

Campaign Reform and the Failure of Leadership (Discussion)

Transcript of discussion held in Philadelphia on June 11, 1997

MICHAEL USEEM: Paul, just to press your argument a little bit here, I really like the thrust of where you're going on this, but just to sort of test what's behind the argument or press it a bit, it seems to me you got maybe two arguments for what would happen if you get your one to three minutes. The principled argument is that we really just want this to happen. It's kind of an act of leadership to get Clinton and Dole out there, and therefore, this just ought to get done. The weakness of that argument is that if people, indeed, click off, it's sort of a pyrrhic victory in the end, but we might work with that a bit.

But the pragmatic argument, which I sense is where you're really going here, is that, if we do this, there's a lot of clicking off at the outset, but pretty soon people will start to say, 'Boy, did you see Dole? It's just unbelievable what he said.' And so, after a few sessions of this, it becomes part of our culture and our tradition, and people will actually not click off. So are you...

PAUL TAYLOR: That's exactly—I mean, nobody passed a law that said we had to have presidential debates. We started having televised presidential debates in 1960, and then we didn't have them for, I think, for about three or four cycles, and then they came back. But they worked. They're a big event. They work for the press, because you can build up and you can have all the

gamesmanship. They attract a big audience. The audience was, indeed, down this last year. But it is something that is accepted and has worked its way into the political culture, it seems to me, in very much the same way...this shorter form—I don't know whether one minute's the magic formula—whether forcing candidates on screen for the full one minute is the—I don't know. What I do know is we are ready and we need to start experimenting with alternates to what you saw behind me, because that, we know, doesn't work.

And I do believe that the good can drive out the bad, and that, over time, when the politician claims it—there's no point in talking policy in campaigns, you just get annihilated, you have to be somewhat sympathetic to that. That's what campaign after campaign tells them. Let's change the rules of the game a little bit and hope behaviors change.

JOYCE APPLEBY: How would your candidates on camera prevent commercials like the one you showed us?

TAYLOR: Well, two things: common sense, and I can actually give you some empirical data. We had wound up with about 50 different candidate on camera presentations between Clinton and Dole last year—25 apiece. They didn't appear when I hoped they would, in the heart of prime time on all the big networks. They appeared in scattered form. They weren't promoted very well as a result, but we had a little bit of a taste of it.

What you got, unfortunately, from my point of view as an ex-journalist and also as a citizen who wants to consume interesting stuff—what you got was boilerplate. These were usually 2 or 2 1/2 minutes; some of them were one minute. Each of the networks had a slightly different format. You got Clinton on the bridge to the 21st century and Dole on his 15-percent tax cut, and they ran from about mid-October to Election Day, and if you had been paying attention, you'd heard those things many, many times. So they were a little bit inert. They didn't have the kind of the drive and the energy that you want to get from real politics. So that was the downside.

The up side is that both the scholars who pored over them—and we had Kathleen Hall Jamieson, I think, will be here tomorrow—you know, analyze

the discourse in them, and it turns out that it was more accurate than any other discourse we had gotten, certainly in the sound bites, even in the debates. There was better argumentation. It's not so much that they didn't go after each other; occasionally, they did. But when they attacked the other guy, they said, 'Here are the three reasons why I don't think his plan is going to work.'

So there is some empirical evidence that it'll produce better discourse. We took a national poll about people and people said, 'We found this very useful.' They rated it better than the press coverage of the campaign. They rated it better than the ads. They rated it even better than the debates.

Finally, if, you know, the simple, the palliative of forcing a candidate to be on screen, to take personal accountability, full accountability, for what he or she says, it seems to me—you know, I hope it doesn't cut out the attacks, and one of the things I always have trouble with is when people talk about too much attack, too much negativity. I actually like attack, and frankly, in campaigns, I want negativity. I mean, this is what this is about, it's conflict, difference of ideas—'I'm better than him' or 'I'm better than her because of the following three reasons.' Nothing wrong with that.

And, indeed, to some who object to conflict as the dominant mode of discourse and the dominant way that the press organizes—using conflict in a campaign setting is a very, sort of efficient shorthand for reaching the inattentive audience. And that's part of what journalism has to do, and that's part of what campaigns have to do. So it's not the attack and negativity, but it is that you will get more accountability. In the end, it seems to me, what this is about is accountability. We have this system where the incentives are for less accountability, and we need to change that.

MICHAEL SCHUDSON: I'm trying to establish a sort of queue here. I have Cass, then Cal and Theresa.

