

**USC Annenberg
Ceasefire! Bridging the Political Divide
Monday, June 18, 2007**

8:15PM Discussion:

Dean Geoffrey Cowan, *USC Annenberg School*
Gov. Kathleen Sebelius (D-Kansas)
Harold Ford, Jr., *DLC chairman and former Congressman (D-Tennessee)*
Former Mayor Richard Riordan (R-Los Angeles)
Margaret Carlson, *Bloomberg News*
Moderator: Judy Woodruff, *Senior Correspondent, "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer"*

Additional Participants

Matthew Dowd; *Brand Strategist*
Maria Shriver; *Wife of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger*

Discussion

Judy Woodruff: Thank you, all. What a great evening. Thank you to Mayor Villaraigosa. I'm honored to be, to play a small role in facilitating tonight's discussion. There is a spectacular Panel that has been put together for us to continue the discussion that is the theme of this Conference, "Bridging the Political Divide," and I'm going to call them up one by one.

To begin, the former Congressman from the State of Tennessee, Harold Ford, who is now the President, the Chairman, and the CEO of the Democratic Leadership Council.

[Applause.]

The Governor of the Sate of Kansas, Kathleen Sebelius, Governor Sebelius.

[Applause.]

The former Mayor of the City of Los Angeles, Richard Riordan.

[Applause.]

Thank you. And, finally, my dear friend and fellow journalist, Margaret Carlson of The Week Magazine and Bloomberg News.

[Applause.]

So we are going to jump right in, because I think we've been having these conversations at the table, and I think we were all inspired and provoked by what – in a good sense – by what Mayor Bloomberg had to say.

So I want to launch right in by asking Congressman Ford if some of what Mayor Bloomberg had to say about how we need to – we need politicians who are honest, politicians who will put partisan interests behind them, politicians who will think about the greater good, is that going to work – it works in New York City, it has worked for him, would something like that work in Washington, D.C.?

Former Congressman Harold Ford: Yes. I, first, want to thank Annenberg, and thank Mayor Bloomberg for – and Mayor Villaraigosa for having us all here. And whomever cooked the meal, it was good. And thank all of you for participating, and the fellow Panelists.

I think Mayor Bloomberg and Mayor Villaraigosa laid it out fairly well, that to answer your question, can it be done in Washington? Yes, you have to remember, seven years ago in Washington as a former Chief of Staff to a President here, some of these challenges were being addressed. A budget was balanced, much like mayors and governors have to do, and I'm proud of not only Governor Schwarzenegger, who I'm always delighted to see, but I'm always happy to see the First Lady, who I know is here, as well. My Governor in Tennessee, Bredesen, is leading in the same way.

But seven years ago we had a balanced budget, there was an effort to tackle the entitlement drain that is occurring in Washington. There are many whom believe that the unfunded mandate in Washington is much our Mayor Riordan than is stated by Congress and by Democratic and Republican leaders. Some say the number may be as high as \$40 trillion to \$50 trillion in the unfunded mandate of Medicare and Social Security, so much focus is on Social Security.

But the real challenge is on the Medicare front. When you change personnel good things happen, and I know that the owner of the LA Dodgers is here, but I think about two years ago when the new Manager of the Detroit Tigers showed up in Detroit, who would have thought they'd have made the World Series. He brought in a different style, a different approach, and an accountability that Mayor Bloomberg spoke to.

When you have those things happen in Washington, better things happen. The next President will emerge from that ilk, be it someone in this room or be it someone in the race already, I think the country is going to reward that person who is honest, who is forward-looking, and who is willing to take some risks for the better good and, particularly, for our future.

Judy Woodruff: But, Governor Sebelius, it's one thing to say that, again, that it's working in New York City, and we're going to hear some more from Mayor Villaraigosa about how it's working in Los Angeles tomorrow. You have your own experience in the State of Kansas, being a democratically elected Governor in a mainly Republican State. But looking at Washington, and you come to Washington all the time, do you believe that Washington is ready for the kind of changes that we're talking about tonight?

