

## Informed & Engaged Ep 11

[00:01:11] Hi, everyone. Welcome to the 11th edition of Informed & Engaged today. I am absolutely thrilled to have Brian Stelter join us. Brian Stelter, as many of you know, is the chief media correspondent for CNN Worldwide. He's the host of Sunday's Reliable Sources and he is the author with a wonderful team of the most reliable newsletter, daily newsletter for anyone in the media business or anyone who cares about the impact of media on our democracy. Welcome, Brian. Thank you for joining us.

[00:01:51] Thank you for the plugs. Thank you for reading the newsletter.

[00:01:55] Hey, hey. It is a must read. It must be with great links with really terrific links. Because what you do in the newsletter is you really help steer and direct your users to really important, not just your reporting, but other very important reporting taking place across the media landscape. So today, Brian, we're really thrilled to talk about your new book, Hoax.

[00:02:25] And you wrote a book that The New York Times where full disclosure, Brian and I both worked together at The New York Times. In fact, we sat next to each other over a period of time at The New York Times.

[00:02:43] So in The New York Times book review, it was described as this book provides a thorough and damning exploration of the incestuous relationship with Donald Trump and his favorite television channel, Fox News. So the author, the title of the book Hoax Donald Trump and Fox News and the Dangerous Distortions of the Truth is based on three years of reporting and interviews with more than 250 former Fox staff members and current Fox staff members.

[00:03:22] And Brian, tell us, why did you write this book? Why did you feel compelled to write this story?

[00:03:29] Well, there's two big reasons. The first is that nobody else has put together all the examples of the Fox Trump feedback loop. I've been covering it. Others have been covering this phenomenon. It's nothing we've ever seen before in modern media where there's such a revolving door and such a feedback loop between a president and as his preferred network. So I wanted to put all in one place for history. But the more urgent reason, the more urgent feeling I had was there were all these sources of Fox who were spilling their guts out to me, telling me the place had changed so much. Told me they were so concerned about the amount of pro Trump propaganda and misinformation that was on the air. And so, you know, they were leaking to me. I think they were linking to me, Jennifer, because I work in TV now. So I understand the business in a way that other reporters maybe don't. I don't know. But that was one of the reasons sources were citing were, you know, Brian, you're on to you get it. You know what we're going through. And so even though I work for a rival of Fox, people were willing to confide in me there. And I thought, this is the untold story of Fox and the Trump years. It's not all, you know, Sean Hannity up there making tens of millions of dollars, you know, spreading it raised with the president. It's also about the journalists and the assistance and the producers who are really disappointed in what the channel's become. So that's really what drove me to want to write this right now.

[00:04:54] Because one of the things that you talk about in your book is that you felt it's very important as a citizen and as a journalist and as an advocate for truth and factual information.

[00:05:08] And in the book, you trace the beginning of President Trump's relationship with Fox News dating back to 2012. So how did that get started and how did that help contribute to Donald Trump becoming a candidate?

[00:05:24] Yeah, I didn't take this seriously enough. Back in 2012, doesn't 13 isn't 14, but most CNN 2015 before Trump entered the race. What Donald was doing, he was calling into Fox and Friends every week, every week, once a week, like usually on Monday morning, sometimes Thursday morning. He was doing these weekly chats with Fox and Friends. And look, I wrote a book about morning TV. So I know morning TV is really powerful. That connection viewers feel to morning TV is really powerful. So as much as The Apprentice helped introduce Trump to the country and portray him as a business man and effective businessman, what Fox and Friends did was it taught him about politics and it taught the Fox viewers about Trump. So it was, I think, just as important as The Apprentice in the foundation of Trump's political launch. Then in 2015, of course, he launches his campaign. He stops calling in once a week. But the truth is, he was calling in even more often because they were interviewing him as a candidate. And he had all those relationships at Fox thanks to his phone calls. So I think that was the foundation that was underappreciated when it comes to Trump as a candidate, because think about it like every week he was talking to the GOP voters, be a fox. Every week he was getting to know them. He was getting to know their priorities. And I think in many ways it was a political education for Trump.

