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Can Rush Keep It Up?

March 5, 2012

Rush Limbaugh's gross comments about a female college student who voiced support for President Obama's birth-control insurance compromise have forced some old Republican allies to distance themselves from the talk-radio star, raising questions about Limbaugh losing his potency, says Peter Dreier.

By Peter Dreier

The response to Rush Limbaugh's latest tirade about college women having too much sex suggests that he may be growing impotent, politically at least.

With a large audience of conservative listeners, the radio reactionary was once able to intimidate Republican politicians into defending his outrageous comments or publicly apologizing to him if they dared voice even the mildest criticism. He was invited to speak to gatherings of GOP pols and activists, who took Limbaugh's advice in order to gain his favor and avoid his vitriol.



Talk-radio host Rush Limbaugh

A Who's Who of the conservative political world — including Karl Rove, Sean Hannity, Mary Matalin, Rudy Giuliani, Fred Thompson, and Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas — attended Limbaugh's fourth wedding in 2010.

But the reaction to his comments on his radio show last week — when he called a Georgetown University student a “slut” and a “prostitute” for advocating expanded access to birth control — shows that his influence may be on the wane. Has Limbaugh finally become politically impotent?

Last year, Fox News pulled Glenn Beck's show off the air as a result of declining ratings, a boycott by consumers of companies that advertised on his show, and growing [controversy over Beck's increasingly lunatic diatribes](#). Is the end now in sight for Limbaugh's radio empire?

The latest firestorm over Limbaugh began after he attacked Sandra Fluke, a law student who testified on Capitol Hill last month in favor of the Obama administration's decision to require employers to offer health insurance plans that cover birth control.

Limbaugh said that Fluke “wants to be paid to have sex. She’s having so much sex she can’t afford the contraception. She wants you and me and the taxpayers to pay her to have sex.”

The talk-show host then went further, adding: “So Miss Fluke, and the rest of you Feminazis, here’s the deal. If we are going to pay for your contraceptives, and thus pay for you to have sex. We want something for it. We want you post the videos online so we can all watch.”

Limbaugh’s remarks sparked sharp criticism not only from President Barack Obama (who phoned Fluke on Friday to express his support) and other liberals like House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-California, but also from some Republicans and conservatives, who acknowledged that Limbaugh had crossed the line.

GOP presidential candidates Mitt Romney and Rick Santorum were forced to rebuke Limbaugh’s comments, even though their own remarks were quite tepid. Republican Sen. Scott Brown of Massachusetts, who is running for reelection, called Limbaugh’s comments “reprehensible” and said that he “should apologize.”

A spokesman for House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, said that Limbaugh’s words were “inappropriate.” Carly Fiorina, the former corporate CEO and one-time GOP candidate for U.S. Senate from California – who now serves as vice chair of the National Republican Senatorial Committee – called Limbaugh’s comments “insulting.”

Could it be possible that the GOP establishment is finally realizing that its sharp rightward turn — fueled in large part by the right-wing echo chamber of which Limbaugh is the most influential player — is alienating all but the most conservative voters and leading the party off a cliff?

(Over the past two decades, the modern Republican Party has often walked hand in hand with Limbaugh toward that cliff. After the GOP congressional victory in 1994, the House Republicans were so thankful to Limbaugh that they made him an honorary member of their new majority.)

Since his comments about Fluke, however, several of Limbaugh’s top advertisers pulled out of his syndicated radio show. Quicken Loans’s Twitter statement said: “Due to continued inflammatory comments — along with valuable feedback from clients and team members — QL has suspended ads on Rush Limbaugh program.”

Two mattress companies, Sleep Train and Sleep Number, made similar statements on Friday. A Sleep Number spokesperson wrote on Twitter, “Recent comments by Rush Limbaugh do not align w/ our values, so we made decision to immediately suspend all advertising on that program.”

At first Limbaugh not only stood by his statements, but escalated the controversy. On Friday, he offered to “buy all of the women at Georgetown University as much aspirin to put between their knees as they want,” as a form of birth control.

But by Saturday, the anger toward Limbaugh had reached such a crescendo that he was forced — perhaps for the first time in his career — to apologize. The apology, posted on his website, said he did not mean to make a “personal attack” against Fluke.

“My choice of words was not the best, and in the attempt to be humorous, I created a national stir,” he wrote. “I sincerely apologize to Ms. Fluke for the insulting word choices.”

However, his sincerity remains in question. Limbaugh has made a habit — indeed an entire career — of cowardly hate-mongering toward women and other groups. For years he has called women’s rights activists “Femi-Nazis.”

The Anti-Defamation League has challenged Limbaugh for anti-Semitic remarks. He has a long history of making anti-gay statements. He lost his position as an ESPN sports commentator for his racist comments about an African-American quarterback.

But what fueled Limbaugh’s tirade against Ms. Fluke? The brouhaha over Limbaugh’s recent comments have drawn attention to Limbaugh’s hypocrisy between his past public rhetoric and his own personal life, including his previous habit of unleashing harsh attacks on drug users at the same time he himself was addicted to drugs.

Now, in light of Limbaugh’s attack on the Georgetown law student, it hasn’t escaped attention that the radio shock jock has been married four times (beginning in 1977) and has no children. Did all of Limbaugh’s wives use birth control? Or could it be that Limbaugh is impotent in that way, too?

In 2009, returning from a vacation in the Dominican Republic, Limbaugh [was briefly detained](#) by U.S. Customs when they checked his bags and found a vial of Viagra with another person’s name listed as the user. Viagra is prescribed for erectile dysfunction, but it is sometimes taken by men visiting other countries for “sex tourism.”

