

No More Chris Wallaces! Republican National Committee Should Upend Nature of Political Debates



by Roger L. Simon

Presidential aspirant Vivek Ramaswamy on March 8 tweeted the following:

“I’m calling on @GOPChairwoman and @GOP to *immediately* announce the debate stage criteria. Don’t hide the ball. Don’t do what @DNC tried to do to @BernieSanders in 2015. I’m starting to learn how corrupt the process is & I won’t play along.”

Fighting words! On the face of it, Ramaswamy is just trying to call attention to his long-shot, although intriguing,

candidacy. Normal behavior in such a situation.

But beneath the surface, there is a truth many of us realize—the level of American political debate is downright atrocious, not to mention the candor. We're a long way from Lincoln–Douglas.

Need I cite once again the hideous meddling of Candy Crowley in Barack Obama versus Mitt Romney or, worst of all, Chris Wallace ruling out any discussion of the Hunter Biden laptop during Donald Trump's debate with Joe Biden?

Given what we have learned since, and Wallace doubtless knew at the time (who didn't really?), the latter could be an all-time record in journalistic malfeasance.

I'll get back to the general election presidential debates but regarding the primaries, to which Ramaswamy was obviously referring, and although the first Republican one doesn't take place until August, it still behooves @GOPChairwoman (aka Ronna McDaniel) to keep the decision-making process on those criteria as transparent and timely as possible.

Even though McDaniel was reelected chair by a substantial margin, she presided over a string of Republican losses. As they say, the whole world (meaning, in this case, mostly the Republican world) is watching. She is, in essence, on probation. Too many already think the Republican National Committee (RNC) is a club for insiders to get free trips to expensive hotels they could largely afford to pay for themselves anyway.

The one thing, if I can speak for others, that what we don't want is what Vivek describes as "hide[ing] the ball." The rules of the game—who can be on that debate stage—must be made clear considerably in advance so the various contestants can plan accordingly, not just for Ramaswamy, but also for other candidates such as Nikki Haley and those yet to declare.

Shifting the rules obviously distorts the contest. If, say, the candidate needs more than 10 percent in a polling average to appear, Trump and DeSantis, as of now, would have the floor to themselves. If it were 5 percent, we might have double or triple that number. And so forth.

But it's not only those criteria that interest me. Equally important is who gets to ask the questions. It's that old Chris Wallace thing again.

Isn't it time to say goodbye to the mainstream or legacy media, whatever you want to call them? That goes for Fox as well. It even goes for so-called alternative media. I say this although I started one.

Journalists of all stripes, but political journalists especially, however they might hide it—some well, others not so much—are among the most biased people around. They came to the occupation because they were obsessed with the subject, and wanted to change the world with their writing. Whether for good or ill doesn't matter for this discussion. In the end, they're biased.

Some readers will recall *The Epoch Times*, in conjunction with the Nashville Republican Women, last year tried a different approach for a Republican primary debate in Tennessee's 5th Congressional District.

Instead of those traditional journalists, we had subject matter domain experts such as Gordon Chang on China and Jeffrey Tucker on the economy, asking questions in various areas.

The problem was, of course, that these experts would have their biases as well, and we gave that considerable thought. But we hoped that the experts would have enough allegiance to the truth of their specialties to override potential bias.

The debate, which was a first-time experiment, had its

problems, but I am happy to report, and others corroborated, that the experts did an excellent job of eliciting truly substantive viewpoints (unique, these days, in U.S. political debate) and therefore actually informing voters in that election.

The extent that this can be done, and improved upon, in a national election isn't clear, but without some attempt to reform these debates, what we will be getting is the same old, same old.

Debates, in the end, won't be about ideas that might govern the country but about catchphrases that make good sound bites. ("I knew Jack Kennedy. And you, sir, are no Jack Kennedy!")

I would imagine, McDaniel and Co., were they reading this, would be thinking: *Yes, yes, blah-blah-blah. ... But Bret or Hannity should still host the primaries. ... They bring audience.*

No doubt that's what they once thought about Wallace.

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