

**CENTER FOR STRATEGIC
AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (CSIS)**

**THE CHALLENGE OF COVERING
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS**

MODERATOR:

REGINALD DALE, DIRECTOR,
TRANSATLANTIC MEDIA NETWORK, CSIS

SPEAKERS:

GERARD BAKER, U.S. EDITOR,
THE TIMES OF LONDON

ROSS DOUTHAT, SENIOR EDITOR,
THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY

ALBERT MAY,
FORMER GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS EDITOR,
ATLANTIC JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION
GWU PROFESSOR

FRANK SESNO,
CORRESPONDENT, CNN
GWU PROFESSOR

ABBI TATTON,
INTERNET REPORTER, CNN

KAREN TUMULTY,
NATIONAL POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT,
TIME MAGAZINE

THURSDAY, APRIL 24, 2008

*Transcript by
Federal News Service
Washington, D.C.*

REGINALD DALE: It's great to be at George Washington University and I would like to thank GW for its hospitality. We have a very wide range of people from different branches of the media here – print, television, the new media – and they all have American experience, a lot of experience, even if some of them don't have American accents. We're going to make brief statements and then have Q&A and discussion and I'd like to move along the panel from right to left, if that's appropriate these days, with Al May to start.

ALBERT MAY: Thank you. Welcome. Reggie sent me some questions to address and I thought it would be easier for me to set those questions out there and then the other panelists can respond to the questions as they like and I'm sure they'll all agree with me, although any differences will be worthwhile. My background is about 24 years as a newspaper reporter, editor, and I've been at GW for about 11 years teaching and writing about largely political journalism and the role of the press in public affairs.

So, I speak both from a practitioner's point of view and as an observer, at least for a while. The first question is: how do American journalists and foreign correspondents overcome the challenges and avoid the pitfalls of covering presidential elections? Well, the great Scotty Reston said, basically, that what you need is a sense of history and a good pair of shoes. Now you probably need some equipment to go along with it, a high tolerance of frustration and a deep skepticism of polls and television pundits, particularly those who used to work for politicians. You should know that they never really stop working for the politicians.

Another question: Should journalists stick with the herd or go out on their own? The herd is a lot more fun, but it is also more expensive. Going out on your own is lonely and the work is harder, though probably more rewarding. It was interesting that the New York Times last month had a story about how the major newspapers have backed off staffing the presidential campaign planes this year, largely because of the expense of the long campaign([link to NY Times article](#)). My reaction was that was probably pretty good. I think if you want to simply chronicle what the candidates are saying in their travels, you can get a bank of television sets and you can surf YouTube and you're not going to miss any feeding frenzies on Obama's preacher or Bill's eruptions or McCain's temper, because everything now has become so immediate that you often wonder whether you actually have to go out and cover the campaign.

I'm being somewhat facetious. I do think that the herd phenomenon is still with us and has been for a long time and may be even worse because of the acceleration of the general climate of the media environment. Another question: How far should journalists go in focusing on issues and how far on the contest itself? I think that, in our politics,

this question is really influenced by when you ask it; what stage of the election are you talking about?

Our political parties are pretty homogeneous and so our nominating process is less differentiated by policy. Issues do come into play. They help shape records and they help shape ideological profiles of candidates in the nominating process - for example, in the case of Mitt Romney, there was a great deal of press scrutiny about his ideology and his record as governor of Massachusetts and I think that was a perfectly appropriate. But I don't think the issues really differentiate the candidates very much.

The story of the primaries is one of a contest and it certainly has been this time. The contest skews the coverage in that direction and it's the dominant story. And I don't know any editor that would argue with this, given the wonderful story that we've seen unfold, particularly between the Democratic candidates. I do think you will see stark policy differences in the general election. That's when we tend to have those arguments and I think they will get covered.

Should journalists try to predict results? If you can't signal to your readers or your viewers what is likely to happen next, what good are you? What is your utility as a journalist? I think the best advice is just to avoid flat predictions such as "McCain is dead" or "Hillary is inevitable." I have always said: "Hedge your bets with the time-honored phrase, 'on the other hand.'" The conventional wisdom has had a rough time in this election cycle. It's probably been wrong more than usual, but it's been a pretty unpredictable election.

I do think we have a higher tolerance for being wrong than we once did. I don't know if there's any true penalty being exacted for being wrong. Maybe there should be. Are the problems different for print, broadcast, and electronic media? Yes, but not like they used to be, not even like they used to be a couple of election cycles ago. The convergence of the media that a lot of us started talking about 10 years ago has certainly manifested itself in this election.

The Web has changed everything and our predictions are being fulfilled. The Pew research poll has tracked this over the election cycles and I think it's worth giving just a few numbers. According to a poll released in January, about a quarter of Americans say they now regularly get their campaign information from the Internet. Now, that's double 2004 and it's almost triple 2000. That's a very short time in our election process.

It's also interesting that roughly four in 10 Americans under the age of 30 regularly get their campaign information from the Internet. And about four in 10 also report that they have at least watched some kind of online campaign video. That's interesting because only about 20 percent of people over 30 have ever gotten anything off of a campaign video. So you can see what the demographics are going to do on this.

But the old cycles of morning newspapers, the national evening news, even the publishing schedules of newsmagazines are largely irrelevant. Nobody waits.

Everything goes to the Web first, even if it's reaching largely elite audiences. Our best example was the New York Times story on McCain and his relationship with the woman lobbyist. What was amazing about that story was that the Times published the story on their website the day before they put it in the newspaper. It had already been critiqued, criticized, and massaged by noon the next day. The newspaper was still on the racks when it became clear that the story didn't essentially have many legs on it. It had been digested in that very short time. So the speed is truly astounding.

Also, everyone now is using video. I actually saw this word in the New York Times: "YouTubeification." This notion of visual medium has really taken over, which is not actually why the Internet started out. The Internet began largely as a print-oriented medium, and I think it's now moved very fast to a visual medium.

And then, finally, the last question was: How hard is it to be fair? I don't think it's any harder to be fair today than it has ever been. That's really not the issue. It's whether you are perceived to be fair. And that's extremely difficult in our polarized politics. And I would almost suggest to journalists that we should always remind ourselves that the viewers and the readers aren't fair in the way that they receive our messages. And I think that there is almost a danger in being overly concerned about fairness because I believe that it leads to timid coverage.

One of the bright spots, I do believe, in the 2008 coverage has been a distinct uptick by news organizations in testing the truth of candidates. They have employed the Internet as a very useful platform for this. And one of the leading organizations, the Annenberg Political Fact Check at factcheck.org, has spawned a lot of imitations, not only at the national level – the Post, the Times, National Journal – but also at local level. And there's some evidence that local television stations and newspapers are using the Web and have a greater emphasis on actually checking whether candidates are telling the truth.

There's even a heightened awareness of this in the old media. The classic example would be Hillary and her Bosnian sniper thing. I don't want to overstate this because there's still a lot of election to go, but I do think the gray areas in the coverage so far are pretty mixed with some bright spots.

KAREN TUMULTY: The first presidential campaign I really covered in any sort of a big way was the 1988 election. And it is sometimes very sobering to think it's been 20 years that I've been doing this. Of course, I was doing it for my junior high school newspaper (Laughter.) – but, back in those days, the first advice you would get as a new reporter on a campaign was: There are two things that you should never pass by because you don't know when you're going to see the next one.

The first one was a restroom, and I can tell you that is still true. But the second one was a payphone. And it's so archaic to even think about how desperate we all used to be to find the payphones because now, of course, everybody has that technology in their briefcase. But you do see this sort of look of desperation when you get to a

campaign event and the traveling press corps arrives. The first thing that everybody is looking for is a power source to plug in the re-chargers for everything. So some things do change.

