H A R V A R D U N I V E R S I T Y

JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

JOAN SHORENSTEIN CENTER ON THE
PRESS, POLITICS AND PUBLIC POLICY

THE PRRESS AND THE ELECTION

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Kennedy Forum
Littauer Building
Kennedy School of Government
Cambridge, Massachusetts

BEFORE: ALEX JONES
Director
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I N D E X

P R O C E E D I N G S

(11:30 a.m.)

MR. ELLWOOD: My name is David Ellwood, I'm the long-serving Dean of the Kennedy School, 25 days and counting, so if there is anything wrong, blame me.

(Laughter)

MR. ELLWOOD: I want to welcome you to Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, it's truly a terrific day and we are thrilled to be part of things today.

The Shorenstein Center and Walter Shorenstein have been hosting delicious brunches before conventions for quite some time, involving the various network anchors. And for example, it started in 1992, I guess, back in New York City, and continued with the Republican Convention in 2000, in Philadelphia, I guess. So today we have the best of all, we've got the entire crew here, and we've got them at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, so it's a spectacularly wonderful day and we are really looking forward to it all.

So, this is a group of people that really does need no introduction, so I just want to welcome

you all to the Kennedy School. I want to say a word about the Shorenstein Center. We at the Kennedy school here are about advancing the public interest through the power of ideas and the training of outstanding and talented leaders. And part of that strategy involves several centers that really can delve into and focus on critical issues. One of the most important here is the Joan Shorenstein Center for Press, Politics and Public Policy. It was founded in 1986, thanks to Walter Shorenstein's generous gift, really to honor his daughter Joan, who was a remarkable investigative journalist, and a colleague of many of the people on stage and many of you out in the audience. It's a marvelous tribute and the Center has been doing remarkable work throughout this time.

So I want to just welcome Walter, and to thank you, Walter, for your support both of the Center and the school, and ultimately the nation.

MR. SHORENSTEIN: Good morning. I'm pleased to welcome you here. I'd like to thank our distinguished panelists for their participation and their ongoing support of the Joan Shorenstein Center.

Almost 20 years ago, Joan's friends Don Graham and Al Hunt worked with me to convene a meeting at Don's Washington office, where the idea of this center was formed. I'd also like to thank Graham

Allison, Derek Bok and Senator Ted Kennedy for their subsequent contributions to making this dream a reality.

This Center was created to honor the passion and dedication my daughter Joan brought to her work in journalism. Like our panelists, Joan had begun her career in an era where network news played a central role in shaping our national dialogue. She understood the critical importance of professionalism, integrity and impartiality in presenting issues of the day.

With the advent of the 24 hour news cycle and the spread of the internet we've seen our sources of information increase dramatically. This proliferation has brought with it an increasing participation in diminishing reality as newcomers fought to capture some segment of the market, sensationalism and rancor are seen as a key to attracting viewers.

But to corporate media empires more focused on the bottom line than on serving the public interest, it is not surprising that voter turnout has diminished, even as participation has grown. I applaud the tireless efforts of our panelists to resist the ratings driven rush to dumb down the news. Throughout their career, these individuals have set the standards

for professionalism and journalism integrity. They understand the importance quality journalism has brought to an informed democracy. Like the Joan Shorenstein Center, they are working hard to preserve the enduring values of high quality journalism.

Please join me in thanking and welcoming this remarkable group of individuals. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. JONES: Thank you very much, Walter Shorenstein.

I am Alex Jones, I am the Director of the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy and moderator of today's panel. And I want to welcome you to the Kennedy School's John F. Kennedy Forum, it really is a pleasure to have you here with us.

I know that you know that we have assembled the most celebrated and most influential group of television journalists in the country, without any question. But for the benefit of those of you who don't own televisions--

(Laughter)

MR. JONES: --let me introduce them very briefly, from left to right. Judy Woodruff is the anchor of CNN's "Inside Politics". Dan Rather is anchor and managing editor of the "CBS Evening News".

Jim Lehrer is anchor and executive editor of "News Hour with Jim Lehrer". Peter Jennings, anchor and senior editor of ABC's "World News Tonight". And Tom Brokaw, anchor and managing editor of "NBC Nightly News With Tom Brokaw".

(Applause)

MR. JONES: We're going to have a conversation for about 40 minutes and then we'll open it up to your questions. And I want to encourage you to step up the microphones when the time comes, we have microphones, here, there, there and over here. We want this to be an exchange and we want it to be an opportunity to talk with some of the people who have the most to say about how campaign coverage really rolls out, because television, I think without question is the vehicle that is the delivery system for most political news, at least most of the political news that lands.

Let me start, Tom Brokaw, with you, if I may. This year, one of the things that is said to be different is that the sort of boiler room kind of atmosphere has been raised to two or three times mach speed of that, in terms of the instantaneous response, the spin, the rebuttal to anything that any candidate says. How is it working in this campaign season, as far as you putting together a newscast are concerned,

trying to get responses and to the bottom of things that one says and the other says and the other says?

MR. BROKAW: Well, let me just say first of all, Alex, that this is symptomatic of the new world in which we live, everything is rapid response and there are so many more tools that are effective in being able to do that, websites, the vast array of cable outlets that are out there, places that you can go and get your message on the air.

During the primary season we didn't see the war room concept at its most cold-blooded efficiency as we are about to, beginning this week here in Boston, with the Republicans that are already in town, they've got a war room set up, they've made all their numbers available, they've got graphics on the walls there. And they will be responding to almost every semicolon--

(Laughter)

MR. BROKAW: --as it's spelled out from the podium. And I think that is a fixed part of what we are up against now for the fall. And our job remains, all of us here, to be gatekeepers, to make sure there is some kind of a filter that that goes through, that we test it for its factual accuracy, what the motivation is, and put it in some kind of a context.

MR. JONES: Dan Rather, the convention of journalism is that there is an opportunity, someone says something and then the other party gets the opportunity to rebut, but that really doesn't serve people very well often, that, he said, she said, because in many cases, and I'm talking about both George Bush and John Kerry, they have both said things that are demonstrably, by factual analysis anyway, not true. Is the convention of journalism to allow a response from the opposition instead of being journalists to say, so and so said this, but this is what we think, and this is what we can demonstrate, or this is what the facts are. Is this kind of convention defeating the ability of people to actually understand where the bottom line is and what the facts are?

MR. RATHER: No, I don't think it's defeating. It is a problem for anybody who practices journalism, particularly daily journalism, but in general in journalism this is a problem. My own view of this, and I'd be interested to know what my colleagues view is, but I'd be surprised if it varies very much, is that insofar as it's possible, one of the jobs of any journalist is to separate the brass tacks from bull shine. On the question having to do with the spin machines, I mean that is our job to separate those things out.

Now, when you have the kind of situation that you outline, in which you can say he says, but he says; I don't see myself limited by that. If there are demonstrable facts that run counter to what one or both have said, then I think there's a responsibility to point those facts out. However, I don't consider it my job, some others may, but it's not my job to say, don't you see that candidate Y is "lying", I don't see that as my job. My job is to say he says this and he says this; here are the facts, some of these facts are at variance with what candidate Y said today and there may be at variance with what candidate X said the day before yesterday.

I think this is in the mainstream tradition of American journalism, has been for a long time and continues to be.

MR. JONES: My sense is though that the he said, she said part gets there, but too often the here is what the facts are--

MR. RATHER: I think that is fair criticism, and I do not exempt myself from criticism about the level. I think it's important for viewers and listeners and readers to understand that fear has increased in every newsroom in America, for a lot of reasons, and it may be one of the things we want to talk about.

But there is some fear that if you take that extra step, this is not an excuse, it's to explain what sometimes happens. There is an undertow that says, okay, candidate X has said this, Y has said this, here are the facts we need to point out, you know what, maybe today we want to point only a few of them or not point them out at all, because when you do that you are going to catch hell. Now, we get paid to catch hell. But what I'm suggesting is that those, and I include myself in this criticism again, who are prepared to pay the price for that, have gotten fewer, and those who are willing to do it do it less often than they once did.

MR. JONES: I would like to get a response to what Dan just said.

MR. LEHRER: I would just say that the idea of asking a person a question, which is primarily what I do, just sit there and the person gives an answer, I am never tempted to yell: "Liar!"

