

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

JOAN SHORENSTEIN CENTER ON THE  
PRESS, POLITICS AND PUBLIC POLICY

THE GOLDSMITH AWARDS SEMINAR

Tuesday

March 8, 2011

Bell Hall

Belfer Building

Kennedy School of Government

Cambridge, Massachusetts

BEFORE: ALEX JONES

Moderator

John F. Kennedy School of Government

79 JFK Street

Cambridge, MA 02138

ADVANCE SERVICES  
Franklin, Massachusetts  
(508) 520-2076

MR. JONES: This is one of the most interesting parts of the Goldsmith weekend, as we think of it as the Goldsmith event. This is something that allows the reporters who are finalists in the Goldsmith competition, who have been chosen, as I think you all heard last night, many of which could have been a terrifically appropriate winner of the Goldsmith Prize. This though is the opportunity that they have to talk about what they do and frame it in a way that puts it in a context of investigative journalism, period.

The difficulties of it in a kind of fundamental, nuts and bolts way, the difficulties of it in the context of a world that is changing very rapidly and where resources are limited and where changes are profound. This is not something that I invented. The format that we had last night and the format we have today, the way this was all conceived, it was the product of the fertile brain of my predecessor at the Shorenstein Center, Marvin Kalb, who is sitting right over here and who I hope will ask the first question when the time comes.

This is a free-for-all, in a way. I mean it is an opportunity for each of the groups of investigative journalists to speak about what they did and the difficulties that they had in a sort of free form way. We will then open to this audience so that you can question them. I'm going to do it not in an alphabetical order but just in a kind of random way, so I think that, if I may, I would like to begin with one of the stories that last night I know that people were talking a lot about at the dinner and that was the story about the bail bonds situation and that incredible statistic that two-thirds of the people incarcerated in jails in this country are there because they can't make bail.

So, Laura Sullivan? There you are. Would you start us off talking about how you did

what you did and where you think this story maybe should go from here?

MS. SULLIVAN: I think that when we were talking about difficulties of the story, I think the hardest part with this one was simply getting access to jails which, in this case, it was Rikers Island in New York and the Lubbock County Jail. That was very difficulty and it took -- it seems like you just call them up and you walk in the door but it was actually about 20 different jails that I had on my list before I found the right one that would let me in and allow me to talk to the number of inmates that I wanted to talk to.

And then, especially in this story where I needed to find -- it wasn't going to be hard to find people stuck in jail on low bail because two-thirds of everyone in jail is stuck in jail on low bail, so that wasn't going to be the problem. The problem was going to be to have the sort of unfettered access to talk to as many inmates as possible so you could find the right ones that really sort of show the different aspects of the story, and so that was the tricky part.

And, as it normally does when I go into prisons, which is generally sort of my beat, is that you just have to wait out the -- you have to wait out the FLAC and bore them enough to tears that they move on and go get coffee. So that's what happened here and they finally left, and then I just sort of had my -- I had some freedom in the room to just wander around the Lubbock Jail and ask everybody how much are you here for? What did you do? What's your story?

And after interviewing, I mean I probably, in that particular room, interviewed maybe 12 or 16 inmates and then I found the three that sort of came through in that story, like Leslie Chew and Doug Currington and another guy. And, by doing that, you can sort of show, not tell, the different aspects of who is affected by low bail, so that was probably the hardest part. And then the hardest part is that I think that my editor Steve

and I really wanted to show the long term, what happens to them at the end of the day.

Like it's one thing to go in and say well these people will be screwed by the system or it really is going to mess up their lives, it's much more compelling to say this did mess up their lives and they were affected by this, so we knew we would have to wait and it was going to take six months to sort of wait to find out what happened to them all and how they all ended up faring. So the tricky part with that is that this is not a population of people that own homes and have cell phones and you can just kind of like call up and say well how did it work out for you?

I mean it was really, really difficult to track these folks down after the time, for over this period of months, and then there were other characters too that ended up not making the story that I was following for the sake of not really sure who was going to end up in the story, so that was probably the hardest part is finding them at the end of the day. And there were times, I remember at the last minute, one of the last guys who ended up -- his situation ended up so badly that he ended up in state prison.

And I thought -- I mean I had located him in the right Texas prison and with Texas, as I'm sure folks know, it's always very difficult to get into prisons, and I located him, I set up the interview, I had the clearance from the warden and I went all the out there in the middle of nowhere in Texas, like the northwest part of the state. It took hours to drive out there, I got there and I showed up and the officer was like he is not here anymore, he was moved yesterday, and I was like what?

And they said he is like now in the middle of Texas. I was like well if you were to put where we are versus where he is, they are like we are in the northwest, he's in the middle. And I was like and how long of a drive is that? And he was like you're looking at maybe five-six hours, and I was screwed. And I called Steve in this total panic because it was like

two weeks to air and we just needed this guy, and I was like well I don't know what we're -- I don't have approval, I don't know what I'm going to do, we are never going to get into this prison. There is no way I'm going to get same day approval to walk into a Texas prison.

And I was calling the FLAC and I was like come on, you know, like you've got me at the wrong prison and it's not my fault that he got moved, like can you do this? And she was like oh, I don't know if we can help you, like whatever, you know, not really, and so I called. I broke all the ranks and I called the prison warden, the one in the middle of Texas, and I said -- I don't know how I got through to him but I just asked for him directly, got through his secretary. I'm like it's really important, I needed him to come on the phone right now.

So he got on the phone and I was like all right, look, I am a reporter and I was like yes, I am calling you directly and I said but here's my situation: I've got this story, I really need your help, I'm at this prison on the wrong side of the state. I really need to interview this guy, it's already been cleared, like this is what my story is about. And I did this whole speech about how critical it was that I was able to talk to this inmate, and there was a long pause and he goes well, come on then.

(Laughter)

MS. SULLIVAN: So I get in my car and I'm racing across Texas and I finally show up, and he was such a nice -- I mean he was such a nice guy. Everybody had already left, it was night time. It was the only time I have ever been in a prison at night, it was a very weird experience. He waited for me personally, all the other officers had gone, the night shift had come in, and he brought the guy out to the cafeteria and I got to interview him. So, anyway, a long story short, it's hard to track these people down.

MR. JONES: What is the origin of this story? Steve, maybe you could talk about that.

MR. DRUMMOND: Well I think Laura ran across it at one of those wonky Washington meetings and, as we have now worked together on projects for about four years and many of them have come from a paragraph in a report on Native American women or, in this one, a report that mentioned it, and Laura came in and said I want to do a thing about bail. And what hooked us very quickly was the fact that almost everything we thought we knew about how bail worked in this country was absolutely wrong.

I just assumed that if you didn't want to go to a bail bondsman you could just go pay the money yourself at the window and it turns out that's not true. Or that they set the bail based on your income and poverty and, instead, they set it about ten times that. That if you skip town and run away, the bail bondsman pays a penalty for not bringing you back, and that that's how the system works, and it turns out a lot of the judges just forgive that money because the bail bondsmen contribute a lot of money, just every single thing.

And so the challenge for us, as the story evolved over many months, was that there was a human story and a policy story and the tension in many, many rewrites and drafts in how to shape this thing was the balance between telling the story of human beings completely lost and damaged by the system, who were going to lose their jobs and who were going to lose their income and not be able to pay back whoever they victimized in their crime, and all of these things, versus the policy, the broader policy implications of the cost to the taxpayers, the corruption and sort of the lobbying and power of the bail bonds industry, and a lot of the tension with us as we wrote the pieces was kind of the pendulum swinging back and forth between the human stories and the policy.

MS. SULLIVAN: And when we were at that -- when I was at that just sort of

conference at the Justice Department with criminologists it was just -- it was one of the most dry, I mean just your eyes were glazing over kind of conferences. And it was at the coffee break, like literally at like a table over there, and this guy, he's like you're the one from NPR, right? And I always love that because you never know what's coming next.

(Laughter)

MS. SULLIVAN: And I said yeah, I am, and he said you know, you really need to take a look at the analysis of the numbers of the low income people within the system and how it's effecting the way the bail is implemented. And I looked at him and I said you know I work in radio, right? And he said no, no, you've got to believe this and I think if you crunch the numbers, it's probably costing tax payers like billions of dollars. And said oh, well let's go to lunch, so we did, and that's when I sort of got my first bail--

MR. JONES: Do you think there is any national constituency in either Congress or the administration, or something like that, to try to address this as a taxpayer issue?