What is really remarkable about this presidential race is how treacherous it has been to hang onto anything that resembles the conventional wisdom. The first big story I did on this race was in the summer of 2006. It was a story about Hillary Clinton and John McCain and how they were already emerging as the frontrunners of the two races. I wrote that everybody thought John McCain would be a strong general-election candidate if only he could possibly get through a primary, but that was really going to be tough.

And everybody thought that Hillary Clinton was an absolute lock to win the Democratic primary and her problem would be in a general election. Well, of course, exactly the opposite has turned out to be true. John McCain pretty much, after some troubles last summer, skated through his primary. And now it's Hillary Clinton who is running behind. So that was my first indication that this was going to be a very different kind of election season and that we really couldn't rely on any of the old patterns, any of the old assumptions, to get us very far.

When we see, especially on the Democratic side, the numbers of people who are showing up, the new ways of raising money that Obama is tapping into, the new kinds of voters - young people - it really has been a great lesson for all of us that we really sometimes in this business should go ahead and let the voters talk and maybe actually listen to them for a change, which, of course, gets us to one of the questions that they wanted us to talk about, which is predicting results.

There are so many types of media out there – and I'm finding myself in all of them at once. I'm a Time magazine reporter, but some weeks it almost feels like the magazine is an afterthought, because by the time I get to write my story for the weekly magazine, I probably will have blogged two or three items related to it. I will have written a piece for time.com on the website. I may have talked about it on television. Everything is moving so fast.

But if I look at my main job, writing for Time magazine, the real value now is in giving people, as far as possible, a guide to what lies ahead. My story in the magazine that hits the newsstands tomorrow has a headline something like "Tell Me How This Ends." After a lot of reporting with a lot of people in the Obama campaign, a lot of people in the Clinton campaign, and a lot of Democrats outside of them, I have tried to give readers a sense of the three potential scenarios that could actually end this campaign and the conditions for each of them.

So we do find ourselves out on a bit of ledge. But especially for those of us in the mainstream media who now find ourselves competing against so many other kinds of media, with so many other different kinds of standards, the real test is: Do we have the ability to help people navigate all this? And if we don't, we're all going to be out of business pretty soon.

So, when we look at whether the problems are different for print and broadcast media, they're not, because we're now all doing basically the same thing. It's just the challenge is different, but hopefully the standards are the same. And I must agree with Al. I don't think it's any harder to be fair than it ever was, but I do think that given the general volume – when you've got the blogosphere screaming in one ear and cable television screaming in the other and talk radio screaming – it is harder and harder to make yourself heard and also to convince your audience that you're being fair because the most engaged listeners and readers are often people who are coming at us with a fixed viewpoint.

So I think you need to acknowledge other viewpoints and respect other viewpoints, but you've also got to be willing to call these candidates, particularly when something they say is just absolutely dead wrong or absolutely unfair. So, anyways, I will hand it over.

REGINALD DALE: Gerry, I don't know if you're going to address this, but perhaps you could say something about whether the challenges of reporting for foreign audiences are different, and how far foreign correspondents here follow the American press or whether it's possible to branch out on your own.

GERARD BAKER: I will address that. Just a little bit about myself – I've been in the States in Washington for almost 12 years now. And this is my fourth presidential election, previously with the Financial Times and now with the Times. I'm glad to see Reggie gives it its proper designation: the Times. Unfortunately, I've noticed in this country, it often has to be called the Times of London, apparently to distinguish it from another newspaper, which is commonly known as the Times of New York. (Laughter.)

But I've been here for a while now and I have seen many of the changes that Al and Karen were talking about. And I really would echo their remarks, most of what they said. I think perhaps the most significant difference, particularly about this campaign, or a process that has been going on for at least the last decade or so, is clearly – and, again, both Al and Karen touched on this – clearly the democratization of the news process.

If you go back and read the famous campaign book, “The Boys on the Bus,” which I did again quite recently, one of the greatest political books ever written, you can see that 30, 40 years ago, you get a very good picture of how an election campaign, the news of an election campaign, was disseminated to the American people, to the people around the world. It was disseminated through this sort of order of high priests of news who were the absolute doyens of their profession, who followed the presidential candidates around, who were literally boys, because they nearly all were, I think, in those days, and they were literally on a bus.

And they determined, essentially they dictated, the way in which the American people would read about, would cover, and would come to understand the campaign. Obviously, television had a more direct impact, too, but the role of those people who led

the campaign coverage, those senior journalists, many of whom, incidentally, interestingly, are still around today playing a similar role, is very, very striking and it is very, very different from the way it's done now.

And that New York Times article that Al mentioned touched on this, most strikingly perhaps, [by reporting] that many news organizations now don't even bother to have reporters on the bus or on the plane or certainly not for the whole time; they will just switch in and out. And what's happened is that there are so many more sources and availability of information for people. Now, let me just illustrate that by two stories, which have been very big in this campaign.

The first is arguably the biggest, potentially the most consequential, story of the Democratic primary of all, which is the story of Barack Obama's now infamous remarks at a fundraiser in San Francisco a few weeks ago at which – I'm sure you all know – he commented on how the immiserated working class of Pennsylvania, of rural and small-town Pennsylvania, clung, as he put it, in their bitterness to religion and guns. That's now become, you know, absolutely one of the biggest stories.

Now, that story didn't come out through the New York Times or through CNN or through any piece of reporting, actually, by any of the traditional media outlets. It came about because someone – at what was supposed to be a private meeting – recorded the remarks – it was a private fundraiser – recorded the remarks and, in a very short space of time, thanks to the extraordinary speed with which electronic technology works, it was available on the Internet and it was everywhere very, very quickly. And that arguably may turn out yet to be the most consequential story for the Democratic primary campaign so far. And that was, incidentally, a reminder that even when speaking in private – at supposedly private meetings – politicians now increasingly need to be careful of what they say.

But it was an example of how the dissemination of news and information and indeed opinion and interpretation of campaigns has changed. And another example – and this is where I'll touch on Reggie's specific question about foreign newspapers – another example was another very damaging story for the Obama campaign which was, again, you'll recall, about a month or six weeks ago when one of Barack Obama's senior foreign policy aides gave an interview to the Scotsman, which is a Scottish newspaper, surprisingly enough, which a long time ago would only have had a very small circulation. You could give an interview to the Scotsman – and I mean this with no offense to my good friends at the Scotsman – without any fear of anybody ever really outside Scotland ever seeing it.

And, obviously, Samantha Power, the Barack Obama advisor who did this, was still – for all of her obvious talents – perhaps thinking that she was operating in that world that we used to live in. But she gave an interview to the Scotsman in which she famously said that Hillary – among other things – that Hillary Clinton was a monster.

This was immediately put on the Scotsman's website, as you would expect. It was immediately picked up by those various aggregators of news, the Drudge Report and everybody else who trawls through these various newspapers around the world and it became, again, a huge story and Samantha Power within hours had to resign. Barack Obama was disowning the remarks and some of the other things that she'd said.

That, I think, is an example of how democratized, how widely disseminated the news process now is. If you gave an interview to the Scotsman 40 years ago, unless one of the "boys on the bus" had happened to pick it up and thought it was very interesting, it wouldn't have mattered in the slightest. Today, everybody has that information; it's around the world incredibly quickly.

So that's an example of how things have gotten better for the foreign media covering these things because actually there is no such thing anymore, if you like, as the foreign media, because, thanks to the Internet, everybody has access to everybody's news sources anywhere around the world. Foreign media on the campaign trail used to be regarded by candidates and their staffs as sort of like an anthropological curiosity, which did not really need to be taken all that seriously.

