but reasonable or moderate. And that – more than Stephanopoulos' ill-advised \$75,000 contribution – is the real problem.