

**FACTCHECK.ORG  
ANNENBERG PUBLIC POLICY CENTER**

**PANTS ON FIRE: POLITICAL MENDACITY  
AND THE RISE OF MEDIA FACT-CHECKERS**

**WELCOME:**

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**INTRODUCTIONS AND OVERVIEW:**

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**PRESENTERS:**

JUSTIN BANK, FACTCHECK.ORG

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**JOURNALIST PANEL:**

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**POLITICAL CONSULTANT PANEL**

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Washington, D.C.*

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: We are going to start on time and pick up stragglers as we go. The FactCheck.org staff has organized this conference because we are very interested in the phenomenon of ad-watching, not simply about national races, but about statewide races as well. My name is Kathleen Hall Jamieson. I'm director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania, which is part of the Annenberg School for Communication.

My job is to tell you three things from our academic research on ad-watching. The first thing is that when an adwatch is done well in studies of voter responses, we can show that voters are more likely to get the facts; that is, adwatches as a form of communication, in the short term, do work. Second thing, when a lot of media, in a media environment, come on board with the same kind of adwatch, the adwatch that points to the same factual discrepancy and across that media, there is a lot of signaling to voters that the ad was deceptive, that process of ad-watching can create a backlash against the deceptive ad, and that's good news.

The bad news, my third point, it is very rare that across a media market, many media outlets come in and repeatedly tell voters that's a problem and as a result, let the electorate get that clear signal. Today, we ask the question, is it increasingly likely, decreasingly likely, or this there really no change in the likelihood that more signals are coming to the electorate about facts in ads. To present the data and introduce the panel, Brooks Jackson, who heads FactCheck.org.

BROOKS JACKSON: Thank you, Kathleen. Well, I want to welcome you all to a conference we're calling, "Pants on Fire," a moniker that I lifted from the man at my left, Bill Adair, who I will introduce shortly. What I want to do right now is go over just what we're going to be doing this morning. First, a little bit about FactCheck.org – we launched FactCheck.org in December of 2003. And over the last few years, frankly, we've felt kind of lonely because nobody else that we knew was out there doing quite what we were doing. I got my start as a journalist in this sort of stuff at Cable News Network, CNN, where I was asked to do adwatches starting back in the 1992 election, when there was a flurry of interest in this sort of stuff.

But it seemed to me that this type of reporting had gone into decline. In fact, the original idea of this conference was to write a kind of obituary for adwatch reporting. We commissioned a couple of studies to document my suspicions. Justin Bank of our staff herded together some very talented young folks and conducted what we believe is probably the most extensive survey of newspaper practices in this adwatch area that's ever been conducted, both in terms of the number of papers and the extent of time that it covers. And we also, to get a handle on what was going on in television, commissioned Bob Papper, now of Hofstra University, who is a veteran of this sort of stuff. Bob conducts the annual survey of TV news stations for the radio television news directors

association and actually knows many of these folks by name. So he was, we thought, was the best person to get a handle on what was going on on the television side.

Well, it turned out that, to my surprise, and I think to Bob's, it wasn't an obituary we were writing; we were going to be reporting on a kind of resurrection. As you'll here, the number of adwatch stories and the number of newspapers and TV stations doing them did indeed fall off for awhile and hit a pretty low period, at least the newspaper reporting in 2000, but has come back strong since and is now running, so far as we can tell, at record levels both in television reporting and newspaper reporting.

As we were tabulating these to us, somewhat surprising results, along came two new players, primarily web-based one of them: politifact.com, run by the St. Petersburg Times with help from Congressional Quarterly – they're under joint ownership – and a sort of breath of fresh air; you'll hear more about that later. And the Washington Post, shortly after that, launched a dedicated feature called "The Fact Checker" with veteran reporter, Michael Dobbs, who text messages me that he is trapped in the subway, experiencing delays on the red line, but will be here shortly.

These two new ventures by major media organizations convinced us that this trend that we had found, to our surprise, was continuing and gathering some strength. And so, what we've done with this conference is to ask some leading practitioners of this kind of journalism, adwatch stories, fact-checking, truth squadding, call it what you will – many of us who have done this sort of thing found quickly, by the way, that it wasn't just the TV spots that needed checking, that the same messages were being transmitted not only in TV ads, but through all sorts of medium.

We're going to be asking, what does this trend mean? What does it mean for the politicians? What does it mean for us in the press? What does it mean, probably most importantly, for the public, for citizens, for the voters. You will see shortly, hear about these. What we're going to do, first of all, is present to you our findings. I'm going to ask Bob to come up. And before that, I'm going to ask Justin Bank to come up and go over in detail just what they found in their surveys, first of newspaper reporting, secondly of TV news department reporting.

There will be an opportunity briefly for questions after that so everybody here is firm on what we're doing about that. The reports are available to you if you haven't picked one up, in your press kits. They are available online at the Annenberg Public Policy Center website; they should have been posted there just a few minutes ago. And after we've presented those findings, I will ask our panel of journalists, who will be trickling in here, to discuss what that means for them. We'll have a coffee break and we have two veteran political consultants – Ladonna Lee is here; Anita Dunn is coming – to talk about what this trend means for the politicians and what it means for them as practitioners of political strategists.

I will introduce our journalists in our political panel more completely later. But right now, I want to introduce Justin Bank. Justin, where are you? Justin is coming up.

Justin joined our staff in – when was it – 2005. He is both a staff writer, researcher, web guru, and my basic go-to guy on all sorts of – whenever a problem comes up. Justin will tell you what he did in supervising this newspaper study and what he found. Justin Bank.

JUSTIN BANK: Thank you, Brooks, and thank you, everyone, for coming here today. I am going to be running through our newspaper study, as Brooks just mentioned, that we organized over this past summer and a little bit into the fall as well. We've titled the study "Coming Back Strong," and as Brooks mentioned, it's really a title that kind of caught us off guard. We were so prepared to see the numbers come down and I think, as you'll see, they did very much the exact opposite.

So just, first, to give you guys a broad understanding of what we did study, we looked at 34 of the top 44 newspapers in the country by circulation. We would have done the top 44, but unfortunately, our resources were a little limited just by what the newspapers put out there. Using popular databases or academic databases such as Lexis-Nexis and Factiva and Newsbank, we were only able to access so much of archives of top newspapers. And we wanted to have as comprehensive a study as possible, so we focused on all of the papers in that top 44 that were available and searchable between 1992 and midway through 2007.

As well, we wanted to limit ourselves just to good adwatches, just good, solid adwatches that when we looked over, we said, this is what we're trying to do on our website. There was other newspaper stories out there that was very close to the definition: maybe it made an adwatch reference in passing; maybe it said it was an adwatch, but it wasn't really. But we focused only on those newspaper articles which we identified through a screen and which then we read through and were confident were good, solid adwatches. And I'll be boring you with a little more minutiae of methodology towards the end. But first, I want to get to our findings, and findings that we're exceptionally proud of as well, specifically one finding, and that is that ad-watching is up; it is way, way up.

And you know, today, we are fortunate enough to assemble a pretty esteemed panel of practitioners, new and old, people who have been doing this business for a while. And they are going to have some great stories, and they'll be able to really liven it up a little bit. And I think that's really the treat of that whole conference. But we hope that, if nothing else, you do walk away. And it's something that I'm sure Professor Papper will be pounding on in a minute as well, but just that ad-watching is going exceptionally up.

And as our study shows, it's going up a lot. The bar chart to my right over here is – charts out adwatches for election years and for off years. The darker-colored bars – towards the bottom are those off years, and you'll notice they're obviously much, much smaller. And it's probably intuitive to figure that in election years there would be higher adwatches. And you can see that there is a general trend of it kind of dipping down towards that year 2000 and then kind of making that steady come back. And then in '05, '06, it just really just ran away with that. It nearly doubled every other year with the exception of one or two. And that's really, you know, it was just – as Brooks mentioned

earlier, we really can't emphasize enough, just it surprised us so much that it was going up so strongly, so quickly.

And you know, the bottoming off in 2000 is something we'll get to in a second as well. But we want to show you that it didn't just happen, you know, these totals. It wasn't just one or two papers carrying the ball all by themselves. It was actually a lot of newspapers making the transition over. This chart over here charts how many newspapers were carrying out adwatches in a given year. If they ran just one adwatch, we would include them here.

And as you can see, it was relatively steady. It moved up a few newspapers and then once again, kind of bottomed out in that 2000 election. But since then, we've been going up. And it's extraordinary to think that there's just more and more newspaper going out there and saying, let's go out there; let's, you know, evaluate these ads and try to speak a little of truth to the power here.

And so, past that, what we also tried to evaluate here was understanding the makeup of these adwatches, trying to understand what kind of races or kind of political ads were evaluated. And what we ended up finding was that non-federal elections were far and away covered more: 56 percent to a federal election's 41 percent. And what non-federal elections include are state elections, local elections, as well as ballot initiatives. And as you can see by the pie chart over there, state elections was the forerunner of that trend; it really, it was nearly double what presidential adwatches were.

And we had just naturally assumed, well, presidential adwatches are the biggest race in the country; it affects the most people; it will carry the most adwatches. But time again, it just wasn't. It just seemed as though more papers were covering the state adwatches or the state ads, rather. And the reason being, we realized, was a number of ads we looked into were regional newspapers. Not every paper is the New York Times, the Washington Post, the USA Today's, that will go out and will have a national constituency, but they will be local papers, papers such as the Milwaukee Sentinel, the Tampa Tribune, papers that have more of a local constituency, which if they want to communicate with their readership, they'll want to focus on races that affected them and only them.

And so, what was also interesting about this was, we ran the state adwatches to understand if there were certain bumps when they were being ran. And it was, actually; they were in midterm election years.

So what we did was, we charted out each election cycle, an election cycle being a presidential election, the first off year, a midterm, and the second off year. And what you can see in this line chart over here is that each color line over there represents one election cycle from presidential year to the second off year. And invariably, the midterm will always be bigger than the presidential election. There will always be more adwatches run during that midterm election year. And the reason being is you combine it with the findings we found with the state adwatches. All 72 percent of state elections are

held in those midterm years. And so, it's just bumping up the coverage in those midterm years.

And the second thing you might want to notice from this chart, and that you can see in our findings, is that this last election cycle blows away everything before it: 2004 was the most adwatched presidential election year; 2005, the most adwatched off year; 2006, far and away, the most adwatched midterm year.

And so, when we went to look into this, we saw that the state adwatches were relatively consistent. They jumped in 2006, but not terribly so. But what we did see that did jump was congressional races. Congressional races tripled, quadrupled even, what had been done previously. And I think this chart says it all. If you look across time, it stays relatively consistent until, again, we get to that 2006 cycle and all of a sudden all of these papers are running vastly more congressional races.

We're not sure exactly why. We suspect maybe people are becoming more interested in the minutiae of government, that they're more interested in their congressional races. Or maybe it's just that those newspapers have more tools at their disposal that they can look into it. But either way, the results were pretty astounding for us.

And then, past that, what we wanted to do was look into what newspapers were doing good work out there. And what really surprised us is that there were a lot of newspapers that were really getting out there and just doing a slew of adwatches. We like to call these our rising stars. There was the Denver Post, which hadn't run an adwatch in 1992, but ran many in 2006. And, additionally, the Tampa Tribune, the Sacramento Bee, these papers all did not run one adwatch in 1992, the first year of our study, but by 2006, it was 72 adwatches, a remarkable turnaround.

But of all of these papers, the one paper that stood out more than anyone else that ran one adwatch before 1999, but since then, ran the most adwatches in 2006 and so many more past that, was the Columbus Dispatch. This paper blew up on the scene, came out, and was just running adwatches nearly every day as we were looking through our study. We would search through and every single day of the election season, there would be another Columbus Dispatch adwatch. And it really kind of towered over the rest of the cycle.

So when we looked back and we tried to see who was at the vanguard in 1992 versus who was in the vanguard in 2006, which papers were out there, it was interesting to see that some papers stayed the same – the Miami Herald was consistently one of the top six papers. But all of these other papers, the ones that I just mentioned as rising stars weren't really running adwatches in 1992, but by 2006, were running them in numbers far passing what the top producers were doing in 1992. And it really was encouraging to know that there were new practitioners out there who were embracing the style of journalism and going out there and presenting it and doing it quite well, actually.

But past that, we also wanted to see over time who was doing well. And what we found was, you know, as you can tell by that earlier shot, the Miami Herald really, from start to go, was running adwatches as consistently as could be. And they ended up producing more adwatches throughout the time of our study, the 16-year cycle, than any other paper. But the Columbus Dispatch, which I mentioned a second ago, which hadn't produced one adwatch before 1999, still ended up tallying the second-highest total in the entire study, which, again, I think speaks volumes about the work that they were doing there.

And now, as I promised earlier, I just want to close on some notes on our methodology. The screen that we used to determine what was an adwatch included six words. If you look through the report, you can read more about that. But we identified six words – adwatch, political ad, campaign ad, and several others – that we found were constantly coming up in the kind of articles we were looking for. And so we did search through those databases for those words, we identified all of the articles that had those words, and then, we read through them, each and every one of them, which was well over 7,000, to see if it met our criteria of being an adwatch.

Now, I mentioned earlier that it could be labeled an adwatch to be an adwatch, but it could still not be an adwatch if it was labeled an adwatch, which sounds very confusing and hurts my head, actually, just to say it. But essentially what that means is that if the newspaper were to label an adwatch and within the content of the article, it didn't really check any facts, we just wouldn't count it. We kept track of it, but we didn't include it in our study. And similarly, while there were articles out there that didn't say they were an adwatch, but still the majority of them did a good ad-watching job, we made a point to include them in our study.

