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Sunday, January 23, 2011

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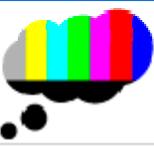
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## Media Decoder

Behind the Screens, Between the Lines



January 22, 2011, 2:48 pm

# Olbermann's MSNBC Exit Was Weeks in the Making

By [BILL CARTER](#)



MSNBC, via Associated

Press Keith Olbermann on "Countdown" on Jan. 21.

On Thursday, [NBC](#)'s news division staged an elaborate presentation for advertisers, seeking to sell commercial time in NBC's news programs over the next year. All the members of MSNBC's prime-time lineup spoke at the lunch with one exception: [Keith Olbermann](#), the network's biggest star.

For the last several weeks, Mr. Olbermann and the network have been in negotiations to end his successful run on MSNBC, according to executives involved in the talks who requested anonymity because the talks were confidential. The deal was completed on Friday, and Mr. Olbermann made the announcement on his final "Countdown" hours later.

Friday's separation agreement between MSNBC and Mr. Olbermann includes restrictions on when he can next lead a television show and when he can give interviews about the decision to end his association with the news channel.

The executives involved in the discussions confirmed that the deal carries limitations for Mr. Olbermann in terms of when he can next work on television, though he will be able to take a job in radio or on any forum on the Internet. The deal also prohibits the host from commenting publicly on the deal, the executives confirmed.

Mr. Olbermann did not respond to requests for comment Friday or Saturday. None of the executives who discussed the deal would reveal the exact length of the restrictions.

The decision was completed one year to the day from the last time NBC decided to end a relationship with an on-air star: [Conan O'Brien](#). Mr. O'Brien agreed in the deal not to start up a new television show for nine months, and not to grant interviews for five months. The executives involved in the discussions with Mr. Olbermann said his agreement was not dissimilar to Mr. O'Brien's.

Many of Mr. Olbermann's fans responded to the decision by accusing [Comcast](#), the incoming owner of [NBC Universal](#), of forcing him out for political reasons. Several of Comcast's top executives have been financial supporters of Republicans; Mr. Olbermann is largely credited with establishing MSNBC's liberal voice.

Comcast issued an official statement Friday denying any involvement in the decision, saying it had no operational control of the company yet, and adding: "We pledged from the day the deal was announced that we would not interfere with NBC Universal's news operations. We have not and we will not."

But the company is still drawing criticism for the move. Marvin Ammori, a law professor at the [University of Nebraska](#), said in an e-mail Friday, "Keith Olbermann's announcement tonight, the very same week that the government blessed the Comcast-NBC merger, raises serious concern for anyone who cares about free speech. Comcast proved expert in shaking down the government to approve its merger. Comcast's shakedown of NBC has just begun." Professor Ammori is a former adviser to the nonprofit group Free Press, which opposed the Comcast-NBC deal.

Months before Comcast was expected to gain control of NBC Universal, Comcast officials were worried about the perception that they might interfere with MSNBC for political reasons.

One executive, who asked not to be identified because Comcast had instructed employees not to speak about the situation, said the company dreaded the prospect of being blamed if Mr. Olbermann were to quit soon after the takeover.

Mr. Olbermann had butted heads with his superiors long before the Comcast deal, including Phil Griffin, the top MSNBC executive. According to several senior network executives, NBC's management had been close to firing Mr. Olbermann before, most recently in November after he revealed that he had made donations to several Democratic candidates in 2010 — one of them, coincidentally, was Representative [Gabrielle Giffords](#), who has been the subject of many of his recent shows after being shot in an assassination attempt.

Mr. Griffin said the donations had violated NBC News standards. Mr. Olbermann was suspended.

*Brian Stelter contributed reporting.*

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[tatateeta](#)

San Mateo

January 22nd, 2011

8:29 pm

I already cancelled my Comcast cable more than a year ago after they refused to take Fox out of my cable menu. I do not want my family to be forced to see the torrent of racism and lies coming from Fox 24/7. I still have internet service from Comcast. Perhaps it's time to cancel that as well.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 222 Readers

[2.](#)

milltownfan

Illinois

January 22nd, 2011

8:29 pm

Chris Matthews and Ed Schultz should be next to go. Can't stand either one of them for more than a minute.

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[3.](#)

Mr. Moderate

Cleveland, OH

January 22nd, 2011

8:29 pm

Finally, somebody got it right. Olbermann is a nasty, puerile, petulant you-know-what.

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SanW

Charlotte, NC

January 22nd, 2011

8:29 pm

Were they close to firing Joe Scarborough for his political donations?

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[5.](#)

[Bonnie](#)

Columbus

January 22nd, 2011

8:29 pm

I was always a big Keith fan until there was so much negative rhetoric everywhere that I couldn't watch his anymore either. But he was ABSOLUTELY essential as a balance to Fox Noise. I do love watching Rachel Matto and am so glad he brought her there so I can't give up watching MSNBC all together as a protest.

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[6.](#)

[Alessiana](#)

MD

January 22nd, 2011

8:30 pm

I hope he opens a YouTube channel where he can speak his mind. That shouldn't violate his agreement. Losing Olbermann's voice during these times is a blow to all citizens looking for another point of view. I miss him already, and it's only Saturday. I am going to miss his commentary on The State of the Union, and on the two rebuttals. The timing on this is awful.

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[7.](#)

[mgatlin13](#)

ny

January 22nd, 2011

8:30 pm

political reasons - there are no corporate liberals

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[8.](#)

willig

Alamo, Ca.

January 22nd, 2011

8:30 pm

Good riddance to a purveyor of venom and hatred. He can always find employment with Hugo Chavez his mentor.

