What It Means To Be a Female Political Blogger: An Interview with Debbie Schlussel

Interviewed by Celia Romm Livermore, Wayne State University, USA

Debbie Schlussel is one of the top bloggers on the Internet (her blog is at: http://www.debbieschlussel.com/), as well as, one of the top conservative bloggers and one of the top female bloggers in Cyberspace. She is currently writing a book on Islam, terrorism, and its supporters and enablers in the United States. Schlussel is a practicing attorney, writer, and commentator on politics, pop culture, Islam, terrorism, and American and international affairs. She holds Law and MBA degrees from the University of Wisconsin and is a graduate of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Her work has appeared and/or has been cited in the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, New York Post, Jerusalem Post, USA Today, Reuters, Associated Press, and virtually every major national and international media outlet you can think of.

Celia Romm Livermore: Can you tell me what made you start your blog and what keeps you going?

It’s something I always wanted to do—even before the idea of blogs became a working concept. I’d read something in the newspaper or see something on television that I knew wasn’t true or that was simply absurd. And I had something to say about it, including my own unique insight backed up by knowledge and research. So, in my mind, I was kind of blogging to myself and in conversations to my friends before I actually did so in print online.

I’ve been writing op-ed pieces since I was literally in the seventh grade and a local Detroit area newspaper published a column I wrote on Soviet Jewry. The people were being oppressed by Communism and needed to be free. I saw that even if my work did not change things, it affected the people who read it and made them want to join me in doing the right thing and changing things.

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A big inspiration that keeps me going is not just the effect I’m having and the attention my work is getting throughout the world, but that I’m doing the right thing. Sometimes, that is enough. I was inspired to speak out by my late father, Dr. H.L. Schlussel, M.D., a Vietnam-era Veteran, proud American patriot, and proud Jew who was proud to describe himself as a Zionist. He was not afraid to say, “I support Israel,” and taught me to have the courage of my convictions and pursue them in writing and speaking out, no matter how much hate-mail and how many attacks came my way in response.

But I also love looking at American pop culture and how it is bringing us down (which I don’t love). So I comment on that, too. If you don’t understand what’s hip in America, you’ll never understand how to save America from itself and how to influence what our government does.

Celia Romm Livermore: What do you consider to be the most unique aspects in your experience as a female political blogger? Are there any benefits to being female? Are there any disadvantages to being female?

There is certainly a gender gap in politics. Straight men are more conservative and women of all stripes are more liberal, so it would be logical that straight men are more attracted to a conservative woman’s site. But I don’t think men gravitate to my site based on my gender. I’m not successful because I’m a “female blogger,” but because I’m a great blogger, regardless of gender. My large audience is more about my expertise and unique way of saying things, coupled with my knowledge on many areas. That’s not particularly gender-specific.

Any benefits I get for being female are outweighed by the extreme hate that those who attack me feel they are entitled to because I’m a woman. You should see the gender-based hatred and sexist comments I get. I have been told by some of the readers of my site to shut up. I received threats that they’d never dare send a man. I’ve had several men send me death, rape, and torture threats. Three of them have been prosecuted in federal court for this. Plus, even women threatened to rape, torture, and kill me. I doubt they’d have the guts to send that kind of hate to a man.

But it’s not just them. I find the hatred and professional jealousy from male conservative writers and commentators to be vast and intense, especially because I’m a woman. They can’t handle it. They resent it. And it’s all because I’m a woman whom they can’t control and who doesn’t always toe the party line.

Celia Romm Livermore: Do you believe that the Internet made a difference to how politics is played today?

Definitely, the Net made a difference to how politics is played today. It democratized it. And that’s another thing my enemies in the mainstream media and mainstream conservative media don’t like: that they can’t control me and other voices. They can’t be a gatekeeper between me and the public. I can report stories they want me to keep quiet. And back in the day, they could keep them quiet because they controlled the means of distribution—the way word would get out to the public. But now they don’t. They can’t stop me from breaking stories and they can’t stop people from reading them. And they can’t stand that. That’s the great thing about the Internet. For now, no-one can control what I write and who reads it . . . unless you’re in China or Saudi Arabia and the like.

It’s the ultimate democracy, the ultimate free market. And they hate that people are reading me. But because of the internet, they can’t stop it. And that’s the other great thing about the net—fewer space limitations. I can post tax documents, pictures, and videos to bolster my research and claims. You can’t do that in newspapers or on TV. People won’t take the time to
read them. The Net is active, not passive, like TV news or reading the physical newspaper.