[00:06:47] So you, of course, describe in the book the very special relationship that Sean Hannity, Fox News anchor, has with the anchor of his own show. I bet he has with the president. But I must say, until I read the book, I didn't really fully understand how close their relationship is harmful and how at times it's actually, as your book reports, Sean Hannity sharing misinformation and disinformation with President Trump and President Trump sharing that on Twitter or the feedback loop back on on on FOX. So just tell us a little bit more about that relationship and how is it evolved over the presidency?

[00:07:41] Right. I think Ukraine is a great example. The scheme that led to Trump's impeachment can be traced right back to Hannity show in 2017 and then in early twenty nineteen. And so I string that throughout the book because one of my arguments when my core argument is that when these stars on Fox are trying to help Trump, they end up hurting him. They end up misleading him, end up sending him down one way roads, which gets lost or stuck with conspiracy theories and culture war fights. And Hannity is an interesting example of this and this evolution, because before Trump came along, Hannity, so it was getting kind of stale. He was always like second or third banana, big time. Bill O'Reilly, Megan Kelly. You know, his stick was getting old. And then comes Trump. So he gets on the Trump train very early and starts to call himself a journalist. You know, this is a guy who always says journalism is dead, which is crazy. But then he started to call himself a journalist. He says, I'm an activist journalist. I'm an opinion journalist. Well. There's a lot of room for a lot of opinion journalism, and I'm a fan of a lot of it. But what he is doing is not journalistic sound. He doesn't have editors. He doesn't have fact. He doesn't have checks and balances. He doesn't have standards and practices. He doesn't have accountability when he screws up. So he's not functioning in that capacity. But his show looks like nightly news for Trump all. I mean, he even has those graphics over his shoulder

that look like he's Lester Holt or Norah O'Donnell, even though he's definitely not. So I think what he's done he is he has taken a part of the country segment of them off from traditional news, and he's put them into Hannity work in the Trump world and Hannity world. And it's been very effective. But like I said, it also hurts Trump. You know, Hannity is on there saying you're trying to distract from the Russia probe, trying to distract from Russia's attack on the elections by saying, well, Ukraine did it to Ukraine, did it to Ukraine, tried to meddle, know. And that gets in Trump's head. It creates an anti Ukraine narrative. You can trace a lot of the breadcrumbs of the Ukraine scheme back to these TV shows. And that's why these TV shows matter now, because they are informing or misinforming the president. You know, I think, you know, for all of us, you know, who love the Knight Foundation, you all stand up for quality journalism, for quality and media, for accountability, for standards, for all these things that are missing from talk shows like candidates.

[00:10:10] So the most recent example, of course, is the pandemic and how and you've documented that in the very opening of your book. And I thought it was so interesting how you reported that, that Suzanne Scott, CEO for FOX, just stop. Said no more denials. Yes, here.

[00:10:35] Friday the 13th. Let's go back to March. OK. February, March, when I reproduce the timeline of Fox and Trump's rhetoric about the pandemic. It was even worse than I thought. There were moments in January where he was asked about the pandemic by Fox. There were moments in February where there were commentators and doctors taking seriously. But there was way too much denialism downplaying of the disease. People comparing it to the flu on Fox. And this was even in early March. I mean, this was up until Friday the 13th, March 13th. That's when both Fox and Trump took a U-turn. Lindsey Graham is on the record saying he thinks that's the Trump took the virus more seriously. What do you think? It's a coincidence that's the Dave Fox all of a sudden got a lot more serious? I don't think so. I think these two entities moved in concert, Trump and Fox. So Friday the 13th, which, you know, by then New York City started to shut down. We can feel we will grind to a halt. You know, the sports leagues, the Broadway theaters, everything's already stopped by Friday the 13th. Fox News CEO Suzanne Scott calls the bruises of Fox and friends in their office shots, shots to the proverbial door and says, you know what, you all we're doing this morning was irresponsible. You cannot have Jerry Falwell junior on the air with conspiracy theories. You can't have Ainsley Everheart saying it's a great time to fly. We're not allowing you guys to fly. We're not allowing our staff to fly. So she can't be on the air like the air promoting air travel. So basically what she said that day was no more of this stuff was B.S. From now on, you're going to have a doctor on your show every day. She was taking really smart steps. The problem is it was two or three weeks too late. You know, the problem with all of these reactions was it was two or three weeks too late, just like the president was two or three weeks too late. This virus was silently getting thousands of people sick all across New York City. And finally, folks are taking more seriously. But after that, the damage had been done. Sorry for the long answer, but I'm fired up about this. This is why the book is called Hoax is because, you know, the pandemic is proof of why cable news can have really serious consequences.