And with that, I just want to conclude with a point that Brooks made toward the end of his presentation, which is just that this study, to our knowledge, is the most expansive of its kind. We've reviewed literature of other adwatches while we were setting up our study. And the majority of them would either look at one newspaper over this kind of period of time or a shorter period of time or maybe several newspapers, but only for a cycle or two. We looked over 16 years, which was four full four-year election cycles and 34 papers and were able to come up with what we feel are very authoritative number on the state of ad-watching. So with that, thank you very much and I hope you enjoy the panel.

MR. JACKSON: Thank you, Justin. Any questions on the newspaper study? Just wanted to stress – yes?

Q: How far down the ballot did you ad-watching go? Did you do like the commissioner of sewers or how far down because a lot of the smaller races of course are very important to the local – and what did you consider ads – (off mike) – or only newspaper articles.

MR. BANK: I'll take the first question first. We didn't search for ads. We searched, again, for those certain key words. And we did find plenty of down-the-ballot ads that ended up being in our study. When I showed you that number four of the 38 percent of state ads, that includes all down-ballot state ads. And if you notice, there was also a little sliver of the pie for local ads. Those should be county commissioner, dog watcher, or whatever it may be that's further down the ballot. And you know, as our numbers showed, you are 100-percent right; those down-ballot ads do get a lot of coverage. And that was really what was bumping up our state adwatch total and our local adwatch coverage. And then, the second question, I'm sorry?

Q: What did you consider an ad? Did you consider door hangers or things like that or only articles in newspapers?

MR. BANK: I'm sorry, the question was if we evaluated, if we counted adwatches of ads that weren't just television ads. We did. There were radio ads that were covered; there were mailings; it very strongly was TV ads. And we didn't even think the numbers were worth mentioning; it was well into the 90s. But we did find that there were other adwatches out there for other means of communication.

MR. JACKSON: Other questions? I want to introduce now Bob Papper, who is currently professor and associate chair of journalism, media studies, and public relations at Hofstra University, formerly at Ball State University. He oversees the annual radio-TV News Directors Association Hofstra University survey on the state of radio and television news in the United States. And that's the reason we engaged Bob to do this survey for us. He will – he also edits electronic news, the Journal of the Association of Education, Journalism, and Mass Communication, and has worked as a producer, writer, and manager at television stations in Minneapolis, here in Washington, D.C., San Francisco, and Columbus, Ohio. Bob Papper will now present our survey of TV news stations.

BOB PAPPER: Thank you, Brooks. I'm going to run through fairly quickly, maybe in the spirit of television, in terms of what the data shows. I'm not going to get into – I mean, this was a survey that we conducted, and if you have the papers in front of you, you can see the methodology; I'll be glad to answer questions on that.

In terms of the big picture, what did we find. More TV stations are running adwatch stories than ever before, even more plan to. Viewers like adwatch-type stories; this is really one of the critical points and I'll talk more about this in just a minute. And TV stations are most likely to run adwatch-type stories on statewide elections. And, again, I'll break all of that down so you can see exactly what TV stations are looking at.

This is the big picture in terms of what is going on. Now, the very last number at 2007 and 2008 is a projected number. But the study was done in the summer. And so, we're really already in the current election cycle. So those numbers should be pretty good. In terms of these are stations – what percentage of stations ran adwatch-type

stories over that time? And you can see a steady trend in the case of television, adding more and more. And I think we'll get to some of the reasons in just a minute.

In addition to the 45-plus percent of respondent TV news directors who plan to run adwatch-type stories this election cycle, over a third of the TV news directors said they weren't sure yet at this point in the summer. So that number is likely to rise. It's hard to know exactly how far up it might go. And maybe we'll take a look later on to see exactly what did take place.

And stations report running more adwatch stories than in the past. We looked at that over time and, again, you can see the details in those packets that you have. The average television station that ran an adwatch-type story ran 8.4 adwatch stories; the median was 6. But what we see is that the numbers very much are a function of the market size, which really translates, for the most part, into the size of the station operation. And the smaller the station, the fewer the number; the larger the station, very much the more they are likely to run adwatch-type stories and the more adwatch stories that they are likely to run.

State elections came in first. Over two-thirds of the adwatch stories looked at state elections. And you can see, U.S. House and U.S. Senate just below half. State-ballot issues and local elections at over 40 percent, and local elections might be city council and it might be mayor – you know, that varied. But you can see, it's very much of a local orientation in this.

News directors reported that viewers like adwatch stories. What's interesting about this number is that for those of you who have been in the business, for the most part, we hear from people who are unhappy, so that if you do a story and people don't like it, you'll hear it; if you do a story that people like, no one says anything. And so, that's actually a pretty surprising number that news directors have received enough positive feedback to come back on that side of the equation because that really does say something, based on what we normally see.

Almost two-thirds of respondent TV news directors reported that adwatch-type stories improved the reputation in the community and that's part, undoubtedly, of why they were running it. Over 85 percent of respondent TV news directors called it "good journalism." But this is, I think, one of the critical figures right here, is that a third of those TV news directors said that it increased viewership.

And what is also interesting, that if we go beyond those figured and we look by market size, over half of the news directors in the top-25 market said that it increased viewership. And what's interesting about that is that if you're in one of the largest markets, than you can know minute by minute how your audience is reacting to what you're doing in your news shows. So I would say that these news directors are not guessing at what is taking place and the effect of ad-watch stories, that they know that this is something, and they can know that this is something that is increasing viewership. And I suspect that's why we're seeing more of it in the case of television.

Most of the TV news directors who don't run adwatch-type stories say they simply don't have a big enough staff or enough resources to do it. And, again, the bigger the market size, the bigger the station, the more likely they were to run adwatch-type stories. And it really drops off quite a bit after Market 100.

And this gives you the methodology of which was a – you know, we went a survey to all of the TV news directors. That's how many, at the time – that's how many local TV stations originate local news. A hundred and sixty-one is – for TV news directors, is a relatively high number of response. TV news directors are notoriously poor at responding to surveys.

Are stations that do adwatch-type stories more likely to respond to a survey like this? Of course. You know, when I took over the RTNDA research 14 years ago, one of the things that we learned when I changed some of the methodology is that stations that do news were more likely to respond to that study of TV news than stations that do not. It's not a staggering difference, but there is at least some difference. So when we talk about just over 38 percent of the stations doing adwatch-type stories, is that likely to be a little lower, yeah, it's probably going to be a little bit lower. And I'll take any questions you may have. Deborah.

Q: (Off mike) – based on.

MR. JACKSON: Excuse me. Just wait until you get a microphone and please identify yourself. We're going to have a written transcript of this. I should have made clear at the top, so the transcriptionist knows who's speaking.

Q: Deborah Potter with Newslab. Bob, your survey is essentially self-reporting, correct?

MR. PAPPER: It is self-reporting.

Q: You did not do any studies of actual content?

MR. PAPPER: No. We asked news directors. Now, what we did – and in your packets, you'll see the exact survey and the wording of the survey. And we defined adwatch-type stories. But in the end, yes, it is up to the news director to say, yes, we did that or no, we did not. And two-thirds of them said they didn't. Any other questions? Thank you.

MR. JACKSON: Thank you, Bob. Two points I want to make just in case they weren't clear before. One is, our definition of an adwatch is a story in which the news organization comes to an independent judgment about the accuracy of a factual claim being made.

In other words, a story that said candidate X claims that candidate Y's ad is false or misleading, not an adwatch or a fact-check story. A story that says candidate X has run an ad and it's shot in soft focus and there's \$1 million dollars behind it and makes no comment on the accuracy of the factual claims, not an adwatch, even if it's labeled adwatch. But a story that says candidate X has an ad up that claims that such-and-such is true and that's a bunch of baloney, and here's why, that's an adwatch whether it's labeled an adwatch or not.

That's our definition and we are confident that we have, in the newspaper survey, caught every adwatch that was out there during the period because we looked at every story that referred in any way to a campaign ad or a TV ad and then also applied some tests of our screeners, and they were remarkably consistent in the way that they coded these things.

The other point I want to make is that neither of these can be taken as random samples; they are not scientific studies. They are as good as they get. We've got a 100-percent sample of those large newspapers that can be text-searched during the period, but we don't know what is happening in those – was happening in those newspapers that could not be text-searched.

Similarly, the stations that responded to us, while a large portion for these self-selected surveys, still is not a random sample of all TV news stations. And Bob and I both agree, it's probably tilted toward those stations that do run adwatches for the simple reason that, if you're running these things, you're going to be more likely to crow to the Annenberg Public Policy Center and Professor Papper that you're doing them. And if you're not, you probably just say, well, I don't have anything to say and throw that survey away and don't respond.

So please do not report these as scientific surveys, but they are as extensive as we can make them. And I think they contain valuable information, and they show there is strong evidence that there in both newspaper reporting, certainly, and TV reporting, there is a trend toward this kind of journalism.

With that, we will now move to our journalist panel. And I want to just again stress we are going to – we have five journalists who are practitioners in this area at what we now come to see as a – the cutting edge of what we now come to see is a pretty strong trend. I'm going to introduce them and take them in pretty much the order, roughly the order in which they started doing these things. And I will ask each of them to make a brief presentation. We will then go to questions.

I want to moderate a little bit here and I have some questions; I want to draw some information from all of these panelists. And then, we will throw it open to questions from you in the audience. After that, we'll have a coffee break; we'll bring our political panelists up to evaluate this trend from what I'm jokingly calling the victim's point of view. We'll see what they think about it and what they think of us and where

they're still flying under our radar and escaping notice. And then, we'll adjourn after that.

So, the panelists that you'll be hearing from now, again I'm going to take them in the order in which they'll appear first. The first panelist is, if I find my notes, is Colin Benedict of WISC-TV in Madison, Wisconsin, and Colin has, nearly as he can remember, back in the mists of time, has been doing these since what, 19 – or 2000 –

COLIN BENEDICT: Two thousand and two.

MR. JACKSON: – 2002, and from the looks of the station's website, has turned out a slew of them. He was then the political reporter and is now the news managing editor of the station, but I believe these reality-check features, is what you call them, they will be continuing under another reporter.

I'll just introduce everybody briefly here and then ask Colin to start. The next presenter will be Mark Matthews, political reporter for ABC 7 News in KGO San Francisco. And I think yours started in early 2004, is that correct?

MARK MATTHEWS: May of 2004.

MR. JACKSON: May of 2004. And his features have become, he tells me, viewer favorites at the station. He's – Mark is a journalist who start – was educated at University of Texas at Austin, began his career as an investigative reporter at stations in California and is now, I believe, the political reporter at KGO, that's correct?

MR. MATTHEWS: One of a couple.

MR. JACKSON: One of a couple. Okay.

MR. MATTHEWS: I – (off mike) – national. We have somebody else covering Arnold.

MR. JACKSON: Okay. The third person, I believe chronologically, Jake Tapper is senior national correspondent and senior political correspondent for ABC News, reporting for every, just about every program they have. Jake, I believe, did – I know did a lot of this kind of reporting in the 2004 presidential election because he was constantly dragging me over to the studio to do sound-bites. And Jake will tell you about what he's been doing at the network level in this area.

The newest entrance in this area – and I am so glad to have – that we have company in this area now, Bill Adair, is the Washington bureau chief for the St. Petersburg Times and the editor of a website that looks a little bit like ours: politifact.com. It's, as you'll see, when Bill presents, they take a little breezier approach to things than we stuffy, academic, university-based folks do. But the fact-checking that's been done on that site is quite prolific.

And the newest entrant here and a welcome one is Michael Dobbs, who just recently launched “The Fact-Checker” feature for the Washington Post. And Michael, many of you remember – I certainly do – just one of the – wrote one of the most memorable first-person stories ever. He was on vacation, as it happened, swimming in the ocean when the Christmas tsunami hit in Southeast Asia. And I will never forget, Michael, your reporting on that. But that’s not all he’s done; he’s been with the Washington Post full time since 1980 and the reporting from Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and the skills he brings to “The Fact Checker” feature I think, personally, are remarkable. We hope we in the future see more efforts like this.

So, with that I’m going to ask our panelists to come up one at a time, tell you a little bit about what they do. Hold your questions until we’ve all been through and you’ve learned a little bit about what each of these gentlemen does at their news outlet, and then we will throw it open to question. Colin?

MR. BENEDICT: Thanks so much, Brooks. I just wanted to put together a brief PowerPoint presentation here. I’ll give you a little idea of what we do, sort of why we started doing it, and kind of how it’s evolved over – since we started it in 2002.

It started simply as an adwatch and it’s kind of expanded from there, but in 2002 we kind of sat down with the public television station in Madison and decided that we wanted to do a joint project and this is part of what we came up with and started ad-watching. I think we did maybe a half-dozen ads in that first election cycle and kind of went from there.

Once that project was over, which was sort of an election-year project, the response was so positive that I said we need to continue to do this. And we expanded it to more of a fact-check. So, it could be a political ad, it could be just a candidate’s statement, it could be any kind of thing, but we kind of took it from there and expanded it, and I know a lot of the work that’s being done is in that area as well right now.

My number-one goal in this is to make it digestible. I think politics is so often sort of hard to comprehend, and I guess, as we looked at this, and as I looked at how we were reporting these things, whether it was an ad or a complex issue, I felt it kind of could be categorized under the banner of reality check, and something that we could try to make it digestible for our viewers. So, that’s what we did.