And it’s timely. I can quickly get the story out there and effect change in minutes and half hours versus days and weeks and months. In the past, news took much longer to spread. When a story was controversial, the mainstream newspapers would make sure you didn’t see the story anywhere. But now, the newspapers are going out of business and my site is growing in traffic every single day because I get real news out there immediately.

Another great thing is that the Internet encourages whistleblowers against government wrongdoing. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents and other men and women in federal and local law enforcement read my site and contact me with major stories that are being silenced by their own agencies. I had to laugh a few years ago when Marcy Forman, the then-Director of Investigations for ICE went on a national tour warning ICE agents not to talk to me. But that only encouraged them. You can’t stop the online media, so you have to work with it. That’s what the agents know and their bosses still don’t get. I’ve broken major stories about ICE and the FBI and even the Justice Department that have affected change and even gotten people who are bad actors demoted.

Celia Romm Livermore: What do you see as the advantages of the Internet for politics in general and for conservative politics in particular?

I think I’ve addressed that above, but I think that the great thing is that no particular side (right or left) can control the news and what information we’re getting. That’s a great thing and it’s almost leveled the playing field.

Celia Romm Livermore: What do you consider to be the disadvantages of the Internet (perhaps relative to other communication media)?

I think it intensifies the crazies. It’s not just the many death, rape, and torture threats I’ve gotten. Or the vile, vulgar, sexually-laden rape fantasies many have put in the comments section of my site and in e-mails. It’s also that people feel increased freedom and decreased shame about their behavior. I’ve had a jealous female “conservative” blogger who has been cyber-stalking me for several years. This person began by making up false allegations about me on a blog popular with her then-law school. When I was contemplating suing her, she retracted the comments and admitted they were completely fabricated. But so many people read them. And then she continued to stalk me by praising the death, rape, and torture threats against me as “very valid points” on her blog. It gets out of hand and people think they can do and say whatever they want because it’s the Internet. There is no-one stopping them unless you sue. And that gets time-consuming.

Another disadvantage is the “real time” thing. While it’s an advantage in many ways, it’s a disadvantage because you never feel like you have a break. I’m always a slave to my computer and worried about getting something else up soon, or I’m afraid I’ll lose readers.

And the other disadvantage is that many people rip me off. A “writer” for World Net Daily is notorious for this. He has ripped me and many other writers off repeatedly because it’s easier to do online and there is less recourse. And, again, the bravado some people feel on the Net, including to commit intellectual property theft and plagiarism, is intense. There are some really despicable people out there. And they repeatedly rip off my work. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve been disgusted to hear leading media personalities read my exclusive stories, word for word, on their radio shows and present them as their own without credit to me.

Celia Romm Livermore: What do you see as the future of political blogging? Do
you expect it to affect future elections more than it did in the 2008 elections?

As long as there is an Internet and electricity or WiFi power, blogs will continue to uncover stories and change and affect races. And it will continue to do so more than in 2008. People are watching less and less TV, getting their news more and more online and not just from the mainstream media online. People are looking for more and more independent information on candidates and their past activities and alliances. And newspapers and TV news outfits aren’t doing the investigative reporting. I am filling that void and so are some others. And we will affect elections. I have a few big stories in the hopper that I think will definitely shake things up.

I hope my stories aren’t stolen as much. But, sadly, that will increase, too.

But it’s not just blogging online. It’s social media. Barack Obama’s brilliant use of social media in getting elected in 2008 is now something that’s imitated by every candidate who wants to win. At the time it was unique. Now, though, it isn’t. It’s required. Unfortunately for all of the newcomers to social media online, while it makes it easier to get their messages out, it also increases the noise and they have to break through the noise. Now everyone is doing social media.

Celia Romm Livermore: Do you consider the fact that the Democratic Party was more active on the Internet in the last elections one of the reasons for the outcome of the elections?

Yes, this definitely helped Barack Obama win. His “My Barack Obama” Net strategy was brilliant, if also disturbing. Telling kids to pressure their parents and grandparents to vote for Barack Obama was problematic. But, for him, it worked. John McCain’s daughter Meghan was online, too. But her efforts backfired. I think also the fact that wasn’t a strong conservative to run against Obama was a problem. It wasn’t just the effect of the Internet.

Celia Romm Livermore: Do you believe that the Internet has different impacts on male vis-à-vis female politicians?