MS. SULLIVAN: There is a -- I mean right now it's a battle under way in state houses across the country between a very, very powerful bail bonding lobby that has millions and millions of dollars at their disposal and a national lobbying organization funded entirely to push this issue, versus a bunch of, you know, public workers who work in the pretrial release division. I mean they are the ones who are going to be saving taxpayers money, they are the ones who are trying to make this argument that there is a place for pretrial release, that this is what is in the best interests of taxpayers, and they are getting squashed like bugs left and right.

So, because of the story, in three states they actually used this story to beat back the lobbying efforts in Virginia, Oregon and Florida, because of this story, and--

MR. JONES: Beat back which lobbying efforts?

MS. SULLIVAN: The efforts of the bail bonding lobby to come and take down pretrial release. There were bills in those three states to take over the pretrial release programs and shut them down so that more people would have to pay bail and poor people would be stuck in jail. And they, on the House floor in two of those states, lawmakers said, as NPR reported, and they passed out the story and they ended up being successful. So that was sort of fun to see, that sort of impact, but I mean it's a big -- this is a battle happening all over the country right now between the well funded lobbying group on the bail bonds side and some non-funded public servants trying to explain what their job is and why it's in the best interests of tax payers.

MR. JONES: Speaking of well funded, I would like now to go to the story of Bell, California. Jeff Gottlieb and Ruben Vives, if you would, first of all, talk about first approaching the city administration at Bell and how things worked from there in a kind of a more vivid way than I was able to describe last night.

MR. GOTTLIEB: Well what originally happened is we had first written a story about a neighboring city, Maywood, which had decided to lay off its entire workforce and so it signed with the sheriff's department, the L.A. County Sheriff's Department to do its police work and with the City of Bell to do its city services. So then we had heard rumors about an investigation into Bell, so I called the D.A. and he says nah, we're not investigating, other people are, so we're not going to.

And then I just sort of said, and I'm not sure why, what about Bell? And he says listen, as a matter of fact we are investigating the salaries that their city council -- the high salaries that city council members are making, and I'm like really? We don't know anything about that. And the D.A. proceeds to tell us all about it and sort of give me a lot of his stuff. Now, that was only the city council members and it showed they were

making about \$100,000 a year, and this was a city of about 40,000 people, for a part-time job that they should have been making about eight grand a year.

And so eventually then we decided to go to Bell and take a look at what -- we wanted to look at appointment contracts, expenses, minutes of meetings. So Ruben and I walk in there, and first we asked to see the city manager, who we never met, and he wouldn't see us, and so then we see the city clerk and we tell the city clerk what we want, figuring she is going to go get it and just give it to us, and then pulls out a form and says you have to fill it out. We figure that's just some kind of bureaucratic stuff, fill it out, and then she says okay, that will be ten days before you get it, which they are entitled to do according to state law, but it just shouldn't happen that way.

She should have just given us the stuff, it should have taken her ten minutes. And then I asked her for a copy of it and she then charged me a dollar for it. And so I was then telling her, I told her, fine, if we don't get it in ten days we are going to sue you. And so every day now I'm calling her and I'm saying are we going to get it and she would say no, you are going to get it at the end of ten days, and every time I talked to her I said okay, we're going to sue you if we don't get it, and then we're going to ask the judge that you guys have to pay our legal fees because that's part of the law.

So then on day nine I get a phone call from her and she says Mr. Rizzo, who is the Chief Administrative Officer of the city, well we'll give you the documents and Mr. Rizzo would like to meet with you. Do you want to --.

MR. VIVES: No, go ahead, it's fine.

(Laughter)

MR. GOTTLIEB: And she says we will meet you, he wants to meet you, that's fine, we figure city hall, in Little Bear Park.

(Laughter)

MR. GOTTLIEB: And so I literally have -- I tell Ruben this and we have visions that we are going to meet this guy on a park bench, literally.

(Laughter)

MR. GOTTLIEB: So we show up, Ruben and I go separately, we show up at Little Bear Park, which is -- it's a place I would bring my three-year-old to go play in. And it turns out that we actually meet in a conference room where Boy Scouts have their meetings and Rizzo had brought ten people with him, clearly trying to intimidate us, including a couple of attorneys, city council members, all the city administrators. So we start asking questions, and the documents are sitting here stacked in a pile and somehow they expect us to look at them, but we're going to get them anyways, so why waste our time?

And so we start asking questions and I turned to Rizzo, and during these ten days both of us had been talking to people and we had been hearing clearly there was a sense something was wrong in Bell but no one could put their hands on it, something was wrong. We were hearing this guy Rizzo makes a lot of money, 300 grand-400 hundred grand, that's what we were hearing, which is a lot but not so spectacularly out of line for a city manager. So eventually I asked Rizzo, I said how much money are you making? And he says \$700,000.

He coughs out 700 grand, which was so high I thought I had misheard him and I say how much?

(Laughter)

MR. GOTTLIEB: And he says \$700,000 and Ruben says?

MR. VIVES: I said Jesus Christ.

(Laughter)

MR. VIVES: I thought I gave away the story right there.

(Laughter)

MR. GOTTLIEB: So then I then turn to the police chief, who had been the Chief of the City of Glendale, which is a much larger city, and he had retired and a week later had taken the job in Bell, and I said how much money do you make? And he says \$457,000, and I said how much did you make in Glendale? And he says \$215,000. Then I turned to the assistant city manager and I said how much money do you make and she says I don't know.

(Laughter)

MR. GOTTLIEB: Everyone knows. And then this interview went on for four hours, ultimately it was sort of the tension kind of rising and falling and there were some great quotes. These people were utterly unrepentant. I mean Rizzo's comment was, on the 700 grand, was people may choke on that but, you know, I could make more money in private business. I had asked one of the city council members, who was a pastor, I said do you make 100 grand, you know, in your real life? And of course he said no, and I said what did you think when you got this paycheck? And he said I though it was a gift from God.

(Laughter)

MR. GOTTLIEB: And when he says this I'm thinking to myself no, the gift from God was that quote.

(Laughter)

MR. GOTTLIEB: And so that was, like I said, just sort of the beginning of this eight month trek, which we are still on, writing about Bell.

MR. JONES: So where do things stand in Bell now? Do the people of Bell have a very different administration or is this something that has significantly changed, by your estimation?

MR. VIVES: I mean the changes are happening today actually. There's municipal elections going on and so the citizens for the first time will get to elect an entire new council, which hasn't really happened before. They had a system in place in which a council member, in the last year of his term, would step down and then appoint someone, and so it would keep this sort of cycle going so that it was impossible and of course anyone trying to challenge the incumbents would end up losing anyways. So, and I think there's a lot more transparency now certainly. Anymore changes you can think of?

MR. GOTTLIEB: Well I mean the anger of the citizens of Bell is just like I mean palpable and now everyone is suspicious of everyone. You have a couple of different factions now in the city council race. I mean what would happen, after our story, our story, the first story, appeared on a Thursday and then there was a city council meeting on a Monday and all hell broke loose at this meeting. And then what happened at various city council meetings is there's a public discussion where anyone from the audience can stand up and so what happened literally for three hours, and Ruben went to more of these meetings than I did, were people from the public would stand up and they would say you're a fool, you're a jerk.

And then the next guy would come up and no, you're worse, and then the next, and this would go on literally for three hours, the anger toward these people, and I think it's clear that there have been changes. What's going to be interesting is when these people are elected, I don't think they quite understand how mundane governing a city can be. Where it's sort of refreshing that you have this real democracy in action, new people

being elected, it will be very interesting to see what happens.

MR. JONES: I mean I know that Los Angeles County has a lot of these independent cities within the sort of Los Angeles County region. How many of them are there? Do you know?

MR. GOTTLIEB: In L.A. County?

MR. JONES: Yeah.

MR. GOTTLIEB: We've used the number, I'm trying to remember, it's what, 88? Something like that, yeah.

MR. JONES: And how many of them now would you say are transparent about the salaries of all of these kinds of things, since this series ran? Has that changed?