[00:12:43] So, of course, you report how Fox News is, like many cable television channels, is driven by ratings and ratings drive revenue. And so what's different about what Fox is doing to present a catered, tailored content to a partisan audience? How is it different than what we're seeing on MSNBC? And some would say CNN, yes. Yes. CNN and CNN chief media correspondent of CNN.

[00:13:22] I think the difference at FOX is that there is more of an obsession with the ratings. There is more of a culture that's profit oriented. And I think I think I know why. I think you go back to 2001, doesn't to Fox News started to beat CNN in the ratings. And this was, of course, Roger Ailes is goal. For years now, they've been winning for 18 years. I say winning like Trump or, you know, like this focus on winning. They've been winning in the ratings race for so long, they can't afford to stop there. There's there's a real fear about letting the ratings slip. They want to keep the letter with the audience once. And in my interviews with sources there, it just seemed to me there was much more of an obsession with ratings than I've ever experienced at CNN. Obviously, I care about ratings because I want everybody to watch me. Right. Of course. I mean, although my ratings but there's not that same level of intensity and devotion to the ratings that I found at Fox. You know, for example, about, you know, booking does enter. Napolitano is a great legal analyst, a fox who also is sometimes very critical of Trump and calls out Trump's conduct and shows don't want to book him because he'll turn off the viewers. The viewers turn the channel or turn off the channel. I know as a host to CNN, we don't make decisions that way. In fact, if I have a Trump supporter on like ten hours, a Trump aide, or if I have, you know, the ultimate Trump critic, we're not thinking about the ratings game in that same way. So I think that's the difference at Fox. It's also so profitable for there's such a focus on keeping it that way. And that, I think, is what's caused this process of more and more extreme content on the air.

[00:15:09] And, you know, Brian, so much a.

[00:15:13] Cable TV news, like with MSNBC, they're also catering to a partisan audience and we just said the same thing with, you know, part of CNN. So style. So it's business. It's business, too.

[00:15:30] One of the other differences, I think, with other differences on MSNBC is biggest stars. Rachel Maddow and Rachel often times promote local newspapers. She'll show front pages of local papers. She'll tell her viewers to subscribe to local news. What you hear on Fox is the opposite. You hear the failing New York Times is a lie. You hear these attacks against the media every day. So instead of encouraging people to have a healthy, balanced news diet with vegetables and steak or whatever. What would Fox do saying is don't trust anything else but us? Well, that's a highly cynical strategy. What they're saying is everything could be a hoax. It's the same rhetoric from the president. And I think that's damaging. I think that's one of the reasons why FOX is different than MSNBC. It's much more intense. The message is much more intense and much more like us against the world.

[00:16:20] And so recently, Knight Foundation, with Gallup released its most is a new survey and Americans on both sides. The survey found see increasing biased media. And not surprisingly, given the strategic battering of the traditional news in terms of battering, Seventy five percent of Republicans have an unfavorable view of the media. And sixty one percent of Republicans say the attacks on the media are fair. On the Democratic side, you know, it's quite, quite the opposite. Twenty two percent have an unfavorable view. And most people do not think that that the that the battering, the strategic battering is is is fair. So so that's where we are now in America. We are so polarized. How do we get anybody to listen to anything when or views that do not represent their own? When when? That's the view of the traditional news media and by 75 percent of Republicans. Right.