And we found that over time, the easiest way to make it digestible was simply to tell people who paid for the ad. And a lot of times, that explained a lot of what was going on. I want to show you a short clip of one of the stories that I did. I’ll give you a little bit of backstory here. This is an adwatch; it’s an issue ad, and it’s an ad that, around this time, which was, oh, about a year ago, a Connecticut casino – Connecticut tribe was trying to build a casino in Wisconsin. And this is an issue ad on that subject.

(Begin video segment.)

MR. BENEDICT: In two heavily played TV ads, viewers are asked if they really want East coast gaming in Wisconsin. Both ads refer to a proposal to build a casino in Kenosha.

MR. : The Mohegan Indian tribe in Connecticut operates one of the largest casinos in the world.

MR. BENEDICT: That's true; it's a 295,000-square foot casino in Connecticut. But before we go any further, you should know who's paying for these ads. It's a group called Wisconsin Gaming for Wisconsin. Who's that? Well, it's made up of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Milwaukee Urban League, Visit Milwaukee, and one other group, the Forest County Potawatomi. The same tribe that operates a casino in Milwaukee is running ads to try to stop a much larger casino from being built 40 miles away in Kenosha.

(End video segment.)

I think we probably just summed up why that ad is being run right there. I mean, the ad makes no mention of the fact that it's paid for by a casino that doesn't want the competition 40 miles away. And simply by, I think, telling people who paid for that ad, we've pretty much explained why it was on the air. So, that – you know, it can be very simple. I think these adwatches can be very simple, but be very effective and I think for our viewers, that was a good example of that.

We sort of expanded it in this last election cycle to sort of say, well, let's give some viewers some tools. Instead of just reporting after the fact, maybe we should tell viewers what to watch out for beforehand. So, I did one story before the – at the beginning of the election cycle, which talked about, here are four things to watch for in political ads, four tricks of the trade that they'll use to sort of maybe influence your mind or shape what you're trying to think about his particular issue. So, I think that was a particularly effective use of our resources.

And we've also tried to use it to sort out complex issues, things like Medicare Part D, tax rankings, gas-price stories. All these things have sort of fallen under the reality-check banner, and we've done stories explaining these types of things just to, again, to use my term, make it digestible, and that's kind of what we've done.

The viewer response, Bob summed it up very, very well – I would have to say our graph would be exactly like that. I maybe get one or two negative comments, but overall, it's – you get a hundred emails saying thank you for doing this. And I think the viewers want it. They're asking for it and they're demanding it. And, you know, it puts us in a great position. I mean, why wouldn't we want to be the authority on this issue; why wouldn't we want to provide a service that our viewers want?

We are in a smaller market, so I don't have the ability to look at our ratings and what its effects on our ratings are, but from every other anecdotal evidence – piece of evidence that we have, it's overwhelmingly positive. And the viewers ask for more as well, and we ask for more from them. So, at the end of every story it became practice to say, you have an idea for Reality Check? Email us at Reality Check at [channel3000.com](mailto:channel3000.com)

The candidates also like the coverage. We found over time that they would start using our analysis in political ads to attack their opponent. This is a clip from a story – I'll give you a little bit of background and then show you how I sort of dealt with that issue. This was in the gubernatorial race in 2006. The incumbent Democrat Jim Doyle and Mark Green, the Republican challenger, were both running a slew of ads and both on the topic of illegal immigration in Wisconsin. And this is a particular – this is an adcheck of an ad that Mark Green ran alleging that Doyle's ads were misleading.

(Begin video segment.)

MR. BENEDICT: Then, there's this claim about Doyle's truthfulness. Watch the bottom of your screen.

MR. : His ads just aren't telling the truth.

MR. BENEDICT: There it is, misleading, the source is this station. Green's proof is our Reality Check report from last week. And he's right, we did call two Doyle claims misleading. But here's what Green doesn't tell you. We also called his ad from last week misleading; in fact, we questioned the same claims you just heard again about Doyle supporting welfare and subsidized home loans for illegal immigrants. So, if he values our analysis of Doyle's ad, it raises the question, why did Mark Green repeat his own misleading claims in this very ad? That's reality check. I'm Colin Benedict.

(End video segment.)

MR. BENEDICT: So, you know, I think that the – I think that was one of the most well-received reality checks that we did and obviously the most enjoyable for me. (Laughter.)

It was – so, you know, they obviously started using our misleading tags to try to paint the other as dirty, but, again, the ad of course leaves out sort of the big picture, which is sort of what I tried to do there.

MR. PAPPER: One of the things that we found, by the way, in the study, is that a lot of news directors reported that candidates used adwatch-type stories in their own ads and in just about a third of those cases, they said the misused information in adwatch stories to advance their cause.

MR. JACKSON: So, if you use our stuff, you'd better be careful because we'll be looking at that. Mark Matthews.

MATTHEWS: As Brooks mentioned, I started out doing investigative work. I spent most of my career in San Diego as an investigative reporter and came – I mean I'm not to say that there aren't crooks in politics; there are in San Diego and that's as close as I got to politics while I was down there. In 2003, December of 2003, I got an opportunity to go to KGO-TV and be their national political reporter and we leaned pretty heavily on FactCheck.org; we've got a video of, I think, the first story we did in May of 2004 and:

(Begin video segment.)

MS. : As governor, George Bush enacted reforms that produced dramatic results.

(End video segment.)

MR. MATTHEWS: What we were doing is we were fact-checking – (chuckles) – what we were doing was ripping off FactCheck.org. (Laughter.) The first story we did was – this video's supposed to move, but it's not – and it's not going to.

The first story we did was on FactCheck.org. And we got Brooks to go to the ABC bureau and do an interview with us and explain to us what he was doing and get him to agree to let us take his stories, basically, and put them on the air, which was of tremendous benefit to a new political reporter who was trying to learn the ropes and, you know, put good information on the air. Brooks provided the good information. We made it clear that FactCheck.org was doing all the heavy lifting and we were getting the benefit, which was good information that was pretty well received. In fact, it was so well received that pretty soon we were doing a fact-check story every Friday because the producers love for alliteration.

And then we started doing them more than once a week. It was 2004, the presidential elections. The presidential election was going on and there was lots of ads, and our biggest difficulty was finding a broadcast-quality example of the ad that Brooks and his team had fact-checked and then it was graphics heavy, so we had to get our graphics department to put together the thing that you're not seeing. And that was the hard part. Two thousand and four rolled into 2005 and – you've got it? Great, let it go.

(Begin video segment.)

MS. : As governor, George Bush enacted reforms that produced dramatic results.

MR. : Fact check: Bush's dramatic results came because some Texas school officials reported phony dropout rates.

MR. : What we do is we try to monitor the factual accuracy of what the candidates are saying and what's being said about the candidates.

MR. : 19 years senate foreign relations committee, author of a strategy to win the war on terror.

MR. : Fact check: the ads – (inaudible).

(End video segment.)

MR. MATTHEWS: (Video continues playing.) And that was the first story we did, and as I said, all the hard work was done by Brooks and his team. We put it on the air with the graphics that we were able to put together. In 2005, Governor Schwarzenegger decided it would not be an off year politically in California; he had a whole raft of propositions that he wanted to push forward with his agenda. So, we were in a little bit of a bind because now we didn't have Brooks doing that kind of work; we had to start doing it ourselves, which was really a great thing for me and a good thing for the station. I was able to use what little investigative skills I've managed to gather and we started doing our own fact-checking.

I remember calling Brooks up and saying, how the hell do you do this? And he said, get a lot of people and be very, very careful. (Scattered laughter). And so, we were very, very careful; we still don't have enough people. The reaction we've got, you know, even the complaints that we got were framed in a way of, why aren't you fact-checking this guy, which is a positive.

We got this person to call me up one time and say, why don't you fact-check Nancy Pelosi and all of the property that she owns and the grapes that she owns in Napa and she doesn't have union workers, but she's getting all of this support from unions, but she has non-union people picking her grapes. It turned into a wonderful story. The guy that wrote the book on that was a fellow named Peter Schweizer from the Hoover Institution, and he got it completely wrong, and we got him on the air saying, I don't have to fact-check my allegations; it's up to her to deny them, which was – (laughter). We got a thousand hits in one day on our website, and for a fact-check story, that's pretty good. Our website gets maybe 2.2 million web visits, whatever that is, in a month. Our fact-check stories are about 4 percent of that.

But when we ask viewers what they liked about news, our research department tells us that 60 percent of the people that were surveyed – I guess they did a 6(00)- or 700- people survey – 60 percent told them that fact-check of political claims would make them more likely to watch local news. And they ranked it as third out of 16 different characteristics. They ranked it as third for the most compelling reason to watch local news.

I found this out when I called our research department and asked them when Brooks invited me here because it didn't matter to us, really; what mattered to us is that it fits in with what we want to do, which is not the he-said, she-said, but do the work, do the research, put the information out there and so now we have Brooks Jackson and thank

god I have Jake Tapper and the ABC political team because they never sleep. I don't think he blinks – (laughter) – and that's a really, a great resource; it's terrific to be able to thank you in person. Any questions?

MR. JACKSON: Let's hold questions until the end if that is okay.

MR. MATTHEWS: Perfect.

MR. JACKSON: Thank you. I neglected to say about Jake, before, that he's some kind of a media renaissance. I think there's no news medium that you haven't practiced in, right?

MR. PAPPER: Video games.

MR. JACKSON: Video games, well we haven't gotten to video games yet. Anyway, Jake will tell you about it. Jake Tapper of ABC News.

JAKE TAPPER: I think that ABC News "World News Tonight" started doing fact checks, if I'm correct, right after Senator Zell Miller's speech at the Republican National Convention, which you may remember, was somewhat histrionic. And the idea – I wish I could claim any credit, but the idea belonged to the late great Peter Jennings and the executive producer of "World News," Jon Banner, that just – the idea just being, Zell Miller had made many, many allegations about John Kerry in primetime; let's check out and see how accurate they are or are not.

And from then, we just started regularly doing fact checks after debates. We would do them live after the presidential debates between Kerry and Bush, and then on occasion throughout the week. And it was a lot of fun, as Brooks mentioned. We would drag him in whenever he was available to be a voice in the piece.

There are not a lot of people in Washington who you can go to to be considered reliable arbiters of what is true and what is not true. It's a very – it's a very, very small pool, especially if you're inclined as I am not to just go to newspaper reporters, which is, I think, generally kind of a lazy habit sometimes that the TV reporters do when they want to say something but they don't have the confidence to say it. So, Norm Ornstein, Stu Rothenberg, Brooks Jackson, the pool's pretty small – Kathleen, I think we hit on you a few times, so I'm grateful for that.

I think we have a clip to show. I'm not sure what it is, but we'll watch it and I'll tell you all about it.

(Begin video segment.)

PETER GIBBONS: (In progress) – that calls itself Swift Boat Veterans for Truth are being challenged again today. Three more veterans who served with Kerry have come forward to contradict what the group has been saying. Here's ABC's Jake Tapper.

MR. TAPPER: Patrick Runyon was with John Kerry the night in 1968 when Kerry won his first Purple Heart.

PATRICK RUNYON: It was the scariest night we ever spent over there.

MR. TAPPER: In June, Runyon told the story of that night to a private investigator, who said he worked for a Vietnam veterans group. The investigator wrote up the conversation in this affidavit and asked Runyon to sign it; Runyon refused.

MR. RUNYON: It didn't – I hate to say captured what occurred there. And he added stuff like, I do not recall Kerr firing, which I know, definitely I said, Kerry was firing.

MR. TAPPER: The investigator, it turns out, worked for the anti-Kerry veterans group sponsoring this latest ad. The group says there was a miscommunication between Runyon and the investigator. John O'Neal, a leader of the anti-Kerry veterans, characterizes the incident when John Kerry won his Silver Star this way.

JOHN O'NEAL: The kid was wounded in the legs by machine-gun fire, and as he ran off, John Kerry jumped off the boat and shot the kid in the back.

MR. : Why do you call a Vietcong sniper a kid?

MR. O'NEAL: I can call him Vietcong sniper if you want me to.

MR. TAPPER: Jim Rude, today an editor with the Chicago Tribune, was with John Kerry that day in 1969. In Sunday's newspaper, Rude writes, O'Neal's description is wrong and untrue, and says, the sniper was a grown man, not a kid.

The group also disputes Kerry's Bronze Star, contradicting official Navy records saying Kerry was under enemy fire when he saved the life of a Green Beret. Jim Russell was on a nearby boat that day.

JIM RUSSELL: People who said that there was no enemy fire on that river, that day when we were attacked, must have been on a different river.

MR. TAPPER: Senator Kerry has refused to refute the groups charges point by point; his campaign says he does not have to since Pentagon records and an increasing number of eyewitnesses confirm his accounts. Jake Tapper, ABC News, Washington.

(End video segment.)

MR. TAPPER: That's funny, I didn't even think of the Swift Boat Veterans ads as part of our fact-check because it was this whole other separate entity as you might recall, in 2004. It was – I guess, maybe that's really where we started fact-checking,

although I didn't think of it that way, but the ads were so prolific, and at the end of the day, so effective. That was a difficult process for some of us trying to cover the Kerry campaign and fact-check the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth ads because the Kerry campaign, for about – well, I think the Swift Boat Veterans started their attacks maybe in April or May and then they started their ads in August, and as you know, John Kerry didn't feel it was necessary to respond to the ads.

And in addition to not responding to the ads, internally in his campaign, his campaign aides who I would call and say, you know, who's – this is going to get very arcane, but who signed the after action reports and who did this and who did that, they would – they were – they didn't know; the records were sealed, the candidate was uncooperative. It was not always easy to fact-check the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth ads.

