

Fox taps NPR analyst fired for Muslim remarks

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WASHINGTON — NPR fired longtime news analyst Juan Williams, also a commentator on the Fox News Channel, after he said he gets nervous flying with people in Muslim garb. Fox immediately hired him, giving Williams a three-year, \$2 million deal.

National Public Radio said it was terminating Williams over his comments on Fox's "The O'Reilly Factor." The firing caused an Internet firestorm, as some commenters at NPR.org applauded the firing, while others denounced the "political correct" reaction, accusing NPR of liberal bias. Conservative bloggers and Republicans did the same.

Williams and Bill O'Reilly were discussing O'Reilly's appearance last week on "The View," when Joy Behar and Whoopi Goldberg walked off the set over his views on Muslims.

"Where am I going wrong here, Juan?" O'Reilly asked. Williams, 56, said too much political correctness gets in the way of reality.

"I mean, look, Bill, I'm not a bigot. You know the kind of books I've written about the civil rights movement in this country," Williams said. "But when I get on a plane, I got to tell you, if I see people who are in Muslim garb . . . and I think, you know, they are identifying themselves first and foremost as Muslims, I get worried. I get nervous."

NPR CEO Vivian Schiller said Williams' feelings about Muslims should be between him and "his psychiatrist or his publicist." She also said Williams had veered from journalistic ethics several times before.

Newt Gingrich told Fox that Congress should investigate NPR for censorship. Sarah Palin tweeted, "NPR should receive NO fed tax dollars . . ." if it operates as intolerant, private radio." Williams said he was abruptly fired: "I said, 'You mean I don't even get the chance to come in and we do this eyeball-to-eyeball? . . ., person-to-person, have a conversation? I've been there more than 10 years,'" Williams said. He said Ellen Weiss, NPR's vice president for news responded, "There's nothing you can say that would change my mind."

The Los Angeles Times reported yesterday that Williams was promptly hired at Fox, where CEO Roger Ailes called Williams said, "Juan has been a staunch defender of liberal viewpoints since his tenure began at Fox News in 1997," Ailes said in a statement, adding a jab at NPR: "He's an honest man whose freedom of speech is protected by Fox News on a daily basis."

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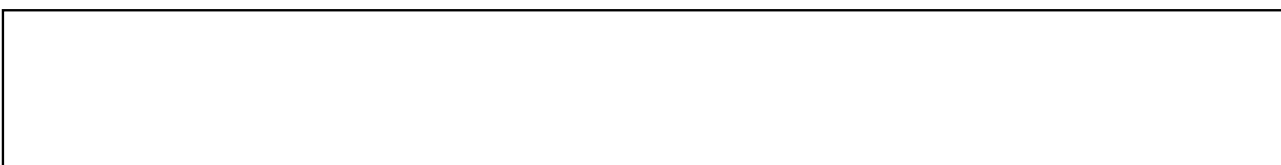
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