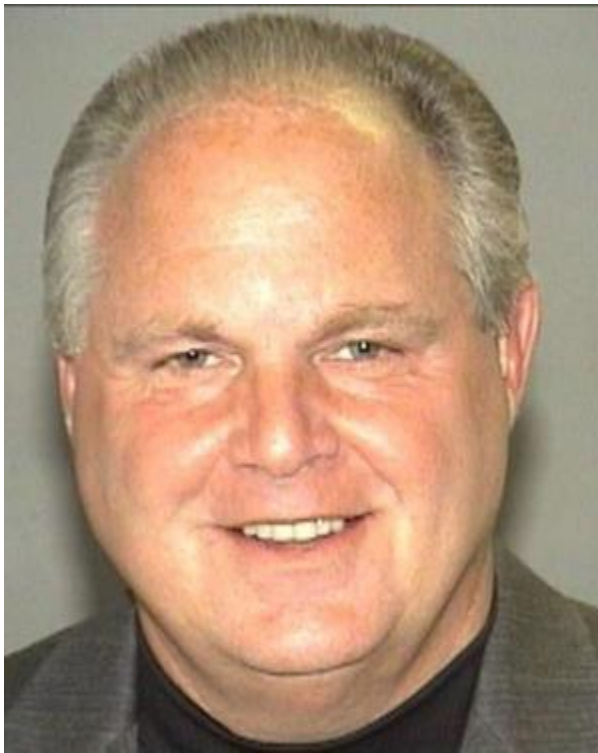


Free Speech Bites Rush Limbaugh Back

YAHOO! CONTRIBUTOR NETWORK

By [Isa-Lee Wolf](#) March 9, 2012 3:40 PM

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Rush Limbaugh

COMMENTARY | Let's have a little First Amendment chat, specifically about the clause that ensures freedom of speech. People seem to have a lot of trouble understanding what that means: often, regular citizens assume that the First Amendment allows you to say whatever you want, however you want, wherever you want, with no consequence.

Not exactly.

Or to be more accurate, not remotely. First things first, though. The Constitution only applies to government action. So say you have a spat below in the comments, as someone calls you an "idiot" and you respond, correcting the genius on his spelling. Your discussion gets heated. The Constitution doesn't care.

But say you call a Congressman an "idiot." That Congressman -- a representative of the government bound by the Constitution -- cannot then take action to silence you, or to censor your speech, in the same way websites can, thanks to the First Amendment.

So back to the original point. Recently, [Rush Limbaugh](#) [bled sponsors](#) over his [vicious attacks](#) of Sandra Fluke, the woman who wanted to testify before Congress about contraception. You may be wondering, hey, is that legal? The guy was just exercising his First Amendment right to call that woman a slut and a prostitute, and to say that she should be required to post sex videos online. How can he have consequences for exercising his free speech?

Well, unless he was threatening her, encouraging others to threaten her, or in some way, stepping into the realm of [unprotected speech](#), [violating broadcast standards](#), or a law, the government itself cannot take action against him.

But we private citizens are free to take whatever steps we choose, even boycotting companies that advertise with him. Free speech may guarantee your right to be free from government interference when it comes to what you want to say, but it does not ensure that you will be free of negative reaction to what you say, which is a very different concept all together.

In fact, the reaction to Limbaugh's repeated diatribes shows the strength of the First Amendment at work. The speech clause creates a so-called "[marketplace of ideas](#)," where opposing thoughts and opinions may be expressed instead of censored.

Limbaugh certainly expressed his opinions.

But then others are free to express their reactions, are free to offer counter-speech, and are free to call attention to what he said, as well as to let consumers know that they could, unwittingly, be supporting Limbaugh's show through the companies with which they choose to do business. Speech is designed to be the most self-correcting of self-correcting markets.

It doesn't mean that we'll always like what we hear or read or see. But the beauty of the First Amendment is in the simplicity of its response: the answer to speech you do not like is more speech.

It works, too. Just ask Rush Limbaugh.

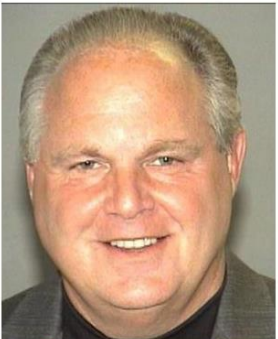
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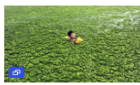
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