And at the – it also was complicated because at the end of the day, even if you have people like John O'Neal who's referring to a Vietcong sniper as a kid, and then you can point out on national TV, why are you calling – clearly you're calling a Vietcong sniper a kid because you're trying to create an impression that John Kerry was doing something he should not have been doing, and – but at the same time, John O'Neal and the other veterans who were part of Swift Boat Veterans for Truth were veterans, many of them decorated, many of them respected. And just because they were all affiliated with a group that was making charges, some spurious, did not mean that everything they said was untrue, so that was complicated.

It was an interesting opportunity to be a fact-checker for ABC; I still do some of it on my blog now. One of my – I became first interested in politics because of my father and one of my earliest political memories is him yelling at the television watching a debate. I'll just say B.S. is the word, although it was the full word, not just those two letters – (laughter) – yelling at candidates. And now I get to do that professionally, which is rewarding.

But I'd say, one of the weirdest things about it is how easy it would be for candidates to avoid being fact-checked if they just took a little of the hyperbole out of their speech and just stuck to the actual facts. The best example I can think of, of this from 2004 is when John Kerry would refer to General Shinseki as having been fired for having recommended 200,000 troops for Iraq. General Shinseki was not fired; he was marginalized, but he retired at the time that he was supposed to retire.

So, for John Kerry to continue to say Shinseki was fired when it was not true undercut his own point, in my view, because the point that General Shinseki was marginalized is an important one, that the administration didn't listen to what he had to recommend and the way that he was disregarded at the Pentagon afterwards is a shame. But, by taking that extra step into hyperbole, where John Edwards memorably tread in 2004 by promising that Christopher Reeve would walk again if only President Bush would lift the stem-cell ban. It seems to me that they are blurring their own messages.

Anyway, that's it. Thanks.

MR. JACKSON: Thank you, Jake, next is Bill Adair, who has launched politifact.com. I want to point out that he's come bearing gifts, one of the trademarks on their website is their truth-o-meter, and as a little stress reliever, which you can, if you wish, pick up on your way out along with little Factcheck magnifying glasses, pencils, we've got all kinds of goodies. Anyway, Bill?

BILL ADAIR: Thank you, Brooks. It's great to be here, I really have been inspired by Brooks and Kathleen's work at Factcheck from the beginning. It was something, I think, we've been long overdue in doing in the media and they really have set the standard for thorough fact checking that is unbiased and in-depth and it's just great work.

My original inspiration for this actually came from Kathleen's book back in the mid-'80s when I was a college student. I was a political science major at Arizona State and I did my senior thesis on political ads and how the media was failing to check them. And Kathleen at the time had put out a book about political advertising. And I did – and I studied a race in Arizona where, it was a referendum about regulating hospitals and the hospitals got together and ran a big ad campaign claiming that this initiative was going to limit health care.

And the ads were all false and the Arizona Republic, in particular, did a pretty poor job at telling people how false this was. And I interviewed, the reporter covered the race afterward, and she was like, yeah, you know they were all false, but you know – and there was just not – (laughter) – there was just not enough realization by the media that this is one of our core obligations, to say something's false.

And as we look forward to the 2008 presidential race and what we are going to do at the St. Petersburg Times, I approached my editors with the proposal for Politifact, and said, you know, we can't be afraid to call things false, and I think we in the media have been scared into false balance. And so many political stories have this kind of well, on the one hand, and on the other hand, and we haven't said, that's false. And I think we've got to get some guts to do that. And I think that Brooks and Factcheck have given us the courage to just say, that's just wrong! Or, alternately, and one of the things we try to do that's different in Politifact is to say, that's true. And I think that we really serve voters in doing that.

And so we, as we came up with the idea for Politifact, one idea was to create what over time would become a very rich database that voters could go to and see all of the claims that we've checked by the candidates and whether we decided that they were true or half true or false.

And we came up with the idea of the truth-o-meter – not – you know, the phrase has been used before, but we took it to an extreme here and have really built the entire site. And pretty much, many of the things that are politifact also appear in our newspaper

and in Congressional Quarterly's weekly report. But we came up with the idea of the truth-o-meter, recognizing that truth is not black or white, that it is really gray. And if you read Brooks and Kathleen's book that came out a few months ago, they get to this and they explain some of the many ways that candidates and elected officials can fudge the truth.

And it was clear that using a meter like this was a great way to give voters a snapshot of truth. And it's not a perfect science; it's an art. You know, you can quibble with our rulings; I'm sure some of them – but I think in balance, we do a pretty darn good job of giving you an overview of whether something's true. And one thing that we've decided to do that was a little different from Factcheck is that we would slice and dice the claim by the candidate into a sentence that could be ruled on as true or half-true or false. And so, each truth-o-meter ruling you see there does that, where we have, instead of just taking an ad and saying is it true, a single ad, as with one I did on Bill Richardson, may involve three claims that we rule on. And that, each of those then go into this database, so that if you're interested in Bill Richardson, you go to the Bill Richardson page, look that up.

So, let me – I'll walk through the page a little bit, if you could scroll back up to the top just for a minute – wonderful design and architecture. We used an open-source program called Django to create this, a brilliant reporter web architect named Matt Wade came up with the concept sort of based on my scribbles on a piece of paper. And the idea is every day we have a lead story – you see there it's the Obama chain email story. Not every day, but we try at least a couple times a week to have a new "On the Tube," which is a – either an ad or a video that we check. And then every day, things rotate down so you can see yesterday's lead story is now beneath the Obama one and everything just gets pushed off. It stays in the archive, which I think is the true value.

Still on the On the Tube area here on the right, you'll see, this I essentially just a truth-o-meter ruling on one claim from Romney's ad. The claim is, she hasn't run a corner store, she hasn't run a state, she hasn't run a city, she hasn't run anything. And if you could click on the headline, that opens up the truth-o-meter ruling and explanation on that item. And the whole philosophy here is putting the voter first. You know, a lot of fact-checking over the years, I think, has been really good, but you've got to read to the 18<sup>th</sup> paragraph to see if it's true. And we wanted to respect voters' time and say, okay, we'll tell you at the beginning how true it is, and if you want to go deeper, you can go deeper.

And so, you can then read and see why we decided it was barely true, if you could scroll down just a little bit. We always have the ad; we use YouTube videos, so we always have the ad there that you can play. And then just as fact-check does so well, we put in the sources. This particular one doesn't have much because it's really just based on her resume and an interview, but if you go back to the homepage now, most of our items have clickable sources so you can go through and see the sources that we relied on.

Now, if you scroll down there, the first section here on the left is the truth-o-meter. This is simply a claim by a candidate. Candidates makes a claim – let me pick one here – let's do the Hillary one. Hillary made that claim in the debate NIH funding has been cut under Bush. You know, I heard that in the debate and I thought, you know, I remember covering a lot of press conferences where they were talking about doubling NIH funding; I'd be surprised if it's been cut. We gave that to one of our great researchers at CQ, checked into it, found it wasn't true, did the math to make sure you adjust for inflation; nope, still not true. Call the Clinton campaign, hey, we got you, and they sort of lamely tried a few things to try to convince us otherwise but finally kind of threw up their hands and said, okay.

And so – and then, if you were to open up, we won't take the time now but if you were to open up to the same format as the one we saw in Romney. So, the truth-o-meter rulings, these are our most recent five, if you could scroll down, here is the attack file. We realize, and this area has actually been the most active lately, that it's important to check the attacks on the candidates as well as the claims made by the candidates. And we also came to recognize that the attacks are not going to come from other candidates; they're going to come from 527s and from the RNC and the DNC and in this case, one I just did today on Obama's email, it's going to come from a chain email.

So we formatted this in such a way so that this goes into Obama's database, the email one; it also goes into the chain email database. Let's click – go ahead and click on Obama. Now, this is Obama's candidate page, so this has every ruling that we've made about him and every attack against him that we have checked, and again here thumbnails, respecting the voter. They don't have a lot of time – I just want to see, what did you say on that one about that email? Well, there it is. This chain email, which I know Michael did a nice article about and others have written about, you know, totally wrong claims that he refused to say the Pledge of Allegiance, proving – you know, the video from Jake's network proves that's not true. So, we – if you're interested in Obama, you can go to this page and see it and you can see any attack on him that we have checked. I think this is a real value.

Now one last thing, if you'll – could you go back down to that item for a minute? Click on chain email, and this is a real crusade for me because I just think these chain emails – we in the press have sort of ignored them for too long and sort of – it's a bunch of crackpots, zealots, you know, we don't need to check that; we do. Obama was getting asked about this at every campaign stop this week. And these things are out there and people are wondering if they're true. And I think we have an obligation, even when they seem ridiculous, to just say, you know, we checked it out, it's wrong.

So, I've done, I guess three of these? Yeah, three of these. The first one was the one I just talked about. The other one was this Hillary Clinton one and I think some of the Hillary ones are rebounding after they were done in 2001 and when she first got elected to the Senate and then kind of smoldered for six years and now they're coming back. And I just think it's really important for us to check those too. And the beauty here is broadly defining journalism. We are not just about producing a daily product with

the political news of the day. We are serving voters by creating a database that they can go to before the election to say, huh, I'm kind of interested in Obama or Bide, or whoever; let me see how they stack up and we've made that as easy as we can for them.

Let me just close by saying I think there's a tremendous future for this. I'm, like Brooks, very encouraged to see others getting into it. We've had interest from other news organizations that want to partner with us. We've got another newspaper that wants to do a franchise of Politifact and do their own Politifact in their state. We've also just created a widget and I've got press kits that are out at the table that have information about this. If you have a website, if you're a news organization, or if you're anybody with a website, you can put our widget on your website and it will put the most recent three truth-o-meter rulings and it'll just constantly update. And the Denver Post is using ours already, and we just got a call yesterday from Harvard, from the Institute of Politics, they want to put it on one of their pages.

So, I think there's a tremendous future for this. I think we're really doing something special and it's long overdue. So, thank you.

MR. JACKSON: Thank you, Bill, and we'll have questions shortly, but first Michael Dobbs, who ironically I guess we'd call the new kid on the block – (chuckles) – since you've had the most recent feature but certainly no kid at all. One thing I want to stress is that this is not the kind of work that's not best given to a cub reporter, but to somebody who's been lied to a couple of times. (Laughter.) Michael.

MICHAEL DOBBS: Well, thanks very much, Brooks, and you're certainly the father of this movement. We – and it's great that we're now a fraternity; we're not just ink stain wretches, we're ink stain fact-checkers and we're proud of our calling. Jake mentioned the Swift Boats for Truth – Swift Boats Veterans for Truth. I was involved in that too back in that last campaign. And I think it actually illustrated quite a few things wrong with political reporting.

And most of the reporting on that episode was not looking into what happened in Vietnam all those years ago; it was looking at the horserace aspects, the potential impact on Kerry's candidacy. It treated everybody the same, you know, there was – one side would say something; the other side would respond. So, there was this sort of he-said, she-said journalism to it. There was very little attempt to find out what actually happened. I think I was one of the first people actually to go down to the U.S. Naval Historical Center in, here in Washington and comb through all those – a lot of those records and produced a very big piece trying to determine what had happened in one particular episode. So, that kind of whetted my interest in this whole business.

We've got the – our website up there. The – my experience is not perhaps a real traditional experience for an American reporter. I spent a lot of time covering communist countries, particularly the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe. I spent 10 years in that part of the word, and so I covered this extraordinary story, the collapse of communism.

Now, when we were covering that story, we did not try to be fair and balanced; we tried to be fair, but we didn't try to be balanced. They're two different things here. If one person is telling the truth and the other person is telling a lie, as was often the case in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the communist parties – party regimes would simply tell lies; we did not give fair time to the people who were telling the lies. We tried to tell the truth as we saw it, and if we had abided by the strict conventions of American journalism, you know, we wouldn't have been able to describe this incredible story that was unfolding in front of us very truthfully.

So then, I returned home after the collapse of the Soviet Union and I started covering the State Department – this is in 1993 – and suddenly people told me that we had to – you know, there were different conventions of journalism here to the ones that I'd been used to as a foreign correspondent, that you need to, you know, there needed to be balance. Reporters couldn't make independent judgments, which I had been making for virtually 10 years and that part, recovering the collapse of communism.

As, I think Jake said, or Bill said, that journalists here seem to be reluctant to make judgments and it takes some sort of courage and confidence to make independent judgments of your own. But I think, you know, we have to do it. And I think that the American press, including the Washington Post and including myself, failed during the run-up to the war in Iraq because we didn't make the kind of independent judgments that we should've been making based on the evidence that was in front of us, for the most part. We allowed ourselves to participate in the kind of he-said, she-said journalism, and of course, given those rules, the administration had a great advantage because they controlled the information and there were very few people on the other side to contradict them.

So at any rate, how did I get involved in this particular venture. I retired from the Post a couple of years ago. I took a buyout and I went off to write a book. But the Post said that I could come back on contract to cover the 2008 political campaign. And I tried to sort of formulate, I guess about six months ago, what I might do as a political reporter covering the 2008 campaign. And I wanted to correct what I saw as some of the flaws in political reporting, the focus on the horse race and the he said, she said.

I was also interested in exploring the new technology. But it seemed to be that a lot of blogs, a lot of Internet coverage is either very partisan or very opinionated. So I wanted to get away from that. I wanted to do something factual and unpartisan rather – and you know, 99 percent of blogs on the web are both partisan and opinionated. And it turns out, actually, that's one way to drive your audience out. The easiest way to get an audience is to be very predictably on one side of the argument. It's much more difficult to be unpartisan and factual, but you'd have thought that there should be – that if there are all of these partisan blogs out there, you would've thought there would be an audience for something that tries to be unpartisan and factual rather than opinionated.

