

Straight News

An Interview with Bret Baier, Anchor and Executive Editor, Special Report with Bret Baier, and Chief Political Anchor, FOX News Channel

EDITORS' NOTE Ranking the highest-rated cable news program in its time slot and consistently one of the top five shows in cable news, Bret Baier celebrated his 10-year anniversary of anchoring Special Report in January 2019. He joined the network in 1998 as the first reporter in the Atlanta bureau and is now based in Washington, D.C. For the 2012 and 2016 political seasons, Baier served as co-anchor of FNC's America's Election



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Headquarters. He also hosted 13 Hours At Benghazi, a documentary featuring exclusive interviews with the American security operatives who fought on the ground during the attacks in Benghazi. Additionally, Baier has anchored more than two dozen political specials on FNC, reported from Iraq 12 times and Afghanistan 13 times, traveled the world with various administrations and military officials and reported from 74 countries. Baier was awarded the 2017 Sol Taishoff Award for Excellence in Broadcast Journalism. Prior to his anchor role, Baier was named chief White House correspondent in 2006 and covered the second term of the Bush administration. Before that, he served as national security correspondent covering military and national security affairs, as well as defense, military policy and the intelligence community from the Pentagon. As FNC's Southeastern correspondent from 1998 to 2001, he covered a range of stories, including the 2001 Timothy McVeigh execution and the 1999 Elian Gonzalez story. He has also provided a series of reports from Cuba and covered more than a dozen hurricanes. Prior to joining FNC, Baier worked for WRAL-TV (CBS 5) in Raleigh, North Carolina, WREX-TV (NBC 13) in Rockford, Illinois and WJWJ-TV (PBS 2) in Beaufort, South Carolina. A graduate of DePauw University, he has a BA in political science and English. He is also the author of four New York Times Best-Sellers, Three Days in January, Special Heart: A Journey of Faith, Hope, Courage and Love, Three Days in Moscow: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of the Soviet Empire, and his most recent book, Three Days at the Brink: FDR's Daring Gamble to Win World War II, which was released in October 2019.

How do you define the purpose of your show and what have been the keys to its success?

I took over Special Report from my mentor and friend Brit Hume almost 12 years ago. The purpose of the show is to bring news from the U.S. and the world to viewers fairly and completely so they can feel they have a good sense of what's happening and can trust that they can make their own decisions about how they view something without being told how to feel or think.

Most of the show is straight news. The panel is a balanced analysis of the news of the day from all sides and then the show ends on the brighter side with good news, which we all need. That equation has enabled the show to become one of the top shows on cable and the only one that primarily is made up of straight news.

How important is it for the news to focus on the facts and truth in order to maintain public trust?

Very important. I look at myself – anchoring and as the executive editor of the show – like an ice hockey goalie trying to prevent bad pucks from getting through. There are a lot of bad pucks (bad information) on the Internet and social media, so facts need to lead the day. How each side deals with that is also part of the equation. We present all sides and then let the viewer make the ultimate decision empowered by what we can say definitively are facts and how each side portrays them.

How do you describe your leadership style and what do you see as the keys to effective leadership?

I have written books about Presidents Eisenhower, Reagan, and Roosevelt (FDR) and I studied their leadership styles. I would say Eisenhower summed up how I look at leadership: Surround yourself with good people, empower them to be great, welcome dissenting views and have people articulate their case one way or another, and then make a decision while always lifting up others along the way. Don't make things about you – make it about the team and always give credit to others.

Great leaders don't succeed because they're great – they succeed because they bring out greatness in others.

How do you define resilience and what do you see as the importance of resilience in addressing the crises the world is facing today?

I look at resilience as toughness – the ability to bounce back when you hit a bump in the road, the ability to dig down and power through tough times, the grit and determination that has made America the nation it is. Hard work has been a part of our DNA. I think, especially in today's world with the challenges that we're facing, someone who outthrusts and outworks others will get ahead.

What has been your impressions of the media coverage of the global pandemic?

Media has evolved in its understanding of the virus as the medical community has and there is a lot we are still learning. It's a scary virus and the number of deaths from it has been horrific. There is a delicate balance that needs to

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be struck. We should present what we know and what we don’t know about the virus and then discuss what public policy decisions are being debated, but we shouldn’t stoke fear for ratings – the virus is scary enough on its own.

What needs to be done to drive true change around the issue of racial inequality and social injustice?

I cover these important issues. I cover how lawmakers and community leaders deal with them. I don’t pretend to have all the answers. I know we will continue to report on all sides of this important issue fairly and hopefully whatever the ultimate answers are, we can arrive at them peacefully.

How has your personal resilience helped to drive your work?

I began in a small TV market and bounced around the country until I started with a new cable network called Fox News. The Atlanta bureau started in my apartment with a fax machine and a cellphone. Twenty-four years later, I look back at my work trajectory and especially the early days as resilience. But really the biggest challenge in my personal life has been being with our son Paul as he has fought congenital heart disease. Paul was born with 5 congenital heart defects – his heart was pumping the wrong way. After 3 open heart surgeries and

9 angioplasties, Paul is a strong 13-year-old boy and the tallest kid in his class. During the many hours spent in hospital rooms, I saw Paul’s resilience, my wife Amy’s resilience, my 10-year-old son Daniel’s resilience, and mine.

Who are some of the resilient leaders you see today?

I have a long list and would highlight the doctors and nurses on the front lines of this pandemic and the men and women of the US military who serve our nation in faraway lands with not a lot of thanks. These people exemplify the resilience that makes us a better and safer nation. ●