(Laughter)

MR. LEHRER: Because that is not my function. My function is to press the person. If I think the person has said something that I don't think I have factual information that is contrary to what Sammy Sue has said, I say hey, boom, boom, boom, I press it. But i am not a lie detector machine, that is

not my function. I'm with Dan, is what I'm saying.

And Alex, I would challenge one small thing that you said, there are very few things that are that black and white.

MR. RATHER: That's true.

MR. LEHRER: Most of the news, when some politician says, well my opponent did so and so, that may not be 100 percent, but it may be 30 percent, or it may be enough to where there is a dispute, and for journalists to come along and declare that this guy is a liar and that guy not a liar, or whatever, is risky business, and in the mainstream we don't do it.

MR. JONES: Well, liar perhaps not, but perhaps saying these are the facts, and there are demonstrable facts. And I don't think this is a matter of the Republicans or Democrats, I believe it's both. And my question though is, you in the audience out there, we need to know, using the resources that you all represent, the best information you have about where the truth lies. And that's where the problem comes.

Yes, Peter?

MR. JENNINGS: I think you quite often hear the phrase liar used in the newsroom, you don't very often hear it used on the air.

(Laughter)

MR. JONES: True.

MR. JENNINGS: We are nothing if not gentlemen, on the air.

(Laughter)

MR. JENNINGS: But we are also editors. I think we all spend a fair amount of time telling people in the audience that we are no longer really correspondents, except on rare occasions. We are on occasion live broadcast, which is sort of editorship on the air. But most of our time on the daily broadcast is devoted to editing a broadcast, as you might edit a newspaper. So if a candidate or a campaign has said something that is demonstrably false, as an editor you have any number of opportunities to guide the structure of your newscast, or whatever broadcast you're working on, to point out that this is false.

And one of the things that has changed quite dramatically in television's coverage of political campaigns has been these reality checks, we now devote whole units in the course of political campaigns to doing reality checks on everything from campaign commercials to campaign speeches. So I think we are in a better position to say that something is demonstrably false, while hopefully being somewhat more subtle about the headlines.

MR. JONES: Judy?

MS. WOODRUFF: I think we should put this in some historical context, politicians have always shaded the truth, they've lied. I mean Franklin Roosevelt promised a balanced budget; John Kennedy talked about a missile gap that they didn't find; Richard Nixon talked about a secret plan to end the war. I mean if you start looking down the list of presidents, and certainly people who have run for president, politicians, they are going to shade whatever it is to their advantage. And it's right, some of the time, I mean if somebody says the unemployment rate is nine percent, we can say wait a minute, the Department of Labor says it's 5.4. But beyond that, so often the information, it depends on which pair of glasses you're wearing, do you want to focus on these numbers, on household income, or do you want to focus on wages, both may be true.

MR. JONES: Well, that may be, but that leaves me, again, the viewer, kind of at sea. I mean if everything is true then where am I? There is another aspect of this it seems to me, and that is do you have the resources to be the instant analyzers of the kind of instant responses that you're getting? Do you have the horse with the experience, and the opportunity to really put it together in time for your broadcast?

MR. BROKAW: Yes, we do, actually, we have political operations and research organizations that are more sophisticated now, because they have access to these new tools as well in which it can quickly retrieve information during the course of the debates that I was doing on MSNBC, and I'm sure Peter was doing it at ABC as well. People in the control room were prepared to pounce on some demonstrably untrue comment, or say wait a minute, that's not what they said just three months ago, and we could have corrected it on the fly.

But what you also have to remember, Alex, is that campaigns especially are about the continuity of coverage, it's not just one broadcast one night, and then we go on to other matters. There will be a kind of continuity here that begins this week in Boston, which people will tune in and they will begin to make judgements and they will learn about these candidates and what they are saying and the correctness of what they're saying, or the hyperbole of it, based on taking in information from a wide variety of sources over a length of time.

So we do the best that we can on a given night, but our lead times are very short, generally, and if we don't get it right that night we try to get it right the next night, and people have to appreciate

that as well, I think. And if we don't get it right that week, we count on Tim, in our case, to get it right Sunday morning. So there is this kind of synergy that exists within these broadcast organizations as well to get it right.

MR. JONES: One of the things that was in the *New York Times* this morning was an analysis that says this country is more polarized politically, not necessarily in their feelings about issues oddly, but politically polarized, than ever, even during the height of the Clinton controversy.

Dan Rather just made an allusion to the reality that that sort of puts into a newsroom, such as you all run, that is geared to appeal to everybody in America, which is not, theoretically, no matter what some people may think about your political attitude--

MR. JENNINGS: I take exception, if I may, to the word appeal.

MR. BROKAW: Appeal, right.

MR. JENNINGS: And I also take exception by the way, to the notion that there is fear ion the newsroom on a story. Lyndon Johnson used to watch the evening news with all three sets on at the same time, and it was a very good reminder, I think to everybody that does an evening newscast, that there is a very wide audience to which you try to be relevant. Some of

the people in this audience who represent the creme of decision making in the country, people who can't afford a newspaper, people who can't read a newspaper, all are members, at least in the broadest sense, of the evening news constituency.

Forgive me for interrupting.

MR. JONES: My point is that this is the reality which you're reporting into, an extremely polarized audience. How does that affect the way you do your job? How does it, I mean does it make you shade, does it create, not necessarily fear, but what is the effect within a newsroom?

MR. BROKAW: Well, I am actually doing an hour on that this fall, and it's the single hardest thing I think I've ever done. We are doing something that falls under the broad rubric of one country, two nations, in which we are trying to get at that, and it's very hard to get at on television for a variety of reasons. And I am especially conscious of that given where I spent a lot of my life, out in the west, and having grown up in red states. And I'm constantly mindful of the need, as Peter very aptly put it, not to appeal to them, but to make sure that their points of view and their sensibilities are also getting examined and getting reflected in the political dialogue, and not simply to be dismissive of it.

I mean I think that is one of the continuing obligations that those of us sitting on this panel have, that we are still an over-arching medium, that we cover this country from one end to the other.

MR. JENNINGS: But you're walking delicately, I think, towards something, which is the mood in the newsroom when the country is so divided, and whether it has an impact on the way we select to cover the news. And I even think you're tip-toeing up to the notion of how we behave before a war.

MR. JONES: Could be.

(Laughter)

MR. JENNINGS: I just thought I'd warn my colleagues in case they hadn't got it yet, which I'm sure they did.

(Laughter)

MR. BROKAW: Peter, we generally try to keep up with you whenever we can.

(Laughter)

MR. LEHRER: I am not going to go there until you go there, Alex.

(Laughter)

MR. LEHRER: But I would just underscore what Tom said, that this is our business, to reflect varying views. And the fact that they are strongly held is terrific from our point of view, because that

means people are going to watch us with a little more vigor, a little more interest. The stronger their views, and they are stronger now, there is no question about it, at least in our organization, the e-mail we get and all that, people really are hating right now, there is no question about it. And it's reflected in the reaction we get on both sides.

It doesn't bother me in terms of how it affects what we cover and how we cover it, it just means that people are watching, that's terrific, and they care deeply, that's terrific. I wish they didn't hate each other but that's not my problem, my problem is to make sure we cover the news in a way that we have always covered it, and not allow the hate to affect the way we cover it, and it doesn't.

MR. JONES: By the way, just for the record, we did invite Fox News to be a participant in this today, but they were not --.

Judy, what about from your perspective, I mean you write about politics, that's all you do, you cover politics; is this polarization, the word that was used in the *Times* this morning was hatred, hatred that affects the way people feel about their neighbors and depends on whether you feel one way or another about George Bush at the moment, apparently. Is that something that you see out there as a media problem?

MS. WOODRUFF: No, I don't see it as a media problem. And I'm going to chime in with what Jim, what he and Tom have said, I mean it's going on but what we do in our newsrooms, the decisions we make about what we are going to cover and how we are going to approach stories can't change because people are out there fighting each other. Sure, it makes it an interesting story and we want to cover that story.

But in no way should we feel on the defensive for example, if we get a lot of e-mails or letters or calls or whatever, and people are saying, you're not representing that point of view, sure, we should pay attention, we want what we do, to a degree, to be interactive, we want to be responsive, in a way. But it can never govern what we do.

And I would just add here, I think a lot of this divisiveness that we are talking about here this morning has been churned up by our political leadership, I mean there is a lot that they are doing, both political parties, to churn this up. And that makes the public--

MR. JONES: Can that be reported? I mean isn't that a story?

