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Fallout After a Blogger's Private Comments Are Aired

By **BRIAN STELTER**

Journalists, like all people, have opinions. Should those privately held opinions preclude them from writing?

That age-old debate was reignited, with a twist, last week when the blogger David Weigel resigned from The Washington Post after he made disparaging comments about conservatives on a private e-mail list called Journalist.

The twist was that Mr. Weigel was hired three months ago, in part, to have opinions. As a blogger covering the [Republican Party](#) and the [Tea Party movement](#), he was given more latitude than traditional newspaper reporters to write with a point of view and reach conclusions.

Mr. Weigel has largely declined interview requests, but he [told The Daily Caller](#) last week, "I've always been of the belief that you could have opinions and could report anyway." His blog, called "Right Now," did not present a conservative viewpoint per se; he has described himself as a libertarian and a registered Republican who votes for Democratic presidential candidates.

The case bewildered many people in the clubby world of Washington journalism, and reaffirmed the belief that mainline news organizations are still struggling to adapt to the Web, where opinions are less likely to be scrubbed from a person's writing. In a bid to bolster its online presence, The Post has hired a number of bloggers in recent years who both report and present a point of view.

The executive editor of The Post, [Marcus Brauchli](#), told his newspaper's media columnist that

Mr. Weigel did “excellent work” and that [WashingtonPost.com](#) had room for a “wide range of viewpoints.” But he added: “We can’t have any tolerance for the perception that people are conflicted or bring a bias to their work.”

Mr. Weigel quickly departed The Post after two Web sites, [FishbowlDC](#) and The Daily Caller, published some comments made by Mr. Weigel. After the first round of comments were made public last Thursday — including a joke about how the world would be a better place if [Matt Drudge](#) “set himself on fire” — he apologized to his readers and appeared to move on to other news.

But soon after, a rash of others came online on Friday — including a reference to [Rush Limbaugh](#) dying and a claim that conservatives try to “violently, angrily divide America” using the media — his status changed and his blogging stopped. A Post spokesman said “Dave offered his resignation and we accepted it.”

The Post’s ombudsman, Andrew Alexander, said that “Mr. Weigel’s exit, and the events that prompted it, have further damaged The Post among conservatives who believe it is not properly attuned to their ideology or activities.”

Mr. Weigel, who had written for Reason magazine and the Washington Independent, was one of several hundred journalists, commentators and policy watcher who contributed to Journalist, a left-leaning forum operated by Ezra Klein, who is also a blogger for The Post. Journalist messages were generally kept private by the members. Mr. Klein [shut down the forum](#) on Friday.