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A Brookings Briefing

THE IMPACT OF THE NEW MEDIA:

A Live, Inter@ctive Discussion & Webcast

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[TRANSCRIPT PRODUCED FROM A TAPE RECORDING]

C O N T E N T S

Moderator:

E.J. DIONNE, JR., Senior Fellow
Brookings; Columnist, Washington Post
Writers Group

Panelists:

JODIE T. ALLEN, Pew Research Center

ELLEN RATNER, Talk Radio News Service

ANA MARIE COX, Wonkette

JACK SHAFER, Slate

ANDREW SULLIVAN, The New Republic; Time

P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. DIONNE: I want to thank you all for coming and thank the millions who are watching us out in the blogosphere. This is a very interesting experiment and I'm going to need everybody's help in the audience. As I understand it, some of the commentary is going to appear on that screen as we speak, like people criticizing the tie I'm wearing or the foolish question I just asked. We will have spontaneous response. If anyone should see something up there that looks interesting to them before I have seen it, feel free to call my attention to it.

And because of this sort of multi--"multimedia" isn't quite the right word. In fact, the words are probably going to be a problem throughout this discussion. But, you know, the various ways in which people are joining our discussion. We will have people in the audience; I've got some e-mails over here, so we're going to be trying to bring as many people as possible into this discussion.

We had a great lesson already in the power of this medium because there was a controversy, even before the event happened, that broke out on the blogosphere.

"What, they haven't started yet? This would never happen at a University of Chicago faculty meeting." That's our first comment.

See--comments on our clothes. Yeah, this is fantastic.

MS. : I would say it's green.

MR. DIONNE: What's wrong with that shirt?

MS. : That is not tan.

MS. : It's green.

MR. DIONNE: Maybe it's a flaw in the camera work.

But just to show how wonderful this medium is, even before this event opened there was a controversy that broke out among the blogs that we didn't have a "real" liberal blogger here. Well, I'm a liberal and so I kind of like all the pressure that comes. A distinguished member of this audience said that everybody's attitude toward this medium is mixed--that we love it when people stir pots that we want stirred and we hate it when people stir pots that we don't want stirred. But just for the record, we did invite several prominent liberal bloggers, Josh Marshall, Kos, Jeff Jarvis, Matt Yglesias--and they either didn't respond or were unable to attend. Although my friend Ruy Teixeira I just saw walk--there he is. And Ruy is blogging the event as we speak. And Ruy, I hope you will feel free to join the conversation.

This event is about blogs and politics, but it's also about something else, which is the relationship of this medium to other media. I didn't like--you know, old media/new media sounded like old Europe and new Europe. And one of the things I hope we talk about is the inter-activity between these media, the extent to which--here I'll set off a lot of bloggers--to which the blog world is to some degree parasitic on the old media, and to what extent does it add to what is called the old media.

I'm going to introduce our guests very quickly. Since the blog world tells us all that we have to be transparent, I want to say up front that I asked many of the participants to send me some e-mails in advance to tell me what they wanted to talk about. But rather than have everybody begin with a long lecture, I'm just going to toss out some questions which they urged me to ask them--except for Jack Shafer, who said I could take it wherever I wanted. But if you want to ask a question of yourself and answer it, that's also permissible.

Let me just introduce our panel quickly. Jodie Allen is a senior editor at the Pew Research Center. She joined the Pew Center from U.S. News & World Report, where she was managing editor. She also wrote a bi-weekly column on political economy. Before that, she was a business

editor and senior writer for the magazine--she came to U.S. News from Slate. Before that, she was the editor of the Outlook section, where I often wrote for Jodie and can tell you that she is an excellent editor. She also worked as a deputy assistant secretary of labor for policy.

Ellen Ratner is the White House correspondent and bureau chief for the Talk Radio News Service. She writes about the White House. She is a news analyst on the Fox News Channel. She has a weekly segment, with Jim Pinkerton, called "The Long and the Short of It."

MS. RATNER: I'm the short of it.

MR. DIONNE: And those of you who have met Jim Pinkerton would guess that he might be the long of it.

She is heard on over 500 radio stations across the United States, including, at least once upon a time, in my hometown of Fall River, Massachusetts. She writes a weekly column called "Liberal and Proud" for WorldNetDaily. And she was the only talk show host granted two in-person interviews with President Clinton--which no doubt will set off our right-wing bloggers. And she is political editor and Washington bureau chief for Talkers magazine.

Now, Ana Marie Cox--

MS. RATNER: We have those outside for people who are interested, too.

MR. DIONNE: Commercialism also goes with the blogs, as well.

Ana Marie Cox is a wonderful and very funny person. I am going to read you the bio that she sent me. These are her words. This is an autobiography.

"Ana Marie Cox had a long, disastrous career in mainstream media before being forced into the shallow waters of the blogosphere. An editor at Mother Jones, The Chronicle of Higher Education, and The American Prospect, her poor people skills made her unpopular, while her sarcasm drove people away. Internet journalism, with its higher tolerance for misfits, provided an early home. She was the editor of a whole series of magazines. Ana is pretty sure she is the first University of Chicago graduate to have a fashion spread in Lucky magazine, though there were rumors that David Brooks was the editor's first choice. She now commutes to her laptop from beds in both D.C. and New York. Her husband Chris Lehmann is remarkably well-liked and a features editor at New York Magazine. She is working on a novel about August in D.C. called Dog Days."

Jack Shafer. Now, whenever I read or hear Jack Shafer, I feel guilty. And as a Catholic, I have immense capacity for guilt. And the reason is that I quoted Jack

in a book that I wrote last year. I quoted him saying very intelligent things in the book. There was only one problem. I put two f's in his name instead of one--which just proves that the old media and people who write books can make dumb mistakes no less than people in the blogosphere. So I hereby apologize to--

MR. SHAFER: The mistake was probably quoting me.

MR. DIONNE: No, it was very good stuff, actually.

He is Slate's editor-at-large. He has edited two alternative weeklies, the Washington City Paper and S.F. Weekly. He has written on new media for the New York Times magazine--the old media; on the press for The New Republic; on drug policy, as he puts it, for publications big--Wall Street Journal--and small--Inquiry. His Press Box column appears several times a week in Slate, which he joined prior to its 1996 launch. And he writes that when Richard Nixon personally asked him to firebomb the Brookings Institution in 1971, he asked for the Rand Corporation assignment instead. And Andrew Sullivan will be joining us, but is--Andrew, you're not here yet, correct?

So let me begin with Ana Marie Cox, who posed an interesting set of questions in her--you know, she said, "I suppose the topic of representation of liberal bloggers in

the MSN would be sort of natural for me, but I'm not sure how to answer it." And she also said, and this is what I think I'll throw at her, "It wouldn't be a blogging panel if someone didn't ask about don't bloggers sometimes get things wrong." So why don't we start there.

MS. COX: It's usually my own private drinking game--when someone asks about bloggers getting things wrong, everyone drinks. I wish.

First, I just want to say, A, if my answer seems sort of more fuzzy than usual, it's not the bourbon, it's Robitussin. I've got a bad cough.

But bloggers getting things wrong. That comes up--I mean I seriously have been, I think, on panels every month for the past, you know, six months, and it always gets asked. And also, Is blogging journalism? That would be another one, if you wanted to do the greatest hits of blogging panels. And I think that the answer that I've sort of been tending to give is that, yes, bloggers get things wrong. But of course that's not a problem if you're not presenting yourself as a source of first-hand information.

I mean, I think that journalistic concern that bloggers are somehow like a bad source of information presumes that people are going to them as their first

source of information. I'm not sure if that's true. I know that, on my side, for example, I am a proud parasite, a media vampire. Bloggers could not exist without the mainstream media. There are some facts that cannot be Googled, believe it or not. And so, I think, as critics and as sort of filters, the idea of getting something wrong has mainly to do with opinion or misrepresentation--which is an important thing, but it's not the same as printing a factual error and presenting it as reporting.

MR. DIONNE: Thank you. I want to get back to that. I just want to bring everybody in and then we can get back to that.

Jack, in fact, since you didn't provide a question because you had great confidence in the moderator, rather than have confidence in the moderator, I'd like to turn to one of our first e-mails, which actually came from Wales, from Swansea. And I'll just read the question, because I think it--

MR. SHAFER: I'm big in Swansea.

MR. DIONNE: "I am a final-year university student from the United Kingdom and would like to submit a question to the panel. Do you believe that the Internet and new communications systems helped or hindered the

support of the American people for the war in Iraq in 2003?"

I think that's a good taking-off point more generally for the impact of this medium-- [inaudible] one can talk about it as a single unit, but you can't, probably--on the political debate.

MR. SHAFER: I don't have a strong opinion on that. I don't think--you know, when I go to memory, I can't remember blogs being influential on either side.

MR. DIONNE: Could you talk more generally about the impact of this on politics? In particular, I'd like to take up that question that one's view of how this world works almost always depends on what influence it's having. You know, the two examples I think of are liberals, and certainly a lot of people who worked at CBS were unhappy with the effect of the attack on Dan Rather; not only the effect on Rather, but also on kind of burying the original story. On the other side, I think it was perhaps the one use by blogs among liberals that really worked in the campaign, the attack on that TV show that--Sinclair Broadcasting was going to run that show criticizing Kerry on his war service. And I think there you can say the liberal blogs had a real impact. Could you talk about those kinds of effects?

MR. SHAFER: Without a doubt, blogs have attacked both the [inaudible] media from below and I think they've created a--there's a process everybody who writes for the Web is very familiar with. They're frequent e-mail readers, and if they're wise, they're hitting Technorati, plugging their name into Technorati to see what the blogs are saying about them. And what's interesting is there's a professor at New York University who calls blogging "distributed journalism," which is sort of taking a page out of the computer world where distributed computing is taking and throwing and calling upon, you know, hundreds of computers, thousands of computers to crunch data and solve problems. His name is Jay Rosen. I think Jay's right that what's very interesting about the blog phenomenon is that it allows hundreds and thousands of people to analyze data, to double-check it, to find weaknesses in arguments, and then communicate in real time.

And, you know, all of us print veterans know that the response to what you had published may be in a couple of hours and people phone you with irate comments, or days or even weeks with letters to the editor. But what's I think phenomenal about blog world is that it does cast this wider net of sort of fact-checking and source verification.

MR. DIONNE: Thank you. By the way, I want to thank the person who posted that they really liked my tie. I put a lot of thought in that this morning. And the same person, I believe, or I think it was the same person, said that if there were no true liberal bloggers on this panel, there were also no true conservative bloggers on this panel, so we are indeed fair and balanced if only by omission.

Jodie, you had a very sort of thoughtful thing to say here and it went to this--not only the parasitic point, but also the challenge of this whole media to the economics of newspapering. Let me just read something that Jodie sent me.

"If you want to get depressive about it, you might conclude that newspapers and other print media are caught in a vicious cycle. Their advertising bases, their life's blood, are being drained by competition from the burgeoning of competitors--not just the Internet-based folks, but the ever-multiplying cable channels. And one of their biggest competitors is, ironically, themselves, their own Internet publication. The number of readers now accessing the New York Times online apparently now exceeds the number of paid subscribers to the paper." If anybody

out there knows the true answer to that question, we can get rid of the "apparently."