MR. GOTTLIEB: Yes.

MR. VIVES: I mean most of them are. I mean the day -- I think the day the state required that all municipal governments basically post the salaries of all the public employees and that was done. I mean some web sites immediately put them up and there were some other cities that were sort of hesitant and they took a while to post their salaries, but it was done pretty quickly. I mean everyone was sort of we need to be transparent quickly.

MR. JONES: And has that resulted in lower salaries or has that changed salaries? Or have people decided the better part of valor was giving some money back? Or is it just a matter of letting people know just how much? I mean are there other situations like Bell in which the city administration is making a disproportionate amount of money still, transparently but still?

MR. GOTTLIEB: Well I actually think Bell is sort of extreme because not only were they making an outrageous amount of money, eight people have been charged with

felonies, so that makes it a little bit different. I don't know if people's salaries have been knocked down but what you do see is that could happen. I mean you can see citizens complaining. We get e-mails from all kinds of people and you can see efforts in some places of citizens to knock that down, to lower salaries of council members and not only salaries but a lot of these councils, most councils, I think they get medical benefits, and these are part-time jobs, medical benefits, insurance, those kinds of things. So there certainly have been efforts to change that.

MR. JONES: I would like to ask both you guys and also you, Laura, on behalf of NPR, what is the sort of climate at your institutions for this kind of reporting now? I know the *L.A. Times* has been through a hell of a ride and NPR has got its own issues funding-wise, where does this leave you?

MR. GOTTLIEB: Well when this Bell story started the *L.A. Times*, I can't describe to you how bad the morale was with all the stuff that was happening. You would come into the office, and I work at home most of the time, but I would come into the office and it's like walking into a morgue. And just when you thought that morale couldn't get any lower, it did, and then it would get even lower, and we've been told that this story has helped that. But one of the things I think this story helped, and an editor has sent us e-mails saying this, that it helped the paper get its mojo back.

And we've been much more concentrated now on sort of this investigative stuff, especially on cities. We've gone onto more places than Bell, redevelopment, and we've done a lot of investigative stuff. And I think one thing that's important answering this question is the managing editor told me that two major advertisers had re-upped on their contracts before they ran out because they wanted to be associated with the paper because of the Bell stuff, and I thought that put a lie to the argument that investigative

reporting is so expensive.

And then we were also told that because of the reporting in Egypt and all the people in Egypt that another major advertiser felt the same way.

MS. SULLIVAN: I mean, you know, I mean my motto is pretty much thank god for NPR listeners because it allows us the ability to do it. I mean we are able to do this right now and to spend the time on these stories because we are funded by our listeners and that makes all the difference in the world to us, but we are in the fight of our lives right now. I mean we are going to lose funding and it's going to be ugly and it's going to be really devastating and brutal to the newsroom, and I'm sure it's coming and I think we are all getting prepared for that and how that's going to impact especially like our poor rural stations who are going to be losing their funding mostly because we don't get a lot of funding directly from the federal government, but our smaller member stations do, and then they buy our programming, so it's going to effect us.

I mean we've been very fortunate at NPR because, so far, NPR has been putting its money where its mouth is and there's been a lot of effort and push and just a real belief from the top on down on doing long, long stories that take a lot of time. At the same time, I mean I'm not going to lie to you and say there isn't pushback when you say well actually we need to sit on this for six more months and wait and see what happens to these inmates. I mean there were some editors who were like what? How long exactly?

My motto is never actually pitch your story for the full length you think it's going to take, like reel your editor in slowly until they get hooked into it and then they are sort of with you on that, but you can't walk in the door and say I need nine months to do a story, you are just going to get laughed out of the room. So you've got to be like well I actually need like six weeks, and now I need a few more and I think it's getting really good and

can we have a few more months? And before you know it, it's been nine months, so that's always the better policy.

(Laughter)

MS. SULLIVAN: But luckily Steve has been great at sort of fending off the bullets and keeping us protected under that, so he could probably answer that better.

MR. JONES: Are you the fender offer?

MR. DRUMMOND: I came to NPR ten years ago and one of the things I noticed, coming from the newspaper world, was to sit around and say, you know, they don't break a lot of stories around here, Nina Totenberg being the exception, but there was not a culture of doing what the *L.A. Times* and the *New York Times* and the newspapers do and I think we've had -- it's been pleasing for me to see ten years of the commitment to hiring great reporters like Laura and to taking the time, these things cost a lot of money.

And I was just thinking in a lot of these stories that the challenge with radio is, like with the Lubbock story that Laura was talking about, we can't just call the people up on the phone and interview them, we have to go there. I mean what we do and when it works and when it makes magic for people in their cars is to put people in places and to go places, and so these stories cost a lot of money and Laura is right, we've seen NPR commit to spending at that kind of money and at the same time our audience has grown.

We were told a few years ago that it was flat and that it would never go up again, and I see recently we have like 36 million people listening to us around the country. And it does, even despite the funding battles, it seems to suggest that our listeners are pleased with what we are doing, and so we don't -- we don't have a lot of -- this story had some pushback but it came out all right.

MR. JONES: Karen de Sá, when you did your stories for the *San Jose Mercury News*

about Sacramento, if you would, tell us how you, and I know that you were preceded by another colleague who was relatively new to Sacramento and you got the sort of the snip of the story, if you would, explain how that sort of evolved, how you got the idea and how you got permission from a newspaper that I know, like all others, is strapped to do it because it took a while.

MS. DE SÁ: Yes, we are strapped. However, my editor, I talked about this panel with him, the managing editor, and he said well investigative reporters are expensive and their time is expensive, and he was going on about this, and I looked at him and I said well what about me? And he said well you, you're a bargain.

(Laughter)

MS. DE SÁ: So here I am, a bargain. So this is story began, it was a really simple curiosity of a new reporter to the Capitol beat. I mean I really think that what newspapers bring to investigations a lot of times is they come off beats, and so you have that sense of authority and you know how to find a good story. But in this case I think a fresh eye really, really lent a lot because of the malaise that had set in in the Capitol and a lot of completely acceptable practices that our fresh eyes found to be pretty outrageous.

So this colleague of mine, Edwin Garcia, he just kept going to the hearings where pieces of legislation in California were being introduced and the lobbyists were doing all the talking. The authors of the bills, the lawmakers, were kind of sitting passively as the lobbyists were just taking the mic. I mean this is something that would never happen in Congress, but they completely commandeered the hearings. They plant questions from the committee members, they answer all the questions.

The author of the bill is completely unable to handle the policy committees where the bills are being vetted, they just can't answer. They have very little familiarity with the bills

that carry their names, so that was just like -- he was like whoa, that's weird, what's going on here? So we uncovered this phenomenon of the sponsored bill and we started to figure out just how many bills are identified as having outside sponsors. He quickly left the paper to go be a FLAC for Kaiser, and so this had sat. This project sat dormant for a few months.

I ordinarily covered juvenile justice and child welfare issues and I had just come off a big, really heavy, really emotionally laden project that we had done on the juvenile dependency courts. One of our primary focuses of investigation committed suicide two weeks after the thing came out, it was really intense, but it led to Arnold Schwarzenegger signed a new piece of legislation. It was a big investigation but it was a really heavy thing, so I was kind of like spinning from that still and wanted to do something that was a little less intense, so I just set out to do this months of mind numbing data entry.

I wish I had a team of 12 to help me but *Mercury News* bargain, I just sat there, put my -- my husband here help me set up two screens at home, that was very helpful.

(Laughter)

MS. DE SÁ: So we felt -- I mean when we crunched the numbers from the most recent two-year legislative session we found that like almost half the bills had these outside sponsors, as identified. The bills that were sponsored by private interests passed at twice the rate that bills kind of championed by the lawmakers themselves passed. There was a big, fat money trail between the sponsors of bills and the lawmakers who carried the bills and the kind of -- the interesting part of this and the challenge is when I started to interview about this phenomenon and I was made to feel really ridiculous.

