

Poof! CNN's Jake Tapper disappears from Clinton Foundation website: Column

Kelsey Rupp and David Mastio, USA TODAY 5:10 p.m. EDT May 20, 2015

Journalists are supposed to report the news, not be part of it.



(Photo: Screenshot from May 19, 2015.)

Yet another high-profile TV newsman may find himself embroiled in controversy over his connections to the Clinton Foundation.

Until late Tuesday afternoon, the Clinton Foundation website listed CNN anchor Jake Tapper as a "speaker" at a [Clinton Global Initiative event \(https://www.clintonfoundation.org/clinton-global-initiative/meetings/cgi-america\)](https://www.clintonfoundation.org/clinton-global-initiative/meetings/cgi-america) scheduled for June 8-10 in Denver. After USA TODAY asked CNN about the event, Tapper's name was swiftly removed from the Clinton Foundation website.

One reason for CNN's quick reaction is easy to understand. Last week, ABC News anchor George Stephanopoulos, once a political operative for former president Bill Clinton, was widely attacked after he [failed to disclose \(http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/abc-newss-stephanopoulos-donated-50000-to-clinton-foundation/2015/05/14/49018d46-fa42-11e4-9030-b4732caefe81_story.html\)](http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/abc-newss-stephanopoulos-donated-50000-to-clinton-foundation/2015/05/14/49018d46-fa42-11e4-9030-b4732caefe81_story.html) \$75,000 in donations to the Clinton Foundation even as he covered the Clintons.

Tapper has no comparable connections to the Clintons. But by participating in the event next month, while Hillary Clinton is running for president and the foundation is in the news, he too could face criticism for an overly cozy relationship with the Democrats' most likely 2016 presidential nominee.



USA TODAY

Kirsten Powers: Singling Stephanopoulos out misses the point

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2015/05/19/abc-stephanopoulos-foundation-ethics-donations-partisan-column/27583103/>)

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Jake Tapper

Anchor and Chief Washington Correspondent, CNN

Jake Tapper joined the network in January 2013 as CNN anchor and chief Washington correspondent. His one-hour weekday program "The Lead with Jake Tapper" seeks to examine and advance stories that demonstrate Tapper's own curiosities and interests with headlines from around the country and the globe. His most recent book, "The Outpost: An Untold Story of American Valor," debuted in the top 10 on The New York Times best seller list. Tapper joined CNN from ABC News. Tapper has earned the coveted Merriman Smith award for presidential coverage from the White House Correspondents' Association an unprecedented three consecutive times. Prior to joining ABC News, Tapper served as national correspondent, for Salon.com. His reporting has been published in The New Yorker and The Washington Post, among others. He has also drawn caricatures and illustrations and his comic strip, "Capitol Hell," appeared in Roll Call from 1994 to 2003. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa, Magna Cum Laude from Dartmouth College and lives in Washington, D.C.

Jake Tapper's bio on the Clinton Foundation website, before he was scrubbed from the website. (Photo: Screenshot from May 19, 2015.)

Tapper wouldn't comment on the record. A CNN spokesperson, who asked not to be named, said Tapper was improperly listed as a speaker on the foundation website; he is scheduled to interview former president Clinton at the event and later moderate a panel discussion. The spokesperson said the network-approved interview will be televised. There will be no restrictions on the questions, and Tapper will not be paid by the foundation. Other details are still being negotiated.

That stands in Tapper's favor, but it does not solve the problem for Tapper or CNN, which is scheduled to host three Republican presidential primary debates. After Stephanopoulos' donations were reported [by the conservative *Washington Free Beacon*](http://freebeacon.com/politics/abc-news-anchor-george-stephanopoulos-donated-50000-to-clinton-foundation/) (<http://freebeacon.com/politics/abc-news-anchor-george-stephanopoulos-donated-50000-to-clinton-foundation/>), the ABC anchor withdrew from participation in a Republican debate, a blow to the network that reportedly signed a \$105 million contract (<http://pagesix.com/2015/05/18/george-stephanopoulos-future-and-105m-contract-in-danger/>) with the former Clinton White House employee.

