

Get Limbaugh

by Debra_J_Saunders

I have known Rush Limbaugh since his old radio days in Sacramento, before he became a GOP god. I've disagreed with him over the years. Last year I took on his bashing of Republican moderates and criticized Limbaugh and other talk-radio hosts when they were too harsh on not-yet GOP nominee John McCain. I've never apologized and we're still friends.

If you've watched cable news in the last week, you've seen how the Limbaugh story is playing. Limbaugh said he hopes Obama "fails." As he explained, "I've been listening to Barack Obama for a year and a half. I know what his politics are. I know what his plans are, as he has stated them. I don't want them to succeed. If I wanted Obama to succeed, I'd be happy the Republicans have laid down."

Because Limbaugh used the f-word, Good Republicans are supposed to distance themselves from him. Thus Republican National Committee chairman Michael Steele called Limbaugh "ugly" and "incendiary." Not a smart move. Later Steele called Limbaugh to apologize "adding a new twist to a story concocted by Democrats."

As Politico.com reported last week, Demo gurus James Carville and Stan Greenberg first concocted the idea of making Limbaugh the GOP albatross last year after a poll showed that among younger voters Limbaugh's ratings were in the toilet. White House adviser David Axelrod and Press Secretary Robert Gibbs joined in the get-Limbaugh gambit, while White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel called Limbaugh "the voice and the intellectual force and energy behind the Republican party" on CBS' "Face the Nation."

The Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee jumped into the act and sent out an e-mail instructing recipients to send an "urgent call" for GOP senators "to denounce (t)his shameful rhetoric." Key to the strategy are gullible partisans who fall for the phony umbrage of cynical operatives. Tens of thousands of outraged sheep "I mean, concerned individuals" have signed on, according to the DSCC.

"Shameful rhetoric?" Sorry, but the only thing that would make these operatives more gleeful would be if GOP leaders were caught in hotel rooms with hookers. This whole brouhaha is designed to get Republicans to snipe at each other and, perhaps more important, to distract voters from what is happening to their 401(k)s after Democrats have thrown an extra trillion dollars at the economy.

"It's incredibly cynical," former McCain adviser Nicolle Wallace wrote in The Daily Beast. "It assumes that voters are too stupid to know the difference between a talk-radio host and a party's elected leaders."

This week, former Bush speechwriter David Frum foolishly bit. "Limbaugh is kryptonite, weakening the

GOP nationally," Frum wrote in a Newsweek cover piece, "Why Rush is Wrong." Frum concluded that while he probably agreed with Limbaugh on most ideological matters, "the issues on which we do disagree are maybe the most important to the future of the conservative movement and the Republican Party: Should conservatives be trying to provoke or persuade? To narrow our coalition or enlarge it? To enflame or govern?"

Of course, the answer is: both. Yes, political parties need to reach beyond their ranks, but you don't win with an alienated base. Witness the Clinton-distancing Al Gore and the pro-Iraq-war voting John Kerry. Witness my guy, John McCain.

And you don't win without people who charge up the base. That's what Limbaugh does better than anyone. (And I say that as a "mushy" moderate conservative.)

While many think Limbaugh is enjoying the Obama-supplied spotlight, he was pretty steamed in e-mails to me. Divided government, he wrote, "is designed to ensure that the president fails when he is wrong. The framers wanted the country to succeed; if they wanted the president to succeed, they would not have saddled him with Congress, courts, a free press, and elections every four years."

"I can think of no pursuit more childish than an Oval-Office-initiated food fight with a talk-radio host," Wallace wrote. Apparently Team Obama sees the Limbaugh feud as an effective use of its time.
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