I can well remember, when I was bureau chief of the Financial Times here in Washington, we assigned someone, unusually for us, for pretty well the whole campaign to then Governor George Bush's campaign. And I can remember that then Governor Bush had a tendency to give nicknames to people. He still does. And because he found it so amusing that the Financial Times had thought to cover him, he repeatedly referred to this reporter as "Economics Man."

And so there was this sort of sense of puzzlement and curiosity about some foreigner, especially a financial journalist, covering a campaign. Now, of course, foreign media still don't get as good access to campaigns as the principal domestic media do, but campaigns do understand that the foreign media can have an impact way beyond the circulation of their newspaper or television in Britain or Germany or France or China, or anywhere else for that matter.

So that has changed as well. We are all part of this sort of global news process. And that has also created pressure, I think, I hope, on foreign newspapers not to do what they tended to do in the past, which was to rather follow the agenda of the American media. It has long been a cliché of journalism and of the many foreign correspondents who come to Washington, because it's the most important city in the world for news, that they would tend to read the New York Times and the Washington Post and Time magazine that day, that week, or whatever and essentially recycle it for their readers.

Well, you can't do that anymore. Your readers can already read the New York Times and Time and look at CNN. It's a pointless exercise to simply recycle what the American newspapers are doing because everybody else can have it. I'm sorry to say, unfortunately, that doesn't stop some foreign journalists from still pursuing this particular

line of journalism – but I think its days are numbered. Clearly, people are not going to want to read that kind of stuff for much longer.

So that's putting pressure on foreign correspondents to do a little more original reporting, to do more original journalism, and not to follow rather slavishly the lead of the major newspapers. Thank you.

REGINALD DALE: Thanks, Gerry. Ross, how does it all look from where you sit?

ROSS DOUTHAT: Well, I sit in sort of an odd position because I work for the Atlantic, which is in some ways the oldest of the old media in the United States. We're the oldest continuously published magazine in the country. I think Harper's is technically the oldest, but they had a 70-year hiatus or something in the 19th century so it doesn't really count.

Part of my day is spent editing pieces for the Atlantic magazine that reflect roughly the same approach to presidential coverage that we've been following probably for 100 years or more, which is to say, we're a monthly magazine; we fancy ourselves writing the first draft of history or something like that. So we're a few steps back both from the daily newspapers and from the weekly magazines, certainly from television news and the Internet.

But then the other half of my day is spent as a blogger for the Atlantic.com, which is the newest of new media. So, in that capacity, I'm deep in what Karen well knows to be the swarming quality of Internet media. I thought I'd just offer a couple of observations about that new media landscape because, for me, the change is a matter of comparing my own experience to what I've read about in books, because I wasn't really around and covering the elections of the 1970s, the 1980s and the 1990s.

We're in an odd position now because, on the one hand, people talk constantly and correctly about how this election is a revolutionary election, it's the first true Internet election where the Internet, Internet media, new media, blogs, what have you, are really setting the agenda in a lot of ways for campaign coverage - certainly if you step outside the specifically media world. This is the election in which the Internet has completely revolutionized political fundraising and organizing. And Barack Obama is the main beneficiary of that.

But, on the other hand, it's clear that we're still on the cusp of a new landscape. And it's very tough to tell how it will all shake out because the old media world, where you had a very small number of news organizations and a cadre of almost priestly journalists setting the agenda for the country, that world has passed. But, at the same time, it's still there because if you drill down into some of the statistics that Al cited about more Americans getting their news from the Internet than ever before, that's largely still only true among the younger generations.

Second, even within the groups of people who are getting all of their news from the Internet, most people are going to CNN.com, BBC.com, the New York Times, and the Washington Post. And so you have this strange situation where you have this incredibly diverse and complicated world of blogs and quasi-blogs and online publications and so on that are read by a fairly small number of people setting the agenda for these old-media organizations that are transitioning into a new media landscape with millions, possibly billions, of readers.

And so it creates an odd dynamic where it's easy to forget when you're covering the election from the vantage point of the blogosphere that most people, most voters aren't reading 15 blogs a day. They aren't reading five blogs a day. They aren't reading one blog a day. They are still getting their news from CNN. And to the extent that the Huffington Post, for instance, really matters, it matters because a blogger for the Huffington Post picks up Barack Obama's remarks in San Francisco, puts them on the Huffington Post, and then it gets picked up by the mainstream media.

So there's that curious double effect. And one of the big questions going forward, as the generations turn over, which is a sort of kind way of saying as old people die off and young people get older, is whether the dynamic we have now will endure, whether there will continue to be these sort of large gatekeeper organizations and then this range of people feeding up through the gatekeepers or whether you'll really have total diversification and you'll have millions of Americans getting their news from hundreds of different outlets.

But within that landscape, I think the defining quality of campaign coverage is just the word "more." Whatever it is, you have more of it. People raise the question of fairness and partisanship, and the state of campaign coverage. Well, the answer is that there's more partisanship in the media because there are more outlets competing for audiences and partisanship is an excellent way to find an audience.

But then if you ask whether there is more or less substance being reported, the answer is, again, there is more substance. There are more organizations not only that are out to fact-check the candidates, but there are more publications, especially online, that are devoted to constant analysis of policy in a way that television especially, but also newspapers and magazines simply have never had the space and the resources to devote to. And policy analysis is also something that only works if you're willing to pitch yourself to a narrow, narrow audience. So it's something that's enabled by the Internet, where you can thrive with a very narrow audience.

So, there's more substance. Is there more frivolity? Is there more focus on petty unimportant scandals of the week and gaffes of the moment? Again, yes, because you have dozens and hundreds of people following the campaign's every word, following Barack Obama into private fundraisers, and finding out what he says there. So, the defining aspect is more.

I've only really been a journalist professionally for six years, and for the first few years I was a very junior researcher in the bowels of the Atlantic's vast machinery. So, I'm not sure I'm completely prepared to comment on what precisely the journalist's role is in filtering all of this madness. I would make only one larger point, which is that what we are living through and have been living through for some time is the breakdown of a very powerful model of journalism that dominated American life and not only a model, but an ideal of journalism, an ideal of balanced, unbiased reporting that was possible in a world where there were only a few major networks, there were big daily newspapers that had in many cases had monopolies or duopolies.

And that model is going away for reasons that primarily have to do with technological change. And we are moving back towards the model that prevailed in America during the late 18th and the 19th century, where there is a plethora of competing and more partisan outlets, where more and more voices and partisanship are being injected into the reporting of the news.

And I'm not sure that this is an entirely bad thing. I think the biggest challenge is for journalists to remain fair-minded in an age when they are expected to be opinionated. That's my thought for the day.

REGINALD DALE: Thank you. I just wanted to add a couple of thoughts there in light of what Ross said. I read that only 1.5 percent of Americans regularly read political blogs.

ROSS DOUTHAT: That seems completely plausible based on my traffic statistics. (Laughter.)

REGINALD DALE: It's also often the case that conservatives read conservative blogs and liberals read liberal blogs. And because the blogs often take a more extreme position, the people reading think, Oh, gosh, it's all right to move to the extreme because here it is on a blog. And this can have a very polarizing effect, but perhaps Abbi has something to say about that.

ABBI TATTON: I'm Abbi Tatton. I work for CNN and I used to be called a blog reporter. I'm now called an Internet reporter. I was a producer for CNN and I started doing this job of covering the blogs with another woman right after the last election. The blogs had really started getting going the election before that, but the old media takes a little while to catch up to the new media.