"Even if these newspaper Web sites are highly successful in attracting ads and are able to cover the marginal costs of their operation, the emphasis here has to be on the word `marginal.'"

Can you talk about all that and the whole kind of parasitical problem?

MS. ALLEN: I think that, E.J., this is at the heart of the future of journalism at this point. The problem is that nobody's figured out how to pay for what is emerging as the new journalism. And I have long been--and here I should point out that I have my feet in both camps, although I am here to speak for print journalism. In fact, I joined Slate even before Jack did. And I am a Web addict. I truly believe that, not entirely, but in substantial part, all the media are going to converge and that we will very soon be carrying around with us--they'll be so cheap that the cable companies will give them away--little screens on which--there will be high resolution--you can download your morning newspaper. And you can also program whatever news clips you want. You can do this now. If you go to one of the news sites, you can call up that

little part of the evening news you'd like to see. Live. This is going to happen, I think, pretty soon.

The problem is, who's going to pay for it. Because even when a newspaper such as the Wall Street Journal brags that its Web site pays for itself, it is not. It is covering its own additional cost, its own marginal cost, but it is not contributing the price of that bureau in Beijing. And as you've no doubt read, there are fewer and fewer bureaus in Beijing, let alone Indonesia or other very active parts of the world. Already the print journals are feeling this competition, seeing their advertising bases split apart by narrow focused cable channels as well as by the Internet. Both of those media sell their ads much more cheaply than print newspapers do.

And it's important to remember that a big newspaper like the Post actually loses money on each edition that it delivers to a doorstep unless that doorstep happens to be very close to the printing plant. It does that so that it can charge more for the advertising. Nobody has figured this out. And especially painful for newspapers is the loss of classified advertising. And I can see why. If you're looking for an apartment, why not go to an apartment site and you could put in the exact coordinates you want and up will come several well-targeted

choices and you don't have to plow through all those pages of newsprint.

So it's going to happen. And the question is who's going to pay for all those bureaus where the real reporting goes on? Tom Rosenstiel at the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism has just put out a very thoughtful report--I have a copy of it here--on this whole problem. He says that the danger is that the old journalism of verification, the journalism based on reporting--and reporting is expensive, let alone follow-up--is being replaced by the journalism of assertion: Well, I read this and here's what I think. And as Forbes magazine recently pointed out, opinions are a lot cheaper than facts. They're a lot easier to come by. And that is where I fear journalism generally--and this isn't just because of the blogs. The blogs often have provided important fact checks. And certainly the Internet is now. I mean, like Annenberg School's importantfactcheck.org was a wonderful policing force throughout the campaign. It's not that there is not a role for the Net to play here. And of course some of the most egregious problems, the false newsman in the newsroom and CBS fake documents, were exposed by blog. So they have a role, but reporting is

expensive and we haven't figured out who's going to pay for it.

And incidentally, just to add, if anybody is interested in facts on the Internet during the campaign, we at Pew have lots of them. We have an Internet project, Internet in the Society, that catalogs the high general public use of the Internet as a source of political information. About 30 percent of the total public used the Internet, not necessarily to blog, but to various news sites to find out political information. And considering that only somewhat more than half of the adult population voted, that 30 percent is a big and growing number.

We also have information on blogs, for example, Dean activists. Eighteen percent of Dean activists consulted online columns and blogs, and 9 percent consulted Wonkette.com.

MR. DIONNE: So a secret Dean supporter. Thank you.

Welcome, Andrew Sullivan. Your timing is exquisite, because we haven't got through the whole panel.

MR. SULLIVAN: I'm sorry. I was given the wrong time.

MR. DIONNE: Oh. In fact, this is listed on one piece of paper to close at 11:30 and on another piece of

paper to close at 12:00. So we'll probably do a Clintonian compromise and close around 11:45, if that works for everybody.

Let me turn to Ellen Ratner, because I don't want to lose Jodie's point. There are two points in particular--"threads" some bloggers call them--that I want to hold on to. One is this whole question of mainstream media paying for reporting and what an impact this has on the economics of newspapers. The second is does this medium reflect a polarization that's deep in our political culture, or does it aggravate that or deepen that polarization--or are those the wrong questions to ask?

Let me ask Ellen Ratner how this media interacts with traditional talk media. This is probably the comment of a paranoid liberal. It strikes me that conservatives have, on balance, been much more successful in putting together all of their media in an effective way, that you have the bloggers who link up with the talk show hosts who link up with some folks on Fox News, and they kind of multiply the power they have; and that liberals may be doing that more than I've noticed or they may be catching up or maybe they're not doing it. I'd like you to talk about that.

MS. RATNER: Well, first of all, the liberal media is--or the blogosphere has been sort of more the area of liberals, according to the folks at G.W., Carol Darr and that crop. So I think that that's interesting, that traditionally the liberals have not been in the talk media and the blogosphere now is much more for a liberal. But that's quickly changing.

First of all, I want to say that at this point we're talking about new media. Talk radio used to be considered new media. We run something called the New Media Seminar every year. But the Internet really is traditional at this point, because it's so ingrained in our times, and that also, you know, at this point blogging is sort of traditional. We're now into pod casting. And so I think that it's rapidly changing in terms of what is going to be--what's liberal, what's conservative, and which is the purview of each. We have much more liberal talk radio. And with pod casting out there now, it's going to change, it is going to do--what blogging did to print, pod casting is going to do to radio and talk television.

MR. DIONNE: Thank you.

MS. RATNER: That's a fast answer to--

MR. DIONNE: Yes, I want to get--oh, by the way, oh, there we go. I lost my screen there for a second.

On this question of politics, I looked at AndrewSullivan.com this morning, and we were talking about this the other day, that there is--and this is not only true of people on blogs, it's also true of columnists and other traditional forms of commentators--but that people tend to support those who blog who agree with them consistently, and they tend to denounce those-- In some ways they denounce more those who are not seen as being ideologically consistent or rigid.

For example, on AndrewSullivan.com, there were two postings on the front page. "Conservatism come undone. So it is now the federal government's role to micromanage baseball and to prevent a single Florida woman who is trapped in a living hell from dying with dignity. We're getting to the point when conservatism has become a political philosophy that believes that government at the most distant level has the right to intervene in almost anything to achieve the right solution. Today's conservatism is becoming yesterday's liberalism. So all liberals applaud."

Then I moved down the same page, and there is Andrew saying, "Repeal the Medicare entitlement. It's the only course for fiscal sanity if we want to avoid tax

hikes, and I do." And then somebody like me says, "Aw c'mon, Andrew."

How do you deal with this fact that you are not easily pigeon-holed as--you know, in some ways you're more a libertarian, but you're not exactly that either.

MR. SULLIVAN: I just write what I think. The great sort of joy of writing your own blog is that even if you were in a nicely sort of heterogeneous magazine like The New Republic, which is about as tolerant a magazine of dissent as you can get, there are still parameters in which you're not really quite allowed to go outside. And I think even more now on the right, you know, you're not going to find many dissident views on National Review anymore or Weekly Standard, or The Nation, God help us.

But a blog allows you to say whatever you want. And the truth is those two things are absolutely consistent. It is completely consistent to say you're a states-rights sort of limited government conservative that believes in balancing the budget. I mean, I know balancing the budget is no longer a conservative aspiration whatsoever. The conservatism is now building massive amounts of debt. Or that conservatism now means that states have no rights, that anything can be sold by the federal government. I'm an old-fashioned conservative.

The Bush administration isn't. They're this weird mix of things which I don't think we've quite figured out. The joy of it is I can write what I think.

Now, the readers have taken it out on me for that reason. I mean, I was very pro-war. And then when the Iraq occupation was a shambles, I think, my e-mail box was just jammed with hostility. I'll give you a little interesting example. I did three fund-raising drives. The first one was when I was at my most pro-war, so many conservatives loved it and I raised \$80,000. Which I was kind of amazed by.

MR. DIONNE: Eighty thousand dollars in a very short period of time.

MR. SULLIVAN: In a week.

MR. DIONNE: It's a good income for those who--

MR. SULLIVAN: But no, my point is that the following year, when I had attacked the administration's handling of Iraq, it went to \$20,000. The following year, when I did another fund-raiser, where I was clearly slamming the administration for its fiscal insanity and its betrayal of any fundamental conservatives principles for its own power, I got \$12,000.

So of course all of it's jam in a way. But it does show you that there is a price to be paid. Readers

want to read what they want to read. They like to have their own prejudices or feelings confirmed. And when you constantly challenge them--and my problem is that the liberals are as offended as the conservatives half the time. But hey, this is great. It's not that expensive to run, so why don't we get out there and annoy everybody? That's my principle. As long as you're being consistent.

MR. DIONNE: Jack, what is your view about it? I mean, Slate was one of the first--perhaps I should get both Jodie and Jack on this--was one of the first online publications. What kind of response do you get? I mean, one of the striking things about this new world is how quick response to everything that's written not only online but also--again, to use that awful term--old media, you really hear very quickly from people. How do you, sort of--can you talk about--

MR. SHAFER: When Mike Kinsley launched Slate in the summer of '96, the obvious model was the print magazine model. And I think Jodie will confirm that we basically had a sort of news cycle or a production cycle of a week, where originally Mike was just going to sort of publish everything on Friday. And then he realized, well, you know, there's no printing press; I can press a button, put it up on the Web at any point. And so we started

publishing daily but still observing sort of a weekly news cycle.

But within three or four months, I think that we started getting caught up in tighter and tighter news cycles. And rather than, you know, conceive a piece on Monday, have it written during the week and posted on Friday, we would just accelerate the process. And, you know, a piece would be pitched in the morning, written and edited, and up by 4 o'clock. And I heard from friends working at the Washington Post Outlook section that we were driving them crazy, because they'd have a story meeting on Tuesday and start thinking about assigning a piece, and they'd say, no, no, that won't hold till Sunday--Slate will have already written that story.

MR. DIONNE: That's because Jodie had moved over to Slate, right?

MS. ALLEN: In fact, we reached the low point of hourly journalism, do you remember, when the news broke that there really was a stain on Monica's dress and we couldn't find anyone else to go down and report on the reaction at the White House and so I went. As far as I could tell, there wasn't any reaction, but you can look on the Web. I ended up interviewing Wolf Blitzer.

MR. DIONNE: What did he know about the stain?

MS. ALLEN: Denied everything.

MR. SHAFER: But, you know, the news cycles gotten tighter and tighter and now I think that what bloggers--I mean Andrew, Andrew is out there. When he's working at his best he's crunching news cycles from midnight to 5 a.m., right? And so--

MR. DIONNE: He's on European time.

MR. SHAFER: Yeah, exactly.

MR. SULLIVAN: No, I'm on Pacific Coast time.

MR. SHAFER: Yeah, that's it.

