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opinion

## Littwin: Beck, you're fired

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Like all card-carrying members of the liberal media elite — a designation so much more elegant, by the way, than the lame, lamestream-media tag — I am sorry to see Glenn Beck go.

I knew it had to happen sometime. I knew that Stephen Colbert was right — and that we needed to prepare ourselves for the coming Glenn-Pocalypse. But I didn't think it would go down this way. I imagined there would be fireworks at the end or, if we were lucky, fire and brimstone — with frogs hopping from the mouth of a dragon, which would clearly be a ratings extravaganza.

But no. Just an announcement about "transitioning," a new no-real-meaning word to add to our national vocabulary. And, yes, there was the inevitable debate among those who need to debate something about whether Beck quit or was fired — an argument we haven't enjoyed so much since Keith Olbermann either quit or was fired.

The real question, of course, is what it all means.

It could be as simple as the fact that Beck just got too weird, even by Beckian standards. His ratings had slipped, but they were still good. Many mainstream advertisers had jumped earlier, leaving him with your standard the-world-is-ending product line, ranging from the gold coin market to the best in freeze-dried food products. But I don't doubt that Beck

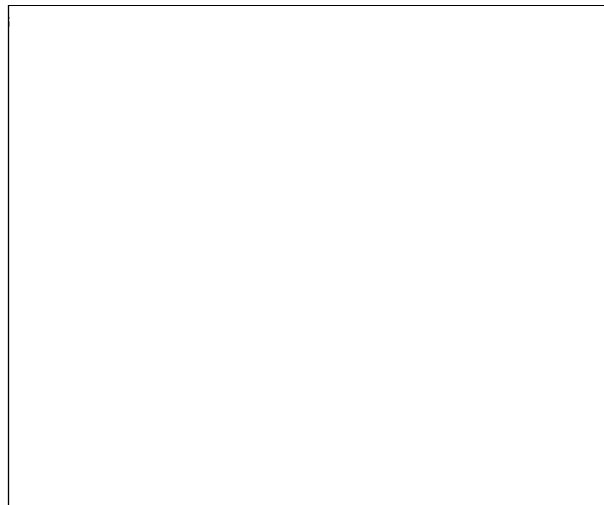
continues to be a significant money-maker. There's an entire Beck media empire.

And it was certainly not that he was too conservative. This is Fox News, after all, the station that proudly brings you Sean Hannity, just as one example. But Hannity, as far as I know, doesn't say that Barack Obama, raised by a white mother and white grandparents, is a racist who hates white culture. Beck is less conservative than he is conspiratorial — and there's a rule of conspiracies: the more you latch onto, the more bizarre you tend to look.

But that's exactly what liberals love about Beck and — I guess — what Beck fans love about Beck. Liberals get to pin Beck to Fox and Fox to Beck, who brings his chalkboard to work to tell Americans that the end is near and that it's all (or nearly all) either Obama's fault or Woodrow Wilson's.

And yet.

If Beck is in decline — if this is about the notion that he had slipped too far into the liberal/caliphate conspiracy world or too far around the George Soros/Nazi bend — then how do you explain the concurrent rise of Donald Trump? It's Trump who has tethered his phoney-baloney presidential campaign to one basic issue —



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birtherism. Forget that he almost certainly doesn't believe a single word he's saying about it. The point is that someone does.

In case you missed it, a Wall Street Journal/NBC poll of the would-be Republican presidential field has Trump tied for second, at 17 percent. He's behind Romney, but tied with Huckabee and ahead of Gingrich, Palin, T-Paw and Bachmann.

I know. Polls this early don't mean much, or anything. But for those who say that Obama wasn't polling well at this point in 2007, he was actually polling a strong second to Hillary Clinton. But Bill Clinton, at this point in 1991, was well down the list. And Jimmy Carter, in 1975, was invisible.

But still, Trump is a known entity and more. Trump is not just Trump. He's The Donald, the reality-TV star, the longtime tabloid staple.

Here's the really strange thing: Trump is so much Trump that he is too weird for — get this — Beck himself.

Just before Beck quit/was fired, he told Bill O'Reilly that Trump's candidacy made him "uncomfortable."

He wondered why Trump would talk about birtherism when there was so much else to talk about — like, I guess, Woodrow Wilson, not to mention George Soros and the Fed.

Here's what Beck said: "The last thing the country needs is a showboat. . . . I would hope we could get serious candidates who could shake things up by not saying provocative things, just by stating the truth of what's going on."

We're moving into a fascinating place politically. We're going to find out what the 2010 elections actually meant. The Republicans are making their case, whether it's in Wisconsin's anti-labor laws or with the shutdown brinkmanship in Washington or Paul Ryan's Medicare plan, which

moves us from Obama's so-called death panels to a Ryan plan that the Cato Institute approvingly says "would transition Medicare from the current Soviet-style system to one based on consumer choice" — in other words toward consumer-based rationing.

It's a time for serious national conversation — talk of Soviet-style Medicare notwithstanding — which obviously precludes Beck's chalkboard. I'm sure Fox, if it cares about being taken seriously, realizes that much. I wonder if someone will tell The Donald.

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