[00:17:44] Right. I do think this is about changing hearts and minds one on one, one at a time, which is not necessarily scalable and not necessarily a very satisfying answer and not a full answer to the problem. But I do know that the more I can relate to the audience one on one, the more I'm once in a while, I'll try to engage with the so-called trolls and show them I'm a real human being and show them that I'm not just a, you know, made up CNN anchor. I do think it has an impact on the edges, at least on the margins. I'm not claiming that they use everything. But, you know, for this book, for example, I asked Fox, I said I'd love to have Sean Hannity on my show and I'm willing to go over on his show. You don't do that in television anymore. Yeah. Apparently, he didn't want to do it because there was no follow up. But the offer still stands. I think we're going to need more of that, not less of that. Not because we're gonna agree on everything, but because we can show we're human beings. We can have a conversation. But I do think around the edges showing that we're real human being in our process, showing our work, showing the attempts to get it right does count for something. Not with everybody, but I do the accounts with some people. I got this great e-mail yesterday from a producer of Fox who said he doesn't think he shares my politics. He thinks he's a very good guy. I'm not sure what where he stands, but he thinks we're very different. But he said, I read your book and I liked it a lot. And I came away thinking, you kind of understood our place really well. You got to the heart of what Fox is. And I like that feedback because I want whether he thinks he and I have different politics. The point is about reporting. Can we get. Can we get the reporting accurate and get to the truth and then we can fight about politics? Well, I'd like to think that if we can have more reporting, that can get us directionally toward what you're talking about. But I know that's not a very it's not a great answer. Right, because it doesn't it's not a full solution.

[00:19:46] Well, it's some building trust. It's one way to build trust. The survey found was to really focus on, you know, just what you said, what people do want, and they do want accurate news and information. There is widespread agreement about accurate news and information, which is our North Star, certainly at Knight Foundation.

[00:20:13] Go past political news when we get out of the political noise, what we see is that people are hungry for news. They want to know what's going on. And when there's an emergency in their town, when there's severe weather or a disaster or something scary or something wonderful, that happens, like there's really bad news or really good news. People do come to trusted old fashion brands because they know where that were the were the most likely ones to get it right. It's just the political noise is so nasty, you know, so hateful that I think it drowns out almost everything else. I loved it in the nine Gallup study, the findings about news overload, because I think that is so real and under under appreciated the people that a lot of people just tune it out because they're overwhelmed. There's too much news that comes out them too quickly. It's overwhelming. I think that's a real issue for this business. But I also think it's solvable. You know, there's ways to design new products and solutions and apps and, you know, ways to help with the news overload problem, too.

[00:21:10] Well, I'll share with you the way that I now deal with the news overlooked. I get the blue bag in the driveway in the morning, and that is my app. The printed version of The New York Times. And I find during this covered 19 pandemic how much I enjoy network news. I love the network news show. I love those summaries.

[00:21:37] Well, CBS, ABC, NBC, CBS. What's your back?

[00:21:40] I flip back and forth. I oh my goodness. Can I admit this? I guess so. Between Lester and Nora. And I'm a major, major Gayle King fan. I loved CBS Morning News.

[00:21:59] Ten years ago when we were serving Jerry and office of The New York Times.

[00:22:03] But if we if we had said, you know, how many people to be walked to the nightly news in twenty, I would have said, well, the CBS show will be canceled. And the NBC Soby announced last life. But, you know, these shows are still doing so well. ABC World News Tonight is Moate is usually the number one show in the country beating all the entertainment stuff that's on TV. You're talking about twenty five million people. These shows together are reaching. That's an amazing thing. It was to remind us that as much as digital is upending everything, these mainline brands that have been around for decades, they've got some staying power.

[00:22:41] Well, the other thing I wanted to mention is, of course, your first book, Top of the Morning, Inspired, inspired the morning show, which had a lot to do with Apple's subscription starring Reese Witherspoon and Jennifer Aniston. And for anyone who really wants to peek inside the morning show business, it is a terrific, terrific read. Thank you. But, you know, getting back to to polarization and the spread of misinformation and disinformation and in the book, it's know very well reported and how that is happening on Fox.

[00:23:27] But let's talk a little bit about how that is happening on social and online and just the impact as I yesterday and Reliable Sources, you had Kevin Reese, you know, talking about Facebook.

[00:23:42] So so based on your work, are you seeing. Do you see Fox for D.C., Facebook or or that Twitter as being the major forces behind the spread of misinformation or disinformation or YouTube?

[00:24:03] Everyone seems to always exclude YouTube, which, of course, has been a home for major conspiracy theories for years.