CASS SUNSTEIN: I thought this was excellent, and I have three kind of thoughts that what you said kind of bring up. One is there's an intimate connection between our project and the law of the First Amendment, and

just a little notation on that—it's very predictable that your free TV initiative will be attacked on constitutional grounds. It's not predictable what way the attack will go. And a little note on that is that there are two free-speech traditions in the United States, not one. One is Oliver Wendell Holmes with the notion of a marketplace of ideas; the other is Justice Brandeis with the notion that the greatest menace to a democracy is an inert people. And one is a marketplace conception, the other is a conception of democratic deliberation.

And at the time that Holmes and Brandeis were writing, they could be free-speech twins, jurisprudential heroes, but those two traditions have broken apart right on the domain that we're discussing—campaign finance laws and free air time for candidates. So we might want to think a bit about what conception of the First Amendment is appropriate.

A second note is the conflict which you've referred to at the end—I think it's extremely interesting—between the 1950s broadcasting market and the emerging broadcasting market. And note that one of the three networks was quite homogeneous, but it also had a kind of community-creating character, insofar as everyone was watching the same thing. Larry Lessig has written and worked a bit on this, that the Internet is extremely heterogeneous and is community-fracturing, in the sense that it creates extremely diverse free-speech communities which can be preselected so that people end up hearing only the echoes of their own voices. And that's a very large transformation, where people don't hear watered-down versions of conventional morality, something which has a virtue—CBS, NBC, ABC—but instead hear what they're drawn to, repeated over and over again. That's a big switch that we might attend to.

A third point has to do with how to think of consumer preferences and initiatives like the one that you're proposing, and a lot of the attacks—I think our first speech today made one of them—a lot of attacks on reforms say that consumer preferences should be taken as given, and it's an insult to freedom to do something like the sort of thing you're doing. Well, one notation about that is that people not only have preferences, but they have preferences about

their own preferences, and sometimes they want their preferences to be other than what they are.

And there is some very interesting work going on now on the analogy between environmental protection and the mass media, where if you look at behavior in the environmental arena, there have been massive changes in preferences, sometimes induced by, you know, democratic choice, with respect to, for example, recycling behavior, where unimaginable transitions have occurred in a very short time, and with respect to control of toxic substances, where informational remedies have produced very large-scale changes. Sometimes people have been willing to take an economic hit in order to reduce pollution, and so corporate America is extremely conscious of environmental hazards, partly for self-interested reasons, partly for altruistic reasons.

But tastes have changed very rapidly, and to say, with respect to what happened in the environmental arena, well, the government or the democratic process itself isn't respecting choice or isn't respecting preferences, would just be a way of getting confused about what the options were.

CALVIN TRILLIN: I had a couple questions. Well, my real question is about how there happened to be a videotape being taken of that guy telling his client to disrobe, but I think [that] may be something better discussed over dinner. I'm sure you're up on that.

But I'm sort of interested in what you think your prospects are. I mean, you talk about two possibilities; one, trying to get the networks to do this, and, of course, even if the networks are only 45 percent of viewership—whatever it is—it's still a big hunk of people, if you could roadblock that—whether there's any realistic possibility of making that a condition of their licenses, which they now, as you say, get for absolutely nothing. And the other is whether there's any realistic possibility of stopping soft money, particularly the latest thing in the paper is the President's attempt to have it done through the Federal Election Commission. Do you see the prospect of that as being...

TAYLOR: To start with the second one first, soft money—I think it's not inconceivable that soft money will be limited—I doubt completely eliminated, but limited in this cycle. Congress hasn't felt compelled to act, despite six or eight months of scandal stories. We're going to start with hearings, probably in the next few weeks; whether or not that changes the equation, I tend to doubt it. What may change the equation in terms of Congress' self-interest are the campaigns of 1998. If we get challengers out there in 1998 who start going around and saying, you know, 'History gave this Congress an assignment, which was to clean up the mess that we all can see, and they haven't done a damn thing,' and they get a little worried about that.

At that point, I think, Trent Lott, you know, gets busy and probably tries to do a minimalist bill that probably doesn't go after soft money or—actually, there's a chance he would go after soft money, because it gets into the dispute between the parties. The truth of the matter is, the Democrats are as protective or more protective of soft money than the Republicans are, despite what Clinton is trying to do. Anyway—so a chance that something good will happen.

On the free air time, I think, in terms of something happening legis...

TRILLIN: I'm sorry. How about the Federal Election Commission? You think that's just a showboat? Think so?

