

HEN IN THE FOX HOUSE: JORGE VELÁZQUEZ AND RAMIRO GONZÁLEZ BETTER SERVED DEMOCRACY THAN BRET BAIER

Fox News has been a toxin in the United States for most of thirty years. Yesterday, Kamala Harris went into the Fox House in an attempt to chisel away at that toxin.

It'll be days, weeks, years before we learn how it worked, in part, because it was (in my opinion) only the third most important TV yesterday.

The most important TV was probably Trump's town hall on Univision. Six minutes in, a man named Jorge Velázquez took the mic (after Trump offered a smarmy compliment him on his hair, which is the kind of beautiful thick mane that Trump covets). Velázquez described that he used to pick strawberries and broccoli and asked, if Trump deports everyone he wants, who will do that work and how much will food prices go up. (Given the way he distilled the problem with Trump's mass deportation plans with one poignant question, I would be unsurprised if he has some tie to the United Farm Workers,)

Trump immediately said he was the best thing to happen to farmers. He seemed to suggest he would bring back the *bracero* program (since Elon Musk has begun paying Trump's bills, Trump has been pushing to greatly expand legal immigration). But he ultimately didn't answer the question. It was an unresponsive answer to a question that every person who imagines themselves a journalist should be asking.

That wasn't the only challenging question Trump

dodged. After 25 minutes, José Saralegui asked Trump why he lied about the Haitians in Springfield. After 33 minutes, Ramiro González, a Republican who has dropped his registration in the party, invited Trump to win back his support by explaining his inaction on January 6. Trump not only offered the platitudes he always does, lied about his supporters bringing guns, and used the first person plural to align himself with the mob (which may end up being useful to Jack Smith), but he did not answer the question. By that point, a number of the viewers in the audience had a hostile body language to Trump. After 40 minutes, Jesús González asked Trump to explain his gun control policy to victims of school shootings. After 43 minutes, Carlos Aguilera asked Trump if he still considered climate change a hoax.

In this forum, average voters asked Trump the kind of questions that journalists no longer do. And they did so on an outlet that still commands a great deal of trust from its viewers.

The second most important TV yesterday may be the Fox Town Hall for women.

It was everything that Trump voters distrust about the media (though will overlook here): A hand-selected group of Trump sycophants that was edited to take out parts damaging to Fox (including that one participant had already voted for Trump).

The Georgia Federation of Republican Women wrote on its Facebook page Wednesday that the group helped host the event, posting photos from the venue and writing they were “Super excited for the opportunity of hosting this event right here in Georgia!”

Shortly after CNN reached out to the group and Fox News about their role, the post was edited to state they were “excited for the opportunity of attending this event right here in Georgia!”

[snip]

The first question posed to Trump at the town hall came from a woman identified as Lisa, who asked the former president a question about the economy. The network did not disclose that Lisa is also the president of the Fulton County Republican Women group.

Some of the town hall attendees made it clear they were supporters of the former president, either in their questioning or in their attire.

“I want to thank you for coming to a room full of women the current administration would consider domestic terrorists,” a woman named Alicia said to laughter from the audience before a question about foreign policy.

But a portion of Alicia’s question was edited by Fox News to remove her admission that she was voting for Trump.

“I proudly cast my vote for you today. I hope they count it,” she added, according to an audio recording from a CNN reporter in attendance.

While it’s common for a pre-taped event or interview to be edited for time, Alicia’s short remark came in the middle of her question, which remained intact on the broadcast.

During another moment missing from Fox’s broadcast, Trump asked the crowd who they were voting for, leading to a chant of “Trump, Trump” breaking out by the attendees.

And Trump still bolloxed three questions. In response to a visibly distraught woman asking about child care costs, he offered the same babbling pablum about assigning Ivanka to address the issue that he offered at the NY Economic Club. In response to a softball about

IVF, Trump first claimed to be the father of IVF before confessing he needed Katie Britt to explain why it was important. And then when a woman asked Trump about making choices for her own body, Trump offered the same canned answer about moving abortion back to the states but him, personally, believing in exceptions that don't exist in a number of states.

Within the safe space of Harris Faulkner's set, Trump seemed not to care about offering credible answers. The women in the room will vote for him anyway. But clips of his answers will circulate outside that safe space.

Importantly, Fox also edited a clip from the woman's town hall, to cut Trump's most fascistic speech, identifying the Pelosis as the "enemy within." When Bret Baier questioned Kamala Harris about it during their interview, she called him on the edit, and used it to talk about what "you and I both know" about Trump's threats to turn the military on Americans. What was meant to be one in a series of gotchas instead became a moment for Harris to point to things that Fox deliberately keeps from its viewers: the threat Trump poses to democracy.

When Baier played a Trump transgender ad, offering little excuse for doing so, Harris noted that Trump had paid \$20 million to instill fear about an issue that has little to do with issues that affect people's lives. Again, she pointed to the spectacle that Fox viewers consume unthinkingly.

The Fox News interview will not win over voters, by itself. But Harris turned Fox into an issue. She called out Baier, repeatedly, for interrupting her. He kept doing it.

She also revealed things that don't get covered at Fox. Harris mentioned having just been on the stage with Trump's former staffers twice. She mentioned his former aides saying that he was not fit to be President. She mentioned Trump's accusations there's an enemy within. She mentioned that Mark Milley said that Donald

Trump was a threat, without raising the word fascism (after which Baier attempted to dismiss it by specifying it was a quote in Bob Woodward's book, telling viewers where to find more). She described Mike Pence's criticisms of Trump and joked that Pence's opposition to Trump is why the job was open to pick JD Vance.

All of these are things that are not permitted on Fox News.

During several of those exchanges, Baier's face looked pained, as if he was acutely aware of the danger of letting such things be aired on Fox News.

After 25 minutes, as Baier was trying to drown out Harris' criticism of Trump's handling of Iran, he said, "We're talking over each other, I apologize."

Harris responded,

I would like that we would have a conversation that is grounded in full assessment of the facts which includes – I think this interview is supposed to be about the choices that your viewers should be presented about this election. And the contrast is important.

Baier interrupted again. As Harris told viewers to go check out her site to see her solutions, Baier interrupted again.

It's the term, "we both know" which Harris used at least four times, that resonates.

Someone commenting after the interview voiced the same impression I have of it: It's a Google interview. [Update: It was Brian Stelter.] No one will be convinced by it. But a number of people might Google to find out what the hell Harris was talking about – to find out what Milley said, to find out what Republicans supporting her have said to explain why, even to find out her plans to help people buy homes.

And when they discover that it's actually Fox –

and not CBS, as the Fox-fueled conspiracy holds – that is hiding stuff from its viewers, they may grow to question what they've been told.

But the Baier interview was, in my opinion, only the third most important TV yesterday. That's significantly true because there are far more undecided voters among Univision's viewers than among Fox's. And Trump showed contempt in that situation. He showed contempt to undecided Latino voters, to their face. And he refused to answer the questions that no one else will ask.

Normally, the whitewashing that Fox does for Trump hides how contemptuous he is of American voters. Yesterday, there were several places where voters might see the cracks in that whitewashing.