MS. WOODRUFF: Sure.

MR. JONES: Them churning this up?

MS. WOODRUFF: And I think we are.

MR. JENNINGS: We are reporting it.

MR. RATHER: That's definitely a story, it's probably an under-reported story, and again I don't except myself, it's probably an under-reported story and should be reported.

But I want to italicize something that Judy has said, and I think Tom and Peter have at least alluded to, in direct response to your question, has it had an effect? I think it has had an effect. I think on the positive side, it's made us at least a little bit more cautious, most of us subscribe to the idea, let me say I do, that you trust your mother but you cut the cards, which is another way of saying you trust your sources--

MR. LEHRER: Say that again, please?

(Laughter)

MR. RATHER: Jim, you've hung around enough newsrooms to have heard that.

MR. JONES: I think the World Series of Poker.

MR. RATHER: That's another way of saying that you trust your source, when a source tells you and that source been right twenty times before, you still call a second source and maybe a third source, that is you check things out. Now, this is one of the tenets of journalism, you check it out, you check, you double

check and if possible you triple check, and then you check again.

Now your question was had it had an effect, this polarization of the country, the hatred quotient if you will, I think it has had at least a subliminal effect, more than that, that you know what, we better check again, because you can't afford to be wrong, you can't even afford, never mind, you never can afford to be wrong with the facts, but you better have the story in good context and perspective when you're reporting an issue that you know there is this high polarization.

Now come back again, I think it was Peter, maybe Tom said they would quarrel with the word fear, I don't want to argue about it, but there is certainly more caution in the newsroom now because the politicians have gotten better at applying the pressure, they've always been good at it, Lyndon Johnson was terrific at it and for all I know Woodrow Wilson was good at it; even I was not alive during Woodrow Wilson's time.

(Laughter)

MR. RATHER: They have always been good at it but they've gotten better at it. Now, if you touch one of the most explosive issues that led to this polarization, they have instant response teams that

will be all over your telephones, all over your e-mail, all over your mail. Mind you, this is not an indictable offense, this is America and they are entitled to do it. But part of what you have to do in a newsroom now that you didn't have to do before, you might have had to deal with a hundred telephone calls before, now if the orchestrated campaign by either one of the parties or some politician's campaign gets on you, you may have several thousand e-mails and telephone calls to which you have to respond.

I'm suggesting this creates an undertow in which you say to yourself, you know, I think we're right on this story, I think we've got it in the right context, I think we've got it in the right perspective, but we better pick another day, just to let it marinate before we come back with the story. Now that can be a positive, but it also can be a negative because sometimes your boss or somebody on your staff will say, you know what, if we run this story we're asking for trouble with a capital T. Why do it, why not just pass on by? That happens, I'm sorry to report that happens. Now you can say that is the result of fear, it's the result of not wanting to deal with the trouble of all those e-mails and telephone calls, but the pressure sometimes tells.

MR. JONES: One of the things that strikes

me when I hear you talking about this is the power of the story that you just told and the transparency that television news has generally not given to what it does, and how fascinating it would be to people to understand how this process works, especially in a campaign season.

Is this more of a story than it's, I mean we talked about it in passing, but it seems to me that one of the things that you have to tell, that would be very illuminating, is just what kind of political pressure and ideological pressure you're under, as you go about putting your news reports together?

MR. BROKAW: Well, Alex, I think the pressure has always been there, I mean the `60s were a very emotional time, with a great deal of pressure. The first story I covered, and Dan was in the thick of it more than I was, on a national basis, was the civil rights story. And you can't imagine the pressure that came to the networks then. They didn't have the same mechanics that they do now, it's just much more efficient, they are able to hit a switch, in effect, and the newsroom is flooded with not just telephone calls but especially with e-mails.

I can't remember a time in the newsroom, however, when we said, we better back off because we don't want to trigger that. What often happens is that

if we prepare a story we all look at each other and say, somebody better be monitoring the e-mails tonight because they're coming in. And we look at them the next day, and I make a point, a deliberate point, of not wading through all the e-mails, I've got kind of an editor of the e-mails who will say, you should take a look at these, or this was the tone, or whatever. Because I believe it would have, at some point, an effect on me and I am trying to build up a barrier.

By the way, it's left to right across the spectrum. But these are the pressures that come with the business, they've always been there. It's just now that there are all these tools that make them a kind of tsunami, if you will, when they want to have it happen. Also, there are organized interest groups out there, there is a guy by the name of Brent Lozelle who makes a living at taking us on every night. He's well organized, he's got a constituency, he's got a newsletter, he can hit a button and we'll hear from him.

MR. JENNINGS: I'm not sure how far out on this limb I want to go,being that I am not retiring quite as soon as Tom.

(Laughter)

MR. JENNINGS: But I think there are a lot of people in this room who actually don't believe what

we are saying. And I am not a hundred percent sure we believe ourselves. I mean you're talking to men and women here--

MS. WOODRUFF: Which part?

MR. RATHER: What part of--

MR. JENNINGS: And I want to emphasize you're talking to men and women who are friends as well as colleagues. I think there is this anxiety in the newsroom and I think it comes in part from the corporate suite. I think that the rise, not merely of the presence of conservative opinion in the country, but the related noise being made in the media by conservative voices these days has had an effect in the corporate suites. And I think it worries people. And I might be dead wrong about you, but I hear more about conservative concern than I did in the past.

On the plane yesterday on the way coming up here a guy walked by me, and I said, as I would under normal circumstances, good morning, and he looked at me, and I went by. And he was waiting for me when I got off the plane and he said: "America hater, leave the country immediately." And I was aghast. But it reminded me that not only is the differences in the country so strong at the moment, and we are perceived to be, I think infinitely more liberal by the way than the news media establishment is, that the general news,

the word tsunami, this wave of resentment rushes at our advertisers, rushes at the corporate suites, and gets under the newsroom skin, if not completely into the decision making process to a greater degree than it has before.

I think they are both right to raise that it was the other way around during the war, and certainly during the late `60s during the Vietnam war, but it is there, and I really think it's there. This is not a very articulate description of it but I think it's there.

MR. JONES: I don't disagree.

(Applause)

MR. RATHER: I'm especially interested in you saying this, this has not been my experience at CBS News, particularly in recent years.

MR. JENNINGS: What about when Larry Tisch was there?

MR. RATHER: I'm thinking, because I can't think of a single time when I have felt any pressure, and I mean any pressure, from our corporate superstructure. And that includes the time when the late Larry Tisch was there. Larry Tisch and I had our issues, we had our disagreements, this was not one of them. I think this may be a place to place situation, and also time sensitive, what corporation is it; where

is the stockholder value at any given time with the corporation may come into play.

I recognize a lot of people may not believe it although I think people will believe it, I say humbly, but very respectfully, at CBS I have not felt this one iota. Les Munres who runs our operation, and Sumner Redstone above him, on this issue, they have been terrific, fighting for resources, fighting for our airtime--

MR. JENNINGS: My boss David West, is terrific too. I'm just simply saying that I believe that it is present. I have had a freer career at ABC News than I could ever have imagined, I can take on any controversial subject in prime time documentaries that I choose to do, any. And they are a hundred percent supportive in that regard. But I feel the presence of anger in the air all the time, I feel it on the street, I feel it in corporations, I feel it in newsrooms, I see it in newspapers, I hear it on the airwaves.

MR. RATHER: Well that's a broader picture. Forgive me, because I thought your frame of reference was the corporate thing.

MR. JENNINGS: I am not stupid enough to sit up here and say it's a Disney issue.

(Laughter)

MR. BROKAW: The fact is, Alex, and it

will come as no secret to this room, and it certainly comes as no secret to us, as there was at one time in our own careers, a kind of tyranny of the left for the liberalism, if you will, during the `60s especially, especially on college campuses, in which it was very hard to hear a conservative voice or to have a conservative point of view reflected on the evening news.

What the conservatives in this country have learned in the last ten years especially, is they feel they have to go to war against the networks every day. I think it's what Rush Limbaugh does every day, it's what does Brent Lozelle does every day. As I say, there are these organized constituencies that are out there that can be mobilized and that is part of the political give and take of the time in which we live.

Our job then is to be resistant to that,we should have been more resistant in some ways, I suppose, to the idea that there were only going to be liberal voices on the air in the `60s, there could have been more conservative voices then, which I honestly believe. When you think back during that time, there was a nascent conservative movement in the country, it wasn't very large, but the only person you saw on the air was Bill Buckley or maybe Bob Novack, that was it.