So I suggested this to the Post and of course, you know, what we're doing here represents a significant departure from traditional Washington Post journalism. If you

scroll down a little bit, this is a claim that went up today by Bill Richardson, saying that he, New Mexico is the only state in the country that is following the Kyoto Treaty. He said this in a radio interview to a woman called Stephanie Miller. Now, if you go down a little further, I said, investigate this claim; it's completely ridiculous. And I am able to make judgment. I say that it's ridiculous; it's not true. I was sort of debating with myself as to whether to give him three Pinocchio's or four Pinocchio's, but I'd given Giuliani four Pinocchios earlier in the week for repeating his false claim about the prostate cancer statistics.

So even though Richardson is doing a fine job in New Mexico on environmental issues, most people think, this particular claim is ludicrous. So I awarded him four Pinocchio's. Now, I wouldn't have been able to do that four or five years ago in the Washington Post. And this, by the way, is not only on the website; it's in the pages of the newspaper. And when I presented this proposal to the Post that I would go around awarding politicians Pinocchio's, I felt that there was going to be a lot of opposition, a lot of debate on this. To my surprise, there was virtually no debate at all. Nobody discussed these sort of deep, underlying journalistic issues, which they would have agonized over just a few years ago. The only debate was my original idea was to give people one-inch noses, two-inch noses, or four-inch noses, in accordance with the traditional story, the traditional fairy tale.

But the editors didn't like the idea of giving people four-inch noses. Instead of giving people four-inch noses, we settled on four Pinocchio's, which was a compromise that I was happy to make. Could we go back to – if you go back up to the top, you should be able to click on the Giuliani, on the left-hand side, this is the second time I tried to tackle the Giuliani story.

Now, I think this kind of illustrates both the flaws of traditional political journalism and, you know, what I and other fact checkers are trying to do. When he ran this ad up in New Hampshire, he claimed that essentially 82 percent of – he as a prostate cancer patient had an 82-percent chance of surviving in the United States and only 44 percent. And therefore, his chances of surviving in the U.S. were twice as high as in England.

We talked to a number of experts at places like the National Cancer Institute here in Bethesda, the American Cancer Society; people have done peer-reviewed papers on this subject. And for various complicated reasons that I won't go into now, this claim is complete nonsense. But yet – we pointed it out; other people pointed it out. And he continued to repeat it. So I awarded him four Pinocchio's the first time and I awarded him four Pinocchio's the second time.

Now, I was talking quite extensive to the Giuliani campaign about this and they said, well, why do you have to do it a second time? And I said, I'll keep on doing it as long as he repeats the claim. (Laughter.) Then they said, well, you know, we have this doctor, who happens also to be Giuliani's medical advisor, David Gratzner, who says

something else and we have all of the – they gave me a whole slew of publications, mainly conservative publications, that said, actually, Giuliani is right.

And they said, you have to balance, you know – you can say, these people say he's wrong, but you also morally, journalistically obliged to put our side of the story in it as well and point to all of these people who say that he's right so it's a kind of balanced story.

And I said, I'm sorry, a cancer researcher from the National Cancer Institute has much greater authoritative standing than a – certainly than Mr. Giuliani, and even more than Mr. Giuliani's medical advisor, who may be a G.P., he may be a doctor, but he's not a cancer expert. So I said, if you can give us, if you can suggest a peer-reviewed researcher in prostate cancer, we'll be happy to organize a debate between one of the people we've quoted and your peer-reviewed researcher. That was about a week ago and so far, they haven't produced anybody at all.

So, my goal in this, I guess – we have, I guess, our website is organized very similarly to Bill's website. We have archives. You can – in addition to looking at the latest post on the left, you can look up the candidates, you can look up Giuliani, you can look up Hilary Clinton, you can look up the issues down below that. I think that, in addition, I hope that as the campaign goes along over the next year, we will build up a fairly substantial archive and record of misstatements and lies by politicians.

So I just conclude by saying that my hero, my journalistic hero and model in the 30 years or so that I've been practicing journalism is the little boy in the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale about the emperor with no clothes. And if you remember that story, the emperor's courtiers and his tailor produce what they said was a fine set of clothes for the emperor. It turned out that there weren't any clothes and the emperor was naked. But the emperor paraded through the city without any clothes on and everybody in the entire population applauded him. And there was just one little boy who said, but he isn't wearing any clothes. And the adults tried to shush that boy up and tell him that he was talking nonsense. But the little boy stuck to his opinion and said, no, the emperor is not wearing any clothes. And gradually, everybody else started saying the emperor wasn't wearing any clothes either.

And I've often felt myself in the position of that little boy trying to tell truth to power even though the truth isn't popular. And it was fairly easy to do so in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe because it was clear who was telling the truth and who wasn't. But you have the same problem here in Western countries and the United States although the sort of techniques of manipulating the truth are more sophisticated than they were in communist countries.

But nevertheless, I still think that the little boy in the fairy tale is a wonderful model for journalists to have. And I think that we should get back to that tradition of journalism. And I think the people around this table are attempting to do just that. And

I'm proud to be part of this new fraternity, the father of which is right here beside me.  
(Laughter.)

MR. JACKSON: To keep this on schedule here, or close to it, I'm going to limit my own moderating to one question, which I address to the whole panel and Jake, if you have a response, we'll start with you and just come down the line. In your experience, and all of you, do you find or feel that politicians are getting more truthful or less truthful. Or is there any change at all? And what effect, if any, do you see of your work on the behavior of politicians? Jake –

MR. TAPPER: I would be remiss, in this academic environment, if I attempted to quantify how much –

MR. JACKSON: Impressions.

MR. TAPPER: How much politicians are lying. I think they're lying as much as they always have and probably always will. I do think that their campaigns are very sensitive to what we do as fact-checkers or adwatchers. I know that during the 2004 campaign, I would constantly get calls from the Kerry campaign, from the Bush campaign, taking issue with – no so much with what I was saying, but whether or not there was this balance because although I agree with Michael, this idea of balance should not exist if someone is lying and somebody is telling the truth, politicians say so many things.

And when you have a minute and forty-five or two minutes on television or however many column inches in the Washington Post or the St. Petersburg Times, the question is, whom do you fact-check, what if one candidate is lying more than another candidate? How many – you know, if we had room for three fact-checks in one piece, how do you allocate those fact-checks?

That was always a subject of debate. I do not think that we are necessarily having a demonstrable result on what politicians are saying, but I do think that we are probably having an effect on how their messages are being heard. And just one other thing, I just was wondering, when I was listening to Michael talk, I was wondering if this rise of fact-check in any way has anything to do with the war in Iraq and the facts as they were laid out before that war took place, facts that obviously many of which turned out not to be true. Just theoretically, it just occurs to me that journalism in general was asleep at the job during the buildup to war –

MR. JACKSON: Mark?

MR. MATTHEWS: Yeah, I think you're right. And I think fact checking has had an effect on the candidates and the politicians.

The president's State of the Union speech, where he talked about the "yellow cake," I don't think journalists did a very good job of fact checking the run-up to the war.

The next State of the Union speech was remarkably fact-free; I mean, people had their knives out and the president, I think, altered his speech in order to not fall into that. And I think that now, we're doing fact-check pieces saying, here's an ad that doesn't have any facts in it at all, and here's how you can tell that, and here are some of the keywords you should watch for. FactCheck.org just did a piece on that not too long ago, and I think we're seeing more and more of it, and I think it's in response to the fact that you're not going to catch me lying if I don't say anything. (Laughter.)

MR. JACKSON: Michael, more truthful, less truthful?

MR. DOBBS: Well, they certainly seem to still make a lot of factual claims, which they – I mean, I find no difficulty finding them. For example, in that Stephanie Miller interview that Bill Richardson gave yesterday, or two days ago I think, was about a five-minute interview and there were, you know, three or four questionable statements in it. So it depends.

You know, different candidates are more vulnerable than others. I mean, Giuliani is more vulnerable partly because, you know, he's got this kind of authentic persona and he's less controlled than Hillary Clinton. And, you know, that's one of the things that is attractive about Giuliani. Whereas it's more difficult to find factual errors in Hillary Clinton's statement because she's, you know, so rehearsed and so prepared. So just because you find the errors does not mean that, you know, you should automatically vote for the fact-free candidate over the candidate who makes a lot of errors.

In the case of Giuliani, you know, everybody can make a mistake. For me, the fact that he repeated the error, for me, is much worse than that he made the error in the first place. You know, I think we have to give them a bit of slack; people can make errors when they're talking just off the cuff, and many errors – and Giuliani falls into that category. But when he repeats the error and is not willing to, you know, to listen to the other side at all then I think we can justifiably criticize him.

MR. JACKSON: Bill, are you seeing any trend here?

MR. ADAIR: I've seen a modest reduction, I think. I heard from a friend in the Senate that the – because I think pretty much everyone in the Senate is running for president – (laughter) – that the candidates, they are very aware of what we're doing and that we've really cramped their style, is the way it was put to me. And so I think there's been a modest impact; visible, like everything in fact checking, all roads seem to lead to Rudy Giuliani because he has, as Michael was pointing out, I mean, he's just saying some of the most interesting, provocative things.

And I'll give examples on both sides. One is the prostate cancer thing, where he's just been completely unapologetic and just continues to repeat this misstatement in the ad and, you know, they just won't back down on that. But another example, and this gets to something you guys did, actually, he's been making a claim for months that he cut 23 taxes, and he just repeated that in speech after speech after speech. And Brooks took him

to task early saying, you know, 23 is just not a fair number; many of these were state initiatives and really, he can probably only fairly take credit for 13 or 14. And we then did an item, largely relying on Brooks's great work, and said the same thing. And in an interview this week with NBC, they asked him about it and he said, eh, I think probably 15. And so, you know, you do get the sense maybe there is an impact there but who knows, you know, because then on the other hand he keeps repeating the cancer statistics.

MR. JACKSON: And a point that was made earlier, 15 ain't bad; why exaggerate it if you don't have to?

Colin, are you seeing any trend? You've been doing this as long as anybody up here.

MR. BENEDICT: Well, I'll talk a little bit maybe more from a local-state perspective because I spend most of my time doing that.

I think they're certainly aware of it; I've seen how they handle things is quite different. But I think they also make a political calculation. I mean, think about the number of people who see that the ad itself versus the number the people who see your adwatch, and in my state, we're the most-watched television affiliate in Madison, which is the second largest in the market out of six in Wisconsin. So if you're running a statewide campaign, the percentage of people who saw my adwatch probably is pretty low compared to the number of people who saw the ad. And until there's that critical mass, where the public is really being inundated with this fact-check, adwatch type of reporting, I don't think there will be a substantial change in how they operate.

MR. JACKSON: Bob, anything to add?

MR. PAPPER: I think it's a good time to be in the field because I think there will be more and more to write about and not less and less, quite honestly. The rise in third-party ads has really fueled a lot of these issues and we keep seeing, I think, a growth in negative advertising, and that's where we see a lot of the attacks. And the advantage of attacks, and incorrect ones and negative ads, is that if you're going to fact check that you are proving innocence, which means that you're kind of doing damage again even as you show something is wrong. And so I think we're not going to see less of that; I think, you know, in some cases we may wind up seeing more of it.

MR. JACKSON: All right. I'd like to throw this session open to questions from the audience. We have two staffers who have microphones and will hand you one. Please hold up your hand if you want to ask a question, and identify yourself, please.

Q: Thank you. For the transcript, my name is Dan Wiggins. I'm not affiliated professionally; I'm a retired government attorney, previously trained and worked in journalism.

My question is sort of, again, anecdotal and it follows up on yours. When I look at someone like Giuliani saying, under repeated cross-examination, I stand by my lie and I'll defend to the death, or whatever he is saying, I do ask, well, why is this man – obviously he hasn't seen your presentation today, and perhaps that will turn him around but I would tend to bet against it. Is it something about the contention he made that is closer to the nerve of his base that he resists recanting or accepting error correction? Is it something about the process? But I toss this question out; I have my own views, but I won't bore you with those.

MR. JACKSON: So the question is, why do some candidates resist in admitting error?

Q: Is there something – yeah, I think someone else may have – the one on Giuliani has been higher profiled for good and sufficient reasons. But perhaps some of the other panelists or perhaps, you know, the consultants' side of it, someone will have anecdotally had an experience where they just refuse to accept correction and we can draw some inferences.

MR. JACKSON: Anyone on the panel – yeah. Jake?

MR. TAPPER: I've covered Giuliani for ABC. I mean, I could tell you it's not insignificant that he's getting the statistic from his medical advisor. I mean, in terms of who Giuliani is, he's a man that has a circle of friends to whom he is very loyal; you can see that even with the Bernie Kerik indictment. He has not done what, you know, Bill Clinton probably would have done in a heartbeat and that's just to say I have never met the guy; I don't know what you're talking about. I mean, he – and he's loyal to people around him.

And Doctor – what's his name? Dr. Gratzner is someone who works for the Manhattan Institute, which is a conservative think tank in New York. I think the larger point Giuliani's making is accurate, right, that their survival rates for prostate cancer are higher in the United States than –

MR. DOBBS: (Off mike.) Let's pause the whole debate here; we weren't going to it. But five-year survival rates do not necessarily mean that you have a better chance of surviving in one country than the other.

