

Ms. Diane Rehm  
WAFU Radio  
The American University  
Washington, DC

7/2/94

Dear Ms. Rehm,

Thanks for your good oped piece in the post 6/30.

But I think you could have gone farther.

Clinton assured what has happened to him and the airing of those who amount to Amerinazis like Limbaugh by not restoring the Fairness Doctrine that was wiped out by those with much to hide and a preference for loudly irresponsible talk shows. Which they indeed did get.

So, why not start a clamor for its restoration? We surely need it!

What you said about talk shows summarized by "providing balance" is not, of course, limited to Limbaugh.

Take Washington Radio and TV and the subject that amounts, among other things, to a de facto coup d'etat and the government's so called investigations of it.

When the knowingly mistitled Case Closed appeared its author, who has trouble telling the truth <sup>was</sup> by accident, was aired extensively and repeatedly, with what he knew was disinformation. He knew his book was on its key points plagiarized, he knew it was dishonest, and it is the most intendedly dishonest book I recall, and he was confident, as was his publisher, that ~~no~~ talk-show host or reviewer would check it out.

Not one did. Jeffrey Frank's Post review was informed by George Hardner that Posner used the partisan work done for an ABA so-called educational presentation as his own and the review indicated that.

But other than that, not a single real criticism of the book or the shyster who wrote it in any article or review of which I know and as of today, I know of only a single <sup>DC</sup> talk show that aired any truthful account of his book and mine in response, which

has yet to be mentioned in print. WPFW aired me and mentioned my Case Open yesterday.

(I'm 81, unwell and cannot travel but I can and do use the phone, ~~but~~ not another station has expressed any interest except a small one in Oregon.)

Case Open has been out for two months. Not a peep from Posner, Random House or any lawyer speaking for either.

Or from a single reporter, a single reviewer, a single writer of oped articles, or a single talk-show host on his or her own.

There are always more issues than can be discussed and no talk show host or hostess can know who is responsible on any subject or who is not but there are few issues that get <sup>more</sup> to the guts of ~~the~~ representative society, its viability and to freedom than the assassination and what then and since then the government and the media did and did not do. So, when there is a solid book on these subjects, it is ignored. The problem is, I think, broader than you represent in that fine piece. Sincerely, Harold Weisberg

Harold Weisberg

*Diane Rehm*

## We Need a Truth Detector

Last Friday when I heard about Bill Clinton's burst of temper against Rush Limbaugh, Jerry Falwell and other conservative and religious broadcasters, my initial reaction was that the president had committed a blunder. As a talk show host and one who hears firsthand both defenders and detractors of the president and the First Lady, I can understand his frustration. But I thought the president could best slough off those attacks by refusing to respond directly and by concentrating on building a record of legislative accomplishment. Having heard the comments of listeners to my program Monday, I am now persuaded that someone had to take on the negativity and cynicism promoted by these broadcasters. Bill Clinton may have the most to gain or lose from speaking out. But all of us bear a responsibility.

I believe talk radio is an exciting opportunity for the expression of diverse ideas, an opportunity for listeners to offer their own and to question others. But left totally unchecked, without presentation of balanced views, it can mislead, misrepresent and misinform millions of talk show listeners who, increasingly, get a major portion of their operating information from such programs. Many listeners quote talk show hosts such as Limbaugh as having "the best information out there." If so, then we have a responsibility as listeners, as hosts, as members of the media and as citizens to challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations rather than to sit back, dismiss them as "humor" and watch the phenomenon undermine our political process.

So often I hear people refer to Rush Limbaugh as humorous, even entertaining. But his intentions are serious, and his impact is formidable. With it goes responsibility. Limbaugh's countdown on the Clinton presidency, his description of feminists as "feminazis," his anti-environmentalist skits (with "Born Free" blaring in the

background) bring guffaws. But quoting from a scurrilous newsletter that alleges presidential aide Vince Foster was murdered in an apartment owned by Mrs. Clinton, and that his body was transported to the site where police eventually discovered it, is far from humorous. To my knowledge, there's never been a retraction or correction from Rush on this.

Health care is an issue of paramount importance to the people and the president, with passionate views on all sides. Limbaugh's 20 million-plus listeners are entitled to something better than recent attacks on the president and Mrs. Clinton for their personal motivation. I've yet to hear anyone on that program who suggests that the president and his wife are honorably motivated and striving to achieve a fair health reform plan. The obvious question is whether the goal is an informative exchange on health reform or undermining a Democratic president. (It's worth noting that nine talk show hosts are currently running for political office.)

The president, in his remarks to St. Louis radio station KMOX, decried the fact that, once his remarks were finished, Rush would get on the air and would have three hours to say exactly what he wanted, with no rebuttal. "I won't have an opportunity to respond. And that's no truth detector."

But there is a need for a truth detector. Rush Limbaugh and any of us with access to the airwaves are free to paint the landscape in any way we choose, for hours at a time. Opposing views from guests and commentators can do part of the job of providing balance. Listeners challenge what they hear, if they're given a chance to get on the air. But they need the facts at their disposal. Without the facts, too often, allegations stand as truth.

Many listeners to my program also tune in to Rush Limbaugh. When I raised the issue Monday of the president's expression

of anger at Limbaugh and broadcasters of the religious right, one caller said the president was elevating Limbaugh. Another said she regarded Limbaugh's show as strictly humorous and entertaining. But others asked why the media aren't taking on the disinformation he puts out and challenging it. They ask why there isn't a "Limbaugh Watch" or a "Falwell Watch," with newspaper editors assigning a reporter to monitor each and every statement made by these and other influential hosts, as they do candidates during campaigns.

The press is a growing factor in our politics. We need to be at least as accountable as public figures whose fate we analyze and affect.

In my conversations with listeners over the past year, I hear their repeated frustrations that the president isn't being permitted to do his job. Many of them who voted for Clinton, and some who didn't, believed it was time for partisanship and gridlock to cease and cooperation to begin. In part because of cynicism fed by the press, including some radio talk hosts and television commentators, they believe that has not happened.

The president's statements last Friday, delivered in anger and frustration, may diminish him in the minds of some who fear that Mr. Clinton has descended to the broadcasters' level by responding to their attacks. The president's outburst has already provided more fodder for a Limbaugh diatribe. But the president stepped up to the plate and did what many of us in the media should have done a long time ago. He pointed to the negativity and cynicism. He took a stand. He challenges us to do the same.

*The writer is host of "The Diane Rehm Show" on local National Public Radio affiliate WAMU FM.*