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius: Well, I would agree with a lot of what Mayor Bloomberg said. We've got some serious problems. I think of DC and incremental change is probably not going to work as well as blowing some things up. I mean the system does not serve America very well anymore. And I was struck by the Dean when he introduced us tonight and introduced these topics and talked about things that need to be studied. And I think there are some things that need to be studied. The way Congressional Districts are drawn, the way campaigns are financed, those are systematic issues that I think don't work very well, and Mayors –

Judy Woodruff: But those are things that are hard to change, I mean –

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius: They're hard to change, and that's why incremental change is probably not going to work as well as American citizens saying, "This just is broken." I mean it's a system I think in many ways is fundamentally broken.

New personnel will definitely help, a new vision, a new leadership style, but I think mayors and governors often are CEOs, and there's a transparency about what you do, you start in one place, and people can measure it. Either gets better or it gets worse. You're held accountable. I think that's very difficult to do inside the Beltway, and some of that's intentional, some of it is accidental.

But, you know, people are looking for folks who can speak in straight sentences, who tell the truth, as the Mayor said, and who then have a proposed solution, and don't think that every solution comes with a party label. There can be winners and winners, and I think we've got to get over the fact that if I win, you have to lose. I think that's too often the conversation. We can actually have a situation where there are two winners, and the public ultimately is the winner.

Judy Woodruff: Mayor Riordan, how realistic is that? You were Mayor of the City two terms ago, how realistic is it to do that? I mean you, again, a Republican Mayor and a Democratic City?

Former Mayor Richard Riordan: I think on the City level it's realistic. Now, I was Mayor as a Republican and the City was about three-to-one Democrat. While we had just gone through the first economic recession in the history of the City, we had the Rodney King riots, people had lost their confidence, and my campaign manager came-up with a great slogan, "Tough enough to turn LA around." And we won, but not by a huge landslide but we won.

But in city government you're much closer to the people. They see what you're doing, they see what's happened in the safety of the city, the cleanliness of the neighborhoods, healthcare, education.

I happen to disagree with the Governor, here, and I think more with Governor Sebelius on Washington. I think there that the legislators are so far away from the people, the only people that know what's going in -- on are the lobbyists, the special interest groups, the unions, the big corporations.

And I'll end it just by saying one possibility, and it probably isn't the only answer, is open primaries. We tried to do it in California, we were voted down, but this is where the two top vote getters in a primary, they both be Democrats, they both be Republicans, or one of each party, are in a run-off.

Judy Woodruff: Well, and I'd love to talk about that in a minute, but, Margaret Carlson, I want to bring you in here because you've covered Washington almost as long as I have. Is -- I mean you heard Congressman Ford say he thinks it can be done in Washington; what do you really believe?

Margaret Carlson: Well, I'm part of the problem. I'm the skunk at this garden party in that journalists really love partisanship, and we love the fight, and so my father-in-law ran an airline, and he said to me, "Well, why don't you cover the planes that land? A lot of them land." I said, "You know, that's not what journalism is about. We want -- we cover the things that don't work."

And that's gotten to a point where you have people like Newt Gingrich getting all the publicity because he's the back bencher throwing bombs. And so it is the loudest voice that gets covered. Until we've reached this point where there is a kind of gridlock in Washington where you begin to say, "Wow, well, this really isn't working."

And so there's something going on now which, Jay, did you bring a copy of the magazine? Time Magazine has -- hey, this is free publicity time for you -- Governor Schwarzenegger and Mayor Bloomberg on the cover, which is now the news is that people can actually work together and get things done because we're reversing things.

Before I turn the floor back over to the people who really matter, I need to give credit where credit is due. Michael Kinsley, who is going to be on a Panel tomorrow, and who was the host of Crossfire for many years, came-up with an idea for a TV program, which was going to be called "Ceasefire." And I think I can tell people, Michael, that --

Judy Woodruff: This is it.

Margaret Carlson: This was such an idea about bringing people together and not having people shouting from their various corners that the program absolutely got nowhere. And so, but times have changed and here we are talking about I think making government work and bringing people into the middle, because we have, you know, Schwarzenegger and Bloomberg actually making the cover of Time Magazine for working together instead of throwing bombs.

