

26 June 1993

David Von Drehle  
Reporter  
The Washington Post  
1150 15th St. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20071

Dear Mr. Von Drehle:

As a former reporter and editor, with 22 years of newspaper experience, I expect journalists to be cynical and even iconoclastic, but I also expect them to be fair and knowledgeable.

On yesterday's "Journalists' Roundtable" on C-SPAN, you repeated two often-heard and incorrect claims about Perot: that he has backed off from taxes and that he hasn't changed his economic plan in light of new budget figures.

Perot, like Rudman and Tsongas, believes that taxes need to be raised in order to eliminate the deficit, but he also believes that Washington needs to keep faith with a skeptical public, which was subjected to a phony deficit cut plan in 1990, and first reduce spending in real terms. Perot also has modified his program to keep pace with budget realities; his statements are not "out of whack."

If you don't believe me, why don't you call Dallas and ask for the United We Stand national newsletter, or get in touch with UWSA-Virginia and get its state newsletter?

You also said Perot's biggest advantage is his billions of dollars. Perhaps this is true, but if this is a crime, it is the news media's, not Perot's. If I, for instance, had the best economic plan that could be conceived and decided to run for president, the print and broadcast media wouldn't give me the time of day, because it is you and your news cronies who determine who are the "credible" candidates.

This brings me to your incredible statement that the media play no role in the political process. Have you ever heard of Rush Limbaugh, whose ideas are shared daily with, and believed by, millions of listeners? Have you ever heard of the AP, UPI and New York Times, whose story budgets are the Bible for hundreds of newspapers that can't afford to send correspondents to Washington? Have you ever heard of the Star magazine or the New York Post, which sidetrack the national debate with stories, true or false but always with 144-point headlines, about Gennifer Flowers or Jennifer Fitzgerald -- stories that then are picked up by "more responsible" news outlets? Have you ever heard of Katherine Graham and other media high-flyers who are wined and dined on a regular basis by the White House? Have you ever heard of image molders such as David Gergen, who, like a magician, can change Bill the Bum into Clinton the Conqueror before your very media

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eyes? Have you ever heard of instant revisionist history, courtesy of docudramas, flooding the airwaves? Have you ever heard of the use of prejudicial and pejorative terms such as Long Island Lolita, Slick Willy and Waco Wacko? Have you ever heard of "gotcha" journalism?

It used to be that a reader would find opinion confined to the editorial and op-ed pages. Now, more and more, propagandistic messages get on the regular news pages via "analysis" pieces. Incorrect statements are picked up whole cloth from earlier news clips. Semantic manipulation is becoming routine within regular news stories.

On the subject of "objectivity" or "fairness," I want to point out that in 1980, the Newspaper Guild, which represents unionized reporters and editors, endorsed Jimmy Carter for president, which hardly boded well for coverage in that election year.

I don't know how long you've been in the news business, but I worked long enough within the Fourth Estate to see many changes for the worse. Open your eyes, but believe only half of what you see; open your newspaper, but believe only a quarter of what you read.

Sincerely yours,

  
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cc. Brian Lamb, C-SPAN

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