At the beginning of 2005, I was a blog reporter. That's where a lot of the political discussion was going on online and then it expanded into social-networking sites, into YouTube. I now feel sometimes that I am the YouTube reporter because it is a visual medium and one of the easiest ways to get through the senior producers is to have some kind of visual like that to get it on TV. Frank knows how that works.

But the difference between early 2005 and now is really marked. It's completely different. When we started covering the blogs, the Internet, as a regular beat, we would treat it as some kind of curiosity, with a lot of skepticism. There was a lot of discussion, head-scratching about why we were doing this. Now, that question is just gone entirely. It's just as likely that any other political reporter for CNN is going to cover a story about the Internet as I am at this point. Case in point: this week was Hillary Clinton's big fundraising call, which happened online after the Pennsylvania primary. Did I cover that story? No, because, while it has an Internet implication, so many things do in this election that the political reporter covering Clinton was necessarily covering that story as well.

So, because this election has so much to do with the Internet for certain candidates and there's so much discussion of it online, this idea that the blog segment is this curious thing that everyone scratched their heads about, that's just kind of gone out of the window.

I keep coming back to this question about how hard is it to be fair. I do a very specific thing. I try and take stories that are happening on the Web and then cover them on television. There are a lot of pitfalls that have to do with production in a lot of cases. Another reason why people really scratched their heads when we started doing the segments is that we were showing tiny text screens on television, which looked absolutely horrible and, rightly, people kind of wrote about that as well.

There have now been developments in technology, and certainly in CNN's coverage, with magic walls that zoom in and out and there are ways that we're covering it now that make it a lot easier. But in terms of who is reading the blogs, it's not everyone, and in terms of how the candidates are using the Internet, they are all doing it differently, and sometimes I feel that I am concentrating so much on a particular candidate that I worry about the balance of it.

Now, necessarily, that is part of the story. If one candidate, like Barack Obama and his supporters are using the Internet in such a way, then that is a story. But you can look at the way one candidate is blowing up online, on YouTube, and another candidate – I remember a Rudy Giuliani blog post that had no comments at one point. It's just different for the different candidates.

And at one point last year, I felt like I was the Ron Paul reporter. Supporters of Ron Paul, the Texas congressman, for the Republican nomination really pushed his candidacy online and it's something that I talked about a lot. I'm sure that any Ron Paul supporter would say that CNN did not cover their candidate a lot, but I felt, at one point, that I was covering him all the time.

So, something that I always come back to is how much I am talking about, say, Barack Obama, because his online numbers are so great. Hillary Clinton's web operation is still extremely sound, but the supporters of Barack Obama and his web operations have really taken it to another level.

Another thing is that we have a lot of discussions about is what we are putting on the air. If something is big online, how big does it have to be to then go on CNN? I always think about it in terms of my friends, who are not going to CNN at 4:00 p.m. in the afternoon for their news, and never would, but are going online to get it. So, sometimes that's in my head - does it really make a difference to put it on CNN?

But if there is something online that's got a couple of thousand views or 10,000 views or something like that, we're always having the discussion about whether putting it on CNN is giving it way more currency than anyone else is – especially if it's some kind of attack ad or something that hasn't been reported on before. And that really came home to me last week: the divide between how people are getting their news. To me, kind of buried in this online world, it always seems that people are getting it in that inbox. There was recently a video online called "White-haired Women for Barack Obama," which was made by a group of women in Nashville, Tennessee, with the help of a young filmmaker, in support of Barack Obama. The youngest amongst them was 79 years old.

I tracked down one of the women after people really started watching it on YouTube and she was very confused when I called her. She was 83 years old, a wonderful woman, and I said that people are really passing this around - on blogs, it's on Daily Kos - and there was just silence on the other end. And I said that 20,000 people have seen your video now on YouTube, because someone's put it there, and she asked, "What's YouTube?"

That was the difference there. She had become kind of an Internet sensation without really understanding how it happened at all. So, things like that make me realize that we should always have these discussions about what we're putting out there.

And then I've been listening to everyone down the line here – are problems different for print, broadcasting, and electronic media? I think what everyone's been emphasizing is the amount of platforms, the amount of deadlines, or the constant deadline - at CNN, it's just like feeding the beast, CNN is always on. CNN.com Live now streams constantly every single day. So I might do a segment for my show, which is on CNN domestic, then there's the CNN ticker which is a blog in its own right and is constantly updating throughout the day. And then I might do a hit for CNN.com Live, which we call the pipeline. There's just a constant demand for more and more segments which is something that I think is a challenge for everyone right now.

REGINALD DALE: Thank you. Frank is the clean-up hitter for this half of the inning.

FRANK SESNO: We're doomed. (Laughter) It's very interesting listening to this conversation. I don't consider myself a dinosaur, but I can lay claim to something because I covered my first presidential election in 1984. I was there when, you know . . .

KAREN TUMULTY: So it was your elementary school.

FRANK SESNO: . . . I was in elementary school. Walter Mondale declared, "He won't tell you; I just did," on the subject of raising taxes, and promptly went on to lose overwhelmingly - and when we were all wringing our hands and covering this incredible sensation, the first woman in history was on the ticket.

So what was it like back then and up through the years when I was covering the Reagan White House and covering the Reagan reelection campaign in 1984 and then beyond? You would get on an airplane and you'd hear a lot of noise and they were called typewriters, and reporters got off of the airplane and went and had dinner because the office was essentially closed and they would hang out with one another and trade war stories, and the echo chamber took place over a couple of beers, or too many beers. And the role of the gatekeeper was sacred, impenetrable, mysterious.

Guys like Lee Huebner, who was - I'll give his secret away - a speechwriter for Richard Nixon, among other things, and we still love him, and others, would sit at the White House and say, we need to disseminate a story. Well, let's leak it to the New York Times or the Washington Post. That will get us in the first news cycle. Then they'll ask us about it at the briefing. That will get it in the next news cycle. We'll get two, three news cycles out of this.

It's all gone. There are no typewriters anymore. There are no "boys on the bus" anymore. There is a bus, but I don't think anybody pays attention because, mostly, it's a virtual bus. There are no gatekeepers any more, not really. There are a few and they certainly try, but it is ultimately and utterly changed. And I think - I would say to you that I believe we're living in the best of times and the worst of times.

I really worry about people manning the barricades and going to the blogs and the places that merely reinforce their own ideas. In a presidential election, you want to hear a lot of ideas, you want ideas exposed broadly. But I also think that we have a phenomenal three-dimensional journalistic experience now, that if engaged properly can change for the vastly better the way presidential races are covered.

Those good old days were the days of the gatekeepers, if you want to talk about elitism in terms of who was deciding what the story was going to be. All the journalists often went out together - what's the name of the place in Des Moines, for instance, the big steak place where we go? The "801." And I did it with Bob Novak and Jack Germond and all of the famous guys.

And you would sit around and all the young reporters would say, "Oh, they know what they're talking about;" they would kind of make notes. And then they would go off and try to sound really smart and older than they really were when they wrote their own stories, because they didn't have much experience of their own. Well, now news organizations have cut the funding; you're not out covering and you have to listen to other people because they're emailing you and blogging you and yelling at you all of the time.

The way a story was orchestrated, choreographed by those trying to pitch the story to us has utterly changed. So Lee Huebner or whoever would leak a story to the New York Times, which would publish it anonymously the next morning, which would have all of the journalists running after it throughout the day, who would then get it anonymously and proudly say, well, I have sources, too, and publish it that night. And then someone would say something publicly to get it in the next news cycle and it would go on in that way, but in a very close-hold fashion.