Judy Woodruff: At one point, Mayor Bloomberg, I think, used the term, and maybe more than one point, used the term “nonpartisanship.”

Margaret Carlson: Yes, here’s – here’s the cover of the magazine.

Judy Woodruff: If you haven’t seen it.

Margaret Carlson: Jay, I’ll send you a bill.

Judy Woodruff: But he talked about nonpartisanship being a goal. Let’s talk about the political parties. The founding fathers, and obviously it didn’t all happen in 1776, but it evolved that we have these two political parties. It’s worked for a long time. Is it still working?

Former Congressman Harold Ford: Look, I’m just not a pessimist at heart. I don’t mean to disagree with Mayor Riordan in any way. I just think that when – you touched on two great ideas. And one or two things that probably need to happen at the Federal level, the campaign reform system or campaign finance reform, a real one, has to happen.

Because part of what happens with members of Congress, as you’ve stated so well, Mayors, that they respond specifically to these narrow interests that have there – they’re able to pull [out of them]. I think Mayor Bloomberg in this Time Magazine article made the point that when you’re able to attain some independence from the system and not have to rely on these contributors, it changes – it changes the makeup.

But, you know, a great Democrat and founder of my Party, from my state,[Andrew Jackson, this acrimony and [bitcher] in politics has always been a part of politics. I mean so partisanship, I’m not afraid of partisanship. What I’m afraid of is paralysis. And what we’ve reached – we’ve reached a point now where nothing can get done – there’s nothing wrong with competing ideas.

[Applause.]

In the Democratic side you’ve got people fighting with one another. I’m the Chair of a group called the DLC, and sometimes the traditional leaders from the Democratic Party don’t like the DLC. It’s a healthy tension.

On the Republican side, they have their challenges. I’m sure that there are things that Mayor Bloomberg is doing, particularly on the issue of the environment and the guns at times that may not please some of the natural based constituencies in his Party.

This magazine here, the most fascinating piece in your magazine, this piece here, This Week, is I love the piece on Schwarzenegger, and I love the piece on Bloomberg, and you mentioned about the Governor, everybody else, including the great Governor Sebelius. But there’s a piece on Iraq, and it talks about these IEDs and it talks about this kid who basically is the genius behind developing these smart bombs or

these roadside bombs, which is the number one casualty claimer in Iraq.

The kid at the beginning of your piece, I can't figure out the guy's name who wrote the piece, but at the beginning of the piece, he indicates that they share with this kid who makes all these IDs, he said, "Do you know that they've developed a team at MIT to try to develop a technology that can detect and detonate these bombs?"

And the kid paused for a second, according to your writer, and said, "You know, I had dreams of going to MIT. And had it happened in another way I might have been at MIT, Governor Davis, as opposed to being on the wrong side of this."

It said the good things and the bad things about this country. The great thing is there's still this unbelievable thing, even with our Federal Government broken or in a dysfunctional state. When you put leadership in place better things can happen.

So I don't mean to suggest, as Matt Dowd has written several times before, as well, that Washington is a rosy place, and it can just be fixed if we all hope and pray and have a faith based kind of moment here, and my faith is important to me, but it's – you've got to have people that are willing to roll-up their sleeves and willing to look – nothing against Margaret Carlson – but the kind of journalism at times that takes – that takes politicians on for things that a lot of times don't make sense – not to accuse you of that, Ms. Carlson, but some, in industry, and be willing to stand above it. And say, "This is what we're going to do, and I'm going to lead around and organize people around a set of ideas that make a difference." It can be done – if it can be done in cities and state legislatures, I should say state capitols, it can be done in Washington, as well.

Judy Woodruff: But, essentially, you're saying that all it takes is new leadership at the top. And, Governor Sebelius, you're saying it's going to take more than that. That's well and good, but it's going to take more than that?

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius: I think it takes everything that Harold just said and more. I – I do think it's a situation where the American public are really desperate for folks who, first of all, tell the truth, tell the truth about what is going on, what our financial situation really is, what the healthcare situation really is, what global warming really is. You know, basically, they know what the truth is and they want someone to confirm that. And then talk about the fact that there are no easy solutions. It's going to take sacrifice. It's going to take us working together. People really want to feel connected to one another.