TAYLOR: Nobody takes the Federal Election Commission... Now this was—nobody takes the Federal...

TRILLIN: Right.

TAYLOR: ... seriously. It's there as a very weak cop on the beat.

TRILLIN: Right.

TAYLOR: That's the way it's been designed. That's the way it's operated. And it simply doesn't have the gravitas within the political system...

TRILLIN: Right.

TAYLOR: ...in Washington to do anything. Similarly, with free air time—although there is virtually no chance that Congress acting on its own might do something, the FCC, the Federal Communications Commission, is under, unfortunately, the now-departing Reed Hundt wants to make this an initiative. I think it's a long shot, but not outside the realm of possibility.

I think sooner or later we're going to fix this thing. We will probably fix it in small bites. There are changes already happening in the states. We are not stuck in this sort of misery forever. The pleasure-pain calculus that members of Congress have has to change, you know, in order...

TRILLIN: Right.

TAYLOR: ...for them to be conducive to—I don't think we're there yet. I think we'll get there eventually. On the free time stuff, I think I'm more optimistic that you could build stigma and taboo, that you can wag your finger, both at the candidates to say, 'You've got to give us something; you've got to give the public something better than—we understand why you do this, but let's reward better behavior.' And the same thing with the networks. The one thing we have going for them is they are owned by big, high-class, you know, corporations that presumably care about their public image, and one way to do this is just through a moral suasion.

I have a feeling that '98 will be the bottom. I have a feeling that turnout in '98 will be a—you know, will just disappear. What's to vote about? I mean, the Democrats and Republicans have decided to stop fighting for a couple of years; everybody's disgusted by politics; everybody's disgusted by money. I think it'll disappear. And I hope that, by the year 2000, with the turn of the century and everything else and the fact that it's an open-seat presidential campaign, you may, you know, the sense of political revival, you know, the one thing I take, you know, from Kevin Phillips is an economic determinist, and he knows that economic booms can't last forever. Political busts can't last forever. Sooner or later they will end, and so let's be ready for that.

SCHUDSON: Teresa.

TERESA HEINZ: Yeah. Couple questions—one on free air time. There is a bill, and I think it's been introduced by my husband, dealing with free air time. I know that he has spoken to the FCC commissioners, he has spoken to Rupert Murdoch, he has spoken to all of the network people. And you correct me on this, because I'm sure you know the numbers, but I believe that business is \$192 billion or more than that, their business in air time. And the question is a democracy project where the business gives up \$1 billion or \$1 billion plus of their free air time towards democracy—supposedly, the behavior of candidates, which would not be categorized in any one way in terms of how they use the time, would improve only because quality, I think, would begin to come to the surface in that kind of—as debates do.

And I say that because, in my husband's last election in Massachusetts there were unprecedented nine debates, which is too many debates for anybody. But there were nine debates. They were set by the newspapers. And what was very interesting in those debates—and there were different types of them, was that, in the end, quality—and I don't say that because my husband won—but I think, in the end, quality of the person in terms of standing up for ideas really, finally, got through to people. And what was most interesting of all the debates was the MTV debate which kids put on, and the kids asked the questions and the candidates were not allowed to talk about the other guy. They had to talk about their answer to that very specific question. And they polled the kids before the debate and after the debate, and again, it was an amazing lesson.

So I think that there are many ways in which we can skin this cat. We just haven't tried them. And I agree with you that I think the paranoia that media has about losing audience and the fact that they have this dummy called the Niensens is a terrible, terrible thing for the American people, not just for politics. And it really curbs an awful lot of creative peoples and creative producers who try to do some really quality stuff and are curbed by their vice presidents in their networks and say, 'You can't do that because we need'—you know, used to be tits and ass; now it's something else. I don't know what they call it.

But the other thing I wanted to just ask you—you say that you like negativity. I think what you're saying is you like...

TAYLOR: Engagement.

HEINZ: ...tension.

RODIN: Conflict.

TAYLOR: Engagement, yeah.

HEINZ: Engagement. I agree with you. Tension is great. I think that one of the great turn-offs of our country has been the destructive negative tone of campaigns, and I did some polling last year for our foundation amongst 18- to 24-year-olds around the country on attitudes towards democracy and role models, etc., and I can send you that. But that is vindicated.

And lastly, I don't know enough either—I don't know anything about the law and I don't know how one could do or develop, in a sense, a national council of the wise that would oversee, without censorship, but some kind of ombudsmanship, together, maybe, with the people who own the networks and maybe with the FCC commissioners—I don't know whom, but a council of wise that really would do—and I don't remember who said this today, but someone said this today: that the French actually knock off a candidate—did you—was that said at breakfast this morning?