So I think what's happened is that the news cycle, what happened is the Web very quickly, within six months of Slate getting started, realized that it wasn't just the print put up on Web, anymore than streaming video on a Web site is television. It started to realize its own strengths and weaknesses and, I think, started playing to them.

MR. SULLIVAN: On that point, you know, the great thing about that was that I was able to read--because the Times would put its next-day's edition up around midnight or so, so that was a great opportunity to get in and slam somebody's column before anybody else had read the column. So you actually preempted their own column. It's huge fun.

MR. SHAFER: Yes, I've noticed it is.

MR. SULLIVAN: You have to learn not to have any friends anymore. The key thing is to just ignore the fact that you're going to be--a blogger has to be a pariah, it seems to me, if they're going to really be worth reading. You've got to make enemies, you've got to be fearless. You can't start covering for your friends. You can't start covering for your former or current employers. You just go for it. And if you don't, it's not as good, I don't think.

MR. DIONNE: By the way, I want to beat the bloggers in noting that the Washington Post, which runs my column, recently bought Slate. And I had nothing to do with putting these two Slate people on the panel.

What about that point-- And then I want to bring in the audience and I want to go to some of the e-mails we're getting. This point about making enemies? Because you're--

MS. COX: Everyone is looking at me. Yes, clearly I found the one medium where my poor people skills are an asset and not a detriment and not a liability. I think it's true. I think that, although it's funny, I think that might be changing. I mean, a few people have made the observation that one reason that bloggers, at least in the recent past, have been such good or such eager critics of the mainstream media is that they don't

socialize with the mainstream media, they don't have friends in mainstream media. I mean, the problem is like if you are in that group of people that are writing all the stories that you're critiquing, then it's hard to really get your teeth into something. And that bloggers, I mean, because they tend to be sort of, you know, non-credentialed part-timers--you know, the Pajamahadine, as they say--it's easy to--

[Inaudible discussion.]

MS. COX: Yes, the only person you have to worry about is your cat.

MS. RATNER: The fact is you're absolutely right. If you start to talk at the White House, which I cover, I'm never going to get to ask the president a question. In the four years I've been there, they've never let me, despite we do--

MR. DIONNE: That's because you got those two interviews with Clinton.

MS. RATNER: But if you are in the mainstream media and you ask the hard question, access will be cut off, period, end of statement.

MS. COX: And I think that also exists just within the mainstream media, people who are critics and who already work at, let's say, the Washington Post. I mean,

it's much harder to be a really--like I said, to really get your claws out.

I think that one of the ways, though, that blogging is becoming traditional media--you said that that is happening--is not just because we have a panel on blogging at the Brookings Institution or that a blogger is on the cover of the New York Times Magazine, but it's just becoming more and more like mainstream media in that it's also pack oriented a little bit. I mean, if you look at sort of the feeding frenzies around Easton Jordan, or Dan Rather for that matter, it's hierarchical. I mean, there are some bloggers that are more important than others and sort of treated with more--

MR. DIONNE: Is that purely because of audience?

MS. COX: I think, yeah, largely. Although it's funny. Like, I--my audience is actually not that big, but because I write a lot about journalism and journalists, a lot of journalists write about me. There's this very great feedback loop, or circle jerk, depending on--

[Laughter.]

MS. COX: But it--

MR. DIONNE: That's a blogging term.

MS. COX: Right. And another way that blogging is becoming like mainstream media is it's sort of clique-y.

I think people are starting to meet each other in real time and starting to meet each other face-to-face. And it does get harder and harder to, like, keep making enemies if you get to know people.

And so, my one--I've said--the metaphor I use a lot, though, I don't think it's completely depressing--I mean, in some ways it's a good thing. I think that blogging is a lot like punk rock, in that when your favorite band gets [inaudible], there's still going to be someone else like, practicing in the garage down the street. I think that for all the--like, once the hierarchy gets established in the blogosphere, my hope is that people are going to try to upset it. That would be in the spirit of blogging at least.

MR. DIONNE: I want to ask one more question and then I want to turn to--first of all, the people who were good enough to get out of their pajamas and come to this room today deserve an immediate shot. But I can't resist asking one particular question. There is this new development where, you know, we look at bloggers as these independent souls who have their independent views and express them. But what we started to see in the last election are bloggers for hire, where political parties paid money to blogs to, in--you know, in the case--The New

Republic had a good piece on the bloggers who I guess were in the pay of some Republican organization, who went after the Argus Leader, South Dakota's paper, to say they were too soft on Tom Daschle--

MS. RATNER: The Republican Convention had actually, on Radio Row, they took a section, they actually put them sort of behind curtains, where they had their "paid" bloggers. They called them bloggers, they credentialed them as bloggers, but Wonkette wasn't there, other people weren't there. And so they were sort of a paid blogger.

MR. DIONNE: And so there's that--and then you've got Kos, who is open about it, but he raises money for candidates as well as commenting on things and having a lot of people come--

MR. SHAFER: Why is that a problem, E.J.?

MR. DIONNE: Well, the question is does this blow up--first of all, does it blow up any kind of campaign regulation? Second, I think the problem in particular that bothers me is whether it's open or not. In other words, it seems to me helpful in terms of truth in advertising to know whether someone is being paid specifically by a party or whether they are expressing these views. And

independent conservative is different from a paid party activist; and independent liberal the same.

MR. SHAFER: I think that what you do is you analyze the information. And I wouldn't get really that hung up on who's paying the person's bills. Andrew got caught in a controversy a couple of years ago where he's written a lot about the pharmaceutical industry and has very strong opinions on it. And on the business side of his blog, he attracted a--the pharmaceutical lobby started running ads. And he came under this shit storm of criticism that somehow he was compromised by this and the pharmaceutical companies had bought his point of view. And he ultimately kicked the ad out, which I don't think he should have. And I defended it--

MS. ALLEN: But that's different.

MR. SHAFER: Wait a minute. Wait a minute. I defended him and said, you know, let's--I'm not really worried about the banner ad. Let's analyze, you know, the truth value of Andrew's copy. And that should be the fundamental thing.

Now, this is not me saying that every political organization--that I support the sort of blind financing of blogs and think that's fine and we need not worry about it. But I don't think we should get hung up on policing it.

You trust the--you analyze the information. I mean, it's quite possible that somebody who's in the pay of the GOP or the Democratic Party may come to true conclusions or present arguments that are fascinating and interesting. And, you know, I think that's the fundamental thing to worry about. If this trend continues, it will take us back into the 1980s or so, where we had very partisan presses that--I mean 1880s, sorry. I get mixed up in my centuries.

MR. DIONNE: I remember covering the Garfield campaign. Older media.

MR. SHAFER: Where newspapers were essentially the appendages of the political parties and the political machines. But, you know, I think that the wonderful thing about the Internet and the blogosphere and, you know, radio frequency is that there's huge, huge playing field for people to express themselves on. And I wouldn't want any thought police coming down and saying, you know, as that one FEC commissioner said, Oh, we would have to ban this kind of blogging because it's financed by a political party, therefore these thoughts are verboten and will be censored.

MS. ALLEN: But it just seems to me that it ought to be labeled. The difference with the controversy over Andrew is that everybody could see the ad where they knew

it was being paid for and you can draw your own conclusions. And I agree there was no problem with Andrew's. But when it's hidden, it's just like paid political announcements on the television. We require "This has been paid for" and "I approve this ad," you know. It's a matter of public information for people to know.

But on the more positive side--

MR. SHAFER: That would be my preference, Jodie, but I would not spend a lot of time policing it and hand-wringing about it. I mean, what Kos writes is what Kos writes. If he's in the pay--he's clearly partisan. It's not going to be any surprise to anybody that Kos is a liberal Democrat.

MS. COX: And I think, for better or for worse, it's hard to keep a secret in the blogosphere if you're getting paid by anyone. I mean, like, these-- Most of us don't get paid very much.

MS. ALLEN: But I think it is worth noting, though, in bringing up this discussion about whether blogs feed upon themselves and a like-minded audience, it does turn out to be true. But one sort of heartening thing, again coming from Tom Rosenstiel at the Pew Project on Excellence, in his State of the Media Report he points out that this huge surge that was feared would come in what he

calls the journalism of affirmation--and people do have this tendency--that that surge has not materialized by and large, with a couple of notable exceptions--talk radio, although not all talk radio; and Fox News. By and large people accessing the Internet for news start their searches at the Web sites of the major newspapers or the network TV channels and then they become what Rosenstiel calls proactive assemblers of their own newscast, as I suggest we all will become.

But people are still fact-oriented still. But there is this minority--and as I point--and I think that this is interesting, that even among Dean activists online, this is a campaign that was totally practically organized around the Internet, their first source of news was the daily newspaper, the second was National Public Radio. Then the Internet.

MR. DIONNE: I just want to, on the cost thing, and then I want to open it up, I think the problem will come if the Internet becomes a way, to use that old 1990s phrase, a way of completely blowing a hole through all campaign finance regulation.

MR. SHAFER: I would applaud that.

MR. DIONNE: Yeah, I figured you would.

MR. SHAFER: Campaign finance regulations are, in my opinion, they're a detriment. They're in violation of the First Amendment. And you know, why, why, why the party--why a blog would send all these considered opinion that should be censored under campaign finance regulations, but the editorial page of the Washington Post shouldn't be, is to me preposterous.

MR. DIONNE: Anyway, we will have a campaign finance system argument another time.

MR. SHAFER: Okay.

MR. DIONNE: I want to, just to give Andrew a last--not a last--there are no last words here, but on this whole issue that you had your converts, why did take the ad--after Jack Shafer so boldly defended you, why did you dump the ad?

MR. SULLIVAN: What actually happened was that I never ran the ad. I actually wrote the--beforehand, I got this possible deal from Pharma. And the New York Times picked this up, ran a huge story about my being co-opted, even though about a year before, I'd written a piece for the New York Times about why I loved the drug companies--and my long history of attacking the attacks on the pharmaceutical companies.

Anyway, I raised huge amounts of protest. And you know, I just felt it wasn't worth--I just felt I didn't want anybody to--every time I talked about the drug companies, for somebody on the far left to say he's bought and paid for. So I just--I never actually got the money. It was just offered to me. So it all blew up. That's about four years ago now. Because back then, we were really--I mean, what I was partly trying to do was figure out how to make this self-sustaining, because that seemed to me to be where the medium would take off, if it could manage to pay for itself. And now, thanks to blog ads, primarily, it is beginning to pay for itself modestly.

So I was just, you know, trying something out. I just didn't want any of my views ever to be compromised by that kind of accusation. So--I was a coward, and decided to be free of it.

MR. DIONNE: Or responsible.

Who wants to ask a question? Please identify yourself. And just to suggest some of the problems we have on this media, and also the possibilities, there is an e-mail we got that reads, from Dave Runyan, "It is amazing that the first bloggers for secret pay in the last election were South Dakota Democrats, but now all we hear about is Republicans at the convention."