MR. JENNINGS: That's a failure of ours

you would agree?

MR. BROKAW: Pardon me?

MR. JENNINGS: That's a failure of ours you would agree?

MR. BROKAW: I would agree, I agree with that.

MR. JONES: Do you think that the public is right to think that television and the networks in general are more liberal than the rest of the country?

MR. BROKAW: I read in your little preparation here that you had a friend in California who said to you, ask them why they're so liberal?

MR. JONES: No, he said tell them not to be so liberal.

MR. BROKAW: May I presume that your friend was not Michael Moore? Can I make that presumption?

(Laughter)

MR. JONES: Actually, this is the real Michael Moore.

(Laughter)

MR. JONES: But really, in some preparation material, I said that a friend of mine from California who knew I was going to be doing this, it was just a throw-away line, he said tell them to stop being so liberal.

MR. BROKAW: He should read our e-mail.

MR. RATHER: He also should listen to Bill Kristol. Bill Kristol, whom I don't think anybody would accuse of being liberal says, and I'm quoting here, I brought this so I could quote him directly, far be it if I missed one word. "I admit it, the liberal media were never that powerful and the whole thing was often used as an excuse by conservatives for conservative failures." Pat Buchanan, not exactly a bomb-throwing bolshevik, Pat Buchanan says; "The truth is I have gotten fairer, more comprehensive coverage of my ideas than I ever imagined I would receive." Another quote: "I've gotten balanced coverage and broad coverage, all we could have asked. We kid about the liberal media but every Republican on Earth does that."

MR. ALTERMAN: That's from my book.

(Laughter)

MR. RATHER: Sorry.

MR. JONES: Eric Alterman.

MR. RATHER: Let me say, in fairness, since--

MR. BROKAW: Eric, will you be having copies outside?

(Laughter)

MR. RATHER: Eric, it says here it was in

the *San Francisco Bay Guardian* in 1996, perhaps you quoted from the *Guardian*?

(Laughter)

MR. LEHRER: One quick thing about this. You can track this, if you have a Republican president and you report any news that is not one hundred percent positive about that president, then you are going to be considered a liberal, that's a liberal story. When Bill Clinton was president we were considered to be conservatives, because there were times when we wrote and broadcast stories that were not necessarily favorable to Bill Clinton.

I'm not suggesting we don't make mistakes, we make terrible mistakes. I mean journalism really is a daily business for us and we make terrible mistakes. And as Tom says, we try to fix them the next day and we keep going and cover the story. But there are very few times that I know of, and none in our organization, absolutely none in our organization, and none that I have noticed in an overt way, where somebody at CBS or NBC or ABC or CNN or anyplace else, where somebody made a decision, a mainstream news organization made a decision about a particular story because of some kind of bias, either conservative or liberal. Now that doesn't mean they didn't make a mistake because they may not have done their reporting job right and they

may have gone at it from a wrong angle, etcetera, etcetera.

But remember, it goes back to city hall, you're the mayor, and a story appears in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, that doesn't make the mayor look good, then you're anti-mayor. I mean it just goes with our business.

MR. JONES: Let me switch gears slightly here because we're running out of time and I want to get plenty of questions. But there are a couple of things I want to address.

You are all not only the anchors, you're the editors of your news operations. Is it in your power, if you chose, to give more coverage to the Democratic and Republican conventions than the three hours that are going to be given? This is to CBS, NBC and ABC--

MR. RATHER: Prime time coverage?

MR. JONES: Yes.

MR. RATHER: No.

MR. JONES: It's not something that you can do as the managing editor of the "CBS Evening News"?

MR. RATHER: No, because I'm the managing editor of the "CBS Evening News" and I don't control the airtime, I don't control the airtime at 6:30, but I

am the managing editor and ultimately responsible for the product, as I think Peter and Tom are as well, they can speak for themselves. But in prime time, no. On some days in some ways, I can have some influence, but it's not my decision, nor do I think it should be.

MR. JONES: Tom, what about you and Peter, I don't know how you--

MR. BROKAW: I had discussions as late as this weekend about expanding some of our prime time coverage, and I was ultimately unsuccessful, but they were reasonable discussions about what was the best case we could make. Now in our case we have MSNBC and CNBC and then for our Spanish language audience Telemundo, and I looked at a grid the other day and CBS News, in all those parts, will do 140 hours, beginning over the weekend, of convention coverage, with a lot of gavel to gavel on MSNBC.

I really do think it's a problem for both the networks, but also for the parties, that they've got to think about how they restructure these conventions, they have been drained of all their vitality. I said to Tim this morning when we were doing "Meet the Press", and this is not quite as self-serving as it sounds, but in `84, at the San Francisco convention, I managed to get Jessie into the booth right after his speech and also Cuomo right after his

speech, that wouldn't happen anymore because there is a politburo running this convention and they determine who is handed out to which anchor and at what time, and under what circumstances, it's very carefully calibrated and controlled.

Now my friend Jim has said there are several other stories to cover and we will be covering a lot of those stories, they just won't be on the network until that one hour in prime time.

MR. JONES: They won't be on prime time and on the networks, and that is something that will mean a lot of people, not because they couldn't if they wanted to, they simply won't--

MR. BROKAW: They could, that's the point, they have choices, Alex.

MR. JONES: I know they have choices.

MR. BROKAW: And one of their choices is not to watch, it's not state television. And we're not comfortable defending these decisions, if it were left to us we'd say hit the switch at 7:00, anchormen seldom fake humility, we'd be willing to go on the air and be there for four hours.

MR. JENNINGS: In exchange I got gavel to gavel on the internet and high definition TV, in other words I had that much influence to get them to try an experiment, which was very nice. And it may be, I

agree a hundred percent with Tom, I think we all do, that the parties need to do something about this convention process because under the current circumstances there isn't a great deal of reason for us to show up, other than for an hour, maybe two on a night. It is certainly a great target of opportunity for us to talk about any number of things having to do with politics and the American democratic process.

I'm hoping that maybe people will begin to -- this is very self-serving -- begin to use other platforms to get the broadcast network's product, as they now call it, in other ways.

MR. JONES: Judy?

MS. WOODRUFF: I disagree--

MR. LEHRER: I would disagree with everything you just said. I think we are about, starting tomorrow, we are going to have four of the eight most important days we could possibly have as a nation. We are about to elect a President of the United States--

(Applause)

MR. LEHRER: --at a time when we have young people dying in our name overseas. We have just had a report from the 9/11 Commission which says that we are not safe as a nation. And one of these two groups of people is going to run our country after

January, and anything --. I'm sorry, you guys are a hell of a lot more important than your bosses are willing to admit. The fact that you three networks--

(Applause)

MR. LEHRER: --decided it was not important enough to run in prime time, the message that gives to the American people is huge, it's not a programming decision.

(Applause)

MR. LEHRER: From Judy's and my selfish perspective it's terrific, that means more people will watch us because you all --. But as a citizen it bothers me because, you saw the Pew poll, the Pew poll said that 75 percent of the American people are now following this election closely. And four years ago it was like 42 percent. People are way ahead of the networks, I'm sorry, in terms of they know how important this is. There are about five percent of the voters out there that are going to decide this election, and they need to see those people.

We are not in the business of telling the parties how to run their conventions, we are in the business of covering what the news is, and the news are these conventions. And what we're going to do is we're going to have all kinds of contexts around it, and do the things Tom was saying about -- I don't mean to give

a promo for our coverage--

(Laughter)

MR. LEHRER: --but we are, we're going to ask everybody about 9/11. We're going to ask, what is John Kerry's view on Iraq? How are we going to get out of there? And comparing, because the public really wants this.

(Applause)

MR. JENNINGS: I don't know what it is I said you disagree with. We are going to do exactly the same thing, we're going to do it in exactly the same way. We believe, as our friend Terry Smith and I were talking last night in another venue, that the election is utterly vital, we are a country in the middle of a war. We will do it in different ways, and I grant you --.

I still believe if the parties don't change their conventions so they become merely infomercials in prime time particularly, then they will never get more than an hour a night out of it.

MR. LEHRER: But, Peter, an infomercial about what? An infomercial about where we are going to take your country.