It was like sponsored bills? Why are you doing this? This is like asking was blood red in Sacramento, I mean people were like why are you doing this on sponsored bills? That

is just our bread and butter, that's the way we work here. Well it turned out that sponsors weren't just attaching their names to legislation or giving the ideas, they were actually writing the bills word for word, and we have this confirmed. I mean I have a bill that a lobbyist sent and then the bill that went to the office of the legislative counsel that has to formally produce the language that goes to the legislature and they are identical. There's maybe a comma change.

They were writing the speeches word for word that the lawmakers were delivering on the floor when they presented the bills and that again was like, when I interviewed, it was like of course we write the speeches, of course we write the bills, that's what we do here. So there was that aspect of it that was really astounding and challenging as well, to get people to recognize that from an outside Sacramento perspective.

And then I guess the other thing was actually finding bills where the private interest really overruled public good and getting the right examples to tell the story. There's a big football stadium in L.A. that managed to completely bypass environmental laws in California. We had plumbing manufacturers getting a bill passed that managed to skirt anti-lead protections in drinking faucets, mobile home park owners that were doubling the rents for mostly elderly seniors on fixed incomes. I mean some really serious harm to the public being done. And then, if you want to hear about the other challenges at our newspapers, we had those as well.

MR. JONES: I want to hear them.

MS. DE SÁ: Okay. Well at my paper, you probably know that the *Mercury News* is usually the lead anecdote of every media downsizing tale of horror that has been written, we are always up there. Our staff is down by a quarter, as I said last night. There's an active proposal now from a consultant who has told Dean Singleton, the owner of these

65 newspapers nationwide, that he should create a universal copy desk for all the papers either at one low cost region in the U.S. or in India, so we have this challenge.

We had an entire investigative projects team--

MR. JONES: May I ask how you found out about that? I mean is that something that was floated because it was so absurd or because some people--

MR. GOTTLIEB: Well that's a good question. I'm actually the chair of our writers guild of our union and we found out about it and we put the word out, and it turned into quite a scandal. They are now claiming that they are not considering India.

(Laughter)

MS. DE SÁ: But, at any rate, somewhere I think.

MR. JONES: Bangladesh, yeah.

MS. DE SÁ: So our entire projects team is now just me. My editor, who is Rick Tulskey, who is a Pulitzer Prize winning, very accomplished investigative journalist, some of you may know, left recently to go launch a watch dog journalism center at Northwestern University where this is the frontier for many, the cooperation between academic institutions, and he is going to be published in the *Chicago Tribune*. So now it's actually just me and I'm editorless. However, when I inter -- for this panel I decided to do a little research, so I talked to my publisher who said if investigative journalism has no future, we have no future.

I talked to my managing editor who said this is newsroom talk, people, so forgive me the swear words, but I will edit it. He said it's harder every day to hold onto than it was the day before but if we don't, what the F are we here for? We can't give up because no one else is going to F'ing do it. So the challenge is that we have this sentiment and this award really helps because they shamelessly produce this ad that embarrasses me every

day, but the interesting thing about this series is not only did it prompt the outrage you would expect, and it was interesting because it was the government lovers, it was the government haters. I got my first invitation to speak before the Tea Party.

(Laughter)

MS. DE SÁ: The people, our readers, they felt that they got a chance to see a friend that they had long taken for granted. They were so appreciative not only of the substance of the report but that the *Mercury News* is still doing this and that they really reacted on an incredibly emotional level. They remembered yes, this is why we so desperately need you, major metropolitan daily. We know that the national newspapers are continuing to do great work and we know that the problem is now the state and local reporting and keeping that alive.

So, at this point, we just, those of us left standing just have to strengthen our resolve and are encouraged by recognition like this, so thank you.

MR. JONES: Well that's exactly why we do it. Can I ask you if the Singleton newspaper group has sort of taken on this as a bragging right as well?

MS. DE SÁ: Well they have and it's so ironic because when I first -- the first award I won for this was just like an in-house award for a managing editor's award or something and immediately thereafter I got a note from the executive editor to come to his office and I was like oh, shit, what did I say? He's like I would like to talk to you about what you said at the awards ceremony and I was like uh-oh.

(Laughter)

MS. DE SÁ: And he didn't really want to talk to me because he talked for like an hour and a half and I couldn't get a word in, but he basically said congratulations but we can't afford to do this anymore, and he said we have to start posting to the iPads and he talked

about ad revenue being down. And, frankly, posting to the iPads has pushed our deadlines back two hours, so not only has it thrown more reporters away from any kind of long term work but it's cut two hours of reporting time off every single daily story, which is huge.

They say we are supposed to start early, but we all start early anyway. So, but then I was told that maybe that was just like he was trying to -- it had to do with the ongoing contract negotiations and he was just trying to kind of intimidate me. So I'm not really daunted by that and it just reminds them that if we don't continue to do this, we have nothing to show for why we should continue to exist.

MR. JONES: Thank you. I would like -- one of the things that is happening increasingly as well is the cooperative effort that was on display between *ProPublica* and Planet Earth--

MR. DRUMMOND: We're always cooperating with Planet Earth.

MR. JONES: I'm sorry?

MR. DRUMMOND: We're always cooperating with Planet Earth.

MR. JONES: I'm mean *Planet Money, Planet Money*.

(Laughter)

MR. JONES: Sorry. But, if you would, talk about, Jake Bernstein and Jesse Eisinger, talk about how this kind of arrangement works. I know *ProPublica* almost always works with a partner, as I understand it, and I would like to get a sense of how you see this evolving in terms of a model that will be not just *ProPublica's* model but other nonprofit models and how you see the relative cooperative efforts that are -- what's reasonable? What is not? Who decides what?

MR. BERNSTEIN: Well, as far as a model that's going to work for other places, I

mean there are other places that are, particularly local and regional sort of -- I won't say mini *ProPublicas* because some of them have grown up just along side of *ProPublica*, but I mean this is happening in California and it's happening in San Diego and it's happening in Texas and other places. As far as the relationships, the partners, every partnership is different, so there's all -- I can only sort of speak from the relationship that we had with *Planet Money*, as far as I mean some are cooperative partnerships where the reporters from the other publication are also doing work along side us and it's all sort of very together.

For ours, our piece was kind of interesting in that *Planet Money* had done this absolutely wonderful program called "The Giant Pool of Money" which had sort of shown from soup to nuts the financial crisis and from home buyers to Wall Street and really tried to explain what had happened. But they felt like there was a piece of it that they hadn't really gotten into, which was this sense that there were people who knew what was going on and had taken advantage of it and that there was actual sort of wrongdoing or bad behavior that had happened.

And they also knew that they just, for a bunch of different reasons, didn't have the ability to do the kind of investigative reporting that was required to sort of ferret that out, so they came to us and they said this is our sort of thesis, run with it, and we did. We started just talking to as many people as possible and we quickly narrowed into collateralized debt obligations, which is sort of the epicenter of the financial crisis, at least on Wall Street.

And then we did a lot of reporting, we wrote a draft of our first story and then we went back to the -- we had been in contact with them but we really went back to the folks at *Planet Money* and we starting working with them on the radio script and that part of it.

So that was one way to do that partnership, but there's -- I think it depends on the need of the partner publication and what they are looking for. We've done other stuff where we've created databases of information and then given access to that database to publications all over the United States and then they've run off and done their own stories based on the information that we've collected.

So I think there's lots of different ways to do it, but the idea behind it always is that we have the resources or the background to do certain things that other publications might not have and so we are offering that to them.

MR. JONES: If you would, talk about *ProPublica* and how it's set up now at the year and a half or two years you guys have been going. What is the arrangement? Where did you come from, for instance? I know, Marshall, you're getting ready to go to *ProPublica*, I think. How do you go about, well, first of all, explain what *ProPublica* is now, in March of 2011, and is it something that will be the same two or three years from now or is it something that is evolving?

MR. EISINGER: What is *ProPublica* now? Well I always say it's journalism paradise. I don't mean to lord it over my lamenting colleagues here but it's a wonderful place. It's small, it's collegial, it's energetic and obviously it's a nonprofit, so we have time to develop stories. We have patience from our editors, they have ambition. Everybody is unified of purpose, so we all know what we are trying to do. I came directly from *Conde Nast Portfolio*, a business magazine that Conde Nast tried to launch unsuccessfully, dramatically and unsuccessfully.

