

WJ
May 19, 1995

Dear Mr. Lamb,

This morning, I watched the viewer call-in show which featured Michael Tackett of the "Chicago Tribune" and Deborah Orin of the "N.Y. Times". During that program, a liberal woman caller who seemed a bit spacey complained that too many callers violated the 30-day rule against repeat calls. She implied a possible conspiracy of Republicans who might be prompted to make repeat calls by conservative radio talk show hosts. She suggested that the callers might even be "rewarded" in some unspecified way.

You obviously cannot control the opinions of callers, but in this instance you seemed to validate her views in your response. You expressed your frustration at the violation of the 30-day rule and urged her and callers of like mind to keep calling and complaining. You did not, however, refute the notion of a "conspiracy" among Republican callers. Your silence on the issue seemed to suggest agreement with her assertion that Republicans or conservatives were unfairly over-represented on C-SPAN call-in shows and that they were the principal culprits in violating the rule.

The woman caller offered no proof of a "conspiracy" among conservative callers. I know of none and as a regular listener of both Rush Limbaugh and Gordon Liddy, I have never heard either of those gentlemen suggest that their listeners call C-SPAN let alone offer rewards for calling. The woman caller who made that accusation was demonstrating a form of paranoia and in the current political climate in which paranoia is all too commonplace, I think that you should have dispelled her notion of a conspiracy.

As a C-SPAN viewer of many years, my subjective impression is exactly the opposite of that of the caller in question. When I began watching C-SPAN I had the impression that there seemed to be a greater ratio of conservative to liberal calls and that surprised me. One might attribute that perceived imbalance to a number of causes- perhaps there is a built-in bias in the fact that affluent homes are more likely to have cable TV, or perhaps conservatives were more frustrated and therefore more vocal than liberals. For the past year or more, however, I have noticed that there seem to be a greater number of liberal callers getting air time. I have wondered whether this was due to greater frustration on the part of liberals, or a change in C-SPAN's no-call-screening policy, or whether there is an orchestrated effort by liberals to make phone calls.

I also always believed that you were very fair and non-partisan in your conduct on the shows, but recently I've begun to see some signs of bias in your handling of the calls. The call claiming a conspiracy is an example of your seeming lean to the Left. Another example was an elderly woman who called some months ago with a snide comment about President Clinton which I found amusing. The comment was not especially vicious nor was it especially venomous in the context of the current climate. However, you turned to your

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guests, shook your head in seeming disgust, and asked, "Where does all the hate come from?"

Your editorial comment on that occasion implied that the woman's rather mild comments about the President were motivated by hate and that she was somehow discredited. I was rather surprised by your reaction because I have seen no similar comments condemning liberal Democrats for their continued harangues in congressional debate which are filled with vitriol and hyperbole. Watching the congressional debates on C-SPAN, I have seen one Democrat after another compare Newt Gingrich to Adolph Hitler and the Republican Congress to the Third Reich. There was constant talk about "starving" children. Rep. Lewis spoke of Republicans "coming for the children" and "coming for the elderly", implying that Republicans were going to abduct them and perhaps do away with them. Any notion of comity or of serious debate has been cast aside as Democrats have engaged in a blatant campaign of rhetorical overkill and outrageous hyperbole.

Forgive me if I have missed any comments that you have made censuring the Democrats for inflammatory rhetoric, but I have not heard you utter any words of dismay over the "hate speech" that is now so prevalent in the Congress.

Over the years that I have watched C-SPAN I have also noticed that you have been silent when liberal callers made cutting and often untrue remarks about Republicans and conservatives. In some cases, these remarks were obviously motivated by hate. An example of the kind unfair remark that Democrats often make is the remark by another woman caller on today's show who claimed that in WWII George Bush had bailed out of his burning plane without regard for the fate of the two crewmen who accompanied him. There was no good evidence for this accusation and yet you did not shake your head and inquire about the source of the hatred that inspired this caller to make that statement. If you are going to make editorial comments condemning callers, then at least you should be evenhanded.

If there has been an imbalance in the number of conservative callers who get air time on the call-in shows, that imbalance to some degree counters the imbalance of liberal journalists who appear on those shows. Perhaps the imbalance in the ratio of liberals to conservative accurately reflects the ratio in the press corps. However, I would like to see the conservative viewpoint represented more often on C-SPAN panel groups. Often, there is no journalist on the panel to give a conservative perspective on the issues at hand or to refute the unfair assertions of liberal callers. I hope that you will make a greater effort to achieve some semblance of balance on call-in shows.

I enjoy C-SPAN very much and believe that C-SPAN contributes greatly to the political dialogue of the country. However, I would like to see more balance.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
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