UNIDENTIFIED MAN: He could lose his seat. The...

TAYLOR: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

HEINZ: Lose a seat. It was...

TAYLOR: Ooh, that makes me...

HEINZ: I don't know. No, what I'm saying is to prevent that kind of thing—but they would say to someone, 'That is factually incorrect. You've got to retract that ad,' or whatever it is. Because there are ads that are patently lies.

TAYLOR: And the broadcasters, under our law, must run them, and I'm perfectly content, to pick up on your point, to let the public be the judge and jury on that. I listen, if you let the courts sort of move in, given the litigiousness of our society, you'll have every campaign being decided in the courts. That would be terrible.

I think I'm quoting Michael Sandel, that "In politics, I think, civility is an overrated virtue." You want—I mean, I would use the analogy of a boxing match. You want engagement. You want them to go at each other. You don't want low blows, nor do you want a pro wrestling match, where it's all a charade, where everybody understands it's purely trivial and it's all about show, it's not about the real thing. But a genuinely engaged, robust political discourse is great, because it does organize a lot of complex information. Is it as nuanced as we would like it to be? Never. That's not what campaigns are supposed to be about. They're supposed to get, you know, in slogans, in hard-hitting stuff, a lot of information. And they are not doing that basic job. And let's think about new vehicles.

To pay my respects to your husband, he is one of the real leaders—I'm really surprised at what little uptake there is in Congress for free time. I think the reason is a little bit of intimidation of the broadcasters, and also, members of Congress understand any free time schemes would place challengers on an equal footing with incumbents, and incumbents now are not on an equal footing, and so they resist it for that reason.

SCHUDSON: I..

TAYLOR: And your last question about the order of magnitude of money—I think that the figures are that broadcasters in order to provide, for free, all of the time that all candidates at all levels take, you're going to have—anybody want to take a guess at how many political commercials ran in America from April 1st through November 1st of 1996, the last six months of the last presidential campaign? How many political commercials ran? The answer is 752,000 of them, at a cost of, more or less, \$500 million. That represents—if you put that \$500-million cost in a two-year election cycle against the gross advertising revenues of the broadcasters, it's a little under 1 percent. It's a lot

of money in the political system. That \$500 million is the most corrupting money because it's the money that the candidates are most desperate to raise. It is not a lot of money into the broadcasters who have been getting these resources for free. So its doable economically.

SCHUDSON: I have a—I don't want to be overrigid on this, but my list is now Tom Bender, Paul Begala, Martin Seligman, Ab Mikva, Jean and Jay, but if someone is right on point, jump in. OK. Tom.

THOMAS BENDER: OK. I would like to ask, actually, essentially, something that the title of the session, in a way—what your thoughts are on the relation of the nature of campaigns as they are now, including, obviously, campaign finance, and what relation that may or may not have to forms of leadership; that is, what connects or doesn't connect these two things? And one thing I'd just like to put out there is there is a way, I think, in which the particular form of campaigning, which not only invites money in all of the terrible ways you're talking about, but it also disembeds the political process, and as I said at our previous meeting, it thins our political culture. It also pretty much means an end to any, I think, reasonable definition of what political parties are. And whether or not—what kind of losses those are, what kind of compensations they are—I mean, one of the things about a political party—actually, something that was said this morning by Phillips was how do people come to positions of leadership?

Coming to a position of leadership through a system of parties is one way, and it constrains the person to be a certain kind of leader, because the whole series of commitments and promises over a long period of time in an institutional context—but if it only is a matter of accumulating several million dollars for a campaign chest, you can be the senator from California, and nobody knows where you came from or anything, or someplace else—not to pick on California.

But anyway, I—whatever your thoughts are on some of those questions.

TAYLOR: Well, very briefly, America's political system is unique in how weak our party structures are and how little ideological content there is. So it

seems to me, because you have neither of those things, the campaigns themselves—it's a very individualistic political culture. The candidates are out there by themselves, and the campaign becomes the tone-setting device. We don't have institutions that maintain ongoing relationships, so the campaign has to be the instrument that draws good people to politics and draws everyday citizens into the public realm. It has to be the glue that binds us to a political culture, and if we go through these exercises where, instead, it is a wedge, it drives us away, then we're in some trouble.

