Who Are the Liberal Media’s Respected Thinkers?

As a news junkie, I often find myself seeking out political discussions and debates on the various news networks. I like listening to the exchange of viewpoints and the impassioned sparring over serious topics from seasoned analysts. The roundtable and panel formats are my favorite. They’re much more interesting to me than the hyper-partisan, red meat shows that are designed more to fire up political bases than they are to enlighten anyone. I’ve already figured out through forty years of life lessons and experiences where I stand philosophically, thus I don’t need constant affirmation that my views are correct.

Still, I’m interested in what people on the other side of issues have to say, and I’m certainly open to being persuaded that I’m wrong. After all, I didn’t always support gay marriage. I wasn’t always against the death penalty. Some people might have even considered me to be a non-interventionist on foreign policy a long time ago. But with that open-mindedness has come a realization that I just can’t seem to escape: Liberals may largely control the media these days, but they’re nearly absent when it comes to serious, independent thinkers among their ranks.

I’m not saying that liberals in the media are dumb. Well, some of them certainly are, but that’s not the point I’m trying to make. I’m saying that there’s just not a whole lot of depth when it comes to the supposed liberal elite in the media. Frankly, it disappoints me. After all, I want fruitful, robust debate. I want to hear opposing, well-reasoned sides of various issues. I want liberal thinkers in the media to convince me that my stance on an issue is wrong by stating a compelling case for why they are right.
The problem is that I just can’t seem to find such people.

When I listen to the opinionated media voices on the left, I very rarely hear any thought-provoking wisdom. I very rarely hear the advancement of pragmatic ideas for bettering the country. What I consistently hear is shallow, knee-jerk reactionism and parroted DNC talking points. And I’m not just talking about the loons over at MSNBC. I’m also talking about the academics who’ve won major achievement awards for their work – aka the geniuses at the New York Times, Newsweek, and the rest.

A classic example of the left’s deficiency in the area of serious thought played out last Friday on PBS’s Inside Washington. The weekly panel of distinguished columnists and commentators were discussing the State of the Union address, and some of the initiatives President Obama introduced in the speech. When the topic of raising the minimum wage came up, regular panelist Mark Shields took a deep, pensive breath and made this professorial statement in support of Obama’s plan:

“If you can’t pay somebody nine dollars an hour, you probably shouldn’t be in business.”

Well there you have it… If you own a company that would have a hard time adjusting to a 20%, across-the-board hike of your employees’ salaries, you might as well just hang things up. You don’t deserve your shot at the American dream!

What a constructive prognosis for businesses in a struggling economy.

Just for clarification purposes, I think it’s important to mention that Mark Shields is, in fact, not an angry teenager living in his parents’ basement. He’s a well-educated man in his seventies who has had a long and impressive career in politics, teaching, and writing. Yet, he not only felt comfortable saying something like that, but his demeanor suggested that he thought he’d said something pretty darned
intellectual. The liberal panelist sitting next to him, NPR’s Nina Totenberg, certainly seemed to think so. She quickly voiced agreement with him.

Is this really what passes for profound, liberal wisdom these days? I fear it is.

Thankfully, fellow panelist Charles Krauthammer was there to broaden Shields’ horizons. “You talk about the economy as if it’s a moral instrument,” he said before explaining that in a country with a staggeringly high teenage unemployment rate, any additional costs thrown at business-hiring will only make the problem for minimum-wage earners worse.

I think liberals sometimes have some interesting points to make when it comes to social issues, but when the topic is the economy, federal spending, foreign policy, energy, or any other of the major challenges our country faces, it’s an entirely different story. There is an inexplicable, intellectual laziness on the left that seems to prevent these people from identifying the very real costs associated with any benefit. I realize this isn’t a groundbreaking observation. It’s just a scary one – especially when our top leaders in Washington seem to subscribe to the same mindset.

It’s hard to escape the notion that the country would benefit greatly from the influence of distinguished, independent thinkers in the liberal media who would actually challenge the shortsighted instincts and gross naivety of their ideological peers.

Forget the media’s problem with liberal bias for a minute... How about just a little bit of seriousness?

Now, I realize that there are several one-dimensional hacks in the conservative media as well, but there is also a surplus of brilliant, independent-minded voices from the right who seem to have no liberal counterparts.
Who are the Charles Krauthammers and the George Wills of the left? Who are the liberals who don’t cling to partisanship, but rather demonstrate a deep understanding of history and policies, and offer contemplative, pragmatic solutions to just about every issue?

Who are the Thomas Sowells of the left? Who are the respected, liberal economic thinkers? At this point, I can’t imagine even the most committed lefties daring to throw out a name like the New York Times’ Paul Krugman. That is, unless they think comic book ideas like creating trillion-dollar coins and faking alien invasions are the answers to our country’s economic problems.

For that matter, who are the liberals in the media who look at a $16.5 trillion national debt, and think our country might actually have a problem that warrants a serious solution — one that doesn’t include demagoguery and gimmick actions that serve no identifiable purpose? Where are their ideas? Surely there isn’t a litmus test for liberal thinkers that demands that they all subscribe to the idea that the welfare state must come at the cost of bankrupting the country.

Who are the Bernie Goldbergs of the left? Who are the honest media critics who place the integrity of their journalistic professions before their personal political views, and call out both sides of the ideological divide for their biases? We’re seeing one finally emerge in the form of Kirsten Powers, but in a trade dominated by liberals, where are all the others?

Even when you look at the people outside of the profession who become media darlings to their ideological cohorts for a few minutes of fame, there’s something fascinating to observe. On the right, those people are the Dr. Ben Carsons, who use their moment in the limelight to put forth productive, meaningful ideas on tax policy and healthcare. On the left, those people are the Sandra Flukes, who use their soapbox to insist that
others need to pay for their birth control pills.

Who are the independent-minded, persuaders on the left? Who are the thinkers? Perhaps those are the types of questions I should challenge the left-leaning readers of this column to answer. I’d really like to know who it is that you respect in the media, and who influences you.

And if you can’t think of any people that aren’t either comedians or professional demagogues, how can that not concern you?