What happens now? Terry McAuliffe [from the Clinton campaign], or David Plouffe or David Axelrod [from the Obama campaign], have listservs and they're taking in emails all day long and they're blasting out. And you've seen guys on CNN reading off their Blackberrys while they're on the air, reporting in real time what they're being told or spun depending on how you want to view it. But, meanwhile, the vast public, as we mentioned, is watching and blogging and screaming and yelling, "That's not true!" and "They didn't say that!" The campaigns have a great opportunity to both muddy the record and correct the record.

Did John McCain really say he wants to be in Iraq for 100 years? Well, that's what the Democrats would have you believe if you listen to them. But you can go to his website and other websites instantaneously, if you're a voter, and see what he actually said. So this is what I mean, I think, by the best of times and the worst of time.

I've covered five presidential campaigns. I've been on the floor of way too many conventions. I assembled coverage when I was CNN bureau chief here, and I used to think of the multiple platforms we had then. But it was nothing like now, altogether different.

I think now that if I were assembling coverage I would still ask my team, "What do we need to tell the story? How do we actually cover what's happening and the candidate?" I'd break it down into clear editorial dimensions: what they say, what they do, where their money is coming from, what their policies and promises are. I would fact-check it. Factcheck.org and a lot of news organizations are doing that. They are all using their websites in phenomenal ways to create what I call "three-dimensional journalism."

I was doing something at CNN yesterday morning, going on the air with something, and I wanted to refresh my memory as to who had won where. So, both on cnn.com and on newyorktimes.com, up comes an interactive map. You can go and look and see who won where, what the delegate count was from each place. You can go back and you can pull speeches instantaneously offline. By "three-dimensional," this is what I mean.

I think the coverage of the campaigns and the coverage of a presidential campaign can converge as well. And a smart, good news organization will be able to use these different dimensions offered by these different platforms. The opportunity then is for one

platform to say what's happening right now. You're telling what people are saying and doing and where they're going.

In another place, you're showing where they've been. You're providing the history and the background. You're able to have an ongoing archive. This didn't exist in 1984 and 1988. There was no way to convey this to your audience. Now a new element, a layer, connects you back and allows you to answer your own questions.

I think that by breaking down by topic and by area, you can examine in great detail, and reality-check in great detail to include cost and politics and all the other elements that go into any particular position, what those candidates are out there saying or promising or pledging. Can you be fair throughout this process? Yes, but I'm not sure it matters in the same way, because among the many things that have been blown up is this notion of the gatekeeper and that you're going to decide what's fair or we're going to somehow decide what's fair. We can be thorough. And there needs to be an element of fairness for sure and always in what we do. But it's harder.

A couple of final points and then we'll open it up because we've been yapping up here for a long time. We had a reunion at the School of Media and Public Affairs a week or two ago, the 25th reunion of the political communication students. And one of our alums who had run for Congress said, "In all the media I use to get to people, you know what makes the most lasting connection?" Any guesses? "Yard signs." The oldest, most analog media I can imagine: a yard sign.

For me, the most valuable reporting on the campaign – now, obviously I am, and all of us are, slightly elite, but it will be music to Ross's ears – is the Atlantic. The length and the depth – so I think two things are going to come back in vogue in a big way. Despite all this "more" that everybody has talked about – a place to go where gatekeepers still do exist to synthesize the news for me.

I actually like going to the nightly newscast because the discipline of those guys having three-and-a-half minutes to tell the whole wide world forces them to be short. So I can get that fairly comprehensively and quickly, and then the longer, more contextual takeout. But people will be able to land on the three dimensions of this kind of journalism that I mentioned as they choose. And that changes the way we cover presidential campaigns. It utterly changes it because it opens it up to a much more contextual, interesting, storytelling and historical kind of coverage than we have ever had before.

It is the worst of times because a lot of people are losing their jobs. It is the best of times because a lot of people are getting jobs. It is the worst of times because people are manning the barricades ideologically. It is the best of times because more information is available to more people more quickly than ever before in human history. It is the worst of times because we have lost our gatekeepers, but it is best of times because if people – and by this, I mean voters and consumers – navigate this world

properly, they can have a much better idea of what their candidates are saying and standing for, filtered and unfiltered, than ever.

REGINALD DALE: Frank, thank you very much. Before we go to the floor, I just wanted to toss out a couple of questions and see if anyone wants to have a go at them because I have just got back from a two-week speaking tour, 10 different stops in the real America, if there is such a thing. There was a famous BBC comic sketch once about two people setting out to find the real America and never actually finding it. But anyway, these people I was talking to, these real Americans had two comments. In different places, they all said very much the same thing.

The first one was that they see in electoral coverage a huge focus on the journalists trying to trip up the candidates and a concentration on petty disputes and not the real issues. And the other one was that the press or the media is somehow setting the agenda because they want a conflict, a contest to continue. And so as soon as Barack Obama looks like he is doing well, then all these things come up to bring him back, so that the contest will go on because that is what the media like. In light of what we have heard now, I am not sure it is possible to set the agenda like that. But I wondered if anyone would like to have a go at those questions.

FRANK SESNO: I have the microphone. Yeah. People, I think, have said that broadly and for a long time. I think it is getting louder. How many debates? How many debates, Karen? How many? Twenty-two debates, I mean, you know.

And the idea that there are a bunch of reporters there, overpaid, over-pampered, living in a little bubble constantly asking the same questions sort of blew up in the faces of Charlie [Gibson] and George [Stephanopoulos] in the last debate [organized by ABC.] So I think that one of the things that needs to change in the coverage of campaigns is who is doing the coverage. And I think there can be, will be, should be much more of a citizen voice. When you listen to citizens, they are absolutely convinced – and I think they are absolutely right because one of our biases is a bias toward conflict. That is partly what campaigns are all about, after all. And I think we are going to have more citizen muscle in this and should.

REGINALD DALE: Any other comments before I go to the floor?

ALBERT MAY: What part of real America did you go to?

REGINALD DALE: I was in the South.

ALBERT MAY: Did you go to Georgia?

REGINALD DALE: No, but I was in South Carolina. Is that real America? Oh, Georgia is real America. (Chuckles.) I'll have to go there next time.

KAREN TUMULTY: I would just add that I don't think this is anything new as a complaint about journalism, because if you look at what the most memorable moments were of the last umpteen presidential cycles, they tend to be gaffes. I mean, the Roger Mudd question to Teddy Kennedy when he asked, "Why are you running for president?" and drew a blank.

FRANK. SESNO: That was a tough guy; he was really trying to trip him up there, wasn't he? (Chuckles.)

KAREN TUMULTY: I know. But the now-famous "macaca" moment on George Allen's part was certainly not a reporter asking about that.

FRANK SESNO: What about Bernie Shaw's question to Dukakis?

KAREN TUMULTY: That is right. It was just there to be recorded. Well, the Bernie Shaw one, I thought, was a little – but anyway, I don't think this is new. And I think that politics is of its nature conflict because it is what contrast is about. It is a decision, it's a choice. It is two people who want the same thing and only one of them is going to get it. So I don't know how you get around that.

ROSS DOUTHAT: I do think one of the interesting things is the strongest drumbeat of criticism, particularly of the Gibson-Stephanopoulos debate, the debate formats in general, has come from the partisan media on both sides. If you wanted to see the fiercest critiques of the way the Republican debates were handled, go read National Review online. And after the Philadelphia debate with Obama and Clinton, you had a petition signed by a collection of journalists. But it was interesting to see it was all journalists from specifically progressive media organizations.

And one of the interesting things – and it will be interesting to see what happens with this in 2012 and 2016 and so on – there clearly is an extent to which you do have a sort of people manning the barricades problem where people are just reading, as Reggie was saying, their own – right-wingers are reading right-wing blogs, left-wingers are reading left-wing blogs and so on.