One of the things that Kevin Phillips said this morning—he wants more referendum and initiatives and recall. It seems to me we have a tremendous amount of direct democracy in our elections. As one of the readings for this thing—for this symposium said, we have more elections in this country than any other country in the world. There's no other country in the world that has two-year terms on its main legislative body. There is no other country in the world that has primary elections. We are unique. These guys are out there. They have no party cover, they have no ideology that means anything to anybody that they can fall back on, so they're naked. They're exposed. They're, not surprisingly, risk-averse. Not surprisingly they tend to pander. Not surprisingly, they tend to attack. I mean, this is built in, and we've got to fight all of those tendencies.

The good news on that is that we really do bring the public in, and I'm with Teresa. I have great admiration for the wisdom—I mean, if there's one thing Americans know how to do, it's watch television and take the measure of people. As ill-informed as they may be, you know, as locked into their own prejudices as they may be, I just think you have to take that dynamic and make it more robust.

PAUL BEGALA: Paul, two points, one sort of specific to something you raised and another trying to press it a little further. This argument that you encountered from the networks and from my former profession of political consultants—I have to say I think that both of them make the audience argument, but I think it's really an economic argument—they'll lose money. Alex or anybody else who makes TV commercials for politicians gets a

percentage of the expenditure to air that ad; ergo, free TV time comes out of his pocket. Westinghouse or whoever obviously gets the other 85 percent. They lose the money.

I think—you know, your slogan is 'Free time for straight talk,' and I'm for free time. I'm just not for straight talk. As sort of defined, I mean, facetiously, I'd rather have free time for free talk. Let these folks unleash whatever creative energies they can find. It's what they do in Britain with astonishing success, where people actually seek it out, they're so good, the quality is so high. They get the guy who made the film "Chariots of Fire" to do one film, Peter Postlethwaite, actor, did a take on "It's a Wonderful Life." It was an incredible, incredible piece of political video.

And I think if you could make that leap to free these politicians, it strips bare the rationale from the networks and the consultants, and leads them only with no fig leaf, and they say, 'Actually, we just don't want to lose money. We want the money.' And that puts them in a less noble spot.

TAYLOR: Well, but what it enables them to say is, 'You want us to give free time to these politicians so they can run ads like that. America, haven't we had enough of these kinds of ads?'

BEGALA: Right. But they'll—but voters will...

TAYLOR: Yeah. I don't want any more of those kinds of a...

BEGALA: The opponent will run something of a higher quality. I mean, the market will—I'm just not worried. I think someone will be smart enough to run a higher quality campaign. Now the point that presses a little further. It would seem to me, I'm very much attuned to what you're trying to do and supportive, and I think there's a larger goal which maybe speaks to some of the other things we've talked about. It's my hope that if you could have that sort of change in how campaigns were run or at least how the politicians use the media in campaigns, you may one day also have a more important change in how the media use the media...

TAYLOR: Absolutely.

BEGALA: ...in campaigns, because I think where that candidate did...

TAYLOR: Right.

BEGALA: ...get it wrong was putting that ad on the air. Carville and I had a rule: If there was anything too dirty or scummy for us to do in a campaign, give it to a reporter. They'll do it.

TAYLOR: Yeah. We...

BEGALA: Now I would have taken that videotape to Channel 9; they would have aired it that night for free, and my hands would never have been on it.

TAYLOR: Well, the—my wife had advised me not to use the `we' anymore because I'm no longer in the press, but I'll still use it, because it's 25 years of habit. We'd come in and, in a situation like this, we'd bayonet the wounded. I mean, it's good copy. It plays to all of the things that we want to accomplish, which is tell a story neatly, cleanly and efficiently. Conflict is the easiest way to organize a story. However, it's a bit like a train wreck you know, it's abhorrent, but there is a fascination with it, and we are guilty of all those things, and the candidates and the consultants know that. There's no question that the media is implicated here. I can't think of a way, frankly, to change the media's behavior, other than to change the candidates' behavior, and from that will flow better behavior from the media, I believe.

SCHUDSON: Martin.

MARTIN SELIGMAN: I'm going to talk to the inert-people question that Cass raised, and I want to talk about the possibility of this commission being involved in a long-term solution. So I'm going to talk about children for a second and their relationship to television and to civics and the like.

Aristotle told us that the two noblest professions were teaching and politics, and the figures that Paul cites about interest in politics and children are genuinely alarming to me on those grounds—12 percent or 13 percent. So I think part of the question that particularly the leadership work group of this

commission might be concerned with is how do children become good citizens? How do children become political leaders?

