

Fox News commentator becomes White House spokesman—a further turn to the right

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President Bush's naming of Fox News talk show host Tony Snow as White House press secretary signals a further turn to the right by the US administration.

This selection for the top public relations post installs in the White House press briefing room a representative of the news outlet most identified with the policies of the Bush administration and the Republican right. Snow brings to the position the type of reactionary credentials for which Rupert Murdoch's news organization has become infamous—subservience to big-business interests and unconditional support for the predatory military aims of US imperialism.

Snow's performance is expected to be more aggressive than that of his predecessor McClellan, whose defense of Bush administration policy had taken on an ever-more robotic style. McClellan's repeated declarations to the press corps that Karl Rove and Lewis Libby had no involvement in the Valerie Plame CIA leak case were exposed as lies with Libby's indictment by the special prosecutor last October. More recently, he was tasked with defending the administration's National Security Agency spying operation on the American population.

Snow takes over as press secretary at a time of slumping popular support for the Bush presidency, with polls showing approval ratings for Bush of just over one-third. (See "As support for Bush plummets, no alternative from Democrats") In selecting Snow, however, Bush has sent an olive branch, not to opponents of the Iraq war or working people outraged by the administration's pro-corporate policies, but to unaffected sections of the extreme right.

The administration has been under fire for months from much of the Republican right, disappointed over Bush's inability to enact Social Security privatization, inflict sufficiently massive cuts in domestic social

spending, or push through key elements of the right-wing social agenda, such as a constitutional amendment against gay marriage. Naming Snow as press secretary is seen as an effort by the administration to "reach out" to and energize this right-wing base in the period leading up to the November elections.

Unlike the other personnel shifts in the White House—the replacement of Andrew Card by Joshua Bolten as chief of staff, the shift of Deputy Chief of Staff Rove from policy-making responsibilities to concentrate on the upcoming midterm elections, the move of US Trade Representative Rob Portman to Bolten's former budget director position—Snow's selection has been portrayed as a move outside Bush's insular "inner circle." But Snow is an outsider only by the standards of an administration that places the same premium as the Mafia on personal loyalty and keeping your mouth shut. And for a similar reason—they have plenty to hide.

Snow worked as chief speechwriter for the senior President Bush and later as his deputy assistant for media affairs. His seamless transition to the second Bush administration, however, is more due to his years of experience as an ultra-conservative ideologue at Fox News and a public spokesman for right-wing viewpoints. He has written for numerous conservative publications, including *TownHall.com*, the *Washington Times* and *Jewish World Review*. Before hosting his own shows on Fox television and radio, he served as a substitute host on the program of right-wing radio hack Rush Limbaugh.

His anti-scientific and falsified views on such topics as evolution and the conditions of America's poor place him in the ideological company of ultra-conservatives and the religious right, as a few quotes from his writings illustrate.

In his August 12, 2005 nationally syndicated column, Snow equated Darwinism and Intelligent Design, claiming that “evolutionary theory, like ID, isn’t verifiable or testable. It’s pure hypothesis.” He went on to assert that “evolutionary theorists find themselves at wits’ end because the fossil record provides no evidence of any species ever turning into another.”

In an April 7, 2006 column on *Townhall.com* he made the preposterous claim that “The standard of living in the nation has grown to the point where the average welfare recipient has more creature comforts (homes, computers, televisions, cars, air conditioners, etc.) than the average citizen of France.” Such retrograde and thoroughly baseless opinions are common among the personnel who occupy both the White House and the Fox News studios.

The links between Fox News and the Bush administration provide a particularly insidious example of a general tendency by the print and broadcast media to increasingly serve as uncritical mouthpieces for the political establishment.

White House staffers regularly tune in to Fox News for updates on the day’s events and the administration often chooses Fox first when providing Bush administration personalities for interviews. When traveling, Vice President Dick Cheney reportedly asks that his hotel television set be tuned to Fox before his arrival, and he gave his only interview on his shooting of a hunting companion last February to Fox’s Brit Hume.

Fox News has been there for George W. Bush since Election Day 2000, when John Ellis, first cousin of the younger Bush, headed Fox’s “decision desk.” Ellis called the state of Florida a win for Bush in the early morning hours of November 8, setting off a charge of similar calls by the other news networks. While the networks subsequently withdrew their declarations and labeled the state “too close to call,” the projection by Fox gave the public impression that Bush had won, playing a key role in legitimizing his subsequent theft of the election with the assistance of the US Supreme Court.

After the September 11 terrorist attacks, Karl Rove, Bush’s chief political adviser, delivered a “confidential communication” from Fox News Channel Chairman Roger Ailes to the president. According to an account in the 2002 book by Bob Woodward, *Bush at War*,

Ailes advised Bush, “The American public would not tolerate waiting and would be patient, but only as long as they were convinced that Bush was using the harshest measures possible.” Such harsh measures would take shape in the administration’s “war on terror” and the adoption of the Patriot Act, the jailing of “enemy combatants” and other affronts to democratic rights.

As the WWSW characterized the revelations at the time of Ailes’ counseling of the president, “Thus the head of one of the nation’s major news outlets coached the president on how best to manipulate public opinion. In doing so, Ailes was carrying out through his top-level political connections the job that Fox newscasters and commentators do on a daily basis—peddling lies, half-truths and government handouts as news, in order to misinform and dupe the public.”

Now a figure with ample experience in this filthy job—acting as a shill for corporate interests, an apologist for war crimes and a promoter of everything backward and reactionary in American society—will serve as the chief spokesman of the American government.



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