

A WVOX/WVIP Interview
Conducted by William O'Shaughnessy
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William O'Shaughnessy:

The world of news and network television lost a luminous figure this morning with the announcement that Roger Ailes, formerly of FOX News, has gone to another and, we are sure, a better world. As he departs, let's go now to Palm Beach to one of his neighbors, also a network president, he's the founder of NEWSMAX. Can I accurately describe that as somewhat "conservative?" His name is Christopher Ruddy. Chris ... Roger Ailes ... did you know him?

Chris Ruddy:

Bill ... I knew him *very* well. I've known him for about 20 years. He was a genius on television, an incredible giant in the news business. We once had a cover of Roger Ailes we did for our magazines. Most people know us for our network and website. The cover said: "The Most Powerful Man in News!" Roger told me a few weeks later he met Obama ... and Obama said to him "Oh, the man Newsmax says is the most powerful man in news!" He was a giant. He changed the landscape of news and cable news forever. He changed the country. I don't think Donald Trump would ever have been elected if it wasn't for Roger.

WO:

Chris Ruddy ... what's going to happen now to FOX News? Are there opportunities for you, for Newsmax?

CR:

Well, Bill, we've already been out there on Newsmax TV. We're now on Verizon FIOS channel 615. We expect to be in another 30 million homes over this summer. People can call their cable operators and ask for Newsmax TV. We're building a very powerful lineup. We think we're, in some ways, better than FOX. We give opportunities for people to call in, to become part of the programming. And we have a lot of good newsmakers coming on all the time. Alan Dershowitz was on yesterday, for example. FOX opened the door for networks like Newsmax. Roger was a pathfinder and broke the media monopoly. For years, you know, the media was largely liberal and left-wing.

WO:

And now ...?

CR:

And now the media, I think, is more open to other points of view. I think CNN, for example, has become more centrist because of FOX. It used to be very left wing in the day. I know Donald Trump doesn't like the media ... but if they didn't have FOX as the counterweight, Donald Trump would have gotten very little airtime on the major networks. I think the country benefits from multiple voices. This idea that we should only have one point of view – back in the day when there were three networks led by Cronkite, let's say as the preeminent anchor, there was generally an Establishment view on things. Now we have multiple views. Even MSNBC ... I watch that too. I don't *agree* with most of their programming, but I think it's good, interesting stuff. I think Ailes would applaud that. That said, I think the guy was ... you know in this business ... the difference between genius and insanity is a very thin line! Roger had a lot of quirks. There's been a lot of allegations about him and FOX News and sexual harassment issues ... it's not my job to judge that, other than to say that the situation there seems pretty darn messy. As you may know in the ratings, MSNBC is beating FOX in a lot of the key demos now. It's not good for FOX. And I think with Roger not being there, they don't really have an organizing principle any more.

WO:

Christopher Ruddy ... another network said that Roger sold his home up the road apiece in Garrison. And another place he had in Creskill, New Jersey and moved to Palm Beach where you are, at the moment. What is it about Palm Beach that all you network chiefs repair to the damn place?

CR:

Well, it's *Shangri-La* down here. It's an incredibly beautiful area. It's got a lot of people from New York and New Jersey so there's a cultural mix that's pretty accommodating, let's put it that way. A lot of amenities. The tax environment ... we have no state income tax, so a lot of people love that. Roger was also facing a lot of litigation, and a lot of people think the reason he bought a \$36 million dollar home on the ocean very quickly was that he was hoping to shield

assets in some of the litigation he's going through. I don't know if that's true or not, but it is a smart idea for a lot of people. I love New York. Newsmax has an office in New York. I think New York is still the epicenter of the media world, for instance, and in business and commerce. But Florida is a great state. C'mon down if you haven't been down here yet.

WO:

Christopher Ruddy ... Roger Ailes, in recent years, took a lot of shots. But he happened to have been a very generous man. There's a group called the Broadcasters Foundation of America, and at the risk of embarrassing you, you also are very generous to that national charity. Is there a side to Roger Ailes that maybe people didn't know about? You know a lot about a lot of things ...