Now, the problem here is I have absolutely no idea whether that is true or not. But again, the advantage of the blog is if somebody out there knows the truth of this, they can presumably report it to us online. So either we have been told a very interesting fact, or not, and I don't know how to distinguish it right now.

Please, right over here.

QUESTION: Ann Pincus of the Center for Public Integrity.

I was struck when you first spoke and you commented that the great thing about blogs is that they're a fact-checking mechanism. I love blogs. I think they're very immediate. But I think a lot of blogs are inaccurate and put out information that is totally wrong and sort of slanders and libels people. So I'm wondering whether you think there should be any standards at all for bloggers. That's my question.

MR. DIONNE: Who wants to defend libeling people?

MS. COX: I'll go for it.

[Laughter.]

MR. DIONNE: I thought you might.

MS. COX: I'll slander you first and then you can-- No.

I mean, I think that, I mean, I think this is the sort of standard answer from a blogger, is that it's hard to actually get away with baseless accusations on blogs because people will write back and let you know that your accusations are baseless. It's not a perfect mechanism by any means, but it works. I mean, like sort of the massive swarming of e-mails you'll get from people correcting you.

Also, I mean, blogging is like any other kind of sort of market, you know, based information trading place, I guess. I'm mixing metaphors wildly. And that, like, if you keep on putting up stuff that's incorrect, people will stop reading you.

MR. DIONNE: Unless they really like to hate the people you are writing nasty things about.

MS. COX: Yeah. I mean, I think if you just, like, put up nothing but inaccurate slander against somebody, I think that it stops being either entertaining-- I mean, it's not useful to anyone. So, I mean, what--I'm actually curious. You seem to feel passionately about this. Is there a specific example you're thinking of?

QUESTION: I'm not passionate, but I do think that some people--you can be attacked and not want to get into the blog game.

MS. COX: Well, oh, but people will--

QUESTION: So how does that person or that organization or that [inaudible] or whoever deal with inaccuracies on blogs? I'm finished with this. I think this is my personal issue.

MS. COX: Well, if you don't want to get involved with correcting a piece of information about you--

QUESTION: Not me personally.

MS. COX: Well, I mean, if one does not want to get involved with correcting a piece of information about oneself, I mean, it's hard--I know, that's a difficult question. I mean, I do think in general, like, because bloggers are so, like, the point of personal pride for bloggers about being this massive fact-checking engine, I mean, even if it's about someone else, I mean, I think that someone out there would want to point out that someone got it wrong.

MR. SHAFER: The New York Times publishes about 4,000 corrections a year, which is about twice as many as any other daily newspaper. Does that mean that the New York Times is a less accurate newspaper than the Washington Post or the Chicago Tribune or the L.A. Times, or does it mean it's a more responsible newspaper, that is, when it makes an error, there is a process by which it corrects them? I think that's true. Is it true that the New York

Times has a larger readership of very well-informed people who will point out the errors to the New York Times? I think that's true. Is the New York Times a fair--you know, by newspaper standards, a fairly responsible publication that will correct meaningful errors? And that's true.

I think that we can't reduce all blogs to--as much as we'd like to, we can't reduce them all to sort of slanderous piles of lies. Because, as Ana says, you know, slanderous piles of lies are fun to read for awhile, but then you want to move off to find information that has higher truth value or higher use to you. You know, one person's slander is another person's truth. One person's wild uninformed opinion is, once again, another person's--

MR. DIONNE: No, but that's not true. That's not true. That very specific, that last sentence you spoke, there is truth. In other words, slander is not true. If something is said about someone that's slanderous and it turns out to be absolutely untrue, that can't be someone else's truth, because it's false.

MS. COX: Right. All it can be is entertaining.

MR. SHAFER: No, no, one person's slander-- You can sue me for slander, we could go to court. You still think it's slander after the court acquits me of slander. You would still till your deathbed go and say that was

slander, Jack Shafer slandered me. And the court might agree with me that it was not slander.

MR. DIONNE: No, but I'm not talking about something that's debatable. I'm saying that there are things printed about people--and it's not confined to blogs--

MR. SHAFER: It depends on the court, it depends on the individual. I can say the most ugly, false thing about the president of the United States. It can't be slander. You know, case law says it cannot be slander. I can say he's having sex with the pandas in the zoo, you know?

MS. COX: I saw that.

MR. SHAFER: You saw that.

MR. DIONNE: It's going to be in her column.

MR. SHAFER: And even though, you know, it's not--it's protected speech. One person's slander can be another person's--

MR. DIONNE: I'm not talking about the legal standard, I'm talking about the ethical standard, that there is--and granted, old-fashioned media have printed things that are not true about someone. So the question about the blogger--and Andrew, come in on this--is, is this a better medium, "better" in quotes, for spreading slander,

untrue things, than the old media because it's easy to get something out online? And I'm talking here about a very specific thing, which is untrue stuff about an individual. Does it get around easier online, and what do you do about that? What is the proper way to deal with that?

MS. ALLEN: I was amazed that the New York Times this week did an interview with Jeff Gannon. And he is asked about these pictures of himself on the Internet that most of us who don't normally look at [inaudible]. And, you know, he talks about composite pictures, but he doesn't answer yes or no.

So to answer your question, yes, it certainly can do a viral kind of thing, that things get around very, very quickly, but also it has certainly given people a chance to do very kind of creative denials that got out very quickly.

MR. SHAFER: If blogs were a fountain of slander, we would see probably more lawsuits. I know very, very few slander [inaudible] lawsuits.

MS. ALLEN: Well, [inaudible].

MR. SHAFER: But they're very, very few. Whereas daily newspapers and magazines and broadcasters publish and broadcast, you know, potentially libelous and arguably libelous material all the time and get dragged into court. Do you know of any slander or libel lawsuits from blogs?

MS. ALLEN: But remember, Jack, that for the very reason that you earlier offered, and that is that you can't libel a public figure, that's why there aren't so many lawsuits. But we had a perfect example very recently of this aide to the governor of Maryland putting a truly slanderous statement about the mayor of Baltimore out on the Web knowing it would be passed around. I mean, and we can expect more like that.

MR. SHAFER: Newspapers have done the same thing, Jodie. There's nothing exceptional about the blogs.

MR. SULLIVAN: I think there is. Let me explain. Everybody knows the phenomenon of when you write an e-mail, for some reason it liberates you to be meaner and sort of more outrageous than when you write a letter. For some reason. I mean, it's quicker and easier. And because you can do it so quickly, you often get angry or ticked off about something and you throw it off there and you regret it and it's gone forever. And of course that e-mail could be posted on any site anywhere at some point and the whole world can see.

What human beings used to do was gossip about each other and throw out all sorts of untrue things and innuendos. And the point about the Web, I think, in general--forget blogs for a minute--is that it simulates a

certain different kind of level of conversation in which these kinds of accusations and gossip are much more sort of accessible. It seems to facilitate that kind of discussion. So I think that is the nature of it. It's chattier. Because it's chattier, it's got more gossip.

However, I think most of the stuff, the nasty stuff on the Web often is directed to other bloggers, actually. It's a very internecine warfare. Most of the vicious things, good knows, I mean, the stuff that's been written about me just blows your mind in terms of what--you want nefarious motives, you want this--the point is, if it's not true, it's not true. So forget about it. It's just someone gossiping about you somewhere.

MS. RATNER: But in terms of getting negative e-mails, et cetera, I mean, in Talk Radio that's all we get. I mean, somebody said to me did you ever get a positive e-mail? I said I can't really remember one--in the talk media. Maybe you get them in the blogosphere, but we certainly don't get them in the talk media.

MS. COX: I'm up there now on the screen.

MR. DIONNE: Oh, there you are.

MS. COX: That's ego surfing.

MR. DIONNE: This question of the Baltimore mayor. This was a rumor that most bloggers and most

mainstream media would not have published. Then there was a huge controversy over it, and then he had to come out and say this is not true. Now, in some ways the posting ended up hurting the governor whom the poster worked for more than the mayor of Baltimore. On the other hand, this rumor is now out there and there are certainly going to be people who will wonder, well, was it true, was his denial true. I don't think the mainstream media would have published that rumor.

MR. SULLIVAN: They wouldn't have published it even if it were true, would they? I mean, that's the thing. The other side of it is there is no--this poor guy Gannon, you know, I don't think it had any relevance whatsoever to his role as a White House correspondent that he had some other stuff going on the side. But these people have no scruples whatsoever, and target people's private lives in the way that is really quite--

MS. ALLEN: [Inaudible] advertising.

MS. COX: But it still had nothing to do with whether or not he's a good journalist. I think more journalists should look that good naked, actually.

MR. SHAFER: How many publications published information about the possibility of Bill Clinton having an affair before they knew it was absolutely true? Lots of

publications. Lots of publications were writing about that before they had, you know, the stained dress.

MR. SULLIVAN: All they had was a 40-year record of consistent philandering.

MR. DIONNE: This gentleman over here.

QUESTION: First of all, E.J., someone called you sexy up there. I just want you to know that.

MR. DIONNE: This proves how inaccurate the blogosphere really is. But thank you, whoever that is.

QUESTION: I wanted to ask you about comments sections and whether you think they're constructive or not. One thing that's amazed me about the blogosphere is how many intelligent voices are actually-- [flip tape] --that don't have, you know, prime real estate on the New York Times op-ed page and have something to say. But what I find is that the comments sections open up this real cacophony of crap and name-calling and seven exclamation points, and really don't add much to the debate. On the other hand, it seems the comments sections are consistent with the democratic spirit of the blogosphere. I just wanted to hear what the panel thought.

MS. COX: I'm anti-comments section on my blog. I mean, like, that's, you know. I mean, I think--

MR. SHAFER: Keep your hands off my blog.

MS. COX: Yeah. I think that the spirit of the blogosphere is maybe less democratic than just, like, individualistic. I mean, so I think that--I get a lot of complaints--or not a lot, but sort of regular complaints about not having a comments section. It sort of seemed like less, you know, legitimately bloggy. But I find--I mean, I will--I'm a control freak and I don't want to have anyone posting anything that I don't approve of on my blog. I mean, I post enough things myself I don't approve of.

But, you know, but they can be--I mean, but then there are places where, I mean, I sort of appreciate, like, the raucousness of, like, Democratic Underground or Free Republic or places that are sort of built to contain, like, a free-for-all. I mean, there is discussion there; I just don't want it happening on my site.

MR. SULLIVAN: I went back and forth on this for years and came up with--because the quality of many of the people that wrote me was so amazingly high. I mean, one of the most staggering things for me was how extraordinarily smart, well-informed, intelligent my readers were, just from reading their e-mails. And I wanted to find some way to include that. But I felt that if you did a comments board it would be a complete mess. So what I decided to do was hire an intern who would independently of me--and the

instruction was run the most critical e-mails you can find, set up an e-mail page, and then I would personally pick an e-mail of the day every day that took me to the woodshed or that added some new detail. So I tried to kind of get the best out of what was coming back without turning it into a circus. That was my--but it means more work. An intern, it means reading 800 e-mails a day, or trying to read as many of them as you can.