Tapper has a far better reputation among Republicans than his controversial former ABC News colleague. But like Stephanopoulos, Tapper has a history on the liberal side of the political fence. According to a glowing profile of Tapper in *Politico* (written by a former Obama administration spokesperson (<http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/04/jake-tapper-cnns-future-or-its-past-105903.html#.VVzGNvIVhHw>)), from 2000 to 2003 (http://www.salon.com/writer/jake_tapper/) Tapper was a political reporter for the left-leaning news site *Salon*, where his work showed great skill and a liberal edge. Years before that he was spokesman for a Democratic congresswoman (http://articles.philly.com/1993-11-21/news/25945173_1_margolies-mezvinsky-press-secretary-caricatures) who became Chelsea Clinton's mother-in-law (http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/04/us/politics/chelsea-clinton-mother-in-law-marjorie-margolies-runs-for-house.html?_r=0) in 2010 (<http://www.biography.com/people/chelsea-clinton-547578#college-years>).

Since then Tapper, like Stephanopoulos, has successfully walked away from partisan politics to embrace a non-partisan persona and network stardom. In 2013, he wrote a well-received book (<http://www.amazon.com/The-Outpost-Untold-Story-American/dp/031618540X>) on the war in Afghanistan, and he has contributed to conservative magazines such as *The American Spectator* (http://articles.philly.com/1993-11-21/news/25945173_1_margolies-mezvinsky-press-secretary-caricatures) and *The Weekly Standard* (<http://www.weeklystandard.com/author/jake-tapper>).

Conservative talk radio host Hugh Hewitt (<http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/radio-host-hugh-hewitt-to-moderate-first-gop-2016-debate/article/2560609>), who will ask questions at one of CNN's Republican debates, said Tapper's participation in Clinton Foundation events doesn't make a difference to him. He calls Tapper "the equal of any journalist at work today when it comes to fairness, intellect, integrity and seriousness. I'd be honored to work with him anytime, anywhere."

Tapper has worked hard building bridges with high-profile Republicans and conservative opinion leaders such as Hewitt (<http://www.hughhewitt.com/jake-tapper-hugh-discuss-hillary-clintons-problem-distance-obamacare/>). It is hard to find conservatives or Republicans who speak ill of him. In Washington circles, his reputation for fairness is formidable. As a CNN spokesperson pointed out, in addition to appearances at Clinton Foundation events, Tapper has been a keynote speaker at Reagan (<http://home.reaganfoundation.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ReagansCountryNewsletterNovember2013>) and Nixon (<http://nixonfoundation.org/2013/07/cnn-jake-tapper/>) presidential library events, just as he interviewed former President Clinton at a Clinton Foundation event in 2012 (http://press.clintonglobalinitiative.org/in_the_news_cgiu/bill-clinton-on-cgi-u-summit-people-that-want-to-make-a-difference-for-the-grassroots-up/).



USA TODAY

Stephanopoulos, ABC have not fully disclosed Clinton ties:
Schweizer

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2015/05/16/stephanopoulos-abc-clinton-schweizer-foundation-hillary-column/27436475/>)

But inevitably when a major news media personality works with an outside group instead of covering it, his or her participation lends credibility to the group and helps publicize its efforts. Often, as with the Reagan and Nixon libraries, that is no problem.

But there are two differences between the Clinton Foundation and presidential libraries.

The first is that Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon are dead. Hillary Clinton is running for office now.

Second, politics aside, while Nixon and Reagan had plenty of scandal, today the doings at their libraries are not news. The Clinton Foundation, on the other hand, is at the center of a swirl of corruption allegations reported on cable news shows, including Tapper's, and on front pages across the country. Should Hillary Clinton be elected, we will be hearing about them for years, whether they have merit or not.

So when Hillary Clinton and her foundation are being accused of questionable dealings, journalists should be observers at foundation events, not participants. CNN views the fact that Tapper is going to get to interview a former president as justifying Tapper's ethical compromise. It might have a point, except that striding on to a stage before a crowd of Clinton Foundation supporters is not the place where a tough interview is likely to take place.

Journalists' role is to uncover facts and get to the truth, not to be used by foundations, either for their legitimate philanthropic purposes or to deflect controversy. ABC and Stephanopoulos have learned this lesson. CNN and Jake Tapper should, too.

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