We have civics courses in every school in America. I don't know what they teach. I think we should know that. I suspect a little hands-on experience with service and sacrifice and civic participation, as well as the usual pledging of allegiance and memorizing presidents' names, would help here. And similarly, TV programming strikes me as completely unrelated now to creating good citizens. And I think we should concern ourselves about that.

In my own field, in psychology, it's amazing to me—we have a psychology of how children become numerate, we have a psychology of how children learn to read, we have a psychology of how children learn to become good athletes. But there's a complete vacuum on the question of how do children become good citizens or good leaders. And I'd like to see this commission get involved in that question.

JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN: Am I—who's next? Am I next?

SCHUDSON: Ab and then Jean.

ELSHTAIN: OK.

ABNER MIKVA: I just want to say you did a tremendous job. You've almost persuaded me about free television. When I think of the Illinois delegation going on free television, I'm not sure that's going to advance the political ball, but I'm willing to listen.

TAYLOR: You know how the sausage is made, too, huh?

MIKVA: The other thing is you've suggested that soft money probably could escape the problems of Buckley vs. Valeo. I'm not so sure, but I really think there's a very good chance that Buckley-Valeo could be overturned. You know, there's only one justice left on the court who was involved in that decision. That's Chief Justice Rehnquist. And I think some of us could count to five, if they had a really good opportunity to look at the question again, and I think soft money might present that. But if we have to somehow figure out

a way of making soft money escape what Buckley vs. Valeo says, I'm not so sure.

TAYLOR: Well, I'll defer to the constitutional scholars here, but my reading of the courts in numerous decisions they've made since Buckley vs. Valeo is that you can read them different ways. They have tended to move more in the direction of spending equals speech, rather than less. So even though the names may have changed, I think the inclination is still there. I..

SCHUDSON: These'll have to be last comments from Jean, from Jay and Michael.

ELSHTAIN: Very briefly on the leadership question, picking up with Tom Bender's comments—I'm wondering what, Paul, what your views are about where the formation of leaders is going to come from. If we have a failure of leadership in the present, it's worrisome about where it speaks to the children issue, too—where our future leaders are going to come from, how you're going to sort of shape and form them in a way that would make them interested or eager in taking part in public life, which actually leads me to my real question for you, which is: Do you regret having asked Gary Hart the "big A" question? Because it seems to me that one of the real issues that people face now when they consider public life is the fact that they may be quite literally stripped bare, that every part of their private lives may be exposed and become sort of cannon fodder for public discussion and sort of salacious titillation.

That's worrisome, and I think there are many people out there who look at that and say, 'I don't want to expose my family to this.' And I think if you think about the—those of use around the table who are from the field of political theory and political science, there's a literature on political socialization and the sorts of things that young people take in, so to speak, about what's going on out there, and if you think about the sort of scandal-dominated civic culture, it's not a particularly attractive scene at all. So do you have any regrets in the dark of the night about your "big A" question?

TAYLOR: Well, I guess yes and no. I'll be happy to provide a rationale for why the question seemed to be appropriate under those rather extraordinary circumstances, so I don't have regrets about having posed...

ELSHTAIN: I wasn't asking for a mea culpa, but just a sort of—yeah.

TAYLOR: No, no, no, but it's a very good question, because it does lead down to a slippery slope that takes us to a place. And we now see it in the military. We now see not just political careers, but military careers that are endangered by this. And everybody's sense is that we have chosen this particular season where politics seems so unimportant; politics just becomes a platform for soap opera and scandal, and this is the way we tell the story of ourselves to ourselves, and it's not a pretty sight.

On the issue of privacy and what are the boundaries that should be respected, I actually think there is, believe it or not, better news on that front than the current spate of scandals, you know, might lead you to believe, and let me take you back very briefly to the '88 campaign, where Gary Hart was the leading contender for the Democratic nomination. The Miami Herald runs a story saying he's had a weekend tryst with Donna Rice. He denies it, and we have a press conference. I ask that question. And there's a sort of a collective gasp in the culture—in the political culture and the country at large: 'Oh, my God, we're now going to a place—do we really want to go into this place? Do we really want to look into the bedrooms of the men and perhaps one day women who would be our leaders? Isn't this an awfully treacherous slippery slope?'

And I think, although there are lots of different opinions on that, I think it's probably fair to say the majority of the opinion in the culture is that is a slippery slope. I'm also happy to say I think that that's a majority opinion in the media. As easy as it is, when you look at all the stories that are out there, to assume that the media has adopted an 'everything goes' rule, it hasn't adopted an 'everything goes' rule. The old rule when I came to covering politics on this was, if a politician's private life ought to remain private unless it impinges on his or her public performance. There's a variant of that

rule that exists in the military—unless it impinges on good order and discipline and unit cohesion and this and that.