MR. TAPPER: I'm not going to embrace the 44 percent statistic myself. (Laughter.) In any case, all I'm saying is I think that he probably looks at this as illustrating a larger point, that he cites this when he's talking about his approach to health care versus the approach to health care of the Democrats, which he sees as running towards more European socialized medicine. That would be the insight I would offer on Giuliani and his loyalty to his friends.

MR. JACKSON: Jake has an excellent point, and it sort of reminds me of something that Spiro Agnew's PR man once said, famously, when reporters kept

accurately reporting stupid things that Agnew had said. Finally, he said, well, don't report what he says; report what he means. (Laughter.) So I think they think they have an underlying truth, and the facts that they may use to illustrate that aren't as relevant to them as they are to us, perhaps a theory.

A person had her hand up here. Please identify yourself.

Q: Hi. I'm Kitty Bennet (sp). I'm a researcher with the New York Times. You're doing fantastic work; I appreciate it every day. I subscribe to all your RSS feeds; it's just great stuff.

My question to all of you is, have you ever run into a fact or something that you wanted to check that was so difficult you gave up? Or, if you didn't give up, what was the hardest thing you've had to do?

MR. JACKSON: Colin?

MR. BENEDICT: Hmm. I don't think there was ever anything I came across that I just couldn't find the answer for. I just can't think of a circumstance where that has happened.

MR. JACKSON: Bill?

MR. ADAIR: I've got one that I shelved, and I hope will bring back at some point, on Obama made some fuel economy claims. And I thought, ah, this will be an easy one to check; you know, fuel economy in Japan; fuel economy in the United States, pretty much the same. I, you know, days later was knee-deep in the intricacies of how difficult it is to compare fuel mileage, fleets, mileage travel to all this stuff, and it just was – you know, I got to the point where I really didn't know whether what he said was true or not.

And it was one of these, well, it couldn't have been true, might have been false, you know. And it just got to the point – Alyssa (sp) was actually not working with us at this point, and so I decided that I would put it aside and see if he repeated the claim and look for, sort of, more guidance.

MR. JACKSON: Michael?

MR. DOBBS: You know, I think that's a good point because often you can't have a snap judgment. And, you know, with deference to Bill I think that, you know, sometimes you need to reserve judgment. You can't sort of give your pants-on-fire judgment just like that. So we have something called a verdict pending, which means that if I'm not sure I kind of open it up for discussion. And I think that the readers are actually a great resource there, and it kind of clarifies the issue.

For example, the whole debate about General Petraeus's claims about declines in Iraqi casualties during the war. When I first started reporting that I wasn't sure, you know, who was telling the truth here and who wasn't. So I – and it's very complicated and very serious issue. So I didn't award him the Pinocchio at the beginning at all. I now have actually a little icon for verdict pending, a kind of judicial scales. I said we're just going to discuss this and we'll see what happens.

Also, with the whole question about Gore and the "Inconvenient Truth." Many readers at the beginning, I was sort of attacked by the Gore followers for criticizing their champion on the day he won the Nobel Peace Prize. But I didn't deliver a verdict that day. I put my verdict pending – I put in a verdict pending category, that I wanted to open the subject for discussion. And then a week or two later, I felt confident enough to give him one Pinocchio because, you know, there were some things in his movie that were wrong. But I didn't feel confident about that the first day.

So, you know, there should be this – I think we should be modest about, you know, what we can do immediately. And we should be willing to revise our conclusions, and we should be willing to involve readers in the research process.

MR. JACKSON: Jake?

MR. TAPPER: There are three subjects that are very difficult to fact check, three areas. One is just on the subject of Iraq. It was very difficult in 2004 to fact check claims about how many Iraqi troops were prepared, were – I mean, the number was misleading, slippery, difficult to assess. And so when somebody would say there are 150,000 troops – Republicans, George W. Bush would say 150,000 Iraqi troops were ready to go; John Kerry would say the number is more like 5,000 – it was difficult to say. It depends what you mean by ready to go, it depends what you mean by trained, tested. So that's one, the murky world of Iraq. I would say it's very complex.

The second kind of thing is like, for instance, if somebody was going to try to fact check Hillary Clinton in that last debate. Well, she didn't really say anything, whether it was not just the subject of the driver's licenses for illegal immigrants but Charlie Rangel's tax plan, plans for Social Security reform; she gave the impression of taking a whole bunch of positions when actually, if you read what she said, she took none. And you can't really fact check that.

And then the third thing is just the crazy comment that comes out of politicians' mouths sometimes. John Edwards being the most recent example when he said, at an MTV debate I believe, something along the lines of – or an MTV forum, something along the lines of, pretty soon every black man is going to be dead or in jail, every young black man is going to be dead or jail. Did you find – I mean, it's just like, how do you even fact check that? (Laughter.) That's nuts. That's just an insane thing to say.

Those are three areas that I always have difficulty covering.

MR. JACKSON: Okay.

Just as a question down here – I just want to add that some things, I think, are not checkable. In our book, Kathleen and I – “Unspun” is the title, by the way – we talk about the sinking of the battleship Maine. They’re still arguing about whether that was a Spanish mine, as claimed at the time we went to war over that or a smoldering fire in a coal locker, which Admiral Rickover later concluded, I think the predominance of evidence probably indicates that’s what happened. But some things are just unknowable.

Yes, sir?

Q: Hi, my name is John Molesky (sp). I’m with the Newseum. And echoing some of the other sentiments, I just want to thank you for your inspiring and very useful work.

My question is along the lines of – back to something Michael Dobbs said about independent judgment, and almost a cultural prohibition in American journalism to exercise it, and the whole fair-and-balanced trap. And I would like to see if there’s any – I think that’s maybe the major obstacle, in corporate media, to your work, is journalists and management falling into this phony balance equation. And could you talk about any trends you see in that regard because I mean, it’s one thing for individual journalists to be courageous, but unless you have support from the organization it’s hard to really make a change.

MR. JACKSON: Right, this definitely falls outside the traditional he-said, she-said objective mold.

Mark, you didn’t get a comment on the last question. What’s your feeling about this? Are we practicing traditional journalism or something different, and how far outside the tradition are we?

MR. MATTHEWS: I think what we’re trying to do where I work, and where all of you guys work, is what journalism is supposed to do. We’re trying to make it – we’re take what is put out to the public, sort through it, find what is true about it, and present it to our viewers so that they can understand it.

And, you know, we do that in our political fact checks; we do that in all of our reporting or at least that’s our goal, to do that in all of our reporting. And it doesn’t matter if it’s a political story or a spot-news story, you want to sort through it.

MR. JACKSON: Anybody else itching to respond to this – I want to take a couple more questions but we are running late and I want to get us back – oh, my goodness, everybody over here. A gentleman here, in the middle?

Q: Hi, good morning. My name’s Gary Michelle (sp), I’m also a government attorney at this time. I am on official leave to be here. (Laughter.)

One of the ubiquitous things the government has, any time you apply for something, is that it's a felony, and it's in the small print of the bottom of anything you ask for from the government, is it's a felony to knowingly say anything that's untrue when you request something from the government, false statements.

My wife and I, you know, when shouting alternately at the talking heads on Sunday morning, she says, why do you watch these things, they're all lying. And it makes me wonder, and I'd like to know what you think, of whether – although fact checking is terrific, but based on what the exposure to it might be and the fact that, at best, it encourages voluntary improvement by political candidates, given the impact that what we've seen and the tremendous consequences of distortion and manipulation of fact during campaigns, might the country want to consider a law that anyone applying for public office, at the point that you become the candidate on a ballot, that you also are subject to a crime; it is a crime to make a knowing misstatement.

Now, you know, I see some heads shaking, and I understand that it may be the naivety or the idealism involved here. But what this is all about is accountability, in my opinion, and if you can in some cases go back and show that a person induced the public to vote for him based on a knowing falsehood, you have a felony which becomes an impeachable offense or at least a sentence, and the accountability of becoming a convicted criminal.

MR. JACKSON: I want to be the one to respond to that.

There's actually an article on our website called, "There Ought to Be a Law, or Maybe Not," where we address that question. Such a law was tried in Minnesota. It was overturned because in the instance a very conservative Republican had run a completely false ad and the prosecutor ended up being Skip Humphrey, of course, the son of a Democratic former vice president. And that's the sort of situation you get into. What government agency are you going to trust to adjudicate the truth of what candidates are saying?

The First Amendment stands for the proposition that – and the reason it's there is so voters can hear all sides. And it's our job in the press to help voters get the facts and reach the decisions but, you know, would you have wanted John Ashcroft adjudicating John Kerry's commercials, probably not. That's the situation you draw into.

So courts have overturned these in the very few states where they've been tried. And states – Ohio has an excellent statute, the strongest they can through the courts, an excellent enforcement mechanism, and it is so weak it has virtually no effect whatsoever. So it's up to us, the voters.

MR. : And nobody here would have a job. (Laughter.)

MR. JACKSON: Plus, yeah, what would we do for a living? So we're against that up here.

I want to get one more question in before we go to a coffee break. Jess, if you could –

Q: I'm Alicia Shepherd (sp), I'm the new ombudsman for National Public Radio. I notice no one's talked about radio.

But I wanted to ask Bill Adair, I noticed on your site you had an ad that was dividedwefail.org, and so then I wondered what happens when the ads are placed on your website and do you check those ads?

MR. ADAIR: Good question. No, I don't. And I don't know that I've even clicked through to see what that ad is all about because I'm not sure I want to know. (Laughter.) I mean, really –

Q: Well, it was clearly a political – and it had a donkey and a –

MR. ADAIR: I think it's an AARP thing but I'm not positive about that.

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. ADAIR: Okay. So, you know, and part of my reasoning is it's helpful not to know, but also just selfishly, it's time. You know, if I've only got so many hours in a day to check things and look on the web at other things that are going on, I don't have time to look at ads. And we've made the decision, you know, if candidates ask to advertise on the site and, you know, I think they would take the advertising, I think that would be no different than any advocacy group running ads in our newspaper or in anybody else's newspaper, you know. So I, you know, we're just very separate; there really is a wall there. And I never know – and in fact, it's weird, on Firefox, if you use a Firefox browser, the ads don't show up, at least on my computer. And so I'm thinking, man, you know, I wonder if our advertisers know that. (Laughter.) So anyway. So we really do keep that separate.

MR. TAPPER: We did the fact checks for ABC (?) radio, also. Just FYI.

MR. JACKSON: So you did look at the ads that were on your site?

MR. TAPPER: No, no. Just that she said that radio wasn't represented. I would do it for ABC radio, also. That's all I'm saying.

MR. JACKSON: Oh, and of course the Giuliani ad was a radio ad, the prostate cancer ad we're talking about.

What I'd like to do now is give you a chance to replenish your blood-sugar levels and caffeine levels, very briefly, while our journalists reseat themselves, I hope, in the front row, hope you can all stay and listen to the political panel and ask them questions. And in five minutes, we'll introduce our political panelists and drive on to the end.

(Break.)

MR. JACKSON: All right. We are going to resume. Please take your seats. The house is not in order. Thank you. I trust you all have your coffee and pastries in hand. I want to – as I mentioned earlier – we thought it would be remiss if we didn't take a look at this fact-checking phenomenon, this trend from the politicians' viewpoint, from the political practitioners' standpoint – the victims' standpoint, if you will – those folks who we've been holding up to our scrutiny.

So I've introduced two, or I invited two of my favorite political consultants to come by.

LADONNA LEE: Sorry, we're having too much fun.

MR. JACKSON: You're having too much fun. That's okay. I don't want to interrupt that. I'm going to get through this quickly. Ladonna Lee, the Republican consultant, now more I think a corporate strategist that has worked in a number of Senate campaigns, for – how many House campaigns do you think over the years, total – lots and lots of them. Currently, with Foley & Lardner and a strategic communications consultant, and vice chair of that firm's government and public affairs practice.

On the Democratic side, Anita Dunn, a former student of Kathleen Hall Jamison, I believe. We're not going to even go into how long ago that might have been, when that might have been. I've known Anita for a long time. Her 2004 clients included Senator Evan Bayh and Lloyd Doggett, and they both won – she wants me to say. She never tells me about the ones she has that lose, and I don't pry about that.

But I can't imagine two more brighter and more informed political consultants to talk about what we've been talking about, the rise of media fact checkers. Ladonna, you're here. I'll start with you.

MS. LEE: Thank you. I really don't consider myself a victim. Our giggle here – and girls do get to giggle, you know – was that, you know, you guys make – by ink by the barrel and now by the Internet – can reach untold numbers, but we probably get paid better than you do. Now, see, no sense of humor there in the front line. Brooks is. I thank you.

Really delighted to be here, because really, you know, candidates, the voters, the press, we all have roles to play in this democracy, and that's what this is about. And frankly, some of the conversation we've just had – and I took Brooks to task, but it is his seminar and his money – the Annenberg Center – this assumption that all politicians are

liars really is a disservice to voters and to democracy in this country. And we could do a whole session on that, but we're not going to do that.

We thought, if we really had more fun, more time, we would take some time and really take you through the Gettysburg Address, because I don't think you guys would have let the Gettysburg Address stand to the sight of day. I mean, Lincoln said our fathers. Well, it wasn't his father at the Constitutional Convention, and surely you would have taken offense at some of the other words in that great speech. But what we wanted to do was spend a little bit of time, as Brooks asked us to do, and talk about how we do this from a campaign sense, or a corporate sense. We're going to focus on political campaigns.