MR. JENNINGS: That is not news coverage, we can do as much news coverage as we want, as often as we want--

MS. WOODRUFF: But Peter, State of the Union messages are pre-packaged events. You name a speech a president gives, they are pre-packaged, they are carefully orchestrated, but we cover them because they are--

MR. RATHER: Well we'll cover the speeches, in all fairness, Judy, yes, we put the State of the Union on, and we are going to have John Kerry on, on Thursday night, we'll have Edwards on, on Wednesday night, and we'll have President Clinton on too. That is a bit, forgive me, comparing two different things, the overall point about whether, in order to provide ample context and perspective for those speeches, you need to be on the air three, four, five, six hours a night, is a whole other question, that was my point.

If I may, out of fairness and accuracy, I've double-checked my own notes, and in fairness to our outspoken and understanding so author, I want to point out that when I said the Kristol quote came from the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, the Pat Buchanan quote may very well have come from your book and I want to make note of that for accuracy, because you didn't have a chance to respond to my smartass remark.

MR. JONES: Oh, he'll respond.

(Laughter)

MR. JONES: Let me invite you to go to the mics. I'm going to ask one more question before we turn to questions.

Those of you, this group knows what Media Tenor is, Media Tenor is an organization that tracks the content of the major news organizations in this country. And they have found, in their most recent analysis, that what has been the pattern since 1998 and before is beginning to establish itself, and perhaps not surprisingly, but the coverage itself is negative, for the most part. It is more negative by far than it is positive. Is that inevitable, is that the character of news? I don't know quite explicitly how they characterize negative, but I think we all have a pretty good sense of it. Why is negative coverage the essence of campaign coverage? Do we have to pull these guys down? Why can't we do more about what--

MR. JENNINGS: Who has done the survey?

MR. JONES: Media Tenor.

MR. JENNINGS: Media?

MR. JONES: Media Tenor, they analyze media coverage.

MR. JENNINGS: I think we have real problems with these descriptions of negative, our broadcast, "World News Tonight" was judged as being the most negative in the run up to the war. First of all,

I don't know the basis on which they judge it to be that way--

MR. JONES: This is not a partisan outfit.

MR. JENNINGS: Well, lots of these organizations don't advertise themselves as partisan.

I just don't know what negative means, unless you've got something sitting right in front of us which we can debate.

MR. JONES: Well, I guess it means highlighting information which is an attack on the other guy, rather than talking about what John Kerry thinks about getting out of Iraq.

MS. WOODRUFF: I don't think it's any different than it's been since I started covering politics. These guys want to make their points, and one of the ways they make their points is by pointing out what they think is wrong with the other guy, that's part of the story, that's always been the way politics is conducted in this country and every other country. It doesn't mean we don't report on the positive things that they say, we do that, but I would dispute the idea that we are more negative today than we were, I just don't sense that.

MR. JONES: Well, I'll dig out the statistical information and send it to you, I think you might find it interesting.

Another thing that this organization found is that there is a disproportionate attention being paid to the war in Iraq compared to say the economy, even though the economy, according to what Americans say anyway, is an even more important story. Do you feel that is something that is out of whack?

MR. RATHER: I feel very strongly about that. Every day when a single American soldier is wounded, much less killed, that is news. And when several are killed on any given day, that trumps the economy. We cover the economy, sometimes I think we over-cover it, we certainly don't over-cover it in terms of intelligence with the economy. The economy is a big running story, it is a big issue in the campaign, it may very well be that people vote their pocketbooks and nothing else. But with the country at war, we've lost 900 of our treasures, our young men and women, it'll lead the "CBS Evening News", it has, it does, it will, as long as it goes on, and I think it ought to.

MR. LEHRER: Same here, amen.

(Applause)

MS. WOODRUFF: Absolutely.

MR. JONES: Tom?

MR. BROKAW: I agree with that. The other thing, I'm always troubled by studies that show a quantitative imbalance--

MR. JONES: I know this is--

MR. BROKAW: We are doing what is required on a daily or weekly basis, or on a seasonal basis, about what the news is. And the fact is that every night we all watch each other, given what the news is on that particular day that's what we're going to be covering, and Iraq has been an overwhelming part of the news, it's gotten a lot of attention, and it deserves to.

Earlier in the election cycle out-sourcing and the place of the American economy was getting some attention in all the debates, and will continue to again when it rises to a new level. At the moment I think that anyone who looks at the American economy thinks that it's kind of in a listless place, they're trying to figure out where it's going to end up. But there are profound issues that will come up during the course of this campaign about the creation of new jobs, the place of America in the global economy, whether we are doing well enough in educating our children to prepare them for the demands of the modern workforce.

So I am always, I think I find these instructive, and I'm not just being polite, but I'm always a little amused by the kind of statistical certainty of that. We don't live in a statistically certain world when we are putting the news on every

night.

MR. JONES: One of the conceits of academics is that you can reduce things to numbers, if you do the content analysis in a serious and fair basis, and this was not a 50-50, this was a disproportionate thing.

MS. WOODRUFF: But Iraq has been at the center of a great national debate for the last year and a half, it's entirely, it seems to me, logical that we would focus on it.

MR. RATHER: Alex, when you're talking about negative coverage, there are people, because I've heard from them, hear from them very consistently, saying listen, you ran another picture of another casket coming back from Iraq, and that in their minds, that's negative. It makes a lot of difference who is deciding what is negative and what isn't. I agree it's negative, there is very little about war that isn't. But we are going to show those pictures when we can get them, at the risk of being damned as all you do is accentuate the bad news out of Iraq. We do our stories about rebuilding soccer fields, schools, all of that. I think it's fair to say that maybe we don't do enough of that.

But in the limited time we have, when push comes to shove making a decision, the fact that there

are people fighting and dying in Iraq and Afghanistan. And by the way, we have tried hard, I think Peter and everybody else here as well, that there is an effort to say, well don't report the figures of people who died in Iraq who didn't die in absolute direct combat, report combat fatalities. And it's all part of the campaign to make it feel that the casualties are less than they are. And that is one of the things that is seen as negative.

MR. JONES: That's one of the things I was talking about when I first started, about lies, about saying the facts are these, so many people were killed in combat. These people, they were not necessarily killed in combat, they were killed --. See what I mean, that is the kind of reporting that I think is essential--

MR. JENNINGS: I think this is very complex. I think each of us feels the human national obligation to record the deaths of American men and women on every day they occur. It is hard sometimes to put them into context. It is hard, at the moment, to put Iraq into context, it is a very dangerous place to work.

We were criticized in the early period after the first phase of combat, as the president put it, for not having done enough on the reconstruction

efforts in the country. And I think we would all agree, been there several times, that we were lacking to some extent in that regard. Now it is just plain damn difficult to get out and around the country, the reporters who are working in Iraq today are really brave people. But it's very hard.

I think we each feel this obligation every day to record that Americans have lost their lives. The larger picture of why they are losing their lives and the circumstances in which they're losing their lives, and the political content, or the role this plays in the political debate is a larger story which we daren't lose sight of.

MR. JONES: Let's open it to questions.

Yes, sir?

MR. WEINER: My name is Josh Weiner, I'm a recent grad here, and was pretty involved in this place when I was here. And actually three years ago, Mr. Brokaw, just after the 2000 election when you were here, I asked you this question about, I guess this was very much on people's minds at the time, about what the networks were going to do to prevent the problems we had on election night in 2000. This group up on the stage is basically the group that just as we did in 200, sort of we will found out again who our next president will be. So my question is now, with the

2004 election coming up in just a few months, what changes have been made since 2000 to ensure, what are you going to be doing differently so that this time on election night--

MR. BROKAW: Well we got rid of that cold ribbon computer that we had.

(Laughter)

MR. BROKAW: The system that we have for gathering votes has been, as you might expect we've gone back through it a lot, there have been some profound changes that have been made. I think it's fair to guess that the three of us will ask not just once, twice, but several times, when they say in our ear, you can call Pennsylvania, are you sure?

(Laughter)

MR. BROKAW: And Florida the same way. And we'll also, it'll take a little longer, which is fine by me, if we have to wait a bit longer that night to find out who won, if it's a close race, that will be fine. But does it mean that we are not going to use exit polls; no, we're still going to be finding out what the voters think as they leave their voting place.

That was a God-awful night for us, and I think for the country as well, not just because of us. Because if we believe so strongly in this system by which we choose our leaders, and every vote counts, why

do we have this Rube Goldberg operation going across the country? Part of the reason that we do is we have people who are in power making decisions that will help them stay in power, either state by state or at the federal level. I mean election reform in this country should be a very high priority. They have made some changes but in my judgement not nearly enough at the state or at the federal level.

