There's hope for Fox News when its anchors hold Trump Administration officials accountable

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Dec. 21, 2018

Chris Wallace of Fox News Channel (Photo: Joe Raedle, Pool via AP)

As a scholar and teacher of rhetoric I understand that our ability to communicate in a civil manner depends on a shared commitment to truth and facts. In the absence of this, it is hard to imagine how rational and democratic deliberation can survive.
Sadly, in our current political climate, the all-too-often knee-jerk refrain about the media is that, instead of being the guardians of the truth, they have become disseminators of “fake news” and political bias. This should be worrisome to all of us, regardless of our political affiliation and ideology.

How refreshing it is, then, to witness rhetorically effective examples of journalism transcending such negative and frequently baseless stereotypes — giving us hope that this moment in history may be an aberration rather than a permanent shift in habits.

Allow me to offer two examples. I confess that both examples are particularly noteworthy for me since they come from a news organization I normally don’t watch or trust, and because they are atypical for that organization. However, as I remind students in my Argumentation and Advocacy class, we have a responsibility to listen to and try to understand the views expressed by those with whom we disagree.

**Example 1:** On Dec. 12, “Fox and Friends” interviewed Secretary of State Mike Pompeo about the attacks on Jamal Khashoggi and how the Trump Administration has not responded adequately and appropriately. Despite their usual tendency to let Trump Administration officials off the hook, giving them a platform to disseminate propaganda, Fox broadcasters behaved like professional journalists; in a nonpartisan manner they pushed Pompeo hard on the accuracy of his statements about whether the United States really is holding the Crown Prince accountable for his despicable actions.

I was delighted to see Fox hosts give Pompeo enough rope to reveal exactly how he may be undermining our country, our intelligence agencies, as well as severely destroying his own credibility as Secretary of State.

**Example 2:** On the Dec. 16 “Fox News Sunday,” Chris Wallace, who more often than not has sided with President Trump, behaved like a professional journalist rather than a Trump sycophant. Wallace astutely and meticulously interviewed Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani and held his feet to the fire on the question of whether the president lied about the two felonies for which the Court in the Southern District of New York has accused him of being an unindicted co-conspirator.

Giuliani’s attempt to answer follow-up questions appeared as a clear deflection — and Wallace correctly and pointedly observed that Giuliani was non-responsive, playing a shell game instead of directly answering questions. Isn’t this exactly what we expect journalists in a nonpartisan manner to do in their quest to unearth the truth and expose the facts?

Put simply, like Fox New anchor Shepard Smith who has a record of debunking Trump rhetoric, Fox and Friends and Chris Wallace exhibited a willingness to place journalistic principles above partisanship.

As a result, these examples underscore why in a polarized political environment the press is our nation’s best check and balance — and vehicle for preserving the rule of law. This is especially
true at a time when facts and truth have been severely and systematically undercut by the President of the United States.

These illustrations give me hope that objectivity and fairness can still be guiding principles for how we communicate with one another and how we adjudicate our differences.

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Richard Cherwitz (Photo: Special to the Register)