The Giuliani example, I will take a whack at. But in reality, in my business, when I'm dealing with a corporate client, I say don't let that truck back over you one more time. Go on. Now, on the other hand, do you know what? Rudy Giuliani is probably perfectly happy to have you all very preoccupied with this issue, because it doesn't mean squat when Election Day comes. Now, you all may say, well, if we can show he's a liar, he may not get through this process. But in reality, it's not what the voters are interested in.

Some of the things that we do when we're putting together a campaign is we are the original fact checkers. Real professional campaign operatives do not put out an ad that they haven't fact checked. That's opposition research. We start; we go; and we look at original documentation. For 20 years, I have not delivered an ad to a television or radio or newspaper without the documentation package with it, because we know we will be tasked to be truthful. And on another occasion, I'm the one who watches the checkbook – Anita is the one that makes the ads on her side of the world – do you know what it costs to produce a television ad? And to have all that money go into producing something that you then have to pull off the air is pretty disastrous.

A couple of examples of things that we've used though tactically to do – I ran the campaign that won on term limits in Washington State. Byproduct there, Tom Foley lost his seat. Term limits have never happened at a national level, but in some states, it has made a difference. And the opponents on that campaign overreached in a radio ad they did, and they claimed – and they stated; they didn't claim – they quoted the leadership of our campaign as saying that they say – and then went through a whole series of things that we said would happen if term limits didn't occur. And they threw in something such as polluting the sound. Now, this was the early '90s, and I'm just like a politician – I have no clue what it was exactly. But I'm going to tell you it was polluting the sound today; somebody can go fact check that.

Washington State did have a false advertising law. And I used that to take that ad off the air. Now, as I'm sitting in the courtroom 24 hours later watching the panel of three judges come down in favor of free speech as they did, I sat and smiled. Do you know why? I bought their time out from under them while I had them off the air, because I had the financial resources, and they didn't have the financial resources to do. So you

know, we got a little bit of press; but in reality, I got more of my message in front of the voters.

Many, many other examples – but we believe we have to go to a much tougher standard, frankly, than what you all provide. You run one or two – the Internet is more lasting – but you’re talking to a group of insiders. Our facts have got to hold as we are in front of the voters with those 12 and 1,500 points of television behind every one of those 30-second ads – 27 seconds now with the new disclaimer with the candidate saying that he is being truthful as he is there up.

In the 2004 race that I did for Senator Lisa Murkowski, Tony Knowles took her to task for her vote on the jobs bill, which as some in this room may remember – nobody in real America remembers this – but it was a bill that gave corporations an advantage on their taxes that had employees outside of the United States. And he just went after her all over. Now, the fact of the matter is, his criticism of her vote on that was that he never acknowledged that that bill also contained the provision to build the natural gas pipeline in Alaska, a issue that was absolutely critical to our strategy and our campaign.

Press didn’t care. They went after Lisa using Tony’s charge on the jobs bill. We talked till we were blue in the face. We knew they would not cover it. So what did I do? Real fact checking, we knew the only way it would pass the straight-face test is if I had Tony Knowles on camera in my ad saying that. Now, he’s pretty clever, and he worked real hard not to do it. So we waited until we had our debate where you get to set the rules of the debate, and set forth a question where you had the question, answer, rebuttal, and another question, and another rebuttal.

Now Lisa flubbed our script and she asked the question when there was only a one on one. So he got a heads up what was coming at him. But we had our film crew there, and she forced him to answer the vote – answer the question of would he or would he have not voted for that bill. And he finally said, no, I would not have voted for that bill. And we knew we had to have it so we could put his face on camera, because otherwise, he would be able to skate away. And as Lisa said, when she is getting him to that point, you know, Tony, in the United States Senate, you can’t vote maybe. You can’t vote on just part of a bill.

So the things that we do tactically in terms of fact that are very, very important in terms of candidates – the reality in this world of YouTube and 24/7 coverage is there’s a lot of time to fill. And I think you all are very much filling a chunk of that time. I’m not sure it’s really what voters care about when Election Day comes. And that is our job as political consultants is through our survey research – and we do this very in depth, as you all have used your survey research to determine what, quote, “voters want to hear about” – is these are not the issues that make a difference on Election Day. The real issues of taxes and healthcare, and there’s a whole variety of things that they, frankly, have much more interest in.

And not unlike the reputation that you all as the news media have, unfortunately, politicians and candidates today have a reputation that they are either liars, untruthful, whatever you all want to ascertain in that. So that's already there. But they want to sort through all of this and see if they can figure out who it is that comes closest to answering the question that they personally are going to ask on Election Day.

One of you used the term gotcha politics. And that really is kind of, I think, all of us know we're in that era now. And I frankly lament it. I don't know that there is any way of getting back to another place. I tend to like newspaper ink on my fingers, so I probably have my staff go to your sites more than I do. And thank you all, because you save campaigns a tremendous amount of time and resources now. We can go one-stop shopping instead of having all of our interns and people do this, because it really does – every morning you get up and you look. And frankly, in the campaign in '06, the first thing you do in the morning is check the blogs; and yes, you check to see if they used what you fed them yesterday so then you all will decide it's legitimate enough to cover. And then, we go on about our business.

But I really, really think that the media has a responsibility to make sure that the fact checking does not end up being this section of the newspaper, and really see how that this then drives throughout all of the stories. If we had one more question, I was going to ask you all who is going to start the halo column? Is there an obligation in terms of fairness and balance if we're going to have Pinocchios, if anybody gets credit for halos.

But recent story in Senator Clinton here, Washington Post – give you a little credit here or discredit as it may be – four columns here all about, quote, “the process of the campaign” as opposed to any substance, until you get to the next to the last paragraph, and it says, voters in Iowa have been so concerned about her vote in connection with the Iraq war that she now declares at the start of every speech that she will end the war if she is elected, although she does not detail how. End of story – one more paragraph just closing out about her saying, please don't feel you have to stay and listen to me if you want to go home.

So I do think we have a challenge to you all in the media and the fact-checking world that it not become the place in the media, the place on the Internet that you go to, quote, “check the facts” of the fair and balanced, the full story, and to make sure that the voters aren't allowed to kind of pick and choose. But I do believe at this point you're talking very much to insiders and activists and people who have already made up their mind on how they're going to vote.

We have done survey research. The web is used as a source, as you get into the decision making time, by undecided voters much more so than it does at this timeframe in the campaign. So you all are going to have to do what we do when we're planning our advertising strategies is we know that fully – I think the last figures I saw – of when you're dealing with the undecided voter, there's something like 40 percent of those undecided voters – and I'm making up that number; I have to always tell people – I don't keep numbers in my head, so I always tell you that I'm using a broad range here. But a

great number of the undecided voters have totally tuned out on anything having to do with the campaign till about six or seven days before Election Day. And that's why, when you see us start rerunning ads, we have to reintroduce the candidate totally about a week to 10 days out before a primary or a general election campaign to capture those people who have said I'm not listening to this; I have a real life. And I'm going to not think about this until it's a timely position to do so.

I think you all will see a great increase in the hits on your site when you come into that timeframe, because people will then see it as a place to go. And I just hope that you are judiciously adding some of those that are telling the truth, because I do think that the only way we continue to have this great democracy is if we do have good men and women who will commit to run for office, and not just see such a gotcha politics that we really can't get the quality people out to run. So thank you and Anita – or do you get to reintroduce Anita?

ANITA DUNN: Not until the 10 days out, no. Well, Ladonna and I both agreed that we actually don't think that the majority of our clients are dishonest recidivists, and that we actually think many of them enter public service because they actually want to do things. But having said that, I will say, our Democratic perspective for years was why won't the press go call these people on lying? That the Democratic Party's entire thought process after every presidential election used to be, if the press had done a better job showing what unbelievable liars the Republicans were, we would have won. It was one of the many pathetic excuses we used to offer.

However, now we are indeed living with what we wanted to have. And so, I'm looking at Bill Adair here whose paper is probably the single greatest deterrent to lying in Florida advertising. (Laughter.) As he well knows, I was shocked to see the Miami Herald and Orlando Sentinel statistics up here, because there really is one paper that you really want to make sure fact checked your ads and gave you a clean bill of health in that state, and it's Bill's paper.

Having said that, there were a few things I wanted to say this morning. And we did have this whole beautiful rap thing on the Gettysburg Address, which was intended to humiliate you reporters, but that will wait for next time. I do want to quote David Byrne from the Talking Heads on the subject of facts, okay? "Facts are simple and facts are straight; facts are lazy and facts are late; facts all come with points of view; facts don't do what I want them to." Okay, because I think it is important as you go into this world, which I – by the way – totally agree with, looking at advertising, but also looking at speech.

We've really come full circle since Dean Broder wrote in the mid-1980s that reporters should be looking at television advertising as speech. And that was kind of an important moment for political coverage of campaigns was the idea that TV ads at the end of the day were really speech that should be covered the way speeches were. And I think what all of these sites are doing is incredibly valuable; not only because as Ladonna

pointed out, it saves us a lot of work – okay – but also because the fact of the matter is, it is important. There are some things that actually are true and are false.

I used to go in front of press secretary training sessions and candidate trainings and I'd complain, or I would tell press secretaries and candidates to be prepared for what I called Neil Armstrong journalism, which was candidate A says the moon is a cold, hard rock, and candidate B says it's a hunk of green cheese. And the coverage of this event is candidates trade charges on makeup of moon, but no one ever picks up the phone to call Neil Armstrong to say, hey, weren't you there? Which one was right?

And so, I believe that there is a real role for journalists to play, because there are some things that are simply true. And there's some things that are simply false. But I have a concern about fact checking becoming a substitute for actually looking at the arguments. And this was really made clear to me when I went back and looked at every single 2004 adwatch that the Washington Post and the New York Times did on the presidential level, because it was the easiest thing for me to do. I mean, the bulk of the adwatches were written by Howie Kurtz who, along with Brooks, used to be one of the two reporters I warned people most about – and the New York Times done by a number of good reporters.

And so I went back and looked at them. And by and large, I found that when you read these adwatches, you actually did get a sense of what the argument in the campaign had been. And yeah, this ad exaggerated this and that ad exaggerated that. But the most common complaint in these adwatches were one that the candidates didn't actually give both sides of the story. Okay, guilty, okay? I've got 27 seconds thanks to stand by your ad to talk about issues that you all ping us for all day for saying we simplify them into 30-second ads. I have 27 seconds to talk about healthcare policy. And you want me to give my opponents' side of the story? Let them pay to give their side of the story.

But the overall argument was often fact checked. For instance, some of you probably remember 1995, the argument over the Gingrich budget and the shutdown of the government, okay? And the fundamental argument there ended up being around Medicare versus other spending. And both sides had an interest in this, right, had an interest in forcing this choice, which is ultimately what elections are about, forcing a choice. And the argument was whether if Medicare spending did not rise as much as it was supposed to under existing statute the next year – whether or not that was a cut.

Well, I'm a Democrat; if it's supposed to rise 4 percent next year and Newt Gingrich takes money out of it so he can go fund tax cuts for the wealthy, to me, that's cutting Medicare. Now, the Republicans didn't see it that way. But that was the argument. And it actually doesn't lend itself to true or false. Yes, Medicare spending was going to increase regardless. But it wasn't going to increase as much. So to me, that's a cut, and that's an argument about priorities. Whereas the Republicans could say, they're lying because it's not getting cut. It's still going to increase. And the fact of the matter is, when you look at the facts, both sides were right. And it was, at the end of the day, not a fact-check sort of issue; it was the debate of the campaign.

So I'd just caution people when they're going out and looking at facts not to miss the bigger picture, which is what is this all about? What is the debate and the argument all about, because fact-check facts, but don't fact check the argument here.

I listened to Jake talk about how he only has a minute, 45 or two minutes or the number of column inches, right? Well, my candidates get what, nine seconds of the minute, 45, to say their piece of it, right? So don't go criticizing them because they left something out, okay, unless you're prepared to give them a big chunk of live time to actually explain what they want to do. I think Ladonna and I who work on opposite sides of many campaigns both agree – our candidates would actually prefer to spend a lot of time talking about what they agree. And I'm looking at this woman from NPR here, because it's uniquely a place that actually lets people kind of say what they want to say and actually explain themselves and doesn't fit into that as much.

But you know, it's not like our candidates wouldn't like to do that. The omission piece – they didn't tell both sides – I think is the easiest and worst kind of fact checking you can get. I was impressed with Brooks' study actually throwing out the adwatches that stuck with what I call Steven Spielberg criticism – didn't like the lighting, the sound effects were bad. That actually does pass for adwatch in many places.

I was also happy to see that the adwatches that they pulled out were actually ones that made a judgment. I pulled adwatches from 2004 on a Bush ad – because I didn't want to do a Kerry ad, because I didn't want to be the typical Democrat making excuses. So I actually pulled a Bush ad that I thought was treated differently by the Post and the Times in that the Post made a judgment – I'm sorry, the Times made a judgment about the argument, and the Post did not. And I thought it was interesting.

I'll just read you, it was one of those ads that attacked John Kerry for having voted against every single defense system ever – Bradley fighting vehicles, Patriot missiles, B-2 stealth bombers, F-18 fighter jets – you guys get the sense of what he had voted against, including body armor in the 87 billion (dollars). The Post analysis of this begins, “while the votes cited are accurate” – i.e. that is actually true – the Kerry campaign says the senator voted for every one of those weapon systems and 76 more at other times, blah, blah, blah.

