

Monday, October 22, 2007

When the nature of an interviewer is learned after the fact.

Image from the Government Printing Office's website. This follows up on my October 19 blog entry about my then-upcoming panel interview for that evening about the pros and cons of gun control, including my discovering only after the interview about the program's links to Press TV, which is at least partially funded by the Iranian government. This televised panel discussion and debate provided me an opportunity to hear the views of others dealing with this topic all the time, and to get my own views out to the public, not only about my insistence that we not be disingenuous to the Second Amendment nor to any other parts of the Constitution, but also to let viewers know that innocent people often get dragnetted into gun arrests (the same thing happens with drug arrests); that many people live in states that permit carrying a handgun in one's car, only to be arrested (sometimes on charges of speeding or other moving violations) in another state that does not permit such activity, without knowing that in advance; and that the mandatory minimum sentences for possessing a handgun in relation to a drug felony (even if the drug felony is possession with intent to distribute a few ounces of marijuana, which I strongly believe should be legalized) are unjust. On the four-person panel were two firm gun control advocates, a gun ownership/use advocate whose gun rights views are at times firmer than those of the executive director of the National Rifle Association, and myself, who says that the Second Amendment needs to be amended before the federal, state and local governments are permitted to limit firearm possession close to the current level of limitations. The two gun control advocates consisted of a gentleman whose son was murdered with a handgun in the District of Columbia, and a fellow local National Lawyers Guild member who has been supporting Brady bill types of legislation. Asked for my thoughts about American society's rampant violence, I responded that the answer goes well beyond the widespread availability of handguns. For one thing, when deprived of firearms, people wishing to commit violence have such alternative options as knives and explosives made from material that is easily obtained (e.g., Molotov cocktails). I said that violence often happens because of societal desensitization about violence and feelings of disconnect in society. I got nods of agreement from the pro-gun control panelists when I said that America's constant warmongering helps desensitize people about violence. I also pointed out that Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh served in the military during the first Iraq war in 1991. The gun rights panelist insisted the current Gulf War was justified for having removed a "sadistic dictator." Further discussing the causes of violence in America, I pointed out the frontier mentality that still overly pervades American society, with too many people having an attitude of "Hooray for me. To hell with you." I said that everyone needs to reach out to everyone else, starting with the people living right next door to us. I also got nods of agreement from the pro-gun control panelists when I pointed out that desensitization about violence also arises from too many police officers being too trigger happy with their tasers and guns. At the conclusion of the taping, I went over to the man whose son was murdered, and told him I was sorry that his son had been killed. He thanked me and gave me a hug, rather than shunning me for my views. From the time I was invited to this interview, I started trying to make sense of what the Arab Television Network is all about, this being the television station that conducted the interview. It appears that the station is too new to have any useful Google coverage. The station is based in Denmark, and its website has limited information. One of the station's employees expects the interview will soon be uploaded to PressTV.com (and possibly portions on YouTube) under the section for the "American Dream" program that handled the interview. Press TV's website says: "PRESS TV is the first international Iran-based news network to broadcast in English on a round-the-clock schedule. Our Tehran-based headquarters is staffed by media professionals from around the world. PRESS TV has an extensive network of bureaus located in the world's most strategic places." The International Herald Tribune reports that the station launched just over three months ago. Other reports confirm that Press TV is at least partially-funded by the Iranian government. An article on IndyMedia.org quotes Amir Afra -- who produces and hosts Press TV's "Fine Print" program -- as saying: "We're state-funded, not state-governed... We are like so many non-governmental organizations that receive state funds. We have our own editorial board." A host of "American Dream" (different from the host when I appeared) is Mark Levine, who claims he is not being censored on the show, and who confirms the show's affiliation with Press TV. Consequently, I wonder why the woman who invited me to the panel interview characterized it as an interview by Arab Television Network rather than an interview for a show running on Press TV. In any event, an interviewee always runs the risk that an unfamiliar interviewing news organization will have an agenda opposite that of the interviewee. Would I still have appeared on this program had I known its connections with Press TV? I probably would have wanted to dig into what Press TV is all about before making a final decision. Even now I do not have enough information about the extent to which the station is as independent as it claims from the Iranian government. Jon Katz. ADDENDUM: On December 13, I accepted an invitation to return to the same "American Dream" program, this time about the December 6, 2007, mall shootings in Nebraska. The person inviting me, from ATV, told me that she always tells interviewees that the program broadcasts on Press TV. Therefore, if I mis-heard about Press TV when invited for the above-described October 19 "American Dream" appearance, I apologize about my original comments about that in the above blog entry. Whether or not I misheard, now I know the nature of Press TV, and told the person

inviting me on the show for December 13 that I accepted the invitation so long as I will not be censored, which she said I will not. If it were only so easy to know something is so just because someone says it is so.

Posted by Jon Katz in Constitutional Law at 00:19