And we sat through -- I had to sit through hours of meetings debating whether we wanted to put Carl Icahn on the cover or go with Britney Spears this month finally, and we don't have those conversations in *ProPublica*, so that's a wonderful thing. We are now

diversifying our funding base, so we've got lots of foundations now giving us money. It initially was primarily from the Sandler Foundation, so I never say this publicly but we basically started with subprime blood money and now we are -- they are going to -- I'm going to get in big trouble for that.

(Laughter)

MR. EISINGER: Don't Tweet it. And now we are getting other foundations and Knight, MacArthur, Ford, Pew, Broad, a bunch of others, and that's not the future for us. Eventually we are going to have to diversify from foundations to actually have some kind of sustainable funding model. I don't think we have any idea what that's going to be or whether it's going to be readers, whether it's going to be a bunch of rich folks, whether it's advertising.

So, in that sense, we are in the exact same boat that all the other media are in the world, but I think that we have a sense that this is sustainable and going to survive now. I think when I joined a year and a half ago, two years ago now, that that wasn't clear that we were really going to be a sustainable model, and I think that this is and I think it's the right model because as much as advertisers paid up for the *L.A. Times* story on Bell and as much as editors profess their love for this stuff, I don't think it's sustainable in a for profit model mainly because I think that there are select pockets.

And I'm glad to be proven wrong by the panel but my view in general is that this stuff is dry, it's worthy, people consider it peas and carrots. I don't think that readers particularly love it. I think that this is extremely important stuff to do and vital to our mission and the point of journalism, but I just don't think it's popular with readers or advertisers and so I think it needs to be supplemented in a nonprofit model, and so I'm hoping that this will be sustainable.

MR. JONES: One of the things that's interesting about *ProPublica* is that it really is the sort of the -- it's something that was created pretty much by Paul Steiger, who is the former Managing Editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, and he believed that it was important as a journalism culture question for it not to be a virtual newsroom with people working from their homes all over the country. He wanted and insisted upon spending the money to bring journalists to a central newsroom, to have them be journalists together in a single place and for there to be a sense of a news organization, or at least that's how he started.

Where is *ProPublica* now and what does it look like if you walked in the door? What's the newsroom like?

MR. BERNSTEIN: Well I think it actually looks like a -- I mean a small newsroom. I mean it's an open floor with lots of cubicles and lots of people working. But I think that Paul's idea was a good one in that what he wanted to encourage was that sort of cross-fertilization, people talking with their colleagues about different things. And we have a wonderful researcher and a great car person and the idea is for people to discuss sort of innovative ways to attack the material that's sort of challenging them at the moment.

The other thing is we have the editor or managing editor, Steve Engelberg, who was the investigative editor at the *Times* and was the editor at the *Oregonian* and Steve is involved in every story pretty much and is just a font of all kinds of ideas, both in reporting and writing. I mean the idea is to keep it fertile and not have people sort of siloed in their own little thing and that we are successful at that to differing degrees and in different circumstances. But I find it very -- it's very fertile and very supportive, which is really nice.

MR. JONES: What about the decision to have it in New York?

MR. BERNSTEIN: Versus? Well we have a small group of folks who are in D.C. I mean I think -- I mean I don't really know. I mean all those guys were in New York, so I think that was part of it, but I also think that their thought probably was we were going to be doing a lot of partnerships with media organizations that were also based in New York. That was probably some of the thought.

MR. JONES: What's your address?

MR. BERNSTEIN: We are actually right off of Wall Street, we are on 55 Broadway, just a couple of blocks down, and I think the only reason that we are so far downtown is they found cheap rent somehow.

(Laughter)

MR. JONES: Let me ask the *Washington Post* folks now to speak, if you would. Dana and Bill. Some of you may not know that Dana of course is, probably second only to Bob Woodward, one of the very most celebrating investigative reporters in the United States. And Bill comes at journalism from a very different kind of perspective, from inside the world of military and military intelligence and that sort of thing. And they made common cause in this series that they did and this long investigation that they did, "Top Secret America".

If you would, Dana, first, and then Bill, talk about the way you conceived it and then the way you sort of confronted some of the difficulties that you had?

MS. PRIEST: Well before I do that I just wanted to say that I don't think most -- I'm an exception, but I don't think most investigative things have to start as part of an investigative team or even a segregated investigative unit or anything like that. Most things I've done, like you were saying, come from a beat. And in my twenty some years at

the *Post* I've always found are things that reporters originate and then they work around their editors. No matter how talented and nice their editors are, they sort of work around their editors to launch and then to get to a certain point.

I think, culturally, to many reporters have gotten to the point where they ask editors questions like what should I be doing or do you like what I'm doing, instead of just doing it and then figuring out how to sell it to them. I think that's so important as newsrooms downsize because for most of my career I was a news hound and daily news beat reporter and I would always have two tracks going; one would be the daily reporting and the other would be some kind of long term project that might vary from just a couple of weeks to longer than that.

So I think, especially now, that's the only way that it can survive. But now I am in this great position where they are not asking me to do the daily anymore. So, in this case, which is the extreme case because neither one of us do daily and it did take two years, but we didn't know that from the beginning, it's a culmination of really years of thinking about what is happening in Washington in the biggest way. Not being able to see that for the first few years after 9/11 because we were doing a lot of other things, but definitely feeling like something had changed, that there was something growing around us, that our sources that we had had for many years were still in the game and that they were -- there was some quality that was just changing.

And Bill and I had talked kind of around this for years really until we decided to show one of our cards to each other at some point, and then eventually actually laid the cards on the table on an off the record basis in case either one of us wanted to go our separate ways--

MR. JONES: You have to understand something. Bill just described earlier today

Dana as more secretive than Dick Cheney.

(Laughter)

MS. PRIEST: I can say a couple of things like that about him too. So, yeah, I mean most of us work by ourselves and that's sort of how I think we are, but when we finally got together we were up at Bill's. I flew up or drove up to Bill's farm in Vermont. He lives in a barn, he works in a barn in Vermont and we sat down and said okay. By this time we had talked quite a bit about the fact that we knew that the it had grown up and it was so much bigger and there were so many elements to it and should we try to look at each intelligence agency and then each intelligence agency with in the military?

And so we were struggling with the methodology and really sort of both at the same time said well, first of all, everything lives somewhere, and this is something that I learned when I was doing the secret prisons story and learned that even though you have cover from the agency, at some point that cover butts up against the actual world and it's in that place where they come together that reporters can figure out what is going on in the secret world that they shouldn't know much about because you have to have a building in which your cover agency, your cover business actually works, and there are people that have to sign corporate records saying that you are a business and those cover records are kept by an actual government, a city government with records, and one thing leads to another.

So we came up with this thing of everything lives somewhere, let's try to find out where things that work on the secret level are located and we'll put them on a map and we'll do like a genome project for this world. And so that's how we started, which immediately -- well not immediately but several, maybe a month later we had to move up to the top secret world because there was so much in the secret world that there's no way

that we could have counted it in five years.

So we went up to the top secret world, which both made our job harder because if it's top secret, it should be more difficult to find, but made it a little bit more doable. And I'll turn it over to Bill. One thing I wanted to say is most everything that we did was not classified. I mean we didn't have any highly classified documents, everything is in the public realm, except for sources guiding us to things, but even those things, we weren't using classified documents. So, again, it's that place where the secret meets the regular world that you have to -- you have at least an address and a building you can go to and get names from. So I'll turn it over to Bill.

MR. ARKIN: So I would say that Dana and I, okay, we're equally secretive.

(Laughter)

MR. ARKIN: She's the people person interviewer in Washington and I'm the data person in Vermont. And I remember very clearly in November, 2008 saying to Dana there are 200 companies in America that do top secret work for the government, and we thought holy crap, this was amazing. And I guess I should talk about how I figured it out because it's really simple, what you're doing. In order to work at a top secret job you have to have a top secret clearance. In order to have a top secret clearance you have to be investigative and you have to be cleared by the government.

And it's a \$9 billion industry, this security industry, and because of the growth of amount of intelligence and counter terrorism work that was being done at the top secret level post 9/11 there was a tremendous need for people who had top secret clearances, and they advertised their jobs.

(Laughter)

MR. ARKIN: And so I collected about 600,000 job announcements.