The Times coverage starts, “throughout his career, Mr. Kerry has either voiced opposition to or voted against appropriations for the weapons mentioned in this spot, though he has said that in light of the climate after September 11, 2001, he regrets some of those positions.” And then, they actually go through and detail the votes in some great detail. And I think it's interesting. You have two very good newspapers, two really good reporters looking at the same ad, and kind of coming out in different places. One of them, well, it's kind of a cheap shot. And the other one is saying, well, you know, it's probably kind of true.

And I think that it really does kind of heighten the stakes for all of you, because as – I’m sorry, I forgot your name, Wisconsin, Madison – as Colin pointed out, we are, in addition to being very careful with what we put on the air, we’re also your chief consumers, because at the end of the day, you know, who is going to read your adwatch and who is going to actually see your story versus us who are going to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars to put it on the air attributed, of course.

So the fact of the matter is it really does kind of heighten the pressure on you to get it right and to do your homework. And then the final thing I will just say, because I know we’re running out of time and we have questions – but it’s a plea to everybody who is thinking about doing this. And that is, looking at Brooks’ study, which was quite illuminating, the most frustrating thing to me as a media consultant is when I am trying to explain why a procedural vote in the United States Senate, which Washington reporters understand is often the deciding vote whether or not a bill gets to the floor – that the procedural vote is the vote.

But trying to explain to a 23-year old reporter in a very small town somewhere in this country who has never covered the Senate, never covered the House, why that wasn’t just a, quote, “procedural vote,” the way our opponents claim it was, and why that actually was the vote. And I have to say that if it’s the five of you who were on this panel doing my adwatches or if it’s Brooks, I’m fine, because you are all very good reporters. You all do your homework. You all go do original research as opposed to just taking the criticism of my ad from Ladonna, for example – (chuckles) – and you actually do go try to figure out what Neil Armstrong found as opposed to just taking my cold-hard rock versus her green cheese, or vice versa, depending on the campaign. (Chuckles.)

But, you know, that is not the case. And I have looked at the prevalence of adwatches, and I know myself how they can be, shall we say, used in other advertising. And I have a real concern about, particularly for federal-level races because in states, you know, generally the reporters who are doing these things are state house reporters, and they – my gosh, they understand the issues. I’m looking at Bill again, but I’m thinking about his Tallahassee reporters. They understand what happened in the state senate. They have got the context. On the other hand, when I have a Tallahassee reporter doing an adwatch on something that happened in Washington, D.C., you know what, they don’t have a clue; they do not have a clue.

So at the end of the day, just as everyone is going off in – (inaudible) – adwatch is proliferating, please check Brooks’ site because eh actually does understand this stuff. But at the end of the day, you know, don’t mistake the facts for the argument because these are campaigns; they are arguments. I believe this, she believes that; we’re going to let the voters decide, okay, and actually, you know, you guys can help decide what the voters hear, but at the end of the day, it is their decision.

So I’m going to wrap up by quoting very quickly from a waitress in Iowa. Okay. I’m surprised nobody actually had this on their websites this morning but there is a brewing and just incredible controversy – (laughter) – that I think the American people

are riveted by over whether or not Hillary Clinton left a tip for this waitress and how big said tip must have been, right. And it got, I'd say a lot of interest this morning in both of our nation's newspapers of record, and not a bit on the blog – no, actually it was on the blogs last night and it was being discussed. And, you know, Hillary has now set up a whole rapid-response website to respond to these extraordinary accusations that she didn't leave a tip. And, you know, it's amazing, right.

So a reporter for The New York Times apparently called said waitress. Okay – (chuckles) – Ms. Esterday. And this is what she said. Ms. Esterday said she did not understand what all of the commotion was about. “You people are really nuts,” she told a reporter during a phone interview. (Laughter.) “There is kids dying in the war. The price of oil right now – there is better things in this world to be thinking about than who served Hillary Clinton at Maid-Rite, and who got a tip and who didn't get a tip.”

So, you know, go forth, check our facts; hold our feet to the fire. The fact of the matter is, you know, honest campaigns, good campaigns, smart campaigns have nothing to fear, and generally we welcome this kind of scrutiny, but don't mistake the argument, and please try to just occasionally just let these folks out there hear about the issues they think are important. Thank you.

MR. JACKSON: Thank you, Anita; thank you, Ladonna. We are right up at 11:30 now. I presume some of you would like to stay and ask some questions, and we'll bring the microphones forward. Can you bring one up to Bill? While he is doing that, I take your point, Anita. In fact, one of the things that we've remarked on already is that frequently what we see as a candidate stepping on a perfectly good argument by stretching it too far, and we always wrestle with that sort of thing. Yeah, Giuliani. Well, 15 – 15, 16 – I forget the number we gave him credit for. Why does he have to go claim another half dozen that he didn't sign and one of which he lobbied against for month after month.

MS. LEE: You know, it's in the candidates' – (off mike).

MR. JACKSON: I don't get it, but – so we – yes. We try to balance that. Bill Adair.

MR. ADAIR: Thank you. I enjoyed both of your presentations. And if I understood them correctly, Anita's was summed up: we welcome this kind of scrutiny; and Ladonna's was: don't bother; nobody reads it; we get everything right; go home.

MS. LEE: Not exactly. Not exactly. (Inaudible, cross talk). Go ahead.

MR. JACKSON: They are not mutually exclusive necessarily.

MR. ADAIR: I wanted to discuss something – Ladonna – a point Ladonna made about the backup materials you guys provide because you now have to submit those to the stations and you –

MS. LEE: Not the – (off mike).

MR. ADAIR: Well, I guess you submit them to us then at least when you give them out.

MS. LEE: We do, because of you.

MR. ADAIR: And there is a real format to these things that somehow has become the accepted style over the years, and it's all capital letter – it's like every word is capitalized, headlines, blah, blah, blah. And they – what is interesting is you guys will rely on news reporters when it's convenient and say, well, you know, look, the Columbus Dispatch says this, but then take us to task sometimes when we rely on other news reports. And I guess my point just is, getting to something else Ladonna said about – and something I think Anita alluded to – about do we say things when they are true? And I think we do.

And I think especially what we're doing and what the Post is doing, and even what Brooks has been doing more recently, is Brooks' coverage of the debate a couple of debates ago was, you know, we checked a bunch of facts on these guys, and we found this and this was true. And I think you are going to see that more. And I think that is important for our credibility. And so that is why we have a true setting on the truth-o-meter. And you go to some candidates and you'll see a lot more trues than you will falses. And I think that will give us credibility over time. And I do think voters want this thing judging from the tremendous reaction we have gotten to it. They really do want to know is that true, you know this thing, whatever. So anyway, but I enjoyed your presentations. Thank you.

MR. JACKSON: There is no question then.

MR. ADAIR: I don't think so.

MS. DUNN: Bill, let me just make one comment, though, because I think you – voters, the voters right now who are enjoying it, and Ladonna alluded to this – there are three kinds of voters at this point. There are information seekers, okay. They are people who actually read newspapers. They go on blogs. They go to your site. They actively look for – and they are looking – especially on the Internet, they are looking for information that tends to validate what they already believe.

There are information avoiders who Ladonna and I spend a huge amount of time trying to chase down and who generally check in the last seven to 10 days, as she says, which is why you can say, why is that bio ad back up at the end of this campaign. Haven't we all seen that enough? And then I think there is a third class of voters now who are literally information fleers, people who consciously set out not to get any information about these – who don't actually have a lot of respect for you guys. God knows they don't respect us or our clients. They are trying to flee from on all of us.

And, you know, I think that when you talk about building credibility, those are the people that all of us need to be rebuild credibility with because they are people who have consciously said, I don't believe any of these folks, so, you know.

MS. LEE: And I can't let you get away with saying that I think it's all perfect. But we have for over 20 years, frankly – before any of the fact checking have felt an obligation to show the documentation. And, frankly, I don't use – I mean, if a piece in your ad line says, you know, a quote from a newspaper, yes, and that is a documented source. But we go back to original documents.

And this last 2006 campaign, I had a major disagreement with the campaign manager on an ad he wanted to run, and I said, show me the original document, and he knew he could do it, and he sent an intern to drive from Billings, Montana, to Lincoln, Nebraska. And that was a very long drive. And do you know what, by the time they go back without the piece of paper, it was past producing an ad that would have used up some dollars that wouldn't have made any difference in the outcome.

But I do know you all have a role in this, but I do – don't want you to get away with the sense that we don't share an equal responsibility.

MR. JACKSON: Mark?

MR. MATTHEWS: I would like to explore what it is that voters really want to pay attention to because you can run a survey, and they will say, okay, it's the war, or it's taxes, or it's immigration. And then they'll make their decision on the word makaka. So I think it goes that they are interested in these things but they are also interested in the person. And I'm not making an argument for the tip story, but I am saying that I don't think that it's just where do they stand on the issues. Sometimes it's, who is that person?

MS. LEE: Well, and the first challenge we all have is not to call them the voters because the reason we do survey research, and much of what Anita and I do pour through those thousands and thousands of pieces of data in every survey that are the cross tabs. And, you know, we didn't see any cross tabs on this presentation I don't think, but the reality is all voters are not the same. And it's a commonly held myth, fact, reality, that many voters believe that George Bush was elected over Al Gore because, quote, "they felt more comfortable with him, that they could go have a drink of beer with him." And a lot of people do make their decision based on that. Our challenge is to understand which groups of people are in the different categories that Anita discussed, and what's the question that is driving them. And that is, frankly, the beauty of direct mail over broadcast media because we can talk distinctly to small groups of people on issues they care about.

MS. DUNN: But I heard you say these are the issues that they care about and this fact check thing is not what they're interested in. I think if someone sees a history of a

person lying to them, maybe about how we got into this war, that that is going to have a negative effect.

MS. LEE: No doubt that cumulative over time, but it will be interesting to go back to ya'll's sites at the end of this cycle and find out if they're all such liars, we can't believe anything that they say.

MR. MATTHEWS: Well, I think that that is part of the spin, but I think that the fact checks that show this guy is telling the truth, this guy is not, over a period of time, I can't help but believe that that would influence people's opinion.

MS. DUNN: Absolutely, oh, absolutely. And I would argue that issues from their perspective always work best when they are credible, consistent with who the person really is, what they believe, and when they serve as a merit to that person's soul and their character. And so what you're saying and what we're kind of saying at the end of the day is absolutely character counts. As a matter of fact, back when we were making issue ads as opposed to independent expenditure ads, I was a trailblazer in the character-is-an-issue category – (chuckles) – but at the end of the day, it is correct. I think what we're saying is that the – makaka thing, thing, which – you didn't do George Allen, did you? Okay.

MS. LEE: He might have been my presidential candidate, but I didn't do his race. (Chuckles.)

MS. DUNN: But, you know, when a small thing actually serves as a very large – resonates largely against kind of pre-existing feelings about somebody, those small things can become important, but at the end of the day, I would say that you have got everybody talking about health care. The background of these folks, whether this is something they have come to recently, how they came to it, what are the differences in their approaches – there are significant difference in approaches between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party.

And most of the Democrats, you know, their healthcare plans – I mean, you know, you can argue about universal mandate versus making it affordable enough for everyone to buy, but let's face it; they all have a very similar philosophy. Republican programs tend to have a relatively similar philosophy – there are more differences between them, but you also have a, you know, former governor of Massachusetts who actually did universal health care. He now doesn't want to – he wants to pretend he never did it – (chuckles) – the way he did. You know, that these issues that people actually are extremely concerned about are as important as these small kind of he said this; he said it was 23 percent but it was really 21 percent, but then he said it three days in a row.

MR. LEE: I agree completely. I mean, that is part of fact checking, too, is to take a part of the proposition –

MS. DUNN: But I –

MR. MATTHEWS: About what it will do, and then explain it.

MS. DUNN: But I would argue, you're going to have some very tough issues out there in the next three or four years, all of you. For instance, the Bush tax cuts end. Okay, now, already it has become an accepted fact to talk about rolling back the Bush tax cuts. There is no rolling back out there, guys; they end. They end because the way he put those into law was for them to expire so he could get them under an artificial budget ceiling, and the whole thing was the ha, ha, ha; we know how this works, right. The estate tax goes way back up again simply because they wanted to get under the budget ceiling. But those things end.

So there is no question about rolling them back or taking something away; they are ending. And yet, I think 90 percent of the time in the journalism coverage and the way people talk about it, there is an accepted fact of rolling it back, and this will be a big argument some time in 2009 really early.

MR. MATTHEWS: You already have it – (off mike).

MS. DUNN: Yeah, you're having it already. There are issues out there that helping folks kind of understand the context is going to be very important. And whether or not Hillary Clinton left a waitress a tip I just think is somewhat small compared to rather large directions this nation is going to – I mean, this is a big election, and it's big differences between the two parties. So –

MR. JACKSON: One more question. Michael.

MR. DOBBS: Yeah, I just wanted to make the point about – you talked about we don't often point out that candidates are telling the truth. I have a Geppetto checkmark, which I have only rewarded once to McCain for his – I was tied up at the time. But, you know, this is rather like journalists don't report on every – on airplanes landing safely. You know, we report on the plane crashes. And, you know, we expect you to tell the truth. It's – you know, that should be the default position, that you tell the truth. We report when you don't tell the truth. Okay, occasionally we'll award a Geppetto checkmark or whatever PolitiFact awards, but I don't think you can criticize reporters for focusing on the exceptional, the plane crashes and people not telling the truth rather than telling the truth because we expect them to tell the truth.

MR. JACKSON: All right, we are past time. I want to thank all of our panelists for coming. I have learned a lot and enjoyed this, and I hope you have too. So with that, we'll adjourn. Thank you for coming.

(Applause.)

(END)