But there is also a sense in which an injection of partisanship into the media process can actually improve the coverage of substantive issues because if you are a journalist for National Review, your investment in the Republican debates is somewhat different from the investment of a journalist from CNN or ABC or where have you. You are, by virtue of being a partisan in a sense, more invested in the substance and less invested in sort of the showmanship, I guess, of debates.

And so, one of the things that has been running around the blogosphere is the idea that next time around, there should be Democratic debates where the moderators are someone from the Nation and someone from the American Prospect and someone from other liberal magazines, and the same should go for conservative debates. And it would be interesting to see if you actually had more substantive questioning in that sense.

REGINALD DALE: Well, I would just say that whether it is old or new, if you travel around, anyway, that part of the real America I went to that there is a huge, I am afraid to say, distrust of the media. And there is a feeling that the media is setting the agenda and it is not the agenda that people want to listen to. And I recall some years ago now when Steve Forbes was running for president, Howard Kurtz wrote this piece in the Washington Post saying the people following the Steve Forbes campaign were terribly frustrated because every time they asked him a question, he replied his three-word-mantra, which was hope, opportunity, and something other else. I can't remember - prosperity?

FRANK SESNO: Worked well for him!

REGINALD DALE: And they were frustrated because when he did that, it didn't give them the chance to trip him up. Now, the implication of that was that the function of a journalist was to trip up the candidates.

FRANK SESNO: But I think it's fine that people get angry at us, and they should. And there are all kinds of places and blogs to let off steam. But people forget that the roles of the media are many. So part of what we are supposed to do is explain the issues, lay it out. Part of what we are supposed to do is be a vehicle, the "mediated experience," we call it, for the candidates to connect with the public. But the other part of what we are supposed to do is to hold people to account. All right. And so if Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama is getting up and delivering the same speech day after day after day, or they are contradicting something that they have said, or Obama has voted present so that he never has to take a position and can run as an empty vessel, we will get blamed, the media will get blamed, just like the media got blamed, rightly, for not being tough enough leading up to the Iraq War. So people want to have it both ways.

ROSS DOUTHAT: I agree. But there is also a distinction between being tough on politicians in the run-up to the Iraq War and being tough on politicians – and I would defend some of the questions that Gibson and Stephanopoulos asked in the Philadelphia debate.

On the other hand, you can see why people are mildly annoyed by a presidential debate where the journalists are like, so who loves America more? What did they say - does your minister love America as much as you do? Now, I think that the [Reverend] Jeremiah Wright controversy is a great example of actually how one of these sort of strange issues can lead – I mean, it produced Barack Obama's speech on race, which was a very unusual moment for a presidential candidate, where they were sort of forced or chose to take a controversy and respond to it with a very long and substantive response. Maybe it was inadequate in certain ways, but it was certainly interesting.

But I think the impatience of at least some media critics comes from the seeming inability of at least some precincts of the media to make a distinction between tripping up the candidates on important issues and tripping them up on frivolous issues.

ALBERT MAY: I would agree. And I would make the distinction between holding someone accountable and tripping them up. Those are different things.

GERARD BAKER: Could I just make one point, too. Clearly what is going on here – and to some extent the experience from Britain has been instructive - is that there has been – for instance, Reggie, you talk about mistrust of the media. Clearly what has been going on in the U.S. media now is an increasing partisanship in the media. And the mistrust originated, I think - and it is particularly interesting that you were in the South, and I am sure you got a particular view of the mistrust, if you like - now, the mistrust originated because many people in America felt that what is dubbed the mainstream media, was dominated by people who had a particular sort of homogeneous, liberal mindset.

Rupert Murdoch always likes to say that he started Fox News because he thought there was a niche in the market, and the niche turned out to be 50 percent of the market. And I think that actually as people mistrust the media – because the media is trying, perhaps, to be objective, but is infuriating people of a particular political position - those people will tend towards, as they do with blogs, they will tend to read – conservatives will read conservative blogs, and liberals will read liberal blogs. And the interesting question is whether or not they trust those media any more or whether we have a more reliable media because we have a more partisan media. I mean, in Britain, we have a very, very partisan press, and interestingly, a television company, the BBC, which is notionally at least objective. I say "notionally" objective. A lot of us don't believe it is at all.

And has that led to a diminution in the quality of journalism in Britain? I don't know. That is something for debate. But it does seem to me the question – this mistrust of the media that originated, as I say, quite legitimately, with a lot of people's concerns about what they saw as liberal bias in the media is creating – if you like – a politically disaggregated media now, where people are getting their own media because it broadly concurs with their own view of the world.

REGINALD DALE: Do we have any questions from the floor? Yes? Front row here.

QUESTION: If I could ask Gerard Baker how – (off mike) – responding to the challenge that you mentioned – (off mike) – British audience – (off mike).

GERARD BAKER: (Chuckles.) Well, I employ others to do it. That is probably the answer. (Laughter.) It is a good question because we all acknowledge that the days are gone of a sort of sacerdotal community of people interpreting the events of the day and going over the entrails and determining what the story of the day was. Ross is absolutely right in that the stories come from a multiplicity of sources now. But it still matters what the editors of those major news organizations, be it CNN or the New York Times or the Washington Post, or actually increasingly, interestingly, the Drudge Report,

what the editors of those news sources decide – how they decide what matters. So we do still have this odd duality, if you like, between a much broader range of instant direct news gathering, if you like. And still the editing decisions that are being made by newspapers.

So for a foreign journalist, you are still dominated – as everybody is, actually – by what the New York Times still decides to put on its front page or increasingly, I have to say to my great grief, what the Drudge Report decides to report, because I can absolutely assure you everybody in London looks at the Drudge Report every day and decides that because the Drudge Report is saying that somebody has had a two-headed baby in Indiana or something, we should go and do something about it. Regardless of your news priorities, those aggregators of news are still very important and are still forcing you to do that.

The other side of it is – and this is where I just don't know the answer – is how many people in Britain who really want news about the U.S. election can get – and I'll be the first to admit this – much better information, much more comprehensive, much better reported, just much more reliable information – from the New York Times website or from CNN's coverage than they can ever get in the Times of London, just by the nature of our own resources. We can't possibly match that. So what I don't know over time is whether people who want U.S. election news or in the same way people in the U.S. who want to read about Britain, why would they bother to read what the New York Times correspondents in London write when they can actually read the Times with its vast resources or the Guardian or whatever.

And I don't think that is in any way even close to resolving itself, or we are even close to anybody figuring out how that is going to work. What is the role of – in an age in which everybody can get any information from anywhere - what is the role of someone sent from one country to report supposedly back to that country on what's going on? The answer is, at this point, we simply don't know.

REGINALD DALE: Perhaps I could add a little bit to that as a predecessor of Gerry's as the bureau chief for the Financial Times here. When I was doing that job, when the early morning call came through from London to discuss what was going to be written that day, I was the person on the spot and I basically decided what the coverage was going to be. Now, with the Internet, the editors in London, or indeed in Paris, Stockholm, Rome, or Warsaw, have all read the New York Times and the Washington Post on the Internet before the correspondent has even woken up.

So now when that call comes through, the editors are telling the correspondent what they want rather than the other way around. There's been a huge power shift from the correspondent to the editor in Europe and that may or may not be a good thing. I think it's sometimes very dangerous because the people who are editing in Europe often have a somewhat skewed idea of the United States - a little bit of British understatement there.

But, anyways, let's hear from some more people. At the back there –

QUESTION: (Off mike.)