[00:24:13] Yeah. Look, I. I would start by saying people are watching this, some of them on Twitter, Periscope or on Facebook. You know, these platforms have provided immense opportunities and I never want to discount that. I don't think I'd be where I am today at CNN writing books, if not for Twitter, giving me a chance to connect people around the world and break lots of stories and get to know people. So I always want to just acknowledge that upfront.

[00:24:43] But that said, you know, these sites have giant sewers, massive sewers and Twitter, Facebook and talk all day about how hard they are to clean up.

[00:24:56] And I get that it's very hard to clean up the wasteland that is on these social media sites. But it is their responsibility. That is their platform. And I do think it's very discouraging to see, you know, all these recent examples this summer of pandemic misinformation that doesn't get stomped out on Twitter or Facebook until the fire is already raging. You know, I guess don't mix my metaphors, but that, yes, they have a fire department. Yes, they show up, but it takes them so long sometimes detect the smoke or the fire. And that's baffling to me as a user, as someone who's on these platforms and frankly, creating lots of content for the platforms, like we're all, of course, feeding them all

the time. So what do we do in that environment? You know, what do we do in that situation?

[00:25:46] No one's withholding their content. I know that almost No. Almost nobody is leaving the platforms.

[00:25:52] Well, of course, there's lots of robust debate now about Section 230 and which allows platforms not to be responsible for the content published there in the same way that publishers are responsible. And then the value and importance of reporting like to hold the platforms to account.

[00:26:20] I mean, just what you shared over the weekend on your show, just about what was allowed like with the fact checkers.

[00:26:31] Right. Just like out loud how much, you know, like obvious, like obvious, obvious conspiracy theory videos to just stop to just continue to really gerardus to the sites that we've been playing to generate.

[00:26:49] The part of this is also really is about human nature. And I never want to forget that. Why is it that there's a meme of me claiming I was on Jeffrey Epstein's plane, like, that's insane. But why does that mean why does someone hate so much? Why does someone feel so isolated and alienated from society that they're going around posting lies like that? That's that's not entirely Facebook fault. It's partly Facebook fourpence entirely. What I wish Twitter and Facebook would do is win that why of an image start spreading to something, you know, acknowledge that it's crazy, but it's not entirely their responsibility. What I think we need a lot more of, Jennifer, is proportionality. We need to have a sense of proportion and perspective when it comes to where we are all consuming on these platforms. Because when I look at my feed, sometimes I look at the red, my red feed, my kind of right wing view of the world. It's terrifying. It seems like there's mobs on every corner and riots on every street. And obviously, there's always some you know, New York has some real problems, but let's not exaggerate them. Portland has some real problems, but let's not exaggerate them. There's a lot of exaggeration and hyper partizanship going on. And what we all need are those journalistic fundamentals that we learned in school that I wish everyone else would be able to learn about proportionality and perspective.

[00:28:07] Well, I think also there's a huge opportunity for Facebook and Google have done some, but to really help support an increase in the quality of accurate news and information. And we know and we've had so many conversations about the impact of the consumer changing behavior on the traditional business model, especially for local newspapers. And so, so much has been lost in terms of local news, original reporting sources like what else can be done to improve it. And that, of course, is is is work that we're supporting here at Knight Foundation. So I want everyone to know you are welcome to jump into the conversation.

[00:28:53] You can add your questions, too, to the chat. We also use the hashtag at Night Live. You can share your questions on Twitter. And for anyone who's worried that they might miss a moment of this call, no worries at all, because we are recording it and we will share the video for you to peruse at your leisure. So let's just let's just jump to the questions, pry into some of the questions. Wow. OK. Because they are pouring in. All right. So. So would you consider this is from Kimberly Bliss when you consider the ability of Fox to convince people of that false reality? Mm hmm. Similar to how cult leaders control the

minds of their subjects. And if so, how is that being accomplished with so many people in our country? And I have a follow up question to that.

[00:29:59] One of those provocative words, the. Yes. Yes. Yesterday, I talked about fascism on reliables or. Yes. Yes. We'll talk about authoritarianism. Yes. But I didn't used to cover during those years. Let's let's put it that way. I'll tell you what's interesting when it comes to reporting from my Coke's.

