

Thanks, Nelson, for whacking gasbags

Thursday, Apr 23, 2009 - 12:16:49 am CDT

Thanks to U.S. Sen. Ben Nelson for his recent [scolding of the broadcast industry's](#) professional anger mongers and those who pay too much attention to them.

Leaning against the wind and din of television and radio ranters, Nelson evenhandedly summarized the sad state of public discourse. It was refreshing for a United States senator to tell it as Nelson did last week when he spoke to the Nebraska Public Policy Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Criticizing those from the left and right who distort information as a way of making a living, Nelson said far too many citizens who complain about government or some particular issue do so with inaccurate information picked up on TV or radio.

Boy, do they.

Nelson named a few of the well-known news media entertainment personalities as sources of these distortions: Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Glenn Beck, Bill O'Reilly, plus some from the other side of the ditch, Jon Stewart, Rachel Maddow and Keith Olbermann.

It's difficult to deny the entertainment value of any of these shows, more or less, according to the cut of your jib. Certainly Stewart's "The Daily Show" is deliberately for yuks. But they all are, in fact, "shows."

Reliable and detached sources for information you'd swear to? Well, hardly.

Nelson gave an amusing example, taken here from his remarks at UNL: "A conservative talk show host, who's anything but fair and balanced, even though some people who subscribe to his agenda think he is, attacked me for an earmark in the omnibus spending bill.

"It was for research done here at the University of Nebraska to control stable flies," Nelson said.

He described the extent of damage those pests do to the cattle industry.

"But the shouting head on TV twisted it around, branded it as pork, and made it sound like the earmark was to study HOUSE flies in Nebraska."

Of course, the calls came rolling in from people angry about the wasteful spending on fly research in Nebraska, which, Nelson pointed out, the Bush administration tried, but failed, to move to Texas.

Gullibility certainly isn't confined to America, but throughout history Americans seem to get a peculiar lift from gasbags who float on their own propaganda — perhaps because we are free to do so.

An example of the weird loyalty these entertainers inspire was there on the Journal Star Web site, appended as a comment to Don Walton's story on Nelson's speech:

"Someone should tell Nelson to look at the ratings for all of the people he criticizes.

... All are top of the ratings. They must be telling the truth or people wouldn't watch or listen."

Zounds!

Ratings = Truth?

Since when did broadcast ratings come to be a test of truth?

Unintentionally, the commenter makes our point.

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