These are smart rules. They're sensible rules. I think they still, by and large, exist despite the incredible spills that we see. And again, to go back to 1988, Hart is knocked out of the race. Everybody gasps, and they say, 'OK, the new rules are "anything goes."' And we didn't need to set up hot lines in newsrooms around the country, particularly The Washington Post. There were about 12 men running for president at the time that Hart was knocked out of the race. It was an open-seat race. And I promise you that the rumors flew in. People were willing to spend their own dimes; they didn't need an 800 number—about the peccadilloes of at least half of them, maybe more, with varying degrees of credibility to them, leading to some degree, in a few instances of reporting—because there is the question, 'Well, if Hart went down on this, don't we in fairness have to look' and I'm happy to say that in the end a collective judgment was offered.

This is not particularly germane. You know, whether the same judgment was offered with Dole. I don't know if any of you read these stories last year, the notion that Dole had, apparently verified because the woman verified it—had had a relationship some 25, 30 years ago—an adulterous relationship. And it was in the press. The press reported it out. And the press came to a conclusion: 'Don't think it's relative.'

I think Secretary Cohen in the military sense is trying to reach for that. I think that our culture is capable of still keeping some lines—it doesn't seem that way, given the titillation, given the excitement. But I'm actually more sanguine on that front. I think we can get past this stuff despite the tornadoes that move through.

Now I guess your question is, does that dissuade people from getting in? Listen, I would defer to Abner Mikva or others in public life. There are a lot of rewards to public life. There are a lot of intrinsic and inherent rewards to public life, to be in a big arena, to try to move public policy, to try to do good for people. I tend to think, as someone who always is supposed to be cynical—I tend to think most people in public life are extremely well-motivated. And I

think those rewards are large enough to withstand almost everything else that the culture throws at it. Doesn't mean we shouldn't help change the equation, but I don't worry too much about good people not getting into politics. I think they always will.

HEINZ: May I say something about that? I've been 25, 26 years involved in public life in Washington, and I've seen it change tremendously. And I have several friends who were in the Senate, I think all of them very good, from both parties, who have left because it's very, very tough to take it. And I lost my first husband, who was in Congress, also. And I remember a conversation with Bill Cohen; I think Warren Rudman—about four or five men; we were talking. And this is not something that was usual, partially because in Washington senators and congressmen, generally speaking, don't go out with one another. And they were all somewhat down, and they all thought individually that it—they were down. And I can't remember what sparked the conversation, but all of a sudden it came out that this was a change in the times, and this must have been about, I'd say, 10 years ago. And things have not gotten better. In fact, they've gotten much less civil, and it takes tremendous courage, persistence, energy, idealism, stubbornness, if you are a good person. Otherwise, I think, you're just an opportunist, which is the other side of it wants to get there to just screw the party and screw the country.

ELSHTAIN: It takes a thick skin, too, you're saying. It really does.

HEINZ: Yeah, it does, very hard. I promise you. And I just went through a campaign and this is my—I've gone through a lot of campaigns and this was very hard. I really felt stripped and abused in this campaign, personally. And that had never happened to me in Pennsylvania, I have to say. Pennsylvania's different.

JAY ROSEN: Paul, thanks for a great presentation and I have two—I have a report and a question for you. The report—and it addresses Jean and Teresa's points—comes from Minnesota. Tom Hamburger of the Star Tribune published this proposal—you probably know about it—called the Minnesota Compact, which is just an idea he floated that would try to improve the

discourse in the Senate race in '96 in that state and the idea was that candidates would face the camera and speak in all of their ads. They could say anything they want, but they had to be on camera. They couldn't have the voiceovers and the morphing of one candidate into, you know—into a cheeseburger or whatever. And there would be eight debates, one in each district, congressional district and the state. The media would focus on issues rather than horse race and insider stuff. And citizens would sort of agree in a sort of civic way to pay attention more than they usually do to politics.

So he just floated this idea, just published it in the paper, and, as a result, Vin Weber, former Republican congressman, and Tim Penny, a former Democratic congressman, saw merit in the idea and created the Minnesota Compact Coalition to try and put it into practice. What they ended up putting into practice was a kind of watered-down version of it and it was, you know, much less restrictive than what Hamburger had proposed, but, nonetheless, they gathered academic groups, civic groups, church groups and other political leaders around the state to create a kind of citizens movement to say, 'We need something like this to prevent other discourse from going in the direction that you showed us.' Right?