[00:30:22] I know I've been covering Fox 16 years. I was thinking about this book for at least, you know, three those years. Definitely the last two years I was taking notes and purpose. The word cult didn't start to come up toward the end of my reporting. And I think that's because there is this growing sense inside Fox that the place some viewers have become more radicalized. You don't want to say everybody, you don't want to paint with a broad brush. You want to have a really fine, delicate brush for these conversations. But there has been a process of radicalization. And toward the end of my reporting, some staffers did talk about feeling like there's something cultlike about the network in the same way that we're hearing those warnings about Trump and some of his supporters, again, not all of it supporters. But, you know, I think you've got psychologists and others who have said there's something called like about some of his support. Now, I'm sure Trump would say there's something cult like about Obama, too. These words get thrown around in every direction. But I don't think it merits study. It merits honest conversation because, you know, I interviewed folks for the book, commentators, guests, host on the show. They would get off the air. Then they would look at their phone and they'd look at their Twitter mentions and they would just be stunned by how vitriolic and hateful the replies were. And again, not entirely Fox. Is Balton on Telic Twitter's fault. But there's something real going on there, and it doesn't seem to be getting better in terms if you look at last night because the Trump era. I don't think we're moving in the right direction in terms of that amount of vitriol, that kind of venom out there.

[00:31:56] Well, just a twist on that follow up question to that is, why are people watching Fox? Clearly, clearly FOX is is addressing concerns and issues. They're not CNN. They're not watching MSNBC. So so I do worry, as is Ben Bradlee. Junior reported in his book The Forgotten, which looked at a county in northeastern Pennsylvania that he voted for Obama in 2008 and then and and four years later and then voted for Donald Trump in 2016.

[00:32:36] And he did this really, you know, good reporting job listening to why so many people voted for Donald Trump. So what is it that the CNN mainstream media is missing is not delivering?

[00:32:56] Well, I tried to say early on in the book to call Fox News a cable channel misses it. It's so much more than a channel. It's almost a way of life. It's a community. It is a family. It's like a senior center or a city hall. And that is pivotal to understand because that's why it has such a monopoly on the right wing audience. And monopoly is a word that multiple sources and staffers use. And like we have a monopoly now, that's what we have. There aren't a lot of others serving this marketplace void. I think there's something to be really there's something to respect about Fox covering issues that other networks don't focus as much on. You know, I think I would point to religion as one of those, specifically Christianity. It's not as if Fox is doing big specials about the Muslim faith, but certainly a focus on Christianity. Where it gets twisted, though, and where it gets troubling is where the network has appeals, the way that politics, where the network seems to be so focused



on white conservative Christians to the excuse of others and where the network gets into real backwards, you know.

[00:34:08] You know, kind of commentary and coverage.

[00:34:12] It would seem to be a reaction to a multicultural brown in America. A lot of what the network is doing feels like a reaction to what is happening in the country and the progress that's being made in other areas. So I always think about this, that the audience is almost entirely white. You know, Fox has about one percent African-American viewership, small slivers of Hispanic and Asian American viewership. It's almost entirely white audience, very old viewing audience. As you know, the news generally is. But Fox skews older than the others. So, you know, there are there are appealing, you know, the reasons why it appeals to, you know, elderly viewers who feel like nothing else speaks to them. And, you know, some of that some of it is very deep. You know, as you were very good to Bradley's book, I was at the store today and the guy next to me in his pickup truck had one of those Trump flags, whereas it that's a depiction of Trump as this really muscular, tough guy superhero. And obviously, the president not that not that effect, nor are many people his age, but not like I can orthography of like Trump as the superhero, the hyper masculine figure that's saving the country, that comes from a place that's really deep. Right. In terms of what's happening in our politics. That's coming from a really deep place. And I think we need to hear a lot more from voters and a lot less from the talking heads on Fox and sometimes CNN as well. And I know I'm guilty of having a talking head sometimes myself, but I'd much rather hear from that driver than from Dan Bongino or Jeanine Pirro on Fox.

[00:35:51] So here's a question from Regina Lawrence, which is a perfect follow up. So on your show, you talked yesterday about the need for more citizen driven way of covering this election.