CR:

Well, I think he would not have risen to the success he did if there wasn't a lot of good attributes. I think he was intensely loyal to his friends. I'm sure he had a charitable side as you point out. I think he had a lot of empathy for people. We're hearing a lot of dark stuff about what happened there. Again, I don't know if it's true. But I think there was probably a lot of good stuff there. I think he deeply loved America. He really strongly believed in a secure nation. I would talk to him often about the sovereignty of the United States. Before Donald Trump was talking about these issues in any serious way, Roger Ailes was. He was the guy that got everybody worried about the border. Ten years ago, nobody was talking about the border. Now, it's a major issue. And Roger started that. Donald Trump carried the flag. And has done a good job raising that flag.

WO:

While we have you live this morning from Palm Beach, I want to beg another minute to ask you about your friend, and you were accused in the *New York Times* of being a *very* good friend of the president. I understand there's a photo going around that shows *you* sitting behind the desk in the Oval Office and he's standing there with his hand on your shoulder. What the hell do you talk about? Chris Ruddy and Donald John Trump? What do you guys schmooze about?

CR:

Bill, I think that somebody photoshopped that photo! (laughter) I don't think it's an accurate photo.

WO:

I don't believe it ...

CR:

I think the CIA or the Russians or Putin or somebody did that and I'm going to need to launch a full investigation. I will appoint a special counsel to find out why my photo with the president was photoshopped! (laughter)

WO:

But you do go to Mar-a-Lago, Chris Ruddy, and you *do* know the guy.

CR:

I've known him for 20 years. I've known him well, I'd say, for 10 years. I am a member of Mar-a-Lago, although I knew him before I was a member. I've known him from the media. I've been with him in Scotland, at the opening of his Scottish club. So I've gotten to really know the president. On his personal side, he's a great guy. He's not what the media is depicting him as. I think he's a businessman, Bill. He's not a politician. And there's good attributes to that and there's bad attributes to that. So we're finding out he doesn't know that you can't tell the FBI director: I think you're pushing too hard on my guy. Donald Trump would talk very candidly and openly to people. Nobody told him that's obstruction of justice if you mention this to the FBI. And I don't think he intended that, if he said it at all. So I think they're out to get him. They don't like him.

WO:

Christopher Ruddy ... can he survive, President Trump? Tell us.

CR:

I think he can. There's a book I've been recommending to everyone. It's called *Big Agenda* by David Horowitz. David has sort of a game plan. He wrote it before Trump became president and then so much of it became true: the

Big Agenda

. He sort of lays out a way for Trump to survive all this. David predicted a likely impeachment hearing. They were talking about this

before

he even took the oath of office. I think he can. But I do think he needs a strong team of advisors around him that are experienced and better in political matters. I think what we're seeing with the firing of the director of the FBI is that he did not have an experienced team. The very fact that they thought that it would be widely accepted as a good idea and that the way they did it would be accepted as a good idea ... it was a very strange situation which has led to this catastrophic situation he potentially faces now.

WO:

Can Mueller hurt the president?

CR:

Immensely. But it also will take time. He doesn't have time.

WO:

Summer has come to New York, Chris. You're not the only one with good weather today. Thank you Mr. founder of Newsmax. We're glad we can get you now in Westchester on FIOS.

CR:

Thank you, Bill. You are a legend and a beacon of hope for all of us in the media world.

WO:

Chris Ruddy, wonderful stuff ...

William O'Shaughnessy, a former president of the New York State Broadcasters Association, was chairman of Public Affairs for the National Association of Broadcasters in Washington. He has been a point man and advocate for the broadcasters of America on First Amendment and Free Speech issues and is presently chairman of the Guardian Fund of the Broadcasters Foundation of America, the national charitable organization. He is also a longtime director and member of the Executive Committee of the Foundation. He has operated WVOX and WVIP, two of the last independent stations in the New York area, for over 60 years as president and editorial director.

He is the author of "AirWAVES" (1999) ... "It All Comes Back to Me Now" (2001) ... "More Riffs, Rants and Raves" (2004) ... and "VOX POPULI: The O'Shaughnessy Files," released in January, 2011. He has also written "Mario Cuomo: Remembrances of a Remarkable Man," a tribute to his late friend Governor Mario M. Cuomo. His newest book RADIOactive for Fordham University Press, another anthology with interviews, commentaries, speeches and tributes was published in 2019. He is presently working on Townies, a paean to those without wealth, influence or high estate in suburban Westchester County, the heart of the Eastern Establishment.