GERARD BAKER: I completely agree and I think what's fascinating is that people are steadily waking up to this in Britain at least - their prejudices about America are being somewhat corrected by this extraordinary Democratic primary campaign where they've seen tens of millions of people voting for candidates for the general election. Much more important, exactly as you say, there is, just as a result of the primary process, there just is a range of sources of news, of competing interests, trying to get their view across within one party, which you simply don't have elsewhere. And you're absolutely right. In Britain, you just have rigid, top-down control of the party and it's even more so on the continent, whereas here you have genuinely diffuse, broadly disseminated seats of power within the Democratic Party, and within the Republican Party, and it's a fascinating process to watch.

And it's very striking that you can't even figure out really who is the leader of the Democrats. You know, there's been this whole debate here about who is going to step in and finally end this Democratic primary and the answer is that nobody can, because nobody has that status. So nobody has the analogous power that the European parties have where they can essentially control what happens. And I do think - and I hope anyway - I actually agree with you that people are perhaps starting to see that the sophistication and the range of American politics are a little different from what they thought.

REGINALD DALE: That is absolutely true. And there was a sort of rather sterile debate about whether anti-Americanism in Europe is anti-American or anti-George Bush because, actually, the two are completely fused. And in the European media, very often, people took George Bush as a sort of caricature of all they didn't like about America.

QUESTION: (Off mike.)

REGINALD DALE: I don't want to get into a political debate. I'm talking about the media coverage. Then just recently you see the European media waking up rather late, actually, to the idea of, gosh, there might be a woman president in the United States. There might even be an African American. I mean, my old paper, the Financial Times, had a column saying that in March. It was a little bit behind the curve there, but it was with astonishment.

GERARD BAKER: Did hey did tell you what it would mean for commodity prices, though? (Laughter.)

REGINALD DALE: Well, this particular column is not too hot on commodity prices. (Laughter.) But it was a sort of, can this really be America? You know, this is actually happening. And it's very interesting that one of the clichés in Europe about the

United States is that it's racist. And the people in the media who've portrayed that cliché have managed to disregard the fact that the last two secretaries of State have been African American. They ignore the fact that there's a Supreme Court justice who's an African American.

But if there's actually a president, or somebody getting close to the presidency, who is African American, I think it will have to lead to some sort of agonizing reappraisal which may be very hard for these people who like to believe that America is irremediably racist. And they'll have to go through a great deal of contortions to get there. But one of the very encouraging signs was – Gerry will appreciate this – the Guardian in London, which is a hardly-ever pro-American newspaper and is guilty of a lot of the caricatures, in my view, actually said the other day, watching the Democratic Party, we might have something to learn from America.

Now, that's pretty astonishing. Anyone else? Yes, Andrew.

QUESTION: (Off mike.)

FRANK SESNO: I do think that certainly the early use of the Internet in journalism in covering campaigns has been to cover the minutiae of the campaigns, the inside politics. I led a study here at GW a few years ago on the rise of the Internet in politics. We actually traced it back to The Hotline, published by the National Journal Group, which went up on a CompuServe bulletin board in September, 1987, I think. And we marked that as the beginning of the Internet. And it has been heavily used as kind of an elite medium aimed at elites and I think that's continuing.

The Huffington Post is one example, but we've also had a new entry in Politico, which is a web-centric – it's still published as a newspaper – so it is a web-centric vehicle that has a very definite elite-oriented coverage that talks in the language of people who would know the language that they're talking, in short-hand. And I do think that's a real mark of the new media.

ABBI TATTON: You reminded me of a story I worked on last year on a website called Eventful where people can go online and demand that something or someone comes to their town, a rock star or whatever it might be. And people were using it to demand presidential candidates in a tiny town in Kentucky, with a population of just a few hundred people. And in order to support rural America, lots of people in rural areas had demanded that John Edwards come out to this town.

I covered the story and I thought it was a great website, and people were using the Web to really make something happen and bring democracy where they are. And then when Eventful actually traveled there with John Edwards, who did go and do this event, there was no high-speed Internet to upload the photos of the actual event, which really kind of brought it home to me that not everyone is getting this medium, not everyone is getting their information this way.

And that's something that I always think about. Am I placing too much attention on this area? Is everyone else accessing what's come so naturally to me? But, in terms of my show, a lot of people are covering Internet stories, but I'm only doing it for these short 45 seconds a day. So, I don't think we're really overemphasizing too much, but it's certainly something always to keep in mind. Then, also, as I mentioned earlier, talking to the older woman in Nashville who's just not getting her news this way, and there are also certain people within CNN who, when I pitch a story about Facebook, ask, "What?" They just really can't get that people are using this. So there are checks and balances there. Not everyone even internally at CNN is on these same channels.

GERARD BAKER: Very briefly, I would distinguish between democratization of consumption of news and democratization of production, if you like. That is, you are absolutely right. Polls tell us how many people get their news from the Internet, and it's still a small minority, although that obviously will change over time.

But the difference is that what is getting through, what is going up from people through the sort of production process which is coming out in news in the traditional news outlets, which people are still relying on, is much more diffuse and much more democratized. You know, the access that people have simply by having a cell phone or a camera or a laptop or a Blackberry to get their news, to get their interpretation of the news, is what distinguishes this era I think from say 20 years ago.

ALBERT MAY: What's really important to look at is not the absolute numbers now or the percentage of the total population, but compared to what? Compared to a short time ago. So the Washington Post has 750,000 to 800,000 people who receive a hard-copy subscription. They have roughly 10 times that number of people a month who visit their website. Barack Obama's "Yes We Can," the music video that was posted a month, six weeks ago with the big "Yes, We Can" thing got seven, eight, 10 million hits.

That's a phenomenal thing. If only 1,000 people respond to something, that's a tiny number in an Internet universe, but how many in the traditional newspaper days, how many letters to the editor got posted? Five? So while it's not complete and while it's still maybe confined to certain demographics, it distributes differently. That's what's really interesting and that's what I think is democratizing about this. So some people are merely going online to read the Washington Post, but they're reading a more interactive product and it's a more interactive product in and of itself. Others are going on YouTube and Facebook who wouldn't have been there at all before.

How many millions have been online to visit or donate through Barack Obama's website? We have to look at this holistically and I think it's nothing short of a revolution in the way we communicate and connect.

ROSS DOUTHAT: Another thing that might be said, of which the Ron Paul phenomenon is a good example, is that you have the potential now for groups that are marginal within the sweep of the American population. What percentage of the

American public are Ron Paul-style libertarians? It's very small and it's very difficult to be organized and to get its voice heard.

But the power of the Internet is also that it multiplies the force that you get from small, scattered communities that essentially become larger and more influential just by virtue of being able to be in contact with each other. And that's not directly related to the production of news and journalism, but it is an important democratizing shift in the media landscape.

KAREN TUMULTY: I would add the sense of community it gives people, too. When I was doing reporting on the early days of MoveOn, they said much of their energy came from people who were like the only liberal sitting in his town in the middle of Utah who suddenly find out they are not alone. (Laughter.) And that also is the power. It's the connectivity. It's the sense that you aren't just one person.

REGINALD DALE: I think that we're still in transition as people grope towards what all this is going to mean. It's still the case that newspapers such as the Washington Post and the New York Times – however they acquire their news, from whatever medium, through the Internet or however – still play a huge role in setting the political agenda, by drawing attention to the sort of things that lead to political conflicts in Washington or to people in Congress deciding to do something about them. Maybe this is just because politicians tend to be of an older generation than you, Ross, but if it appears on the front page of the Washington Post, it still has political impact. There was another question. Yes.

QUESTION: (Off mike.)

REGINALD DALE: Al, do you have something to say about that?

