

CNN's Double-Standards on Debates

For decades, mainstream U.S. news outlets have bent over backwards to appease conservatives and avoid the stigma “liberal media,” but there has been no similar accommodation for progressives, as Jeff Cohen notes about CNN’s handling of the upcoming Democratic debate.

By Jeff Cohen

At the CNN-sponsored Republican Party debate last month at the Reagan presidential library, one of the three panelists CNN selected to question the candidates was conservative radio host Hugh Hewitt, affiliated with the proudly right-wing Salem Radio Network. But at Tuesday’s upcoming Democratic Party debate, CNN is not planning to include a single progressive advocate among its panel of four questioners.

It’s clear that who gets to pose questions has impact on the tenor of the debate. For example, Hewitt used September’s Republican debate to declare that President Obama’s “knees buckled” over Syria and that every Republican candidate was “more qualified than” Hillary Clinton. Hewitt pressed Jeb Bush from the right over his comment about making sure guns are not in the hands of the mentally ill: “Where does it go from what you said last week, how far into people’s lives to take guns away from them?”



Along with Hewitt, the panel at CNN’s GOP debate was composed of two journalists CNN presents as neutral or objective: CNN anchor Jake Tapper and CNN correspondent Dana Bash. (Hewitt’s appearance was reportedly part of [an agreement](#) by which CNN and the right-wing Salem Media company are teaming up on three GOP presidential debates.)

At CNN’s upcoming Democratic debate, the panel is to be composed of four journalists CNN presents as neutral: CNN’s Bash and three CNN anchors (Anderson Cooper, Don Lemon, and Juan Carlos Lopez of CNN en Espanol.) Glaringly missing from this proposed lineup is an unabashed progressive advocate.

There are many qualified journalists for this seat – from respected progressive media institutions that haven’t taken sides in the Democratic primaries (like

The Nation or Mother Jones, to name just two).

Today, the online activism group RootsAction.org (which I cofounded) launched a one-sentence petition to CNN: “For the sake of basic fairness and balance, you should add to your panel an unapologetic progressive for Tuesday’s debate.”

Jeff Cohen is cofounder of RootsAction.org, founder of the media watch group FAIR, and director of the Park Center for Independent Media at Ithaca College.