[00:36:03] So can you tell us more about that? And are you worried? Are you worried? I'm worried that that once again, the Beltway journalist and New York City journalists are missing it.

[00:36:19] Yeah, this is the citizen's agenda. If you Google citizens agenda, you'll find Jay Rosen and others have written about this for many years. And, you know, it's a it's a concept that you start with asking the audience what they want the candidates to talk about. And then you you focus on covering that and asking those questions of the candidates. Once you've heard from your public that they are focused on health care and schools, then you can focus the candidates on those issues by questioning them and asking for their plans and their and their proposals. I think it's a that's certainly ambitious. And we don't see newsrooms oftentimes taking that approach. Rosen's tried to instill this in newsrooms, but I brought up yesterday from the perspective of how can we help the public set the agenda and not Trump? When I look at the president's Twitter feed, I know exactly what he wants me to cover. Right. Law and order and fake news and, you know, these mediums and videos and all this propaganda. And there are weeks where I fall for it. And I know it. And I look back at 2017 and transcripts of my show and I feel like I was led around too much by what he was tweeting. Now, that was new at the time. It was scary at the time. It was shocking at the time. Now, a lot of us are more numb to what he posts. But the point is, don't let him set the agenda all the time. He is one of many players in the political universe. Let's try to help the public set the agenda more. And that's really what I wanted to put out there and see how viewers reacted to that idea yesterday. By the way, we do

that through polling. You know, you mentioned Gallup earlier. Gallup has great data on what what what issues do voters care about? I think that should help us focus our coverage. It's the economy. It's health care. It's a pandemic because oftentimes we can get and I say we I mean, the collective national news media writ large, not everybody. But we can get really focused on what the president is talking about and not on what issues voters are telling us to talk about more.

[00:38:25] Yes, absolutely, and I know that there's even deeper concern with with fewer reporters on the ground now listening and and and really listening to what are the what are the concerns? And you cited a story yesterday in The Washington Post about unemployment and families from us, from Ohio and across the country.

[00:38:54] Yeah, I'm just getting so angry with the lack of coverage about this. You know what happened, Jennifer? I was driving under I was driving into work and I had a whole other segment planned to start the show. And, you know, on my drive, there's Manton's and there's trailers and there's a lot of things in between. I get it. I've always looked inside people's houses thinking, what do they care about? What, what, what, what? How do they consume media? What do they want to know? And just feels to me like the unemployment story is so big and so uncomfortable and so sad and so scary. That kind of like Cauvin that is sometimes it's easier to talk about. I don't know. Trump's tweets, I, I'm just picking on Trump's tweets, but there's lots of examples of that we just can't like. Oh, the Cauvin story and the related economic crisis, even though it is a dreadful time, sometimes it's like a nightmare. But the nightmare is the biggest story.

[00:39:50] Yes. No. Absolutely. Absolutely.

[00:39:53] And now that we're producers, you know, nine o'clock, we're on in two hours and I like, rip up the show. But that's what we do.

[00:40:00] Sometimes it's called journalism delay. That's right. It's called TV and journalism.

[00:40:08] So just getting back to some of the questions, so can you talk a little bit about the current position of the Fox News owners, the Murdochs, and what are they doing about it, about what you documented in your book, about the lack of legitimate news?

[00:40:27] I would describe them as pretty hands off owners, Rupert. The father left when the son Lachlan runs the company. It's on a path to two billion dollars in profits from the Fox News division. That's an extraordinary number. They care about the profits. They're less interested in the content. Rupert is more interested that Rupert talks to Trump frequently. You know, he he views the mission, the network as a political machine as well as a news network. Lachlan, I would argue, is this even indifferent to the content, which is a problem when there's a pandemic in your network is downplaying the disease. But, look, he doesn't talk about it very much. I would have loved to interview Rupert or Lachlan for the book. I would love to quote other interviews they've given. They'll talk about foxes very much. I think they are largely happy with the way things are. If they if they weren't, you would expect them to change it. And a lot of the journalists at Fox who confided in me, you know, they wished for the road, not traveled, the road, not traveled, would have been when Roger Ailes was forced out hiring more journalists. Build up the newsroom, add more bureaus around the world. They don't have a bureau in Asia, no bureau in China, no bureau to cover the pandemic in China. So there's a lot of staffers there who wish for that

road, not traveled, but choose to stay because they want to improve from the inside. You know, they want to they want to make it better from the inside. They want to have the network be as diverse and and strong as possible. Others, however, choose to leave. And one of the through lines and hooks, as I tell the stories, of about a dozen staffers who chose to leave over the years and why, that was very, very compelling.