MR. JONES: Where do you post for a top secret job?

MR. ARKIN: Well some of it is classifiedjobs.com.

(Laughter)

MR. ARKIN: So there are -- so I said this is a big business.

(Laughter)

MR. ARKIN: Some of it is going to Lockheed Martin or General Dynamics or Northrop Grumman and just typing in on their job board top secret or various codes that I know that mean top secret, and then I collected all the job announcements. And the job announcements are pretty clear, they want you to work on the Little Feather Project and the Little Feather Project is at Ft. Meade, Maryland, so now we have Northrop Grumman working on the Little Feather Project at Ft. Meade, Maryland and then some other job announcement will be something similar, that there's a need for a Pashto Linguist to work at Ft. Gordon, Georgia at this organization.

And we just built this database from scratch, from nothing. We built a database and tracked who did top secret work, who did they do it for, what was the nature of the work, where was it located. And then after about a year of that, when Dana started really knocking the crap out of me and saying you know you are never going to get it all, right? You understand you are never going to get it all?

(Laughter)

MR. ARKIN: Then we started to really pick at the data and try to figure out what we had, putting it on maps, categorizing the companies by size, categorizing the agencies by size, looking at which agencies or which companies had been created since 9/11. It was a massive data project, it was the largest data project that the *Washington Post* had ever done. It was an 870,000 field database that we created and despite the sound of a 12

person team that did work on the web, I did all the data and all the analysis.

And from that then we had to pick well what were we going to write about? And what was the story? So of course it was clear that first was going to be an overview, what is this phenomenon that we've discovered that has been created since 9/11, and that was the first part of the series. But after that we really struggled with the question of what could we show that would best exemplify redundancy, out of controlness, ineffectiveness, effectiveness. I mean I think that was one of the things that we also wanted to show, which was where is this working?

And we did beg the government for many, many months to tell us how many plots have you stopped, how many of these have been successful, to little avail. So this is a long data project hampered by our abilities, hampered by secrecy, which was unbelievable, hampered by the fact that we didn't want to go to the press FLACs and the public affairs people until we were fairly far along, so we were doing this all clandestinely.

I eventually got 300,000 contracts that the government had with private companies and went through them and pulled out what the work was that was being done. But I think, in the end, to me, what made this project really possible was that I didn't have the ability to translate what I had, the research that I had done and Dana was really an investigator of the classic sort. She wanted people to talk to and put a face on the story and we happened to be doing it at a time when the *Washington Post*, even struggling, wanted to have a project that it could genuinely call digital at birth, not a print story that gets thrown to the web for rendering but something that was conceived.

And in fact we gave our first briefing to the *Post* about what we wanted to do at the web site before we even did it at the paper. And so from the very beginning with worked with a cartographer, we worked with people who were the software editors, the designers,

who pretty much stayed with us the whole two years. And once they were vested in the story, meaning once they go it, once they understood it--

MS. PRIEST: Which took a while because we didn't really want to tell them.

(Laughter)

MR. ARKIN: Which took a while because Dana didn't really want to tell them.

(Laughter)

MR. ARKIN: Then it really began to sink because then the designers could say oh, now I get it and now I can see. And then in March of 2009 we had to redo the whole thing because of editorial decisions made at the *Washington Post* that forced us to change the database.

MR. JONES: I don't understand.

MS. PRIEST: Well it's that process that we were talking about. We wanted to go through the whole exercise to get as much as we needed to to be able to say this is what we know and then, as we knew would happen, there was a discussion and decision making process of okay, now we know, we can pinpoint where X is happening, but do we really need to tell readers all of that, in that it is top secret work and that sort of thing? So the national security implications then come to bear and we ended up changing how we put it together because we decided, the editors decided, well Marcus Brauchli, who is the person who rightly decides these things with our input, that you didn't need to publish all of those details in order to make the point and that some of those details, many of them, shouldn't be published.

MR. JONES: Can you briefly, because I want to get to the *Las Vegas Sun* as well, what is the atmosphere and appetite for this kind of two year type project at the *Washington Post* now?

MS. PRIEST: Well, just like you were saying, I mean there is no way that, if I had come and said we want to do a two year project, that they would say okay. You really do have to, first of all, you don't know how long it's going to be and so you have to just sort of put them off for as long as you can. Oh, I'm going to work on this for a month and see what it is or a couple of weeks. I mean I've done this with every project I've ever had. Walter Reed also, two people, well what are you up to? Well we are going to come out breaking next week, and then next week comes and you say well just give me until Monday.

(Laughter)

MS. PRIEST: And so you just have to figure out how to manage editors and the good editors know it. They know that you have a track record and at some point they are going to push you to tell them what you are doing, but that certainly happened in this case and, believe me, I was not intending to work on any project in my whole life for two years but it just ended up that way because it was too -- had we started again, I don't know how to do it smarter, but it was just too big. It was such a big universe.

So the *Post*, no, they don't have an appetite, and nor should they, for a two year project. So hopefully we can figure out how to, as we go along, do things much quicker, involve more people earlier. That was a learning process for me. The *Post* only integrated the newsroom with the web and it is two different cultures. People at the web generally don't have experience out in -- outside the building reporting information like journalists do, so you have to be prepared to teach them what it is you are doing, to some extent, how it can't be predicted what the outcome will be. So it's a learning process.

MR. JONES: Let me go to the *Las Vegas Sun* that won the Goldsmith Prize last night. You guys are effectively an eight-page insert inside a larger but much less journalistically

ambitious newspaper. But you are also probably, as far as I can tell, the most integrated print/web operation, journalistically, than any newspaper in the country. There may be others like you, but I don't know anything quite like you.

If you would, talk about, one; Brian Greenspun had to leave. He's the owner of the *Sun* and the publisher and editor of it and he was very frank earlier today about the fact that the *Sun* basically does not make money. He hopes one day it will, that there will be other mechanisms for funding the kind of journalism that was on display in this series. But you guys are effectively working at an enterprise that is on a wing and a prayer, in terms of the good will of your editor and publisher on the one hand.

And, on the other hand, you have been dramatically successful and ambitious and innovative in the way you've integrated both your journalism and the web presence and the effort to create and find an audience that's a new one and endearing one. If you would, talk a little bit about that and the way all that works.

MR. ALLEN: Well I always tell people that you have to have a lot of humility to work at the *Sun* because you don't have a traditional front page. I mean literally you are the third section in the *Las Vegas Review Journal*, and they are our competition, and so what that did is that forced -- I think you have to be humble because you are not ever going to see a front page story on a news stand where like oh, there's my above the fold, big banner headline, front page story. And a lot of people in Las Vegas frankly don't even know that we exist.

They believe that we are actually a part of the *Review Journal* and so we've had people who I know say the *Sun*, you know, my wife will say oh, yeah, my husband writes for the paper, and they go oh, the *RJ*? And she says no, no, the *Las Vegas Sun*, and they go oh, I don't know the *Sun*. I get the *RJ* but I don't know the *Sun*.

(Laughter)

MR. ALLEN: So there is a bit of an identity challenge being at the *Sun* but what it allows us to do is be a lot more nimble and flexible and challenge ourselves to do more innovative type of stories. So we ignore, we are not the paper of record and there's a great freedom in not being the paper of record. We don't cover car crashes or courtroom verdicts or city council meetings, we do, any time there is a big, breaking story, we'll do a second day story, so we'll look ahead to see what's the meaning of whatever happened, as opposed to just saying what happened.

We post those breaking news stories on our web site, but then the goal in anything we do is to just be more analytical. Basically they are all enterprise stories and, as a journalist, that's the kind of thing that I'm most passionate about doing.

MR. JONES: So tell us about this, how did it get--

MR. ALLEN: Well, yeah. When I first came to the *Sun* in 2006 I was a general assignment reporter and when my editor asked me--

MR. JONES: Where did you come from?

MR. ALLEN: The *Pasadena Star News* in California. And my editor asked me to write about health care and the first words out of my mouth were I can't imagine anything more boring than writing about health care. I had read so many terrible health care stories that just read like they came off of press releases or all these panicky stories about the latest disease that's going to decimate the entire world, and then this follow up story that said oh, well it actually wasn't as bad as we thought it was going to be.