(Applause)

MS. WOODRUFF: I would just add, we've made some changes, one thing is we are going to be in a big hurry to try to call, to be the first to call Utah and Massachusetts on election night.

(Laughter)

MS. WOODRUFF: But if we get some numbers back quickly on Florida or Ohio we may wait a little bit longer, as Tom said.

We have made some specific changes inside our operation, the standard for any call is higher, the margin of error, even on those states where we are just relying on exit polls, and there are states where we will do that, if it's a Utah or possibly in Massachusetts or Kansas, or one of those. But in addition, double-checking, triple-checking, going through the system. We all know that 2000 was a disaster for our business of reporting elections and we

don't want to make any more mistakes.

MR. JENNINGS: We are going to follow ten of the eleven recommendations from the Center here for improving election night television. The only one we are not going to is encourage viewers to vote. We think it is a God-given right to not vote, if you so choose.

MR. JONES: It's also a God-given right to encourage them whether they want to--

MR. JENNINGS: But we will try to breathe life into the numbers, give seasoned correspondents more opportunities, all three of us are very much in favor of that. And we will, following number one, anticipate problems with the new and untested--

MR. JONES: This is a document that the Shorenstein Center has put together and is making available to not just main news organizations but to television stations all across the country, because in many cases local television is taking an enormous part in the campaign election night coverage. And this is in part to of course try and help them.

But thank you for holding it up, Peter, I appreciate it.

And any who want one are most welcome.

Yes. Who are you?

MR. ALTERMAN: My name is Eric Alterman.

It was a great discussion and I think all of us really appreciate your candor and your thoughtfulness. It didn't start out as a great discussion though because in the beginning we got a lot of the boilerplate about how we are always under pressure from both sides and we have to respond. When in fact, and you may disagree, as I see it there has been a 30-40 year war on the media by a very well-funded right wing machine -- I wish what you were saying was true -- of which this administration is part and parcel. And it seems to me the coverage we have been getting has been to one degree or another, for whatever reason, reflective of that war on the media, on honest reporting, which is termed "liberal". So that if you look at, I know you don't like statistics but we're in a great university and we're going to need them, it's not as great as a lot of people who went to it think it is, but it's still--

(Laughter)

MR. ALTERMAN: --a great university.

MR. JONES: We need a question here.

MR. ALTERMAN: Here's the question. There are two sanguine studies, I think, the University of Maryland "Progress on Policy Attitudes" found that a majority of Americans believed at least one of three falsehoods about Iraq, not things that are arguable,

but that A, we either found weapons of mass destruction; B, that there was direct evidence, three falsehoods, there was a direct correlation between believe of those falsehoods and support for the war. It seems to me that --. And then the other study I would bring up would be--

MR. JONES: A question, please?

MR. ALTERMAN: All right, here is the question. In a country where most of the country was misinformed, had misinformation going into the war, 70 percent believing Saddam Hussein had something to do with 9/11, and we've now learned that all of this wasn't true. What was the networks' responsibility for the misinformation that people carried around, and how will this be done differently in the future?

MR. JENNINGS: Eric, this might be one of those places where people give network television altogether too much due. I think we've been conscious in our newsrooms of many facts in the course of this war, but none have we been quite so conscious of as this business that so many people believed the connection between 9/11, al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein supporting the attacks on 9/11.

In my own news shop we've done story after story trying to draw attention to the disconnect between the available evidence and the public belief in

that regard. It's a very, very hot one I know, for a lot of people to debate in the country and I think we've paid a lot of attention to that one, if not to others.

MR. JONES: This is a topic that would be a long one, and I don't think we ought to stop on this because we've got other questions.

Yes, sir, up here?

MR. SHEAR: My name is Harry Shear, I'm a recent graduate of the Kennedy School.

My question is, Mr. Lehrer gets almost an hour every night for PBS to address the country and the three networks have,with commercials, I guess 22 minutes. Has there been any movement within the three networks, now that you're part of big conglomerates with big movie studios attached and everything, to expand your nightly news?

MR. RATHER: None, zero, nada.

MR. BROKAW: It'll come up episodically when the war begins or when 9/11 happens we'll do an hour, it works well, the affiliates and the owned-stations as well can't wait to get the so-called prime time access back, which is that half-hour that follows us, that was designed originally by the FCC and handed off to them for their stewardship, so they can cover issues of local interest, which is "Jeopardy" reruns

five nights a week, or whatever.

(Laughter)

MR. BROKAW: The greatest single disappointment of my tenure doing "NBC Nightly News" is that I really believed when I began that we would get to an hour, and there were kind of faint hints along the way, but nothing more than that. I just don't think it will happen, especially with the rise of cable that the networks--

MR. RATHER: I disagree with the latter part of that, I think it can happen, having said to you that at our network there is absolutely no movement with this at all, and I'd be very surprised if it is at one of the other two.

MR. BROKAW: It's a shame.

MR. RATHER: I cling, and I use that word measuredly, I cling to the belief, and hope is father to belief, that there is some possibility that one of the so-called big three over the air broadcasters well some time, not in the immediate future, go to a seven day a week, across the board, one hour newscast in prime time, probably at 10:00, possibly at 9:00, which would be a kind of a mixture of the evening news--

MR. BROKAW: And the "Today" show.

MR. RATHER: --"60 Minutes", "Nightline" kind of, meld those in, for an hour. I think that is a

possibility, but I wouldn't bet the double-wide on it.

(Laughter)

MR. JONES: Peter, do you have a comment?

MR. JENNINGS: No, I was actually totally fascinated that the man is sitting in Mr. Glickman's box.

(Laughter)

MR. JONES: This also begs the other question that one hears debated, or at least offers the possibility that the evening news shows are simply going to disappear with the three of you, because you have such iconic power that if you were no longer the anchors that the programs simply will, not immediately, but eventually simply go away. What are the prospects of that?

MR. BROKAW: When you said that we were an iconic power, Al Franken just looked up in absolute bemusement and amusement at that moment.

(Laughter)

MR. FRANKEN: I wasn't listening.

(Laughter)

MR. BROKAW: For the first time, by the way.

(Laughter)

MR. BROKAW: I don't think that that's the case. I think that one of the things we've learned is

that as viewers grow a little bit older they still come to the evening news. Now will this generation, with all the other choices that it has, that is the twenty-somethings, getting their news as they do from the internet and other places, will they feel as connected to the idea of a network nightly news broadcast, or "World News Tonight" or the "CBS Evening News", when they get to a stage in their lives when they are slightly older, parents, or have a different kind of a stake in society? I hope so, I think they are important and I can say that with the advantage of getting ready to leave.

Even after I leave I still think they'll be important because I think it's that one place in the country where people turn every night and see what's going on. And the big investment in the news divisions is made in that half hour broadcast that is done on a nightly basis.

MR. RATHER: I'm a little more optimistic.

Sorry, Judy, go ahead, please?

MS. WOODRUFF: While we're waiting for that to happen, CNN is here, there are other news channels that are here on cable, that are covering news around the clock, you've got the internet. There are all these sources out there that we didn't dream of when we all started in this business, I mean the

choices are endless. It made not be one place, like the fireplace that we gather around, but--

MR. RATHER: I do want to point out, and you, Judy, take a backseat to no one in my admiration for what you, CNN and a lot of people in cable do, but one, there are a lot of people in the country who can't afford cable or don't afford cable. There is still a question of, if you're looking for maximum penetration with news of integrity, you are going to need for the foreseeable future, over the air broadcast and/or satellite broadcasts. It's a small point.

But I'm a little more optimistic about the evening news broadcasts as now constituted. Now, one, I do not now nor have I ever believed I am an iconic power, I'm a reporter who got lucky, and I can be dumb as a wall about a lot of things but I'm at least smart enough to know that. And if you ever start inhaling that iconic power stuff you're finished, totally, completely.

If you pull back to what we call in television the wide shot, the three evening news broadcasts, the cumulative total on any given night would be between 20 and 30 million, that's homes, not people. And on a weekly basis, you can do the math, which is to say if you only had one evening newscast and it got all the viewers, it would be by far the most

watched program in television, bar none. It is to say that the evening newscasts are still a good business, and I think in the future, if one or more networks were to drop out of the evening news business, which is entirely possible, it would be a very good business. So I'm a little more optimistic about an early evening newscast surviving, on at least one network, perhaps not all three.