I come from a State where 27% of the voters are Democrats, a long way from 50, but people cross the party line over and over and over again to – I mean I was struck by the fact – Maria is here tonight, I know the Governor will be here tomorrow, Governor Davis is here. We've had a Democratic Governor twice as much in the last 50 years as California has. People reach across party lines for all kinds of reasons, so partisanship is not –

Judy Woodruff: Why do they do it in Kansas?

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius: Well, I think because they actually like the direction that's been set. They like what's going on. They want an ability to come together. I have a former Republican Governor in my Cabinet. I chose him specifically because of his expertise, but also to reach out. We have Republicans working with us all the time to get budgets passed, we move things ahead. I know you're going to hear from Governor Napolitano tomorrow. She does it each and every day.

This is happening all over America, where Republicans and Democrats -- Kansans don't get up in the

morning saying, "I live in a red state, or I'm a blue person in a red state." They think of themselves as Kansans and Americans. They want somebody who is connecting with their lives, their issues, their problems, and putting their dollars where they think they should be, which is education and healthcare and alternative energy solutions, and saying, "We don't have money to do everything, here's what we're going to do, and we're going to get it done, and move on."

Judy Woodruff: But to both of you, why can't that – why isn't that happening in Washington and what does it take to change it? You mentioned – go ahead.

Former Congressman Harold Ford: Go ahead.

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius: Well, you know, I'll defer to you. I do think that there are a number of incredibly talented, very thoughtful people in DC. I do think, personally, we're missing a leader in the Office of the White House, and I would like to see a leader in the Office of the – calling upon us to work together.

[Applause.]

And I don't mean that as it has to be a Democrat, it has to be a Republican. I think we need a new leader who brings us together, who calls on all of us to be Americans, to face the tough problems as Americans, and then talks to us about what that means. And it doesn't mean that there are 400 things off budget – I don't know what the hell off budget – I don't know about Janet and Arnold – I mean I'd love to run sort of an off budget, but we don't do that, you know?

We have this much money and you allocate it certain ways, and you either do it or you don't do it. I can, you know, veto things or not, but there is no off – I mean there's no secret cache of money that's going to support other things or other people. It's very transparent, people know, and they can make a decision of whether they want their dollars spent that way or not, and whether or not what I'm proposing makes sense.

Our legislature is two-thirds Republican. They pass the budget year after year after year, because we bring people together and say, "This is what Kansas wants, this is -- they want their kids educated, they want their dollars spent on healthcare, so 85% of our budget is education and healthcare.

Judy Woodruff: But to play devil's advocate, in Washington, I mean you know, everybody here knows the way it works is we do have redistricting that's developed a system, now where you have more people on the far right of the Republican Party and farther to the left of the Democratic Party. You have a campaign finance system, which you brought up, you have a system that rewards tension and, you know, conflict, as Margaret said.

Unidentified Speaker: Well, again, I think it comes down to the special interest groups in Washington who control the legislature, but when you have strong personalities – you have Reagan and Clinton, very strong personalities. They did get things done that were nonpartisan. Clinton brought the Democratic Party to the middle on taxes and healthcare, things like that. Reagan actually doubled the amount of taxes I pay, as, you know, he wasn't that conservative in so many areas.

But on the local level people, as I mentioned, are very close to the Mayors. And what Mayor Bloomberg has done and what Mayor Villaraigosa is doing can be done on the city level. And it's amazing, you need great leaders to do it. But on the state level we have an amazing Governor in Arnold Schwarzenegger, but you're not going to have the Arnold Schwarzenegger's every year.

Judy Woodruff: Well, and maybe that's what we need, we need Mayor Bloomberg, and Governor Schwarzenegger, and Mayor Villaraigosa, all in the White House together.

[Applause.]

Unidentified Speaker: Can we change the Constitution?

Judy Woodruff: But – but to get back to this question, the way Washington really works, Congressman Ford, can you imagine the House of Representatives and the Senate working without this very, very sharp partisan divide that exists right now? Where the party, the committee system is controlled by the parties, you know, it's all done along partisan, along party lines. You said a minute ago it's not that there's something wrong with having parties, it's just the way – the fact that they can do business with each other.