But I agreed to do it, but my challenge to myself is I was like I really want these to be interesting stories. I mean, first and foremost, you have to earn a reader's attention and it's such a passive medium you have to really engage them somehow. So I had written

about a lot of scandals. Another approach I take to the beat is that I want to write from the point of view of the patient. Any story I write, I don't take a business approach. I want to be a representative of the every day person as they encounter the health care system, and usually it's them getting ground up in the wheels of the machinery of health care, which is very dysfunctional in the United States.

So I got this assignment in 2008 to write a big picture project about health care and there was a joke about health care that kind of led to this; where do you go for great health care in Las Vegas? And the punch line of the joke is the airport.

(Laughter)

MR. ALLEN: Because everybody knows, unfortunately, that there's bad health care in Las Vegas. And I had heard this joke a lot of times but it wasn't funny because it's a true reflection of the harm that takes place in hospitals. So I started interviewing people to develop some general themes, I still had no idea what this story was going to be about, and started talking to Alex, who is our data analysis, computer assisted reporting person, and we started brainstorming what are ways that we can go beyond just an anecdotal story so that we can really quantify what is happening in our hospitals in a new and innovative way?

And so we identified this database of every inpatient hospital visit in the state. These databases are kept in almost every state across the country, they are based on billing records, and you can analyze these databases. Starting in 2008 they put a code in the data that says whether or not a condition was present at the time of admission. And so if, for instance, some type of an injury or an infection was said, they noted that it was not present at the time of admission, well then that's indicating that it is acquired in the hospital.

And so we focused on injuries and infections that are preventable and that are hospital required and then we decided, because the hospitals know this, the doctors know this, the insurance companies know this, everybody within health care knows about this, except for the patients, and patients have a right to know. And there is no transparency in health care almost universally across the nation and so we said wow. When we identified this database, we were like we can impose transparency on them, even though they refuse to provide it, and we don't need their permission.

And so when we got that database in April of 2009 it was a -- I mean we cherished it like it was a newborn baby, I mean we just -- we knew what we had when we got that thing and we were like this could be really, really interesting to analyze this. So Alex set about wrestling that thing like it's a python the length of this table. I mean it's 2.9 million records and each record probably has 50 elements to it, and so it took probably about a year to wrestle with that and analyze it and clean it up because it was dirty in a lot of ways.

And then it was a matter of how do we make this meaningful so that you could analyze this any different way? I mean you could look at cost, you could look at the quality of care provided to different people based on insurance type. I mean there are so many different things that you could do with this data, but we wanted to figure out well what's the best thing that we can do with it and the most interesting? And so we honed in on these preventable injuries and infections, and then we had false starts.

I mean I remember we wrote an entire version of the story with all the analysis and everything and then we realized, when our editor's eyes totally glazed over, that this was not going to be the way to do it. It was just too obtuse, too complicated and just too boring, and so we scrapped that one and came up with the kind of five part series that it

ended up being.

MR. JONES: And, if you would, talk about the digital dimension at the *Las Vegas Sun* because you had, for every one of these five stories, you had some very imaginative computer graphics that were pegged specifically to that particular story.

MR. ALLEN: Well, again, we wanted to make it meaningful and the *Sun*, we're really fortunate to have some extremely talented -- we focused a lot on developing the online side because, like I said, our print side, we are an insert in the other paper and it's through a joint operating agreement. We have a fixed amount of income, which I understand is declining every year, that we get for our print product but online the Greenspuns have really devoted a lot of vision to trying to come up with a model that will actually work online.

So they brought in some really talented people and so we kind of knew we have this great team of data people and we have this -- we all talked about convergence, and so we wanted to find as many multi media ways to tell the story as possible. So on the data side Alex and I sat down with the flash developer and came up with some ways to present the data online that would be meaningful, that would be interactive so that you could actually kind of play with it.

We did a lot of videos with a lot of patient stories on video and then each element, we just tried to have something, again, interesting and innovative and engaging so that there would be a lot of different ways to interact with the material.

MR. JONES: Is there a culture at the *Las Vegas Sun* that is specific to the *Las Vegas Sun*?

MR. ALLEN: Yeah, absolutely. I mean I think we're not -- we realize that we can't be stuck in the past and I think it's like a playground because we are encouraged to come up

with whatever you want to do and you can do it. There has never been any idea that I've had where they have said well we don't really do that here or that doesn't sound very good. Well a lot of them aren't good, so I mean if they are not good, they just tell me well that's a bad idea, and that happens a lot too.

But when I have a good idea it's affirmed and then we are empowered to do things. So even though we are extremely small, we only have -- we have fewer than 20 reporters, including the breaking news and the enterprise side of what we do, we are encouraged to create and come up with new things, and so it's really fun.

MR. JONES: And is it connecting, do you think, with the people in Las Vegas?

MR. ALLEN: Absolutely. I mean this project, I mean the response was overwhelming because these people, when you look at the statistics, I mean there's a recent study that the Office of Inspector General for HHS did that found that 15,000 Medicare patients per month are dying in hospitals nationwide. So you look at the numbers of people being infected and injured in hospitals and it's over a million a year, and so those people are out there in the community. Everybody knows somebody who has been infected or been injured or been harmed in some way.

So once we started writing these stories from the point of view of these patients, I mean there was a deep connection with the community. I mean hundreds of e-mails and phone calls and just an overwhelming response.

MR. JONES: And how much of the *Las Vegas Sun* is Brian? Brian Greenspun?

MR. ALLEN: How do you mean?

MR. JONES: Well this is one of the really interesting aspects of it, the *Las Vegas Sun* is a newspaper that's been in the family, the Greenspun Family, for some time. They bought it I think back in the late '40s. Brian Greenspun's father, Hank Greenspun, was a famous

character. I mean he ran machine guns to Israel and he, with the *Las Vegas Sun*, in its earlier version in the '50s, he attacked Joe McCarthy. He was a very controversial, combative kind of man, but his newspaper was not a success and it was after he died that Brian made the deal for the joint operating arrangement with the *Review Journal*.

And Brian is not a journalist, I mean he was not trained as a journalist, he was not. His fundamental work, as I understand it, is not being publisher of the *Las Vegas Sun*.

MR. ALLEN: Right.

MR. JONES: It's one of the things he does. But the Greenspun family, when they came in, when Hank Greenspun came out to Las Vegas he looked at this desert, which was selling for practically nothing, and said this is probably a good investment. And the Greenspuns are quite wealthy and they have a lot of different kinds of businesses, including a lot of publishing oriented businesses that have nothing to do with journalism. But, for reasons that are just part of who he is, he has decided that he wants the *Las Vegas Sun* to be either the -- I mean I don't, I don't really know.

What do you think motivates him? I mean, believe me, my wife and I were talking about the Saltzberger Family and we know the Graham Family is represented at this table too. I mean a great publisher, as Ben Bradley I think said, is the most important thing you can possibly have. So how does that work?

MR. ALLEN: Well I mean in a lot of ways I would say it's all him. I mean he is very public about saying the *Sun* is losing money but he doesn't stop doing valuable work to the community because it's just a bottom line, financial decision. And so we sit at a table and we get recognized with awards, but I mean I always give credit to the people who -- he created the vision of what the *Sun* is today and he is trying to find a model that will work for all of journalism in the future, and he is investing a lot of resources in doing that

at a loss to himself and his family financially.

So he really cares about making Las Vegas and Nevada a better community, and so that's one reason that he wants us to do this kind of work and he empowers us and enables us to do this kind of work, but he also cares a great deal about journalism, and his dad did too, and so they really want to find something that will also work for everyone.

MR. JONES: Let me open it up to questions now. I think that we don't -- we started a little late, so I'm going to go a little longer than we had expected. But if any of you have a question that you would like to pose to this group or individuals in this group, just step to the microphone and proceed. Let me ask you a final question about the *Las Vegas Sun*. The sense I get is that the *Sun* is becoming a kind of incubator for other news organizations. I know you get people visiting, you now are leaving. I know that others have left after winning -- the *Sun* won the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service.

The *Sun* most remarkably, to me, won -- this is a newspaper that won a Dupont Award, which is the broadcast version of the Pulitzer Prize, for an online video on gambling addiction. I have never heard of a newspaper winning a Dupont Award. Is that the only time it's ever happened?