MR. DIONNE: So, Andrew, does this mean that the letters to AndrewSullivan.com are edited, but the copy isn't? Your copy isn't?

MR. SULLIVAN: Exactly.

MR. DIONNE: By the way, two things posted here-- I guess this is from Daniel Drezner, whom Andrew Sullivan has blurbed as having an excellent blog: "Sullivan points out that bloggers are much harsher to each other than to any public figure. I have no idea what he's talking about." So Andrew, you can respond to that.

MR. SULLIVAN: Well, you can click on the link.

MR. DIONNE: Dishonesty in defense of--there it is.

MR. SULLIVAN: There's a whole blog devoted to attacking me. It's called SullyWatch. And all they do every day, whatever I say, is point out that it's full of

crap. Which--my boyfriend reads it rather than me and tells me the funniest bits and threatens to send them stuff all the time.

So what the hell?

MR. DIONNE: If you hear of SullyWatch.com--

MS. COX: No, they're looking for it.

MR. SULLIVAN: No, no, no.

MS. COX: It's not worth looking at.

MR. DIONNE: Could we go back? There was another comment there, where we were. And sir, you wanted to comment?

QUESTION: Yes. It's a question for Ellen Ratner in part because it's a question about talk radio and radio in general with respect to political voices. Some of us are working with Jim Wallace and Sojourners--this is the guy who has the new book out, "God's Politics." And in talking with him about talk radio, Ellen, we all know that since the demise of the fairness doctrine a number of years ago, the right wing voice in talk radio morphed into this huge giant--not just Rush Limbaugh but all the others, that parade of horrors, if you will.

So my question, Ellen, is with [inaudible] to progressive voices in talk radio, since talk radio is a medium of polarization, and at least some progressives,

like Jim Wallace, are looking for bridges not wedges, my question is this: Does the medium of talk radio lend itself to bridge-building not wedge-making, and is there a way in radio that a progressive religious voice can be heard in the land?

MS. RATNER: Well, first of all, I am a minority of one in the talk industry, in that I believe in the fairness doctrine. There's not one other person in the entire talk industry that I know who believes in the fairness doctrine. So that's interesting.

Traditionally talk radio and talk media has been the medium of the outsiders, whether it be the liberals or the conservatives. And there isn't that sort of middle, a middle talk show host, although Jim Bohannon is certainly one and there are some other people who claim to sort of be in the middle. So it's not generally the purview, unless you talk about women's talk radio, where there are very different issues.

There is a place for Jim in talk radio if he wanted to do it, but he'd probably have to go through the untapped religious group of people, not the traditional Janet Parshall or--who's the guy in Colorado Springs? I'm blocking.

MR. SULLIVAN: Jim Dobson.

MS. ALLEN: Dobson. It would sort of not be the Parshall-Dobson crowd, it may be a more liberal or medium-religious crowd. And that's the group he would tap into. We can talk about it later if you want. But that--it's different.

MR. DIONNE: But isn't it the case that talk radio is a little bit like the world we're talking about, that the opinion world in general tends to reward people who are--

MS. RATNER: Eighty thousand bucks, hey.

MR. DIONNE: Right. I mean, that's a perfect metaphor for the way the sort of financial market beneath the opinion world works.

MR. SULLIVAN: Although, you know, readership, however, grew. The money thing is a sign of sort of fanatical commitment, but readership continued to rise even when I annoyed both sides. It may even have risen because I annoyed both sides, because people sort of--I think they went to my place sometimes because they were, I wonder what he's going to make of that. So, you know, if you're not as predictable as some people, then I think you can gain audience and readership. So I think bloggers get too hung up on their readership. We tend to get obsessed with our site meters and all the rest of it. But I don't think it's

as depressing as you think, and especially since blog ads will create, I think, in the long run a minimum level of financial support.

I think there is nothing inherent about the blogosphere that does not allow for an interesting, heterogeneous, not easily pigeon-holed blog. And I think it will find a market. It may not in a polarized climate be a huge blog, but it's there, and there are plenty of them out there. And it's not the blogosphere's fault, it's the culture that we're living in.

MR. SHAFER: I see no reason to obsess on polarization of political blogs, because no one obsesses about the polarization of political magazines. You know, the only mainstream non-ideological political magazine that's been published in the America in the last 30 or 40 years was George. And it died because it didn't have a spine. It didn't stand up on either side. We expect partisanship from political publications. It's preposterous to expect, you know, a lukewarm bath.

MR. DIONNE: That's a good point.

QUESTION: I'm Terry Krepel with ConWebWatch.com. It's a media watchdog site that watches specifically conservative news sites such as WorldNetDaily, the site that Ms. Ratner writes for.

MS. RATNER: I write a liberal column for WorldNetDaily.

QUESTION: Right. And I wanted to ask you about that. You and, I believe, Bill [inaudible] are the only two liberal columnists out of something like 30-odd conservative libertarian columnists at a site that is unabashedly conservative. How do you see your role as writing for a Web site that is contradictory, critical, if not openly hostile to your views?

MR. DIONNE: In other words, how can you hang around with these people is the question.

MS. RATNER: I've spoken at liberal conferences and people hiss me, as they have done Alan Colmes, for working at Fox News Channel. My simple answer is no liberal sites have asked me to write for them, and Fox found me early on in the game and I've been very at Fox and I'm very happy at WorldNetDaily. They treat me very well. So, hey. There weren't any other takers. I mean--and I started out very early at Fox and people were--let me just sort of comment on that, is that, you know, there's often a thing about, well, you're a liberal, how could you be? Well, in Washington I've learned to pay a lot of attention to sort of who is nice and sort of their human skills. And I've found the WorldNetDaily people to be very nice in

their human skills. They're fun to be with and they're fun to talk to. I've found the same thing about Fox News Channel. I don't always find that from some of the, quote-unquote, people that I would have a political affinity to. And I see some heads shaking, so people know exactly what I'm talking about.

QUESTION: Gary Mitchell from The Mitchell Report.

I'd love to just get the perspective of people on this panel about the distinction--on sort of basic definitions, between, for example, media and journalism. And there's a sort of assumption operating here that what we're looking at up on the screen and what people on this stage are writing is journalism. And I'm interested to know whether, for example, Ana Marie would classify herself as a journalist and Andrew--and I'm talking specifically about AndrewSullivan.com. The question is, when is what appears in the blogosphere journalism, and when isn't it? And if, for example, it is journalism, are bloggers subject to, or do they have the same freedoms that journalists ostensibly have about protecting sources, for example?

MR. DIONNE: This is a great question. By the way, a propos of that, we got an e-mail nominating Ana Marie to be the writer for The Reliable Source's column in

the Washington Post. And this reader wanted to know if you'd ever do it.

But I'd like to answer Gary's question. Jodie has some views on this too, I know.

MS. COX: And I was going to say, when you get to the--I'm not sure how useful the distinction between journalism and media is for most discussions, except maybe the question of protecting sources is perhaps the only time, I think, that it would be really necessary to get very specific about that. I mean, whether or not I consider myself a journalist, what I do on Wonkette is not journalism. I, however, do write whole magazine articles that are longer than one paragraph for real magazines, that get fact-checked. And that's journalism. Whereas actually there's this thing that has numbers and a dial and I put it to my ear and people, voice come the other side. So I'm familiar with the basic techniques of journalism.

But I also think that journalism is sort of an independent question from blogging. I mean, Josh Marshall is a journalist. He happens to have a blog. And what he publishes on his blog sometimes is journalism. I mean, I just don't think, like--one of my favorite happened in the Jeff Gannon case besides the naked pictures. Was that, I think, Howie Kurtz called Gannon a blogger on CNN. And I

think he was not a blogger. He is now, but he wasn't at the time. And I think he called him a blogger just because Gannon got his facts wrong and was biased. And sort of like the Venn Diagram just collapsed in on itself--you know, if you get your facts wrong and you're biased, you must be a blogger.

I mean, I don't know. I mean, I think--I'm not specifically answering your question, but I just think we have to sort of judge what people are claiming they're doing on their blogs. I mean, if what they're presenting themselves as is reporting, then we judge it by the standards of reporting. And if they present it as commentary and analysis and snarkiness, then there are fewer standards to go by.

MR. DIONNE: I think, by the way--I want to go to Jodie--this journalism question is either very interesting or not, and I go back and forth. I'm thinking it's either a very important question or it's not, because, you know, on the one hand, as Jack pointed out or someone pointed out, our own tradition as a nation, journalism and newspapers used to be partisan organs back in the last century, and we went through a kind of transformation for both kind of commercial and Walter Lippman-philosophical reasons before the turn of the century. And yet, for those

of us who started out in old-fashioned journalism, we do think, wait a minute, there are standards. And I think somehow the answer to this question lies either in standards or in feeling part of a tradition. And I think the two are intertwined.

But Jodie or Andrew, do you have--

MS. ALLEN: Perhaps Andrew wants to--

MR. SULLIVAN: I think it's not an interesting question. I think the people are writing about the world. And this whole--I mean, maybe it's because I'm from England, where journalism--

MS. ALLEN: Where facts don't matter much.

MR. SULLIVAN: Well, they do matter. And there's good journalism done in England. But it's done with much less sense of its own self-importance than these preposterous reporters and journalists in Washington who think they are God's gift to mankind. They're not. They're hacks. The English expression "hack" means all journalists. And it's about writing--

MR. DIONNE: That's a term of respect.

MR. SULLIVAN: It's actually a very affectionate term. And I've sometimes gotten in trouble because I've used it in that sense and other people think I'm being extremely mean. No, I think you're writing about the

world. And when I write my blog I'm writing about the world; when I write a column for Time I'm writing about the world. I make sure that everything I say is as true as I can possibly find out and I express it with opinion. What are we talking about? I mean, committing journalism is one of the easiest things in the world. The great myth, that you need to be trained to be a journalist, is a myth. You pick up a phone and do a story, go on the Internet and research something and write it up entertainingly and well, you're a journalist. There's no elite of journalists. And there should be no schools for journalism. People should learn it.

And one of the great ways--I think the next generation of journalists, and where we're finding the new voices, the interns of the future, are people who are writing their own blogs, 21-year-olds who will be noticed by future editors of major magazines as having a distinctive voice and they will come in there. It will be a very good symbiotic process.

MR. DIONNE: Ellen, I want you to come in.

MS. RATNER: I think there is--I mean, we run an intern program and we do train journalists. And I think that there are investigative reporting ways that need to be learned, whether they're learned on the street or whether

they're learned by internship. And there's also the issue of credentialing, which is we were credentialed as a talk radio news service, but believe you me, the radio-TV galleries did not want a credentialed talk radio news 12, 13 years ago because they thought that we weren't journalists. And I do several radio programs every day, 20 of them, where I give the news and then I give my opinion, and you just have to be very clear about which is which. But if you just have the blogosphere and you don't credential anybody, then who do you allow access to the White House, who do you allow access to a particular hearing on the Hill where, yes, anybody can stand in line but you might not get in? And who do you allow access to ask questions? And I'm not saying that people who are on blogosphere shouldn't be credentialed, but where do you begin to draw that line? And I think we're going to be dealing with that question over the next 10 years.