Former Congressman Harold Ford: Right, and I –

Judy Woodruff: But how do we change that? I mean these are rules that have grown-up for decades and centuries in Washington.

Former Congressman Harold Ford: If there were two things I could change about the place, one would be that a subset – one would be a subset of what Mayor Riordan has touched on – campaign finance laws have to change. I'm a believer in public financing of campaigns at all levels.

[Applause.]

Two, this presidential thing that's happening in this country, where people are starting two years out and are focusing their energies on two states. I'm thankful that South Carolina and Nevada and some others have been at it, but the reality is who wants to watch a presidential race for two years when we're facing the serious challenges we're facing? It's become a test of who can raise the most money.

Where if you change these rules, and you force those that are running for the Senate to be Senators, and you force those that are Governors running for president to be governor, and all the things they're talking about be able to show a record of progress and a record of achievement on, it would be a much better thing for the country.

Now, you're always going to have knuckleheads in politics, I mean at every level, so there's no monopoly on it in Washington, it's just really bad in Washington today, and I think the leadership quotient at a time in which the country really needs leadership is a bad thing.

Take Bloomberg and Schwarzenegger for one example. Bloomberg's idea is that on the environment piece that a couple of things. One, you're going to reduce emissions, 80% of emissions in New York City, where I spend a lot of time now, comes from buildings, 20% comes from automobiles. He's got a set of plans that, frankly, are ambitious, are big and bold. And he's going to take on a big segment of New York to convince them this is the right thing to do. But he has a credibility on a lot of these issues that you have to build over a period of time.

When I say change of personnel, I don't mean just changing the names, I think you've got to have a group of people with the experience and who are able to convey a message to the country when it changes things.

Take Schwarzenegger, as another example, his idea, he still has hummers and everything else that this

guy – this guy has here. He’s a believer that if you can make a profit in reducing emissions and making the environment cleaner that the country will rally around it.

There are two competing models in many ways, and the fact that Mayor Villaraigosa got up here and talked about they’re going to produce about 35% in the same amount of time, and Mayor Bloomberg says, “30%.” I love it that LA and New York are competing to reduce emissions. And if one comes up with a better idea maybe he’ll take his idea and make it better. If he has a better idea, he’ll take his idea and make it better. We all win.

You have to create that type of competition in Washington more so than – I say to my Party all the time, we’ve won seats in 2006, but don’t confuse yourself, we won because the other party is really bad. We had no ideas, and if we don’t produce between now and ’08 we’ll lose, and rightly so. We have to produce on behalf of the country.

Unidentified Speaker: But you don’t get elected [on a new idea].

Unidentified Speaker: Bill Richardson on Meet The Press, I asked him about power, and he said, “We’re going to have to experiment with nuclear power.”

Unidentified Speaker: And I agree with him.

Unidentified Speaker: Wham, they almost cut his head off.

Judy Woodruff: Margaret, the other – I believe it was Mayor Riordan who mentioned special interests, and that’s a term we hear a lot. But, in fact, Washington now is every single city, states, have their lobbying offices in Washington, every organization from the Girl Scouts to the National Rifle Association, to you name it, you’ve got an energy bill now working its way through the Senate, and you’ve got an enormous number of lobbyists who are swarming around the Hill. How do you – how do you – I mean I’m just bringing up some of the things that are a fact of life in Washington, how is it –

Margaret Carlson: Well, one of the reasons Senator McCain is so far behind in fundraising is that he’s offended many of the interests, like telecommunications and the defense industry, where you raise the money. So he – he is not in synch with them so they don’t give him money, but just as many other candidates do play to the special interests because it’s – the place is just a wash in money, you can’t run without the money, and so you – you cut corners and you do things to get it.

And the way you campaign is the way you ultimately govern because you owe those people. And the timeline in Washington, once somebody gets in, you know, since the trash doesn’t have to get picked up, the timeline for getting anything done is so long because you – you don’t have to produce. You know, a President doesn’t really have to produce something that people really know about.