Unfortunately, they couldn't get the Senate candidates to agree, mostly because their political—Rudy Boschwitz's political consultant, you know, said, 'No way, we'll lose the election.' It turns out if he had agreed, he might have won the election. But that's on another note.

However, they did get two congressional candidates to agree to abide by the compact in the 1st Congressional District in Minnesota and also to agree to abide by a separate advertising code developed by an ad executive with a civic mind-set. And they did. And one of the candidates was a woman, and the other was a Republican incumbent, a man. And I know the woman—the reason that she decided to agree was that she started going to the sort of seminars they have for female candidates—here's what to expect. And what they told her to expect is what Teresa's talking about. And she said, 'I don't want to go through this.' And so even though her advisers didn't want to do

it, she signed—literally, signed the compact. And her opponent signed the compact.

Now it wasn't perfect. They complained about violations—there are enforcement problems, you know, it didn't all work out well, but it's an example of civic action, like yours, producing public sentiment and incentives for candidates to behave differently and both of their consultants said they felt that their creativity was constrained by this agreement, which means their ability to destroy was constrained by the agreement.

And so there's an example of something without laws, without any new legislation, without any new Supreme Court decisions, where the tone of that campaign was definitely changed by this simple idea floated by Tom Hamburger and then picked up by others. So that's my report.

Here's my question: Is it your opinion that a public-spirited group of intelligent people, with some money to spend, drawing on the creative talents of people who make video in this country, using hypothetical candidates, could produce minutes or two minutes of television that were compelling, good argumentation, addressing public issues, an interesting, fun-to-watch, in such a way to create a demonstration vehicle that would make visible and tangible to people the possibilities that you are talking about? Isn't part of the problem in your challenge, is that people just can't see how good it could be, right?

TAYLOR: Yeah. Right.

ROSEN: So if you had a piece of footage that showed how good it could be, your task might be easier. Would you agree?

TAYLOR: I would agree. We're going to try to get that in New Jersey in the governor's race this fall and in Virginia in the governor's race this fall. We're trying to create some of those compacts with agreements to appear in your own ads and to use it as models that you can march around the country.

Ultimately, I think the way to change this is through stigma and taboo and showing positive or different ways of doing it. It's a bet, you know? You hope

that you can push against the worst of the culture. I'm not sure. I think if Weld and Kerry, who did eight or nine debates—if they reduced that to, you know, a minute or 90 seconds' worth of argumentation, it would be very compelling.

SCHUDSON: Mm.

TAYLOR: I'm not sure about the Illinois delegation.

SCHUDSON: We're running quite late here. The last comment from Michael Piore and then both comment and answer could be short sound bite length.

MICHAEL PIORE: All right. I'll try and make it short. I feel like sort of an outsider in this discussion, but I do come from MIT and I have been sitting in lately on some of the research planning, both in terms of the evolution of the communications technology and its impact on the economy than on politics. And it seems to me, a little bit, coming out of that discussion, I wonder whether some of these proposals and some of the discussion isn't really fighting the last war, in the sense that the arrival of digital technology and the interconnection of these different communication technologies with television isn't going to so fundamentally change the landscape that—at least from the point of view of this commission...

TAYLOR: Right.

PIORE: ...that a lot more attention ought to be given to the changes that are coming down the pike than to proposals designed to feed into the current state of play.

TAYLOR: I think I agree, you need to look to the future, but talk about the last war. I mean, some of the fragmentation in the diffusion of the audience has already occurred in the current system, as I said before. The networks have gone from 90 percent audience share down to 45 percent. You know what's interesting is that their ad rates held constant for inflation because they are still the biggest game in town. They are still the place where Procter & Gamble has to go and Coca-Cola has to go and Anheuser-Busch has to go. It seems to me, for the foreseeable future, that may be only 5 years or 10 years, it's still the

place where you need to spend time reinvigorating the political debate. You ought to start worrying about tomorrow as well.

PIORE: Thank you.

TAYLOR: Well, thank you very much.

STEPHEN P. STEINBERG: Let me just remind you of the logistics. The bus is awaiting you out at the corner where you got off. My associate, Bill Boltz, will lead you all back there. We hope you'll have a brief respite at the Rittenhouse and then the buses coming back will leave at 7:15 and 7:25 for Carpenters' Hall. And we look forward to seeing you there for a pleasant, relaxing evening.

HEINZ: Thank you.

SCHUDSON: Thank you very much.