MR. DIONNE: Thank you. There's a comment there that there's a difference between journalism and commentary--this is from the Drezner blog. Actually, I'm not even sure that distinction is right. There is a distinction between--

MR. SULLIVAN: Reporting. Reporting and commentary. And the vast majority of blogs are about commentary. Although nothing's stopping--

MR. DIONNE: Good bloggers report news as well.

MR. SULLIVAN: But I would say 95 percent of blogging is commentary on other people's views.

MS. RATNER: That's the worry, that there will be nobody gathering the news.

MR. SULLIVAN: Oh, no, there always will be.

MR. DIONNE: I think the economics of the news business are an important question.

QUESTION: My name is Andrew Finkel. I'm a hack. I work in Istanbul most of the time, but I write for British and American papers.

My question is this: From this foreign perspective we've watched the United States of America elect a president who said there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. You know, the electorate awarded the president not for telling the truth but for telling what they would call in England a porky pie. I wonder if the panel feels a sense of collective responsibility about the state of journalism for not rewarding people who tell the truth, or whether, as Jodie Allen very perceptively said at the beginning of the panel, that market forces in

journalism no longer reward truth-tellers or people who do their job with integrity.

MR. DIONNE: Jack, do you want to come in on that?

MR. SHAFER: You know, the intelligence agencies of the major Western countries believed that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and there turned out not to be. In 1991, the CIA was equally convinced that Iraq had no substantial weapons of mass destruction program, and once we invaded we found exactly the opposite. So I would not take any great lesson from the fact that Bush and the CIA and the intelligence agencies of all the leading Western countries believed that there were weapons of mass destruction.

There were lots of newspapers that did very, very good credible and skeptical work about the weapons of mass destruction question. Michael Massing wrote a fantastic piece in the New York Review of Books about how Knight Ridder, the Knight Ridder chain of newspapers actually did the best job. And he deduced that the reason that Knight Ridder was so effective was because it didn't have access to the highest sources that, let's say, the New York Times could get to and that they were dealing more with people in

the trenches that gave them a better perspective on what the truth was.

MS. ALLEN: But Jack, it's not that there isn't good journalism. And you recognize--I mean, that's good journalism, going out there and doing the footwork. Not that I can claim that I have ever done that myself to any degree. But that's expensive to do that. And it's not that it doesn't still go on, but it's a lot cheaper to send someone over to sit in the White House press room and get a few comments from the source who doesn't wish to be identified and print that as if it were news. I mean, that's the danger--

MR. SULLIVAN: What blogs [inaudible] is that there are people out there who know stuff that reporters in traditional media would have a hell of a time finding. I remember very distinctly in the 2000 election that I was trying to figure out what the hell was going on in Florida. It was very complicated, county by county, count by count. There happened to be a professor in Florida who was an expert on the election rules in Florida who e-mailed me, corrected me about a certain point, and I was, like, wow, could you tell me more? And suddenly I had a source that was able to tell me a day ahead of most of the mainstream media what was really going on.

One of the good things about the blogosphere is that it can take advantage of this enormous pool of knowledge out there that's random. And if they come to respect you, they will send you information and you can put it out there and put it together. And I don't think the blogs in any way, certainly the ones that weren't completely in the tank for the Bush administration, glossed over the WMD fiasco. I certainly didn't. I know a lot of other people didn't and dealt with it.

MR. DIONNE: This just raised an interesting point. We talk about blogs here. We've gotten very blogified in this discussion. The fact is, though a lot of people use the Internet, they use very traditional sites. The reason this came to mind is that during the recount, I became a regular reader of the St. Pete Times and the Palm Beach Post, which had some very good reporting on what is happening in Florida that did not necessarily appear in any of the other papers. I mean, in this whole discussion are we vastly overrating the role of blogs and underrating the access that the Internet gives all of us to all kinds of sources of information besides the opinionated world of blogs?

MS. ALLEN: Oh, absolutely. That's why I made my point. I mean, when you look at the data, which we do

have, blogs are now a very tiny--they never even show up in the general public as a source, although they do--

MR. SULLIVAN: But how much of their traffic is generated by blogs?

MS. ALLEN: Most of this traffic now--this could change--does go to the traditional news sites.

MR. SULLIVAN: But where does it come from? See, the blogs have a million links. I mean, it's not--we're talking as if the blogs are completely separate. No, we're linking to the New York Times, the Washington Post, St. Pete Times, that we are actually helping those people get readership. In other words, I would hate to think--

MR. SHAFER: Parasitic works both ways.

MS. ALLEN: Yeah. I think that's a good point.

MR. SULLIVAN: The whole point of hypertext links, the one fantastic new development, is that you can read a commentary. If you read it an op-ed in the New York Times, this guy has an opinion, he's writing about a report, say, that's come out, you can't tell whether he's [inaudible]. If it's on a blog, you can click the link and read it directly and compare it with the blog. That is reporting added to the commentary. The commentary interests the person and gets them to read the real reporting. So rather than blogs detracting from reading

mainstream media, I think they are encouraging the reading of mainstream media, to double-check and to get a deeper understanding of what's going on in the world.

MR. DIONNE: By the way, a quick question here from an e-mail that I want to throw into the discussion to add to this. "If journalists see their mission, their starting point as an obligation to stick with and report the facts, what is the starting point mission of a blogger? If you get flooded with a bunch of e-mails saying you're wrong on something, what happens to those e-mails? Do they become a central part of the entry or what?"

But go ahead, pick up on--

MS. COX: I don't think we answered the gentleman's question, which is if we on the panel feel responsible for the downfall of American journalism. I do. Just personally. I can't speak for anyone else.

As for what I do--the question's sort of like-- what was the feedback loop, about--

MR. SULLIVAN: If an e-mail says you're wrong, and you are wrong, you post it as soon as you can.

MS. COX: Right. But then also--I get in trouble because I do a lot of satire. And so when I sort of implied that Jenna Bush was a devil worshipper because she signed the--this symbol--which everyone knows, right, devil

horns, I got lots and lots of e-mail about that. I declined to correct my original post, however, because I knew very well that she's a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin and this is a sign for their sports team, I believe. But, you know, that happens too. I mean, like, it's just--people can--you can upset people but you--I mean, there's sort of this balance which Andrew was talking about, like if you're not upsetting people, that's a--you can't just change everything you say just because you're upsetting people.

MR. SULLIVAN: But you can revise, which I try and do. And I get attacked for this, but I actually, when things change, I do change my mind. And I have-- Well, I have--

MR. : [Inaudible.]

MR. SULLIVAN: Well, I have--you can see that there are certain positions I've taken over the last four years that, on reconsideration, I think are wrong. And I consider the blog to be a kind of conversation with my readers in which I will fess up to that and explain why exactly I got that wrong. And I think that's an integral part of the conversation. I do think it is--I really think part of this medium is about conversation. It's not about a monologue. It really is--and the best blogs to me are

those which directly interact with or listen to the people who are reading you and come back to them.

It's a very creative--if you let it be creative. You have to let go a little bit, and then you won't have to think out loud and not be afraid to say things you may later regret or want to reconsider. That creates a kind of, a new--I think it's a new literary genre, myself, I really do. I think it's beginning to emerge, a kind of way of writing that is neither prose in the old sense nor is it journalism in the old sense nor is it talk radio. It's somewhere between the op-ed page and talk radio. That's where it is. It hovers in between the two.

MR. DIONNE: I feel a Ph.D. thesis coming on somewhere.

QUESTION: I'm Dan [inaudible] and I have two questions for panelists.

The first is for Jack. You mentioned the relative lack of slander suits so far. Do you think once certain blocks reach critical mass of readership, like at the level of a daily newspaper from the 1960s or 1970s, do you think at that point it will be worth pursuing the blogs, trying to reach the New York Times vs. Sullivan standard, that they actually had that constitutional malice, that they knowingly published falsehoods with--

MR. DIONNE: That was not a case against Andrew, by the way.

MR. SHAFER: There will be in 20 years.

MR. SULLIVAN: No, but there was another case in which that was the case.

QUESTION: And the second question is for Jodie. One of your former colleagues, or somebody else who used to work at Pew, is getting strung up right now in the conservative blogs for some off-the-cuff remarks he made that were videotaped about that Pew was the source of funding for much of the campaign finance reform process and it gave out a lot of seed money that got that process started and created critical feedback. Do you think that that's [inaudible] blogging--it was also, as you mentioned, a mainstream paper, the New York Post, which broke it online and which became a major source of that story. Do you think both of those factors are really causing people to not speak unguardedly and to be really fearful, you know, as in the Easton Jordan also, carefully monitoring the remarks that they make in public for fear that it will be blown up and no longer being able to have that sincerity level?

MR. SHAFER: I'll answer my question very briefly because I want to hear Jodie talk about this. There's not

a lot of good case law even yet about what rights people in electronic media, on the Internet, possess. I think we will eventually sort of work this out and it will sort of move through the courts. I think the important thing for everybody to remember is the First Amendment doesn't belong to journalists. It belongs to everybody. And I'm very much in the Andrew Sullivan camp here on this arbitrary distinction of who is and who is not a journalist. Anybody that I pull out of this room and assign a piece to for Slate, who's never written before, and their story appears on Slate with their byline, voila, they're a journalist. And I think that's as it should be.

MR. DIONNE: You can line up in the back, by the way, if you want your assignment.

MS. COX: They don't pay very well, though.

MR. SHAFER: Actually, they do.

So I would say that I tend not to predict, because I always predict wrong, but I would venture that what we'll see is, you know, the full First Amendment rights and prosecutions of libel extending to the blogosphere that we--

MR. SULLIVAN: I bought an expensive liability insurance.

MR. SHAFER: Yeah?

MR. SULLIVAN: Yeah, at the very beginning. Which actually took up a certain of the money that we raised. Precisely because. And set up an LLC, you know, so that the blog exists independently of me as a little company, as it were, just so--because I was nervous, given how many people might have it in for me, that I might be liable to that. But we don't know. I mean, it's basically untested. We have no idea what the possible standards of this are legally.

MR. SHAFER: But I think that they're very positive. The same thing happened with radio. And because radio has been, I think, completely over-regulated, radio and television, since the '20s when it becomes a commercial medium, bit by bit, all the First Amendment rights that belong to print have sort of migrated to broadcast. But it was a long, hard battle. I predict the same thing will happen in the blogosphere.

But what's really interesting, as I think Ana said before, all of these media--or maybe Jodie--all these media are collapsing into one sort of uber-media. A Newsweek story is published in print but also on the Web. You know, a CBS Evening News is broadcast at 6:30, but you can also go and start streaming it, you know, an hour later. You know, is CBS strictly speaking a broadcaster or

is it also the Internet news medium? And I think that in my case it's a foregone conclusion, all these First Amendment rights will be there on the Web.

But I want to hear Jodie talk about this New York Times and Pew story.

MR. DIONNE: See, it was very nice of you to talk long because it gave Jodie a chance to formulate her answer for this.

