

6 Website
Charlie Sykes
The Bulwark

For more than 20 years, Sykes was the host of the most popular conservative radio talk show in the swing state of Wisconsin. In 2018 he founded national news website The Bulwark, joining forces with other disaffected Republicans.



"I think of my life as before and after 28 March 2016. For 23 years I had a conservative talk show on Wisconsin's largest radio station. I was an outspoken conservative, very close to every Republican leader in the state. But from the moment that Donald Trump came down the golden escalator, he seemed to be a cartoon version of everything the left had said about the right: racist, misogynistic, xenophobic.

One by one, other Republicans decided that, 'Maybe it won't be so bad. We have to stick with the team.' I could feel that the audience that had been with me for 23 years was shifting. I hadn't changed where I was on Trump but the Republican Party was changing. It was adapting itself to Trump, at first reluctantly, then with a sort of transactionalism: 'We'll get things from Trump that we wouldn't get from any Democrat.' Gradually that became a habit. And here we are today, where the Republican Party is more like a cult of personality than it is a political party – and I'm the one who's excommunicated.

When I voluntarily left my talk show at the end of 2016, I wasn't on the team any more – for the first time. At The Bulwark we gave voice to people who otherwise would have thought they were out on an island by

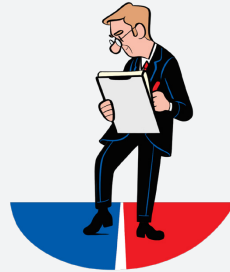
themselves. We create a space, voice and structure where these dissenters can express their opinion and realise that they're not alone. Right now you have people who have been in the [Trump] administration coming forward and saying, 'This was wrong.' These are people who have come in from the cold and become outspoken about what they saw. What role did we play in that? Maybe just to keep the fire burning on the outside, saying, 'If you want to break with this administration there's a place you can go where your story will be told.' It's important to document and comment on what's happening from a source on the centre-right. Why do you preach to the choir? So that they will sing.

"The notion that I could write an article to get people to re-evaluate a fundamental life choice would be naive"

If you think of me as being an optimist, you've misunderstood me. I struggle for optimism. It is difficult to reach into these bubbles and convince [Trump supporters] to come out. I tried when I was on the air, at a time when my influence among conservatives was much greater than it is now, and it became increasingly hard. There are so many ways now of rationalising your position; it becomes a sealed universe. So I wouldn't say that The Bulwark is going to convert hardcore Trumpers to moderation. The notion that I could write an article that will get people to suddenly re-evaluate a fundamental life choice that they've made would be naive. My goals are more modest than when I was on the radio: I understand that if you are going to be a 'never Trump' conservative, you have to embrace your temporary irrelevance. Even after the election there's going to be tremendous resistance in Republican circles to listen to anything that we have to say." — CCE

7 Newspaper
George F Will
'The Washington Post'

A conservative columnist at the liberal-leaning paper, Will is set to vote Democrat for the first time.



"It's my conviction that the US needs a two-party system with two sensible parties – and one of the parties ought to represent conservatism. Trump is not a conservative in substance or manner. I'm eager to give what my little column can to ensure that Biden wins.

The understandable hostility of many journalists to Trump has seeped into their writing and their topic selection to an extraordinary degree. Some of our great newspapers have become openly partisan, not just on their editorial pages but in their news reporting too. When this is over and Biden wins – as I expect him to – there will be, I hope, reflection on the part of the mainstream media as to whether they want to carry on this way or reclaim a journalistic ideal of evenhandedness. There's reason to worry that journalists have found their new role as undisguised advocates exhilarating and won't want to change.

For a columnist, the meta problem is this: the kind of people who read writing by people like me are uncommonly interested in politics and are well stocked with information and opinion. They are least apt to be moved by what media do. In my columns I like to have a high ratio of fact to opinion and to present facts that will challenge settled assumptions. The 2000 election turned on 537 votes, so at the margins things can matter." — HAN

8 Website
Lucia Walinchus
Eye on Ohio

Walinchus is executive director of Eye on Ohio, a non-profit news outlet for investigative journalism.

"This election highlights the importance of good information. Eye on Ohio has a misinformation and disinformation fellow, Shana Black. She goes through the dregs of the internet to find the craziest stories on Facebook and Twitter. We don't necessarily publish them because we don't want to give oxygen to conspiracy theories. But we take them to local papers and radio stations, who can go into the stories in more depth.

Ohio's economy – previously very manufacturing-heavy – has really changed over the past few years, particularly in places such as Cleveland, which has lost a lot of its population. On the other hand, the state capital, Columbus, has gained a lot of new people and become more of a technology hub. So it's now an interesting demographic mix.

We have a whole bunch of data on just how vital civic journalism is and how it impacts on government. When newspapers close, people go to the polls less often, politics becomes more partisan, people who vote do so less often, the number of overall voters goes down and fewer people run for mayor. The national media absolutely do not pay enough attention to local news. A friend of mine once said that when they do, it's almost as though they're on safari and they're coming across an expedition in the jungle. It's important to not parachute in but to actually have reporters who are living in a region and can understand its particular context." — HRS



9 Newspapers
Julie Anderson
'Orlando Sentinel' and 'South Florida Sun Sentinel'

Anderson is editor in chief of two Florida-based newspapers, one serving politically marginal Orlando, the other covering left-leaning South Florida. She aims to keep opinions and political endorsements separate from the newsroom.

"I took over the editor in chief role at the *South Florida Sun Sentinel* in 2018, just two weeks after the high-school mass shooting in Parkland. The whole newsroom – more than 100 people – was involved in covering that tragedy and eventually, after 10 months of investigation, won the Pulitzer prize for it. Then in November 2018, I also took over the editorship of the *Orlando Sentinel*, which is my hometown newspaper.

myself out so that it doesn't affect the news side. The boards interview every candidate who runs for local or state office. Before that we do background checks; we ask them to complete a detailed questionnaire. We put the interviews online so that people can judge for themselves. After the interviews are over, the editorial board will see which candidate would be the best fit for that role and publish the endorsement. It's a



The approach for both is similar in that we focus on enterprise journalism. We also have a penchant towards covering corruption – the misdeeds of those in power. That's at the heart of what journalism is about.

As news reporters we don't take an advocacy role. Separate from the newsroom is our opinion department and editorial board, which take a strong advocacy position on certain things. Those who don't agree with the opinion pages think that it influences our news. Maybe we need to do a better job of explaining the difference between news and opinion but I can't understate how polarised a time it is right now. Conservative readers, especially, are more suspicious of the press in general, since our president has demonised us and called our motives into question.

We have one editorial board in each market. I'm an official member of the editorial boards but I haven't been participating in them – I pull

lengthy process – the board interviewed more than 80 people in South Florida and in Orlando – but it's also one of the most valued things that we do, according to readers. They want to vote and they want to make an informed decision.

The presidential endorsement has the least effect; there's so much information about the president and his challenger. But we do weigh in from the lens of what's best for our community and what's best for our state. The priorities in covering the build up to the election will be on the state's readiness to handle the crush of mail ballots and to conduct a scandal-free election. We'll be looking at any attempts at voter suppression and we'll be covering any candidate visits to our state, and what they'll be focusing on to sway the last undecided voters. We also have to be prepared for surprises that might try to tip the balance one way or the other." — CCE