MR. JONES: Yes?

MS. ARENT: I'm State Senator Patrice Arent, from Utah, and yes, I am a Democrat.

I'm curious about your selection of stories, here we are in the area where we heard from Tip O'Neill, all politics are local; but we rarely hear about local politics. And I recognize you have a limited amount of time, but is there any interest in not just having local networks cover local politics, but maybe broaden what we are hearing on a national basis. Because so much of what is happening on a local basis is coming out of the states?

MR. JONES: Judy?

MS. WOODRUFF: I think you put your finger on something that we really need to work on, because you're right, I mean we just automatically have this focus on the White House, as we should, and on the Congress, but frankly, less and less on the Congress,

the White House just seems to loom larger and larger in the picture in Washington, as the executive branch just has the sort of influence that grows, it seems, in every administration.

But there is a lot going on in the states, there is power that has devolved to the states and we need to do a better job of figuring out how to cover it. It is expensive, we've got to send crews, we've got to send reporters who are knowledgeable producers to do it right on television. To some degree we can count on local stations around the country to cover these stories and call them to our attention, and I think everybody does that from time to time, but I think you point out something that we do need.

MR. JENNINGS: I think the west is under-reported in large measure, I mean serious issues about the west, not just the romance of the west, seriously under-reported, and I think the south is under-reported. But I think we use local situations very often to start us onto what we think is a larger issue. If we are trying to broadcast to a national audience, we are consciously trying to broadcast something that is going to be relevant to people in Massachusetts as well as in Medford, Oregon.

MR. JONES: Yes, ma'am?

MS. SKELTON: My name is Karen Skelton,

I'm from that little western state, California.

I wanted to go back to your discussion about the decision making process in the newsroom. It seems to me you were discussing two kinds of pressures on editorial decisions, one, Mr. Jennings, you mentioned the suite politics or the corporate politics, the conglomeration of ownership in the media might be concentrating more, having more emphasis on editorial decisions.

And Mr. Brokaw, I think it was you who mentioned the political influences, the rapid responses and the degree to which campaign guns can get to the newsroom a little bit faster these days. Can you tell whether any one of those pressures is any greater than the other, whether those kinds, whether your decision making has been influenced by politics or corporations any more than one or the other?

MR. JONES: Peter?

MR. JENNINGS: One of the dilemmas of more media in fewer hands --. Let me just say first of all, I have never been obliged by the Disney Corporation to do anything. But one of the dilemmas of more media in fewer hands is the public suspicion that the public is less well and widely represented. And I think that is partly what I'm talking about in terms of the general perception of us in the media. I think we would all

prefer to have more media in more hands, I think. And it is also true that the larger corporations, for which we now work, are very, very bottom line conscious, there is no great secret about that in any of our newsrooms.

MR. JONES: Dan?

MR. RATHER: Well, having said that I don't feel this pressure from the corporate entity, I don't deny that there may be some in some places, but I don't feel that. But you know, part of what we get paid to do is resist the pressure, that's one definition of the practice of journalism with some integrity. And I think we stand up against the pressure. I think what we collectively said was it would be unwise for the viewers, readers and listeners not to recognize that these pressures exist, they have gotten worse.

The one thing some of them are better for than others is they do create an undertow, I'll maintain it actually creates fear in the newsroom, or just caution, you would decide, but we get paid to resist these pressures. But I don't think you can say well one is ten percent and the other is 80 percent. But I would say, as a consumer of news, one test from where you get your news might be, how well do I think they resist the various pressures on them to be,

insofar as it's humanly possible, honest brokers of information. You're there every night or morning watching the newscast, you can make up your mind. Viewers are much smarter than most people in television give them credit for being. And I maintain that when we do succumb to pressure we generally don't fool anybody.

MR. JONES: Yes?

MR. BOWIE: I'm Nolan Bowie, I'm a Senior Fellow with the Shorenstein Center.

Mr. Brokaw stated that younger audiences tended to go to the internet and other sources for their news, and increasingly for those younger audiences those sources include Comedy Central, Jay Leno, David Letterman. Why do you suppose that younger people go to comedians rather than the network news for political information? And what do the networks intend to do to attract not only the younger audience but a more diverse audience, including minorities?

And in addition,--

MR. JONES: One minute, let's answer that.

MR. BROKAW: The essence of the question is what?

MR. BOWIE: Why do young people go to comedians for their news rather than the networks?

MR. JENNINGS: I don't think they do.

MR. BROKAW: I don't think they do either.

MR. JONES: You don't think young people are turning to Comedy Central or--

MR. JENNINGS: Of course they are, so are older people.

MR. JONES: Well, I mean the thing is, you don't believe that young people are increasingly not watching network television--

MR. RATHER: I agree with the premise of the question, I think he's raised a pretty good question. I think what Peter and Tom are trying to say is it isn't limited to young people.

MR. JENNINGS: I don't believe people tune in Comedy, Jon Stewart, every night consciously, to get the news. I think they tune in to get Jon Stewart's take on the news, which is often brilliant and occasionally hysterical. I don't think young people watch the news.

MR. BROKAW: I think when they watch Jon Stewart, what is troubling him, is that a lot of young people think they are getting the news and I think that is a tribute, in a way, to how absolutely skilled that program is. I think it is a brilliant production of political satire, but I am never entirely certain myself that the person on the other side gets the fact that this is a send up of an interview not a real

interview.

(Laughter)

MR. BROKAW: I think a lot of young people who just don't pay a lot of attention to what is going on in the world, happen to think that Jon Stewart is their favorite anchorman, and he's telling them the facts of what's going on.

(Laughter)

MR. BROKAW: And there are some nights when I'm inclined to vote with them, as a matter of fact.

(Laughter)

MR. BROKAW: Because it's a lot more engaging.

MR. RATHER: But the question behind the question --.

I'm sorry, Judy.

MS. WOODRUFF: I was just going to say, my husband, Al Hunt, has taught a course at another university, Penn, for the last few years, and he has done a survey I think every year, we were talking about this the other day. He asks the students every year, what show do you get most of your information from? And consistently it has been Jon Stewart.

MR. RATHER: I don't think anybody should be surprised at that, it's entertaining, and you say

it's a comedy program, that's going to attract a young audience. But as I understand it, and correct me if I'm wrong, one of the questions behind the question was what can you do to attract the younger audience and get a younger audience for news? Believe you me, there are a lot of people well thought of and highly paid, who spend hours every day trying to figure that out, and nobody has.

I think the news audience, inherently, is an older audience, that try as we may to get the needle to move even slightly downward, it's extremely difficult with a regularly scheduled daily news program. I don't say it's impossible, but if you know of a way to increase that demographic, call me collect.

(Laughter)

MR. LEHRER: I would just want to add one thing, also to underscore something that Dan said earlier, what did you say, if you add them all up you've got 35 million people watching the three nightly news programs, if you add us into there and you've doubled it.

(Laughter)

MR. LEHRER: Give or take a mil.

I may be naive and overly optimistic but I think one of the end results of this incredible burst of information sources is going to be a return to

programs like the nightly news, young people as well as older folks, because they want somebody to sort it through in some kind of even-handed way. And a lot of these young people have not discovered the nightly news programs yet, they've never watched them, or they are not there yet. I think they will come.

I think the gatekeeper idea is going to become more and more relevant than it has been. It's gone way down because of the internet and whatever, it's going to come back, my God, help me figure out what all of this stuff is, what's important and what isn't.

MR. JONES: You know, oddly enough, when Dan Rather was talking about a prime time program, like at 10:00, I wonder if that wouldn't have a different demographic or a broader audience?

MR. LEHRER: I think it would, particularly when -- get Jon Stewart to anchor it. (Laughter)

MR. SOBEL: Hi, I'm Richard Sobel, I write about public opinion, foreign policy and privacy policy, and they come together around questions of homeland security. I want to preface my remarks first--

MR. JONES: Please don't, we really need a question, we're running out of time.

MR. SOBEL: Mr. Rather mentioned fear in the newsroom, somebody else mentioned that a story might be 30 percent accurate, somebody else might think it's inaccurate. The homeland security question, and there are many people here who have studied it carefully, it's a serious one. And yet I'm wondering, the way it is played in the media may have a partisan advantage. What is the media's responsibility to present and leaven the fears that the country has, with some reality about the likelihood of, for instance, another attack, or having to change the election? Is there a way to present this that respects the problem, but doesn't overplay it?