MS. ALLEN: Well, no, but my answer is fairly simple. I believe--and, you know, I'm not really that familiar with this, but--that applies to the Pew Charitable Trusts that fund the variety of Pew projects, including the Pew Research Center where I now work. And I should warn you I've only been there a couple of months. I think of myself as a reformed journalist, except I just realized that there is no such thing as a journalist--

MR. DIONNE: Recovering journalist.

MS. ALLEN: Recovering journalist.

MR. SHAFER: If you ever work for Slate, you're a journalist forever.

MS. ALLEN: But there is no question that nonprofits, 401(c)3's, which we are, the Pew Research Center, are increasingly sensitive about this sort of attack. And I cannot at all speak for the charitable

trusts and I don't even know the details of the charge. But it is very worrisome, increasingly, I think, and you can be sure that at the Pew Research Center we are constantly sort of vetting things--gee, could somebody read this wrong or, you know, will they say we're not--I mean, it's mostly fear of criticisms from conservatives. Liberals at the moment are not so militant.

But no, it is a definition worry.

MR. DIONNE: I honestly don't understand. I mean, I've been connected to Pew through my religion project, but I speak only for myself here. If an organization has financed a cause and has been open about financing that cause, I don't see the problem. My conservative friends, who finance some really interesting--you know, conservative foundations who finance interesting research, or libertarian foundations, they have the right to do that. And yeah, it created controversy, maybe, because it's--I'm trying to remember exactly what the gentleman said.

But, you know, from my point of view--Jack and I actually disagree on the issue--I thought it was a perfectly good cause. They finance some excellent work that even opponents of campaign finance reform could use. And I think there's a kind of excessive defensiveness on

the part of people who may find themselves periodically on the liberal side. But I speak here only for myself and definitely not for the other guys.

MS. ALLEN: There's no question, I mean--and I don't know the legalities of this thing, but I do know there's nothing the matter with the charitable trusts, as they're set up, funding advocacy-related organizations. And I think that the environmental part that they fund does indulge in--not political advocacy, but advocacy on behalf of the environment.

Now, the terms under which we at the Pew Research Center are set up are different, because we are whatever, and we are very doggedly not advocate. I think the worry is that in the public mind Pew does not want to be labeled as a politically active organization and that that would filter down to all this fact-gathering, which is what most of the projects do.

But it's part of the current environment, and there's no question about that.

MR. DIONNE: The questioner probably has the story in front of him, so I'll ask him to correct me. But what I remember from reading the New York Post story was they had videotape of this Pew honcho bragging about how they created the illusion of grassroots organization and

grassroots demand for--I don't call it campaign finance reform, I call it campaign finance regulation. And he was sort of gloating about the fact that he had basically created this Potemkin village with the research and made it look as though it was rising from the earth. There's a term for that, sort of astroturfing, when corporations do it.

Is that an accurate representation?

QUESTION: I mean, he was very sincere. I worked for the guy when he was at USC, and he's a very nice guy, but he tends to be a little bit spontaneous.

MR. SULLIVAN: He should be a blogger.

QUESTION: You know, he probably is. But when he's been prompted, he's a little too free with his remarks and he basically congratulated himself and Pew on having established this [inaudible]. [Off microphone, inaudible.]

MR. SULLIVAN: Yeah, but it's not just the blogs. I mean, Larry Summers, for example, subject to exactly the same thing. No one blogged it. Some person there leaked it. You don't need--what blogs can do is get it out there very quickly, but I don't think blogging is playing any real--I mean, I think the end of privacy is happening independently of blogging, although blogging may be accelerating it somewhat.

MR. DIONNE: Didn't his mama teach him not to brag?

Just on the campaign finance, one thing that probably wouldn't have happened if McCain's campaign hadn't done something in 2000 also.

QUESTION: Nell [Inaudible.] I just discovered I'm a journalist because I wrote for Slate. So that's good to know.

And as a journalist, it seems to me that I would like to ask you to weigh in on two issues that are currently pending in journalism and let me know--on the Terri Schiavo case, is there some aspect of that case that is best covered by a blog, best covered by talk radio, best covered by traditional media like the Washington Post; or some aspect of the case that, say, a blog could never really do justice to?

And also, about this sort of Michael Kinsley/Susan Estrich thing, it's great that we've got such heterogeneity on this panel, but the fact is there are very few women bloggers, I understand, particularly with regard to politics. Does anybody have any thoughts about why that is?

MS. RATNER: I just want to answer, most of the talk radio hosts have been keep the feeding tube in. There's been a couple that haven't. And what they--

MR. DIONNE: Which reflects a more conservative leaning among the talk radio.

MS. RATNER: Well, what I found that was actually helpful to me was that both sides were able to post articles on their Web sites and information--some that they took from the Miami Herald, which included the whole guardian ad litem thing to Governor Bush. But it was in their sort of--one of my hosts, named Scott, has this thing called Scott's Stack, where he puts all the relevant articles, bloggings, et cetera. And so that is a way that information gets disseminated, not just on the air, but via the links to the Web sites which link to bloggers and link to articles and link to actual--yesterday somebody quickly put up on one of the blogs which was picked up then by one of the radio hosts the entire bill that Governor Bush signed. So there is this sort of interaction between blogging, radio, print.

MR. SULLIVAN: I would definitely read the papers about this case to understand exactly what's going on. I thought the Times this morning did a very good job. But I want to find out the temperature on the right. I want to

understand better why they are going absolutely insane and why they want the federal government now to be involved in a heavily litigated state case. To me, it's a very fascinating moment in conservatism's collapse under the weight of religious zealotry. And so reading the zealot blogs on the right gives me a much deeper understanding of what exactly is motivating the religious right.

I've begun to understand the religious right much, much better through the blogosphere than I ever would through the mainstream media, and in fact, partly because the mainstream media never covered them until they had one--David Kirkpatrick is now assigned to cover the sort of native tribe in New Guinea somewhere, to cover religious evangelicals. The blogging there can really help you understand what's going on within a movement, just like reading Kos helps you understand what the loony left is really talking about and what makes them excited--which tells you a lot about where American politics is going.

It's like having the ability to go into a million town halls and listen to what the grassroots are really saying, only you don't have to leave your desk. It's a fantastic source of information about the emotional quality of American politics. And blogs are very emotional. I think that's one thing they also have. The mainstream

media is designed to be cool and calm and collected. Blogging is not supposed to--it's much more human and visceral. And I think that's part of its strength as long as you do not take it to be something other than it is.

MR. DIONNE: Can I say something real quick on that. I agree with Andrew on two points here. One is I, for example, would love to be able to click on a set of documents to tell me where the Roman Catholic Church is on this issue, which seems to underlie this. Because it's my recollection that there's been a drift in the Church's own position. I'd love somebody to post a bunch of documents just so I could understand that--

MR. SULLIVAN: Go to Mark Shea's blog. There is a whole bunch of very orthodox Catholics that blog, whom I read when I want to figure out this stuff. There isn't a page in the New York Times where I can find that.

MR. DIONNE: The other is the taking temperature of the blogs especially that post a million comments, you know, 162 comments on a particular subject, I find also helpful in sort of testing a mood. And I never look at any of these things as much as I should, because you could spend 24 hours looking at all these things.

On the women question--

MS. COX: Well, I was going to jump on the tail end of that discussion really quickly, which is I think that's a really good way to look at blogging, which is like--or to look at--there's a news event and there are aspects of it that are best covered by newspapers, aspects of it that are best covered by other media. And in addition to what Andrew's saying about the idea of, like, getting a feel for what the arguments are on each ideological side of an issue, I also think blogs are really good--I mean, this is sort of maybe just an extension of that, the Schiavo case in particular. Because blogging is so personal, you get a lot of, like, personal history kind of--people talking about their own experiences in these kinds of situations. And whether you want to hear it or not, I mean, like, that's part of the story. And so that's what blogs also are good for, like people--

As for women in blogging, I think that--I mean, I've been sort of involved in sort of three main kinds of areas of interest in my career, technology, politics, and journalism. Women are not well-represented in any of those spheres. Unfortunately, I don't think the solution is to call for just more women. Like you can't just ask that more women come in. There has to be some sort of organic, you know, attraction.

Jodie and I were talking about this earlier. I do have hope that blogging, because it's more conversational, because it's more spontaneous, because it is more personal, more emotional, neither traditionally [inaudible] that--I'm not going to say--I don't think they're gender-specific, but these happen to be things that women are known to bring to the table and feel more comfortable with, perhaps, that it's a way into these other areas.

I was at a conference in Austin recently, and a woman in the audience asked a very similar question about women and bloggers, and was talking about how she teaches a Web design class, just designing Web sites, and it's almost all women. But that once she teaches them how to design blogs, they get really interested in producing their own blog, which leads them to write about more than just design and leads them to comment on daily newspapers, which makes them sort of interested in more technology news-- I mean, I don't know. That's just sort of an answer off the cuff.

MR. DIONNE: Two quick points. One, it shows how things change quickly on the blog. Nell was just described somebody's blog as a Slate employee. So it's a--

QUESTION: [Inaudible] correction.

MR. SULLIVAN: You're fired.

MR. DIONNE: So now it's fixed.

QUESTION: But they spelled my name right, which is really unusual.

MR. DIONNE: And another thing, there was a rebuke to me that I liked. It said, "E.J.'s spending \$100 million to take the money out of politics threatens the wall between reality and satire." I just pass that on.

QUESTION: My name is Chris Conroy. I wanted to comment that I'm having trouble with seeing blogs in the spectrum between, like, talk radio and then you have blogs, and then traditional newspapers. From my own personal experience, I don't see blogs falling in the middle of the spectrum at all. It seems to me that, if anything, talk radio and especially cable news are very passive experiences. You sit there and you listen, especially on a show like Crossfire, where people are just shouting back and forth at each other. It doesn't seem very constructive and it doesn't really seem to add a whole lot of information. It's not very educational. Whereas a blog is a more active experience, where you go in and you click on the hyperlinks. And you check the primary sources. And you read the comments and you see someone who disagrees. You click on their blog and you see their post on it.

I mean, I, with my friend Nick here and two other people, we write a very small blog called RenaissanceMen. Mostly our readership is our friends. But we get linked to from across the country. Someone picks up on a post we do on Technorati, and you know, our friend Kyle got posted on your site, Andrew, as e-mail of the day. It seems that blogging creates a more informed electorate. If everyone participated this much, I think we'd have a much better decision-making system going on in the country.

I just wanted to get the general feeling on whether or not blogs can actually educate people and whether or not this experience is beneficial for the electorate. And Andrew, especially, I'd like you to comment--

MR. DIONNE: Hold off just a second, because I want to bring in a couple of other voices. Hold that thought. Thank you to the Renaissance Man. That's a very good point.

Over here. And then Ruy, you've been blogging there in a corner on the floor. I would love to bring you in before we close. Would you mind saying something?

Anyway, think about it.