[00:42:06] And all show, when you count up the number of people who left Fox left to go work in the White House. So that's yeah.

[00:42:16] That's the other avenue. Usually other avenue. Frustrated with the journalism. And you don't want to. You don't think you fit in or you leave because you got an offer from the administration. And sometimes being on FOX is is the job interview literally. I mean, I know this sounds, you know, unbelievable. But the president will look at the TV and say, I want that person working for me. And that's how people like Morgan Ortega. The State Department spokesperson, you know, it's a big part of the reason why these people get these jobs.

[00:42:43] So, Ryan, we're close to wrapping up now. It's just a couple of more quick, quick questions and quick answers from Barbara Rabb Barbara. Barbara says that in today's climate, your message cannot survive the perception of the messenger. In other words, those who you presumably, presumably want to reach see you as merely part of the fake news. I guess that goes back to what we discussed earlier.

[00:43:12] How how do we come together and talk about facts, talk about verifiable facts, make informed decisions.

[00:43:21] And I'm not going to claim that Hannity's biggest fans are going to read a hoax. But I did try to reach out a hand by opening the book, by telling my own story, talking about my parents and, you know, talking about my life, talking about my kids, just trying to do trying to reach people where they are and show what we have in common before we talk about what we disagree on. Because I get them when I talk about the president being a serial liar. That is a turnoff for some people. But the record is what it is. The record is Google, of all the records, undeniable. And although there's interesting ways people try. So I hope that, you know, we can we can connect to each other on human personal levels. That's why I give up my e-mail address on the air sometimes. Why try to see me as excited, as accessible as I can even to the so-called haters haters? I guess that's some detractors is a nicer word.

[00:44:13] And now another question is, how does a democracy survive with such a powerful propaganda apparatus that we're showing how every day?

[00:44:24] You know, I remember saying in twenty seventeen, the first time Trump called the press the enemy thing to say. I remember saying on the era, America's press is stronger than any demagog. And I think we've proved that three years later we've proved the press is stronger than any demagog. Democracy is harder than any demagog. And I think that remains true. I think we're in this you know, there's a war on. Truth going on. But I think the truth is still winning most of the fights. Look at how many Americans in polling say they can't trust their own president when it comes to the pandemic. It's sad, but most Americans say they can't trust him. The reason the book is called a hoax is because he referred to the Democrats focus on Cauvin as a hoax back in February, and he use that word in March. You know, that word is poisonous. It gets down in the bloodstream and it's

like poison. But most people are not being affected by it. Most people have an immunity built into it. I guess it's built up from all those years of reporting and journalism. So I'm an optimist. No matter what. I can't help but be an optimist at the end of the day that journalists are standing up for decency and democracy. I actually love today's announcement by CNN. What a sign of the times. We hired five analysts. Know we have lots of contributors and analysts are on the air explaining the news. These are five new analysts with a very specific specialty election law. So we are getting ready for the fall. And I do think part of understanding election law and having those analysts is about defending the basics of this democracy. I know we're out of time, but I want to put my e-mail address in the in the chat. So any other questions? E-mail me and BMB Stelter AGM and I'm happy to take more.

[00:46:07] Brian, thank you very much. And again, congratulations on Hoax, and I read in an Axios that Simon and Schuster had to go back and print one hundred thousand additional copies.

[00:46:21] I mean, I think it's a good probably putting them as fast as we can.

[00:46:26] Well, there it is. Well, you can also order it for your on your for your phone and for your Kindle. And it's not only an excellent read, it's an important read. So fasten your seatbelts for the next couple of months. It's going to be a a wild ride. And thank you very much, Brian, for joining us today on Informed and Engaged. Thank you. Thanks.