



Billionaire Trump Donor John Malone Could Soon Be Calling Shots at CNN

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What will *CNN* become under John Malone?

“I would like to see *CNN* evolve back to the kind of journalism that it started with, and actually have journalists, which would be unique and refreshing,” the media billionaire Malone told *CNBC* (11/18/21) in November.

“I do believe good journalism could have a role in the future portfolio that Discovery/TimeWarner’s going to represent,” he went on.

In the interview with *CNBC*’s David Faber, Malone also said:

Fox News, in my opinion, has followed an interesting trajectory of trying to have *news news*, I mean some actual journalism, embedded in a program schedule of all opinions.

Brian Flood of right-wing *Fox News* (11/19/21) said of Malone’s *CNBC* declaration:

Liberty Media chairman John Malone, who sits on the Discovery, Inc. board of directors, wants to see left-wing *CNN* revert back to nonpartisan journalism following the completion of a merger that would put the liberal network under the Discovery channel.

More Than a Board Member

Malone, in fact, is more than a Discovery board member; he’s its chair and largest shareholder. *CNN*, started by Ted Turner and now owned by AT&T, is part of an \$85 billion acquisition by Discovery, expected to be finalized this year.

Malone’s links to politics include being an active supporter — he’s currently a board member — of the Cato Institute, the Washington-based libertarian think tank that espouses the privatization

of numerous US government agencies and programs, including Social Security and the Postal Service.

His Liberty Media empire was among the big contributors to Donald Trump's 2017 inauguration festivities in Washington, DC, with personal and corporate contributions adding up to \$1 million.

However, in 2019, in another interview with Faber on *CNBC* (11/21/19), Malone said:

Look, I think a lot of things Trump has tried to do — identifying problems and trying to solve them — has been great.... I just don't think he's the right guy to do it. Half the people that he's hired and thrown under the bus are now trying to kill him. I mean, what kind of thing is that?

Malone then said he would vote for former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg for president in 2020.

No “Coward’s Way Out”

Brian Freeman of right-wing *Newsmax* (11/21/21) said:

CNN will be the key news property in the merged company, one that will be dominated by entertainment programming. There had been rumors that *CNN* might be spun off or sold, but Malone indicated [in the *CNBC* interview] that's not likely.

Malone, Freeman said, described such a move as a “coward’s way out.”

Freeman asserted that “Malone has cause to worry about the left-wing network,” because

CNN's ratings have collapsed over 50% in the past year and may be suffering from a credibility gap with viewers.... Last March, a *Hill/HarrisX* poll found that 47% of registered voters believe *CNN* holds a liberal bias in reporting.

(In the same poll, 48% of respondents said they believed *Fox* had a conservative bias — but who's counting?)

Steve Straub of the right-wing website the Federalist Papers (11/22/21) said of Malone's *CNBC* comments:

CNN's soon-to-be new owner just made a startling admission, one that has been obviously apparent to us and many others for some time, that the so-called news network has no actual journalists.

“The Most Powerful Man You’ve Never Heard Of”

“John Malone... Meet the Most Powerful Man That You’ve Never Heard Of,” was a heading of a 2018 piece on the website of the British-based *Gentleman’s Journal*. Malone owns

services and TV channels you've most likely used or watched...yet the name John Malone still draws a sea of blank faces.... One of the most powerful, yet unknown, individuals in America...as Liberty Media's chairman and largest stakeholder, John Malone is one of the world's most influential media magnates.

In addition to being part-owner of the Atlanta Braves, the website noted,

he currently owns more land in America than anyone else: 2.2 million acres to be precise.... Malone has a net worth of around \$9.22 billion, and thanks to his buccaneering role in media deals and land ownership, he's been nicknamed the "Cable Cowboy."

The article related how Malone, born in Connecticut, has a Ph.D. in operations research from Johns Hopkins University, and

joined the worldwide management consulting firm McKinsey & Company in 1968. However, fatigued from the constant traveling his job required, he left after five years to join General Instrument; while at GI, he ran Jerrold — a subsidiary which produces minicomputers for the cable TV industry — and was eventually offered the role of CEO of Tele-Communications, Inc... [which] only had 400,000 subscribers and owed creditors \$132 million.... Malone was only 29 at the time.

Within 17 years of snapping up smaller operators and acquiring minority stakes in other channels, TCI, under the management of Malone, had accumulated 8.5 million subscribers and grew into the second largest cable company after Time Warner. Because of his business deals in the byzantine world of cable TV, Malone was compared to "Darth Vader" by former US Vice President Al Gore....

At the helm of Liberty Media, the young American changed the organization from just providing cable services to actually owning the networks broadcast on its infrastructure, including the Discovery Channel, QVC and Virgin Media.

"CNN Could Face a Reset"

The headline last week in *Variety* (2/8/22): "CNN Could Face a Reset Under Discovery Control." The article by Brian Steinberg spoke of how under its recently resigned president, Jeff Zucker, "CNN became more swashbuckling, more colorful..."

But Discovery is "a media company that tries to maintain a quieter corporate demeanor." Zucker

changed the culture of the news outlet, shoving it into more direct competition with *Fox News Channel* and *MSNBC*.... Will Discovery change the recipe? There are signs that executives at the company see Zucker's departure as an opportunity for a reset at *CNN*.

The piece spoke of those who "argue Zucker's strategies have been good for *CNN* — and for people who have been helped by its aggressive accountability journalism in Washington." The article concluded:

Executives charged with leading *CNN* in the wake of Zucker's exit have vowed to staffers in internal meetings that his vision for the network will remain intact, but chances are Discovery will dim Zucker's flash.

That would not be good news.

The future of democracy in the United States is at stake amid the polarization and deadlock of the political process in Washington. Media are increasingly under the control of right-wing zealots like Rupert Murdoch and those behind *Newsmax*, etc., who are poisoning communications.

Critically needed now is an independent, honest, credible press providing, yes, aggressive accountability journalism — a light to enable people to find their way out of this mess. Instead, the nation's oldest cable news channel will soon be under the control of someone who appears to want it to follow the “interesting trajectory” of *Fox News*.