Limbaugh’s attorney Roy Black said Limbaugh’s doctor prescribed the Viagra for Limbaugh but the

prescription was put in the doctor's name for privacy reasons. Limbaugh chuckled about the Viagra incident on his radio show, "I had a great time in the Dominican Republic. Wish I could tell you about it."

Now, people are wondering: Could the link between Limbaugh's sex life, his anxiety about his declining political power and his intemperate outburst about female birth control just be a fluke?

Peter Dreier teaches politics and chairs the Urban & Environmental Policy Department at Occidental College. His new book, *The 100 Greatest Americans of the 20th Century: A Social Justice Hall of Fame*, will be published by Nation Books in June.

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9 comments on "Can Rush Keep It Up?"



1. elmerfudzies on [March 5, 2012 at 9:19 pm](#) said:

Who cares about what this dude Limbaugh says or does? It's time to tune him out. I often don't know or care about radio and or Hollywood celebrities. That chick, Lindsey Lohan? for instance, I could give a hoot who she is, what she does or has done. There's so much visual and written stuff in the news streams a majority of which are impossible to relate to. I'm willing to bet, there are scores of readers who'd love to buy a software program that engineers out most of the so called eye candy and junk news.. eh?



o Big Em on [March 6, 2012 at 11:53 pm](#) said:

I agree 'elmer'! I think the main guys (and I gotta believe that RL's audience is 99% male white guys, probably between 18 & 55) who listen to his radio program are guys that 1.) don't like music, 2.) want pseudo-justifications for not caring (much less DOING anything) about other peoples' problems, 3.) want their politics simple and loud, cause that makes it 'right', aiaa-hey? To me, listening to Limbaugh would be as bad as trying to watch an hour of Jersey Shore or other similar cable crapola.



2. F. G. Sanford on [March 6, 2012 at 6:19 am](#) said:

If you look over Rush's shoulder in that picture, you'll notice the partially obstructed logo which he apparently had some hand in concocting. It is some sort of self-bestowed knighthood which I believe stands for "Excellence in Broadcasting". But ["my friends", as Rush would say], that logo has a sleazier past, and Rushbo wasn't the first to smugly display it as a status symbol. I ain't makin' this up, folks—Adolf Hitler had Albert Speer come up with a monogram for gifts he gave to Eva Braun, and it's exactly like Rushbo's logo: EB, in the shape of a butterfly!

I don't understand why the comedy world hasn't picked up on the fact that these arch conservatives are always preoccupied with how much and what kind of sex other people are having. They bitch and moan about "welfare queens", a thinly veiled racist slur, but get all excited about birth control. "Right to life" is another one, but they're all for the death penalty. Women shouldn't use contraceptives because it, "encourages promiscuity", but it's OK for some fat, sleazy white guy to go to the Dominican Republic and 'have his way' with women who would live in abject poverty if it weren't for sex tourism. Yes, let's destroy the social safety nets, make education expensive beyond the reach of the "unwashed masses", eliminate social security and labor unions, and that way, people like Rush won't have to travel so far to engage in human trafficking. George Carlin really hit the nail on the head: "What is it with these fat, rich white guys sucking on those big, thick brown...[cigars]. Michael Savage is another one like Rush. He apparently changed his name and disavowed his decidedly San Francisco lifestyle past to cash in on the hate-mongering conservative radio goldmine. It's a formula: blame welfare, social programs, taxes, minorities and liberals for all the problems caused by outsourcing, union busting, corporate welfare and endless war. Every arch-conservative I ever knew had two things in common: prurient preoccupation with sex, and they all cheat on their taxes. NO EXCEPTIONS!



3. charles sereno on [March 6, 2012 at 5:52 pm](#) said:

I doubt that Limbaugh will fall as easily as Beck (media differences). However, the list of attendees at Rush's (4th) wedding should be documented for future reference.



4. Seeker on [March 7, 2012 at 2:14 am](#) said:

As of late this afternoon 30 companies had pulled ads from Limbaugh's show. Of course the question is are they simply waiting to ride out the storm or are these permanent decisions?

And still – wouldn't the world be a little more sane and perhaps even our political discourse if Limbaugh was off the public airwaves?



5. chmoore on [March 7, 2012 at 4:16 pm](#) said:

It's interesting how regularly over time Rush has been the subject of TV "news" stories; especially MSNBC so frequently. A longer view analysis, such as this one here, can be informative, but does every one of Rush's broadcasts really warrant daily coverage?

It reminds me of the saying – no such thing as bad publicity as long as they spell your name right. Funny, I can't recall ever seeing a mis-spelling of Rush's name in any of the long running daily TV slams.



6. John Puma on [March 8, 2012 at 7:58 pm](#) said:

Really ... "questions about Limbaugh losing his potency."

I'd suggest if he had ANY potency we may have NEVER heard of him.

This is one, extremely sick dude.



- o Patricia Abbott on [March 10, 2012 at 7:16 pm](#) said:

Potency? That is so humorous. Re the trip to the Dominican Republic. Perhaps he should apply his verbal criteria regarding Fluke to himself.

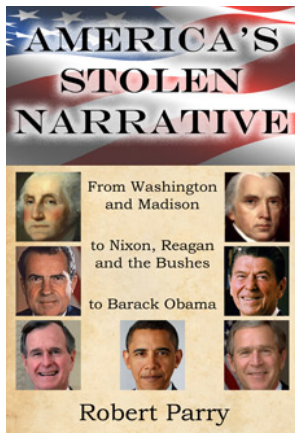


7. lokasi on [March 10, 2012 at 11:21 am](#) said:

Hey there, You have performed an excellent job. I will definitely digg it and personally suggest to my friends. I'm sure they will be benefited from this web site.

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