Rep. Smith at CPAC: “Our democracy depends on the American people holding the media accountable”

While most media coverage of this past weekend’s CPAC, the Conservative Political Action Conference, focused on areas of disagreement among conservatives and Republicans, there were many excellent speeches and panels that received no attention from the media. One of those was by Rep. Lamar Smith (R-TX), who was chairman of the House Judiciary Committee until this current session of Congress. Four years ago, Rep. Smith started the Media Fairness Caucus, and has clearly been the leading voice in Congress to call out the media for its unmistakable liberal bias.

He questioned the use of the term “mainstream” to describe the media, “when the majority of Americans don’t trust it or share the views it espouses?”

He cited a recent Gallup poll to show that “Americans’ distrust of the media is at an all-time high. Gallup found that 60 percent of Americans have little or no trust in the mass media to report the news fully, accurately and fairly.”

Rep. Smith, who is currently the chairman of the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology, added that “When the media don’t report the facts, the American people can’t make good decisions. And if Americans can’t make good decisions, our democracy is at risk. So media bias, to me, is a major threat to our democracy.”

He also singled out Accuracy in Media, along with the Media Research Center and the Media Fairness Caucus in Congress, as organizations that can “increase awareness of bias in the media and encourage Americans to confront it and demand fair reporting.” He concluded his talk, before taking questions, saying that “Our democracy depends on the American people holding the media accountable. Nothing could be more important.”

Here is the full text of his speech to CPAC on March 14th:

\textbf{Congressman Smith:} I’d like to focus on an institution that is among the most suspect of any in America. No, not the IRS. Even in April. It’s the liberal national news media. I call it “liberal,” not “mainstream,” because I don’t believe it represents the views of the majority of Americans.

How can the news media be “mainstream” when the majority of Americans don’t trust it or share the views it espouses?

According to a recent Gallup poll, Americans’ distrust of the media is at an all-time high. Gallup found that 60 percent of Americans have little or no trust in the mass media to report the news fully, accurately and fairly.

People are right to be skeptical about the news they receive. And Americans’ distrust of the national media will continue to grow until the media stops telling them what to think.
The concept of media bias is not lost on members of the media. MSNBC’s Chris Matthews stated “the big networks [meaning ABC, NBC and CBS] for years had establishment liberalism as the basis of true north.”

Politico’s executive editor admitted that “the mainstream media tends to be quite smitten with the Obamas.”

And last June, CBS President Les Moonves agreed that “ultimately journalism has changed...partisanship is very much part of journalism now.” It is obvious what “partisanship” is most represented by the media.

That’s why nearly four years ago, I started the Media Fairness Caucus in Congress. Its purpose is not to censor or condemn but to urge the media to adhere to the highest standards of their profession and to provide the American people with the facts, balanced stories and fair coverage of the news.

Through the Media Fairness Caucus, Members of Congress point out media bias and encourage others to do the same.

We use floor statements, a weekly newsletter, websites and other means of communication to highlight media bias at the national level and encourage the American people to become engaged and educated consumers of the media.

When the media don’t report the facts, the American people can’t make good decisions. And if Americans can’t make good decisions, our democracy is at risk. So media bias, to me, is a major threat to our democracy.

True reform always starts with the voice of the people. If enough citizens criticize biased news stories or change the channel or cancel a subscription, maybe the national media will give Americans what they want – fair news coverage.

Our national media should be held accountable for their performance, just like any other institution.

We need to remind the media of their profound obligation to provide the American people with the facts, not tell them what to think. It will take a group effort, but it is achievable. I encourage public officials in their speeches to point out examples of bias. And to keep reporters honest by citing their past slanted coverage.

All Americans should write letters to the editor to correct any inaccuracies or to point out bias. And avoid reading or watching biased news sources.

This is easier to do today than it was in the past because of the popularity of the Internet and social media. This is an area where the next generation of conservatives can have a great impact.

Finding evidence of a liberal slant in today’s national media is as easy as picking up a newspaper or turning on television news.
For example, over 500,000 pro-life supporters recently marched through the streets of D.C. to protest the 40th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*. The March for Life is always one of the largest public demonstrations that takes place in America. But neither ABC nor CBS reported on the annual march. NBC provided 15 seconds of coverage. While ignoring the march, all three networks did report on a pro-gun control rally that only drew “close to a thousand people.”

An even more recent example is the media’s treatment of the sequester. The media typically called it a “fiscal emergency” that could “crippl[e]” much of America. ABC labeled it a “budget Armageddon” and repeated the Administration’s talking points that “we’ll see flight delays, kids thrown out off Head Start and criminals get free due to a lack of federal prosecutors.”

According to a report from the Media Research Center, two-thirds of the news stories about sequestration repeated the scare tactics pushed by the Obama administration. What was omitted from most media reports was that the sequester was President Obama’s idea. Seldom mentioned was that the House has twice passed legislation to avoid it.

When one member of the media, Bob Woodward, confirmed this, his colleagues were quick to attack him. They put defending President Obama and promoting a liberal agenda above truth-telling and objective reporting.

Unfortunately, agenda driven reporting is a daily occurrence in the media. It’s hard to imagine a worse example of media bias than the national coverage of illegal immigration. Every week, there are multiple stories that minimize the problem of illegal immigration and lax border security and maximize the need to legalize everyone in the country illegally.

Reporters fail to inform the American people that the GAO found that only six percent of the southern border is under “full control.”

Yet they continue to quote the Administration as saying the border has never been more secure. For instance, In February there were 28 articles about immigration in the *Washington Post*. Twenty-three of those had a pro-illegal immigrant tilt, over 80%. The rest were neutral. There was not a single story that covered the side that opposes amnesty. The *Post* is just one of the outlets Professor Tim Groseclose discussed in his book *Left Turn: How Liberal Media Bias Distorts the American Mind*.

Professor Groseclose asserted that “without media bias, America would vote about like Texas or Kentucky.” In the last election, Romney won these states with 57 and 60 percent. And he determined quantitatively that without media bias, Senator McCain would have won the 2008 presidential election with 56 percent of the vote.

*Investor’s Business Daily*’s analysis of federal records showed the journalists who contributed in the 2008 Presidential election cycle favored Democrats by a 20:1 ratio over Republicans.
True to form, according to the Pew Research Center, in the final week before the 2012 presidential election, twice as many stories were positive about President Obama than were positive about Governor Romney.

The media do their best to determine the outcome of elections. That is not how it should be in a democracy.

Fortunately, organizations like the Media Research Center, Accuracy in Media and the Media Fairness Caucus can increase awareness of bias in the media and encourage Americans to confront it and demand fair reporting. Our democracy depends on the American people holding the media accountable. Nothing could be more important.