

Trump and Tucker Gang Up on Fox News



by Roger L. Simon

The big buzz on X (né Twitter) on the evening of Aug. 18—other than complaints that Elon Musk’s newly appointed CEO is taking the site back to square one in free speech suppression—and elsewhere in the media, for that matter, is that Tucker Carlson will be interviewing Donald Trump at the very time that Fox News is broadcasting the first Republican debate.

This is bad news for Fox and the Republican National Committee. The combination of Mr. Carlson and President Trump, both massive celebrities, could well, to use the now-old expression, “break the internet.”

Beyond the network and the RNC, the big losers in this will be

the other candidates, however they're ultimately configured.

This may be especially disappointing to the surging (compared to the others anyway) Vivek Ramaswamy, who has been counting on his considerable verbal skills to outdistance the field. It's also ironic since Mr. Carlson's hour-long interview with Mr. Ramaswamy, promulgated on X earlier the same day, was extremely favorable to the entrepreneur and came close to seeming like an endorsement.

Among those also taking a hit will be Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, whose well-heeled campaign has been under assault for not living up to expectations. This would have been a chance for revival, with or without President Trump present.

Those on the stage will undoubtedly devote a good deal of their time dissing the 45th president, complaining about his absence, calling him a coward for not debating, and so forth, but this may backfire, sending their viewers over to X to see what President Trump and Mr. Carlson are doing.

This will not only pit Trump against the rest of the field, a contest in which he has been ahead by some 40 points for virtually the entire period, but it'll pit Mr. Carlson against Bret Baier and Martha MacCallum, the Fox team, a competition that was decided in a landslide long ago.

What's perhaps most interesting, however, about what has transpired is that it was entirely predictable. Where else would President Trump go the evening of the Fox debate than to the man who had been fired by the network, even though he was by far its most popular host? And who would Mr. Carlson rather have as his guest than President Trump?

One wonders to the degree Fox and the RNC knew this in advance. They should have.

Some internet carpers are bewildered that President Trump would go on Mr. Carlson's show when Mr. Carlson said several

nasty things about President Trump a few years ago. But those carpers are exhibiting a lack of understanding of the two men who are sophisticated enough to understand how things change under time and circumstance.

Besides, they both despise Fox, and for good reason.

President Trump's justifiable disdain goes back to the debates of 2020 when Chris Wallace (then of Fox, now of obscurity) bent wildly for Joe Biden and disallowed President Trump's questions about the Hunter Biden laptop. Given what we know today and are learning more about almost daily, that's arguably the most extreme and pernicious bias by a debate host ever. It could well have thrown the election by itself.

Not that the current hosts, Baier et al., have been particularly friendly to President Trump either—in fact, often the reverse. That would give him little confidence that he would be treated equally with the other candidates, even after the Wallace debacle, after which, to my knowledge, the network made no formal apology.

Further, the RNC has instituted a “loyalty pledge” in order to appear at the debate. If I were Trump, I would find that almost impossible to do given the presence of Chris Christie, who seems to spend somewhere between 18 and 20 hours per day bashing President Trump on any camera or microphone he can find. In the (okay, highly unlikely) event that the former New Jersey governor were to be nominated, this would put President Trump in an untenable position. The RNC probably should have thought about that. In any case, loyalty is only really loyalty when given freely.

As for Mr. Carlson, although by far the star of the network, he was fired by Fox peremptorily—literally with no warning—for no apparent reason. There are many theories about this, some possibly with justification. But I think it's something deeper. He had become bigger than the company and the real

executive class—Murdoch, BlackRock, and so forth—couldn't stand it, particularly since he was having a genuine impact on the public.

We'll see what happens when Mr. Carlson starts a media company of his own, as is rumored.

As for what will happen out of all this brouhaha, it'll be fun for media pundits and that part of the public that are political junkies, but I suspect, even a few months from now, it, though not "told by an idiot," as Shakespeare's Macbeth would have it, will be a lot of "sound and fury signifying nothing."

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