MR. JONES: Peter?

MR. JENNINGS: I think this is one of the most delicate subjects that we have to contend with, and as recently as this week, interviewing an author about a new book on homeland security and the possibility of it occurring again, I was struck by what Senator Luce has said to several of us in the past, that come another attack, if it's inevitable, that the role that we all play would be as critical as any, in terms of homeland response. That's a huge, huge scary responsibility.

On a daily basis, I think we can, as editors, I'll speak for myself, there is this constant

issue of whether or not the country is prepared? I feel no compulsion to be out there slamming the bureaucracy for not being prepared, realizing that even the critics realize it's an enormously complex issue. But I know of no other story on which we consistently stay as closely tuned as I think we do. We may not do enough about one dimension of it or not, we may not call into questioning funding as often as you or others might like. But I think on the modalities of homeland security, I think it's a huge story for us, all the time, and everybody in the newsroom takes it seriously.

MR. BROKAW: I think it's really one of those stories that all of us, as citizens and journalists and policy makers alike are sailing into these unknown seas with no navigational charts that were of use to us before, we are kind of steering by the stars for the moment.

And we are finding our way through it together and I think, as Peter said, it's the single hardest thing that we deal with on a daily basis. The 9/11 report that came out the other day is flying out of the stores, you can't buy it in most places. People are making that an instant bestseller, because there is a great deal of anxiety, which I think anxiety is the real issue in this campaign, across the board.

But that demonstrates to me that the

public is eager for any kind of information that will help them make decisions about their lives. And we are dealing with new areas that are very hard for us to say with the certainty that we can in other areas about what is going on. Because policy makers, you'll see in that report, are wading into these new areas as well, about biological and chemical and what happens. So it's very much a work in progress and it is, if you will, a new beat for all of us and I think we're still struggling to find some certainty in our own judgements.

MR. JENNINGS: Just very briefly, in an advocate sense, when the Congress appeared to be going home for vacation in rather a hurry the other day, with the 9/11 coming out and having had the advantage of being as well-written as it is, and I think therefore very easy for people to grasp. I think in some respects it was pressure from us the made the House and the Senate, and the White House to some extent, reassess how long they were going to let this gestate.

MR. JONES: Congresswoman?

MS. ESHOO: I'm Congresswoman Anna Eshoo, from California.

Mr. Shorenstein, thank you for everything you do.

The most profound decision that a nation

takes is to go to war. As you collectively look over your journalistic shoulders, describe to us what you think you could have done better in the examination in the run-up to the war?

MR. RATHER: One of the things we could have done is ask more questions, with more follow-up questions, in an effort to get more direct answers. That's one of the things, and let me just speak for myself, that more questions should have been asked.

Look, when a President of the United States, any president, Republican or Democrat, says these are the facts, there is heavy prejudice, including my own, to give him the benefit of any doubt, and for that i do not apologize. I think this is deep not only in our American character, in our society, but there is an assumption, and up to a point a valid one, that he knows things we don't know, he has access to things we don't know. However, as a professional journalist, our job is to ask questions and keep on asking questions and continue to press on questions. For one thing, it sometimes makes the policy makers, the decision makers sort of go back and check their hold cards, that is say am I sure about this?

So that is the number one thing I think, we did not do our job of pressing and asking enough questions often enough, pursuing the questions and

having follow-up questions. The idea that we somehow could have gone to Iraq and determined whether Iraq had weapons of mass destruction I just consider, well, I just consider it with a smile, it's not practical. But to keep pressing about where did this information come from, how good is the information, are you sure of the information, those kinds of questions.

When I referred to fear before that's one of the specific things I had in mind. I think there is a reluctance about this, I could be wrong, I'm wrong about a lot of things. I think there is more reluctance now than there was 25-30 years ago to stand up, look them in the eye, and ask the hard questions. I think there is an undertow not to do that--

MS. WOODRUFF: The old Dan Rather would do that.

MR. RATHER: ----not to follow up on it.

MS. WOODRUFF: There were voices, as we know, before the decision to go to war who were saying the evidence is not there, it's the wrong thing to do, including the senior senator from the State of Massachusetts. And those voices were listened to but they were certainly were not given, I think overall, the prominence that were given to just the flood of other arguments that we heard from the administration. I also think that in the aftermath of 9/11 there was

still this sort of hyper-patriotic, I don't know what you want to call it, but mood or demeanor if you will, I think that was still taking hold to some degree in the media.

And I think Dan's point about we're being reluctant to automatically question the president when a president or a secretary of state says something is the case.

MS. ESCHOO: But given what you're saying, have you--

MR. JONES: Are those days over?

MS. ESCHOO: --armored yourselves now?

MR. BROKAW: Congresswoman, I think we've all gone back through this a lot, obviously, and there were lots of questions raised, as we said earlier, about the absence of any terrorist connection, al-Qaeda connection formally, to Osama bin Laden and to Saddam Hussein. We said repeatedly on the air that there was absolutely no evidence that Saddam Hussein was involved in 9/11, weapons of mass destruction were more problematic, not just the CIA but a lot of other foreign intelligence agencies believed that he still had them, to what degree, we didn't know how quickly he could activate them.

I think the big failure on our part was that we didn't connect enough dots on our programming

and have, stop and take a breath, and I think we didn't raise enough questions about the political process, about the absence of hearings, and about forcing the country to--

(Applause)

MR. BROKAW: --stop and ask the questions about where are the hearings in the Senate, where are the hearings in the House, where are the town hall meetings, when they were done the president ran off to Cleveland and came quickly back. I believe this is in part because as Judy indicated, the atmosphere that was created by 9/11.

But I also think what happened in the Democratic Party is that as a result of 1991 and Operation Desert Storm, when so many senators debated it and voted against that war, and didn't want to get caught there again, combined with the environment that existed after 9/11, that they moved forward more hastily than they might have otherwise. But it was our responsibility to at least put up more caution signs than we did. And I think in fact we didn't live up to that responsibility, in terms of generating more of a political debate about it.

MR. JENNINGS: I think ABC news largely lived up to that expectation. I apologize for, I'm shilling here a little bit. I'm pretty proud of the

vigorous approach we took to this and I wouldn't be able to say that were it not for the tremendous contribution that "Nightline" makes to our general news operation. And I referred earlier to the negativity that was ascribed to our news coverage before the war by some people.

I think in retrospect, many of us in the news division thought that was because we had asked a number of questions in a very vigorous way. I don't mean to give us a pass by any means, otherwise I think I might take the John Kerry defense, which is if I had known what I had known it might have been different. Because we did not, we questioned the intelligence sources pretty vigorously, we went over the secretary of state's visit to the United Nations, I think we all did. And the truth of the matter is that not only the President of the United States but a vast number of people in the country and elsewhere in the world believed the coverage which they were getting. And it is only subsequently I think that we have learned it was false.

MR. JONES: We have no more time, I'm sorry to say. I want to say, and I think I'm speaking not just on behalf of the people here, but all the people who were listening, we are counting on all of you heavily. And I know that is something that you

feel but I mean that quite sincerely.

MR. BROKAW: May I say just one thing in closing?

I want to pay tribute to Walter Shorenstein as well. It was in 1992 that we did the first of these, in New York City, and Walter was our sponsor and patron then, we gathered at the Four Seasons Hotel, at the Four Seasons Grille for a sumptuous brunch. I made the remark at the time that it was always good to be with the Democrats, the party of the people, at the Four Seasons.

(Laughter)

MR. BROKAW: Walter, I thank you for bringing us back to Harvard and the Kennedy school, so that we could be, once again, among the grass roots of America, so we are very appreciative.

(Laughter)(Applause)

MR. JONES: To get to the sumptuous brunch, please go downstairs to the tent.

Let me say thank you: Tom Brokaw, Peter Jennings, Jim Lehrer, Dan Rather and Judy Woodruff, thank you all very much.

(Applause)

(Whereupon, at 1:00 p.m., the session was adjourned.)

C E R T I F I C A T E

This is to certify that the preceding transcript is an accurate record based on the recordings of the proceedings taken:

Before: ALEX JONES, Moderator

In the Matter of:

THE PRESS AND THE ELECTION

Date: July 25, 2004

Place: Cambridge, Massachusetts

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Martin T. Farley Date
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