QUESTION: This may be related. I'm Al Millikin, affiliated with Washington Independent Writers. Did any of

you witness the exchange between President George W. Bush and the Russian journalists a few weeks ago discussing freedom of the press and freedom of speech? One Russian mentioned American journalists getting fired, and President Bush pointed out it was not the U.S. government firing these journalists.

How is the rest of the world reacting and responding to our new media, who are mostly free to be only fired, edited, and censored by themselves alone?

MR. DIONNE: That's great. And then Ruy, can you throw in a thought here before we close? You always have a good thought.

MR. TEIXEIRA: Well, I'm not sure I have much to say that wasn't already posted up there. But I guess I was struck by--I'm just about to post this--that, in a way, it's sort of interesting that we have this kind of very pleasant, civilized Brookings event on blogging, basically, and I think that's sort of newsworthy in and of itself because, you know, nobody took blogs very seriously a few years ago and now you have this sort of very earnest discussion about the pros and cons of blogs and where are they going, are they good or bad, and there are free speech issues and all this kind of stuff. But nobody seems--you

know, this is all very familiar and almost comfortable to people.

So I think that's interesting in and of itself that we can have this kind of discussion, you know. I mean, you know, it's an interesting but not cutting-edge event now to have a forum like this on blogs. I think it's just sort of part of this new media--it's talking about this new media universe that's evolving and blogs, we now know, have a place in it. It's not controversial to talk about that. They're not just a cult phenomenon, and so on and so forth. So I thought that was interesting.

And I actually thought it was also interesting that--I'd say interesting what people think about blogs. I heard a lot more good than bad, I guess. I mean, there was some attempt to characterize them--

MR. DIONNE: Stacked panel, you know.

MR. TEIXEIRA: --as irresponsible and they do some bad things and, you know, sometimes they pick up on things that aren't quite true. But it seems to me that if you weight it out, most people were saying blogs do have a role to play, they do a lot of things that mainstream media can't, they're part of this overall uber-media that's evolving, and that therefore they're here to stay and that's not such a bad thing.

So I don't know if I'm fairly characterizing that, but it's what I heard.

MR. DIONNE: Thank you very much. So I guess we had Brookings event because we were earnest. Thank you very much.

Let me start with Andrew. And let's just go right down all the way to Jack for closing comments.

MR. SULLIVAN: Very quickly, I absolutely agree with Chris that it's an amazing educational tool. I've certainly learned a huge amount. And the reason it's educational for most people is that it's--the human mind works better when it's listening to a conversation than when it's sitting down being lectured to. And reading a blog and going to information when you're actively seeking it out, you learn better.

But the second question, this isn't just an American phenomenon at all anymore. And what blogging is doing in places like Iran and Iraq in terms of getting rid of the fear that these people who live either in the chaotic situation in Iraq right now or in the fascist dictatorship in Iran are actually beginning to build a political movement, an underground political movement of change through blogging. And the Iranian government, as would be expected, has jailed and imprisoned and tortured

bloggers for doing exactly this thing. So far from it being something weird that people look at, it's going to be a huge tool for political change throughout the world.

One last comment, probably most provocative, I do think that blogging will remain predominantly male. I think the atmosphere of charged confrontational debate tends to attract more men than women. And the blogosphere is a great example of this, because there's no one controlling it. No woman--there's nobody saying you can't--no one's not hiring women to be bloggers. No one is not reading women because they're being sexist. It is entirely a function of who wants to read them and who wants to write them. And this kind of dialogue, for reasons I don't fully understand, tends to be more male than female.

MR. DIONNE: The Harvard faculty will be voting a motion of no confidence in Andrew this afternoon. Thank you, Andrew.

MR. SULLIVAN: And I will take that as a compliment.

MR. DIONNE: Jodie Allen.

MS. ALLEN: Well, first, I completely agree that the Internet is a terrific tool. I am addicted to it myself. And the very interactivity and the ability to, you know--it must be every night I say to my husband, What did

we do before we had Google? You know, when you just--what is that all about? It's terrific. And it will continue because of academia and its involvement to be a tool both for learning. And you do learn more when you do it yourself than when you sit there passively--or at least I do. And it will also be tool for political change, as it is right now, especially in countries like China and Iran and so on, where people have risked their lives.

Having said that, we still do need to worry about the state of American journalism and how it's going to be paid for. And this is not the fault of the blogs or the Internet. You can't stop technological change. But you can't put your head in the sand and ignore the fact that, as Forbes says, opinions are cheap and news is expensive. And somehow, we as a society have to recognize that it's costly to gather news and that it's a very, very valuable commodity.

As for why women are less represented in opinion journalism, I think that women are less likely--I mean, opinion journalism is basically what? Thumb-sucking. And I think women are less likely to think that they're thumbs are tasty enough to want to--

MS. COX: What a metaphor there.

MR. SHAFER: Thumbsucking.com will soon be a--

MR. DIONNE: If there isn't one already.

MS. ALLEN: There's a wonderful--I mean, Maureen Dowd's two columns from a week ago Sunday and this Sunday--

MR. SULLIVAN: Dreadful.

[Laughter.]

MS. ALLEN: Oh, but she agreed. She did not--

MR. SULLIVAN: She agreed with every position.

MS. ALLEN: --that it's not a question of overt discrimination that keeps them off editorial pages. There's a large element of self-selectivity. But the Dowd column this week is very interesting. It talks about the greater complexity of women owing to the presence of the two active X chromosomes as against the X and the Y. And this may have an inhibiting effect upon women. But remember, everything is distributed by a normal curve and it could very well be that the most opinionated, assertive person in the world is a women.

MR. SULLIVAN: Margaret Thatcher.

MS. ALLEN: Right. Still, I have been thinking that even that extraordinarily wise journalist, Meg Greenfield, a woman of enormous breadth of knowledge [inaudible], when she went to write--which she did frequently--she always felt the need to kind of wrap it around a little--put a joke around it, to be a little

clever. She didn't feel should could just sort of plunk it down there, you know, here's the truth. It was always nuanced. And I think it was, don't you think, a sort of, in some ways, hesitation.

MS. COX: [Inaudible.]

MS. ALLEN: Exactly.

MR. DIONNE: But also acerbic. I mean, Meg could be--

MS. ALLEN: She could be, but she wrapped it around a joke.

MR. DIONNE: My favorite piece of advice, by the way, from Meg Greenfield is when you use an adjective about someone, look at it again. Because there are certain adjectives that should be reserved for Himmler and maybe you need to take a step or two back from the particular adjective. Which I thought was excellent advice.

Ellen?

MS. RATNER: Well, I just want to say that we've been talking a lot about blogs and I mentioned pod casting in the beginning. I think that we don't even know where--

MR. DIONNE: We're so 5 minutes ago on this panel.

MS. RATNER: I don't even know where in two or three years things are going to be taken because of the

Internet telephone technology that's developing that's going to totally take people away from hard lines, and that putting that into what's going to be pod casting, putting that in what's going to be hand-helds. And so I think we're just going to see an explosion.

And the other thing I want to talk about just briefly is the issue of community. You know, bowling alone is something that I used to talk about because people were so isolated in our society. This has totally changed the way people are going to communicate both in small communities, developing of small little newspapers that are community-oriented that happen on the Net, pod casting that happens. And I think we're going to see a radical shift in not just the way news is gathered and people talk about news, but the way we communicate.

MS. COX: Because of the cough medicine, I've sort of lost whether we're still answering questions or not.

MR. DIONNE: You blog, so you can do whatever you want.

MS. COX: Right. Right. I can make stuff up.

I was thinking on my sort of little blog panel scavenger hunt, the things that always get mentioned. We started with do blogs get things wrong--check. And earlier

we had sort of a consensus that facts are good--you know, that always gets head. And now also we have the blogs create community and that blogs in general are succeeding because we're having this wonderful panel. And I think--

MR. DIONNE: I don't think that was the thrust--

MS. COX: Well, blogs--I mean, it was like I think the thrust of it--well, the thrust of it to me seemed to be that we've reached some stage of maturity, that here we are at the Brookings Institution having a civilized discussion about blogging. That means something. I hope that it means that we will have no more panels about blogging. I think that it's time to take seriously sort of the underlying issues that are being raised here and sort of--about community, about, like, partisanship, and about sort of the direction that we're going to take this discussion. And focus it less on just sort of specific, you know, kind of media.

MR. DIONNE: Thank you. Jack?

MS. COX: I think that the evidence that blogging has peaked is that there's a Brookings panel and, you know--

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MR. DIONNE: Really grateful people on the panel, you know?

MS. COX: A hundred people have showed up, and I think that we can check, starting on Technorati tomorrow, the number of blogs and the number of page views will immediate decline.

Whenever there's a new media that invades the mediasphere, there's always this worry about the barbarians being at the gate. This was never more true than when radio happened in the '20s, and there were accomplished radio journalists who could not get accredited up at Capitol Hill unless they were also print journalists. And what's interesting about the accreditation process up at Capitol Hill is journalists do it to one another. It's not, you know, congressmen and senators don't sit around and decide who gets to report. And finally, after several years of this, the radio correspondents broke away and they went to Congress and they said we are producing news; what the competition in print is trying to do is suppress us and marginalize us. You need to give us our own bureau up here, our own association. And they did. And the same thing later happened with magazines, and I suspect a similar sort of thing will happen with blogs.

But what's always interesting about whenever there's a new media, that there's this sort of demonization, of oh my God, you can't have blogs, you can't

have people running around saying what they want to say because they might libel somebody, as if newspapers and broadcasters never do.

What we see after the sort of attempt to suppress a new media is the complete co-optation of the new media. The print publications go out and buy lots of radio and television stations. Over at the Washington Post, they've been pretty progressive about starting some blogs. There are like three sports blogs now, of Boswell and the baseball guy who's reporting about the Nationals, and a couple of other people--Joel Achenbach, who's a columnist, writes a blog. I don't think any of their political writers write blogs, but, you know, six months ago they were very, very nervous about, you know, oh, well, a reporter could just go out and write whatever he thought and wouldn't have to go through the mediation of an editor? Oh, no, no, that can't happen, to they're sort of opening it up.

I'd like to speak to what Jodie's talked about, her worries that this future media won't have a business model that would support quality journalism. And when people talked about the decline of foreign bureaus, about the tragic loss of, let's say, CBS's many foreign bureaus down to, what, two now does CBS have, Marty? Just a

couple. Just a handful. And you know, what this reflects is that these businesses are all dynamic and they're prey to other media and new business models arising. It made sense for CBS to have five or six world bureaus when at, you know, 1 a.m. you couldn't read the Times of London. Now that you can, is it really the best use of CBS's money to go over and re-report what was in last week's Times of London?

So I think that if--you know, I'm not a Hegelian or anything, but I think there is a 20th century trajectory here that's extended into our 21st century of journalism becoming more accurate and more transparent. Not in all cases, but if you want to compare the journalism of today to the journalism of the 1950s, everybody wants to press the button and go back to the 1950s, I think you'd be sorely disappointed.

On the last issue of whether this makes our society much better, I'm --

[End of recording.]