MR. ALLEN: Yeah. And I know Rob Curley likes to say that we are the only organization in the world to win a Dupont and a Pulitzer and the online news association award. So, yeah, I mean it's -- I mean I like to think of it as an incubator. In fact I wrote the story about the Pulitzer that we won two years ago and I really wanted to write that story because I wanted to be able to explain in that story here's what the *Sun* is and here's why we do what we do and here's how we do what we do.

And I think it's a very important story for journalism in general and, again, I don't think people even really know we exist, to be quite honest, so I'm not -- it's not that we

have any type of status or anything like that in the journalism world, but I think it's a great little oasis of a lot of innovative ideas. So, in that way, it is an incubator and, for me, I mean I it's been sort of an incubator for reporters. I mean to come to a place like that and be empowered to do the kind of work that you're really passionate about doing is just fantastic, and that's happened with a lot of other people there too.

MR. JONES: Can I ask those of you at this table how many of you before you came to this event were -- I mean was the *Las Vegas Sun* on your radar screen or was it really essentially not? Is that a not?

(Multiple people speaking)

MR. JONES: I mean aware, but I mean, to me, it reminds me of the *St. Petersburg Times*. Here's a newspaper in a town that is supposed to be the place where people go to die and for years has been considered one of the best newspapers in the United States. It had to do with ownership and it had to do with leadership. Did you say you worked there, Dana?

MS. PRIEST: Yeah.

MR. JONES: Okay, well I mean I think the point is I think you are going to be hearing more from the *Las Vegas Sun*, even though the *Review Journal* got credit for all the things you all have done.

(Laughter)

MR. JONES: Yes?

FROM THE FLOOR: My name is Anna Gorman, I'm a Nieman Fellow this year and also a reporter at the *Los Angeles Times* and I wanted to ask some of you. Our paper has obviously lost a lot of its staff, and older staff and long time investigative reporters, and other than going to an IRE conference every year, what is the best way for young

reporters to get the training they need to become that next generation of investigative reporters?

MR. JONES: Who would like? It's all yours.

MR. DRUMMOND: I think about what you had said, Dana. I think covering a beat is the best way to become an investigative reporter and to work sources and take people to lunch and make mistakes and do all the stuff that beat reporters. And I agree with several of the comments that came out of the panel here today that so many of these projects don't come from people sitting in the I-team room or whatever and thinking up stuff but they come from doing a story and getting a call from someone else or from taking a source to lunch and hearing a completely parenthetical reference to something else that leads to really good stories.

And I totally believe that's where the culture of this stuff needs to come from and I think the thing that we probably didn't do historically in the radio world, and many of our member stations struggle right now because they cover not one city council but 10 or 15, and not really a major read in the newspapers or you are sort of doing a very surface level of reporting. So, anyway, I really think it comes from covering a beat, it's so much of all the things that make these people really great reporters comes out of sort of the basic stuff that you learn in covering a beat and doing it over and over and over again.

MR. GOTTLIEB: Can I add something?

MR. JONES: Yeah, sure.

MR. GOTTLIEB: I actually don't think there is such a thing as investigative reporting, I think it's reporting. I mean all reporters should be doing this stuff, that's what we do, it's part of your job.

MS. SULLIVAN: I mean I feel like there's something to the idea that you just can't ask

for permission for it. I mean you just -- I mean you have to just start somewhere and you just have to keep moving forward. When I think back to ten years ago, some of the like smaller versions of these stories that I was doing in print, just it was you just -- every story builds on itself. You learn more, you gain more over time and then you get to a point where you don't have to ask as much as you used to.

But I get sometimes in the -- sometimes people in the newsroom will say how did you get this job? How did you get your beat? How did you get this situation? And I always -- I never really have courage to tell them, but the true answer is because I never asked for it. I never asked permission for it, I just did it and then if you keep doing it, and you have to fight and steer clear of editors and stuff, you have to maneuver yourself but if you play it carefully, then all of a sudden they stop bugging you about it and they just leave you alone.

(Laughter)

MS. PRIEST: Can I add one more thing? I mean I think the nuts and bolts of problem solving is something that benefits from more than one head thinking about it, so I would -- I mean I would attack that issue, how did I investigate X, by finding the people, even if it's one person in the newsroom who might have had some experience doing it, they may be in some other job right now, and just picking their brain. We tend to be very insular about what we do, and I'm trying to be less so, but I think it's really important to just find people with experience and say look, I've got this issue, how would you think about it, or do you want to talk about it, and people get so excited about that kind of reporting anyway and there might be someone in the newsroom who can offer suggestions.

FROM THE FLOOR: Hi. I'm Ross Kerber, I'm a financial reporter for Reuters News here in town, and I think my question is for Dana but anybody who wants to take a swing

at it too. Often times when I do my regular, daily stories and look for stories, at what point do you go to the official spokesman or the organization that you're worrying about now? It's my business news world it usually pays to start that ball rolling early, but it sounds like you made a point to wait until pretty late in the game?

And it's certainly an open-ended question, at what point do you -- what are some things you think about and when do you go in and start knocking on the front door?

MS. PRIEST: I think if you can do it early, that's good. I mean that's the best because you can leverage what you know to try to get them to help you know more, but you don't do that I think if they still have the power to close off the information flow, and that means, for instance, at Walter Reed they could tell the guards don't let these people in anymore, so we would have had had a problem, or they could put out a message to the people on the base saying these reporters are snooping around, they need to go to public affairs, that's the rules, don't break the rules.

So it's different in every case. The best is to go in earlier, if you can, if that's not going to cut it off, and then there are some cases where you can't go until the last, last minute and that's where those tend to be daily stories or a weekly scoop where, I hate to say this, but they are going to try to clean it up before you write about it, and we actually had that issue in Walter Reed. Should we, knowing a little bit about it, should we go to them and do a smaller story or should we just do it full blown?

And one of the reasons that we didn't do the smaller story was because some of the problems were just so basic, they could have cleaned this up, it would have been easy to clean this up. So there were some really deep seated problems and they needed to be -- they needed to feel the full weight of their own issues.

MS. DE SA: I would just add to that that it really depends on the story. I mean you

can really shoot yourself in the foot going too early. On the other hand, you really want to be fair. I mean, in general, I really believe in no surprises. I believe that informing people of what's going to be in the newspaper is just and it's moral and it's only right, and giving them a chance to respond is also a huge protection for you. If you go to press with something that you haven't, if you have whatever response they want to give you in your story, you are just that much more protected and that much less vulnerable.

On the other hand, we had this problem with our juvenile court series is that there was so much anticipation, we had been working on this for a year and a half. They were so nervous about it that they began scrambling for the fixes and literally on the eve of publication they were like, fine, we are going to do X, Y, Z. We had to like literally add all these little side bar components. Well they now say they are going to do this and that and they were going to double the salaries for all the juvenile court attorneys, and a lot of it was kind of hot air.

But it was just not going to do justice to the story and the depth of what we had found to allow them, on the eve of publication, to come up with all these like slapdash solutions for things. So it is a really delicate balance, but I have really learned from experience, and my editor guided me in this, that as much as you can get from the other side defending itself in your story, you are just going to be that much more protected.

MR. JONES: I'm sorry to say we really have run out of time now. I want to make some presentations before we adjourn though. Jeff and Ruben? If you people these on your wall, if people don't look too carefully, they look like Harvard degrees.

(Laughter)

MR. JONES: We've tried to maximize that. Steve? Laura? Jesse? This, by the way, is the person Alison Kommer, who has been the one who has been responsible for making

all these wheels turn on time.

(Applause)

MR. JONES: Karen? Dana? Bill? And actually we'll ship them to you, so you don't have to carry them. This has always been one of the great ones. I feel like the finalists this year were extraordinary in every respect, every single one of them. I ask you to join me in a round of applause for them.

(Applause)

MR. JONES: Thank you all.

(Whereupon, at 11:47 a.m., the session was adjourned.)

CERTIFICATE

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 GOLDSMITH AWARDS SEMINAR

Date: March 17, 2011

Place: Cambridge, Massachusetts

— 03/17/11

Allyson R. Farley

Date

Advance Services