ALBERT MAY: Actually that is true because I think the Internet has, in fact, opened up that. I think in our mainstream media, we are domestic-oriented because that is where the eyeballs pay with regard to finances and advertising. But I do think the Internet has also opened up the world in a really marked way. So unless I'm misunderstanding the thrust of your question, I think we are less insular as a result of it than we were.

ROSS DOUTHAT: One thing that has happened, too, is that there is probably less coverage of foreign affairs by U.S. newspapers. But it doesn't mean that there is less reading about foreign affairs by U.S. audiences. I mean, it is sort of the reverse of what Gerry was talking about with the foreign press in the United States. If you are a midlevel daily newspaper in the U.S., you are probably cutting back on your foreign bureaus all across the board. But part of the reason that is happening is that the average American who wants to know what is going on in South Africa is going to read the South African press.

FRANK SESNO: No.

ROSS DOUTHAT: No?

FRANK. SESNO: No. I take a much more pessimistic view of things. I tend, you know – I heard Ted [Turner], not just there, but in his glory days at CNN, when he was saying we were going to open a bureau in every country in the world. And since those days, he got married, not just to Jane Fonda, but to Time Warner. That worked well, not – (inaudible) – he got married to AOL, which worked even better, which is why he lost seven of his \$8 billion. And what has happened since then? It has nothing to do with what happened with Ted and Time Warner and all that. But it does have everything to do with what has happened with the technology we are talking about here this evening and the fragmentation of the audience and the business model behind any of these publications or online operations. The best of times, you don't have the monopoly anymore, the worst of times, you don't have the monopoly anymore. (Chuckles.)

And so the ability for the Boston Globe to have their own reporters overseas has gone, and CBS and NBC shut down almost all their bureaus overseas. Now, that doesn't mean that you have less opportunity. Just as you said, you have much more opportunity because you can go to bbc.com or you can go to the Times of London, which I do. You can have all these things on your bookmark page as your favorites and pop through them in 20 minutes every day. But American news organizations are doing less. And the Pew studies show this up - even if you factor out Iraq. And even Iraq now isn't getting very much attention because producers are tired of it and it is all about ratings.

KAREN TUMULTY: It is also really expensive.

FRANK SESNO: It is really expensive and dangerous and all that. But it has the effect of being a great irony that you point out. At a time of incredible globalization of issues and communications, we are actually arguably doing less organizationally than we did before. It doesn't mean that there is less available to you. There is more available to you. But organizationally, I think we are doing less.

REGINALD DALE: I want to pick up something that Abbi said. With regard to my real Americans that I have just been spending two weeks with, they don't go to news.bbc.co.uk. They are complaining about the lack of foreign news. And they complain that it is not on their TV or in their local paper.

FRANK SESNO: Yeah, but they lie. They are lying to you because if they were telling you the truth and they cared so much, that is where the eyeballs would be, and we would be doing more of it. If the real people really cared, they would watch these things. There is Frontline out there. There are shows that have tried this. But they don't get the numbers because they are more interested when you talk about international travel in places like Paris and Brittany.

ABBI TATTON: For a while – and I’m not going to comment on this, I’ll just throw it out there as a fact - CNN was simulcasting our CNN international show at noon every single day. They did it for domestic viewers and brought it in earlier this year. The noon show years ago that was international disappeared for a while and then came back last year as this simulcast. So it was the only point you could really watch CNN international domestically. That show disappeared a few months ago and was replaced with a show that was basically presidential candidates speaking, with no editing, just letting the candidates speak, so people could hear the stump speech.

And now it has changed to a show that they are doing right now called Issue Number One, all about the economy. Now, my pay grade is just nowhere near making the decisions for why that happened, but I think that is an interesting evolution. They were trying to do an international show, but for reasons that I’ll let you all guess, right now it is about issue number one to voters, which is the economy.

REGINALD DALE: Let’s have maybe the last question. Oh, two more questions. Did you have one?

QUESTION: (Off mike.)

GERARD BAKER: Yes. My worry is that the answer is that British journalists and editors are very good at distilling, reflecting back to the British public British people’s prejudices about the United States. And that is what they want to read. They don’t really want to know from our earlier point that the gentleman in the back made – they don’t want to know actually how detailed and impressive and sophisticated the primary race is. They want to know basically that Americans are all stupid, religious nutcases and racists and carry guns and can go around shooting each other. And that is unfortunate. And I’m really only just slightly exaggerating.

REGINALD DALE: Not much.

GERARD BAKER: Not much. (Chuckles.) That is the editing cost at major British newspapers. And I don’t just mean the tabloids, I mean serious newspapers. And I also have to say at the BBC, the editing reflects what they think that British people want to read or see. And so that is what they give them. Unfortunately, as I say, that may be the answer. I hope it isn’t. I hope that the British people don’t have those prejudices as ingrained as they appear to be. And I hope that over time, as they are exposed to more real news about America as opposed to this sort of cartoon stuff they get in most of the British media, I hope that will change. But I fear – and this is the paradox of globalization here – that the more globally available information becomes, the more narrow-minded people will be in their choice of how they pick it.

REGINALD DALE: There is a of self-reinforcing effect there, which is that the editors think they want this view of America, so they give them that view of America, which confirms them in their view of America, so they want more of it. I mean, that is

the danger you find a lot in Europe, not just Britain. French TV has been a specialist in this, too.

GERARD BAKER: Even in the U.S. media, to be fair. I mean, it is better, but even, say, the New York Times coverage of Italy is somewhat of a cliché. My former editor at the Financial Times had a wonderful phrase for it. It was called the swinging spotlight approach to news, meaning that the New York Times will run one piece about Italy every two or three weeks and it will always be about something, frankly, some sort of Italian cliché. That they are all very well-dressed or they – (laughter) – they eat some kind of food. And the reports will be deconstructing this for you and telling you actually why this is and all that kind of stuff. Again, it is a slightly elevated level compared with this ridiculous cartoon coverage you get elsewhere, but it is still the same unfortunately here as it is elsewhere.

KAREN TUMULTY: Could I add, too, that it happens within this country as well. At one point, I was in the New York bureau of the Los Angeles Times, which felt like being a foreign correspondent. (Laughter.) And I recall that the quickest way to get a story from the New York bureau on the front page of the Los Angeles Times was anything that I wrote that would have people in Los Angeles throwing their newspapers down and saying, "Why would anyone live there?" (Laughter.)

REGINALD DALE: There is a phenomenon there that you see in the German media. I was just reading some research on this. There is this one phrase, "American conditions," which is used the whole time. And it is something really sinister. And it is always used in the context of "We wouldn't want that here in Germany." What it means is ruthless capitalism, robber barons, poor people dying in the streets, nobody caring about the less well-off.

FRANK SESNO: This is a great country. (Laughter.)

REGINALD DALE: These are "American conditions." But the interesting thing is that you never have a German journalist analyzing it to find out if these really are American conditions. Anyway, last question over here.

QUESTION: (Off mike.)

FRANK SESNO: (Chuckles.) I'm glad to hear that. Some things don't change. They shouldn't.

QUESTION: (Off mike.)

KAREN TUMULTY: (Chuckles.)

QUESTION: (Off mike.)

REGINALD. DALE: Well, I think that is a very good and uplifting note on which to end, particularly with regard to European journalism. (Chuckles.) I would like to thank the panelists. I think it has an absolutely fascinating discussion, which has all been duly recorded and will be available through CSIS. I thank Lee Huebner and GW for having us here, and I particularly thank Eve Copeland of CSIS, who has worked very hard to make this all happen. Thank you all very much.

(Applause.)

(END)