Yes, I think it does have a different impact. It’s a dual-edged sword, just like being a female blogger. I think women are very successful on the Net as bloggers, and also as candidates. Hillary Clinton was very successful on the Internet. It’s just that Barack Obama was even better at it and beat her in that respect. Sarah Palin, too, is very successful at winning sympathy and positive response. Through her Facebook page and Twitter account, she’s managed to build her mass following into a mega-mass following, even though she quit without finishing her first term. You don’t really see men getting this kind of success online, except for Obama, and he’s the exception.

You can see it in the social media. Female candidates online have bigger Facebook fan pages, bigger sets of Twitter followers, etc. That’s in large part due to the gap in interest in politics, which tends to match the gender gap. Polls and surveys show that men are more aware and more informed in the specifics on issues and candidates.

Celia Romm Livermore: Do you consider the main difference (if any) between political bloggers and politicians? Do the political bloggers fill a niche (or a need) that politicians do not or do they step on each others toes?

I don’t see myself strictly as a “political blogger”. As I’ve noted, my work appears in major mainstream media outlets, and on my site, I also review movies, write about pop culture, and comment on lifestyle issues from a common sense perspective.
But insofar as I blog on political issues, which is a good deal of the time, I focus on getting out information and message that I believe to be the truth. Politicians want you to get out their message, minus warts and reality checks. I try not to be a vessel of any candidate, something which ideologues from both sides of the aisle tend to do. That’s the trap a good blogger avoids. Most do not, unfortunately. They, the political bloggers, tend to be used by politicians because they don’t do their research and homework. Those bloggers fill the void of newspaper editorials or ads that blindly endorse a candidate. I generally avoid that like the plague, and I’ve criticized candidates on both the right and the left whom I see as phonies, while supporting those few I really think fit the bill.

Politicians must watch everything they say. Bloggers can say whatever they want. In that respect, they can step on each others’ toes. I’ve had many candidates reach out to me for support, but when I questioned them closely, they didn’t like it. They expect that as a conservative, I’m going to support them if they claim to be conservative. Not necessarily the case. I’ve also had candidates steal my work for exposing their opponents. They fed it to the press and did not give me credit for my exclusive scoops and hard work. It did not endear them to me.

My blog complements everything else I do very well. It’s sort of a central clearing house and open filing cabinet, where people who hear me on radio interviews or see me on TV can learn more about me and read more of my viewpoints and start following me, learning more on the topics I cover like no-one else, from immigration to Islam to national security. This only helps my audience grow, and it’s very symbiotic. In writing my book, I find a lot of research that I already did for myself, which helps the research I’m doing now and fleshes out a stronger message.

I see myself expanding to other media in the future. I did a few videos, and I may do some more. I also see myself doing more with pop culture and the entertainment industry from my point of view, since that’s the way Americans are most influenced. Pop culture, not politics, is king in America AND online.

I also hope I can structure my day and time in a better manner. I’d like to put more stuff up, but also have more time for myself and for research for many more investigative reports I want to put up but haven’t had time for. Blogging in a 24/7 news cycle is never-ending, and I rarely get a break. That’s one thing I miss about the good old days before the Internet and blogs. I had more time and a more balanced life. I have to work to get that back.

Celia Romm Livermore: How does your blog complement your other political activities? How do you see your activities as a blogger changing in the future?
Debbie Schlussel is one of the top female bloggers in the Internet (her blog is at: http://www.debbieschlussel.com/), as well as one of the top conservative bloggers on the Net. She is currently writing a book on Islam, terrorism, and its supporters and enablers in the United States. Schlussel is a practicing attorney, writer, and well known commentator on politics, pop culture, Islam, terrorism, and American and international affairs. She holds Law and MBA degrees from the University of Wisconsin and is a graduate of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Her work has appeared and/or has been cited in the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, New York Post, Jerusalem Post, USA Today, Reuters, Associated Press, and virtually every major national and international media outlet you can think of. Schlussel's unique expertise on radical Islam/Islamic terrorism and a host of other issues make her a popular speaker and television and radio news talk show guest, both nationally & internationally. She has appeared many times on FOX News, MSNBC, CNN, ABC, ESPN, and FOX Sports Net. And, as an attorney, Schlussel has defeated several extremist Muslims in civil suits and criminal matters who attempted to silence the free speech of non-Muslims and moderate Muslims opposed to the terrorist group Hezbollah. She is also a movie critic for the Sirius Patriot Channel's “Mike Church Show,” and her movie reviews have been quoted in many major media sources, including the New York Times, USA Today, etc.