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[9.](#)

avrds

Montana

January 22nd, 2011

8:32 pm

Keith Olbermann was for me like Walter Cronkite was for my parent's generation -- a voice of reason in the midst of all the noise. And someone I could trust.

I might not always agree with him, and I often thought his humor was over the top, but I always respected him. And I trusted his judgment.

I guess I will go back to CSpan to watch the state of the union next week. There's no way I will watch Lawrence O'Donnell in Olbermann's place.

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[10.](#)

Dr. Zaius

TX

January 22nd, 2011

8:32 pm

I will not watch MSNBC any more.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 144 Readers

[11.](#)

john

washington,dc

January 22nd, 2011

8:32 pm

"Mr. Olbermann had butted heads with his superiors long before the Comcast deal, including Phil Griffin, the top MSNBC executive. " Now you know they NYTimes commentators will go ballistic when they read that since they are firm believers in conspiracy theories. The following will be blamed: Rush Limbaugh, George Bush, Dick Cheney, Sarah Palin, and the Roberts Supreme Court. Who knew all 5 of his viewers also read the Times?

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[12.](#)

[lordmi](#)

lordlord

January 22nd, 2011

8:32 pm

seems they will turn MSNBC to something a-la fox.

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[13.](#)

Eric Lowin

Pleasant Hill, CA

January 22nd, 2011

8:32 pm

Keith's departure is a sad day for courageous journalism. He spoke truth to power and the corporate lackeys couldn't stand that. While Rachel Maddow, Lawrence O'Donnell, Ed Schultz, et al, are of great value, Keith was unique and his voice will be sadly missed while right wing demagogues continue to hold forth on the Flatulent News Network and hate radio across the nation.

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[14.](#)

Vicky

Sacramento, CA

January 22nd, 2011

8:32 pm

THERE IS A GOD!!!

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 45 Readers

[15.](#)

KZS

USA

January 22nd, 2011

8:32 pm

I used to live in a communist country. There and then, the censorship was by the government, and we all knew it was going on, and knew how to read between the lines. Here, censorship is run by the corporations, and unfortunately your average American has no training to recognize what is going on. Don't read me wrong, I like America a lot, but I don't like where it is going since 2000 or so.

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[16.](#)

rufusrafus

Pennsylvania

January 22nd, 2011

8:32 pm

I have a sinking feeling this is the end of MSNBC's ability to present the liberal side of the news. Too long FOX news and its ilk have dominated the airways with their lies and half truths. I fear for freedom of the press.

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[17.](#)

Lauren

Rochester, MN

January 22nd, 2011

8:32 pm

And I should believe what Comcast says because ??...

I wouldn't trust that outfit for all the tea in China.

I will miss Keith, Rachel, Ed and Lawrence.

Anyway...bye bye MSNBC....

Oh and I bet no one is happier than Joke Scarborough and his preening side-kick...

Thank you Keith....I pray your voice isn't silenced for long...I will be waiting along with many, many others.

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[18.](#)

Tony Gillotte

Vacaville, CA

January 22nd, 2011

8:32 pm

Its more than coincidental that Olberman was fired a few days after Comcast takeover NBC and therefore MSNBC. What compels a network to fire its largest star and money maker? What makes his MSNBC bosses contemplate the future without the one ringing liberal voice in its stable? Why, it coincides with Obama making moves to the center of political spectrum, courting corporations that he once called fat cats. There is nothing new under the sun, except when it comes to having liberal voice taking up the struggles of little people to fight back against the fat cats who control their lives through puny paychecks while the CEO's reap millions in salaries and bonuses. Thats how we do it in America.

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[19.](#)

cwade

long island

January 22nd, 2011

8:32 pm

however you look at it, whether he quit or was pushed out, big mistake on msnbc's part, big loss for the rest of us who were given voice by mr olbermann when no one else seemed to speak to our concerns.

thanks keith. hope we hear from you soon

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[20.](#)

[roger](#)

wantage, nj

January 22nd, 2011

8:32 pm

me wonders if comcast will be making a play to out-fox fox and in so doing considers olbermann a liability.

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[21.](#)

Jack Shultz

Pointe Claire, Quebec, Canada

January 22nd, 2011

8:32 pm

Keith Olbermann has been a voice for the left in the US at a time when few had the courage to speak up. I recall that he was among the very few to ask questions about the voting machines in Ohio after the 2004 election, and his work in support of the free health care clinics and on the HCR itself was exemplary.

His dismissal from MSNBC marks a new low for commercial television in the US. He will be missed.

I only hope that he finds a new, very prominent place in American media soon.

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[22.](#)

Jose

Clifton, New Jersey

January 22nd, 2011

8:32 pm

Another indisputable sign of how far this country has fallen. The truth, painstaking research and, ultimately, love of country itself have fallen at the feet of the greedy and the powerful, with the suicidal support of the ignorant. A truly honourable professional communicator stood in their way. That could not be tolerated. Rush, Hannity, O'Reilly and their ilk and the present Democratic hierarchy chronies are celebrating today. May they choke on their champaigne. As for MSNBC, I wish your total demise.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 155 Readers

[23.](#)

Mark

New Jersey

January 22nd, 2011

8:32 pm

I think Sirius XM just found a worthy eventual successor to Howard Stern!

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 22 Readers

[24.](#)

Bill Bauer

New York

January 22nd, 2011

8:32 pm

Shame on this network! I will continue to watch Rachael, but I am going to be very leery about what they do in the future.

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[25.](#)

[Richard Friedman](#)

Wilmette, IL

January 22nd, 2011

8:32 pm

Comcast had nothing to do with Olbermann's exit from MSNBC. And Palin had nothing to do with the atmosphere that contributed to our recent political violence. Any other fairy tales you would like me to believe?

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