Judy Woodruff: But to take ten years to deal with what, immigration and longer, to take 20 years in between a serious attempt to deal with Social Security. I want to stick, just quickly, Governor Sebelius, on this question of interest groups. You know, what we’re calling special interests, to the people who are represented, they’re not special – I mean it’s their livelihood.

I mean from where you sit in Kansas and, again, looking at Washington because that’s – I think that’s the main place we’re talking about, right this minute, what does it look like from your perspective? I mean what can be done? How does it work differently where you are, what could change in Washington, if anything?

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius: Well, again, I don't think there's anything inherently wrong with advocates for a point of view and experts who bring with them information about a point of view, that's really what lobbyists are, and a give and take about a whole series of issues is often healthy.

I think what – what has to happen, though, is leadership has to recognize, whether it's in DC or in a state house or in the mayor – mayor's office, and I'm sure Mayor Bloomberg and Villaraigosa do this all the time, there are voices, who will never have a lobbyist. That's the job of leadership to bring them to the table.

You know, what about the poor who don't have somebody there arguing for their tax break? What about, you know, the kids who are in a terrible school? What about the uninsured? I mean part of that is a missing piece of leadership, and I'm afraid that is heard less sometimes inside the Beltway than outside the Beltway.

But I also think it's a question of, and the Mayor, Mayor Riordan has said this, of being closer to the people – that doesn't mean you have to be physically closer to the people, but I think it does mean a connection. Speaking to the – people are looking for, I think, folks to come together for the common good. That terminology has initially religious connotations, but I think it's a – it's a theme that is beginning to catch some resonance. They want folks to cross party lines and make common sense, and so having an initiative that moves forward and actually works to bring people together.

That, again, is missing. I think there's a win/loss column too often in DC where if our party moves ahead, your party has to move behind. We're punishing people back and forth, we're locking people out of meeting rooms. I mean that – that doesn't happen in – often in a city council room or in a state house, or if it does happen people say, "That's unacceptable. You know, we're not going to let that happen any longer."

Unidentified Speaker: I think an interesting thing in Congress, every day we start the day off, when I was there – start the day off with something called one-minute speeches. And there are no rules to it, so you're allowed to go down and call anybody a jackass from up – well in the House. And you can say the Republicans are awful, mean-spirited, don't care about poor people, don't give a doggone about the environment, the Democrats say about the Republicans, all the Democrats want to do is tax people, they're weak on defense, they hate our soldiers.

And then the day starts with a prayer, [oh, yes.] And then we're expected to go down to the floor and everybody, then think about, "Okay, how do I get along with the Republican from Kansas? Or how do you get along with the Democrat from Massachusetts? And let's figure out how to work together."

There are three other changes, as just, as we're talking about this Congress. End of pork barrel spending. You go to a two-year budget cycle and you make one change to the Constitution. You make sure we have to balance the budget every year, like most governors around the country have to deal with. There's all this hoopla in Washington on how you don't want to have that because if we have an emergency how would the country respond.

The country is not dumb, we'll learn to do it, like governors do. When there's a challenge you respond. And we have to make some fundamental changes to the governance structure in Washington. It makes no sense you can fund a war with supplementals, like we had no clue the war is coming or spending, a bill will be due in late September or early spring. We should fund it like we fund everything else. The same way you said, Mayor Bloomberg, about accountability and responsibility, we – that same kind of approach.

So that's the only thing I mean when I say these things can actually happen in Washington. And as – I don't mean to skirt around this issue of the presidential primary, we should end this Iowa, New Hampshire stuff first. We need to have a different kind of -- have five states and they rotate every year, and you don't tell the candidates until January of the actual year of the presidential race, which of the five states will be the first five.

That way you force them to go everywhere and listen to everyone, and campaign not just where all the special interests, Mayor Riordan, are able to set up in Iowa and New Hampshire because that's their headquarters, you keep them wondering where their base will be. Otherwise –

Judy Woodruff: All right.

Unidentified Speaker: Otherwise, you have them all situated in one state, waiting on all the candidates to come.

Judy Woodruff: I want to – we are going to go to you all for comments and questions, and as we do I just – one of the things I want us to address before we finish tonight is the fact that there are very real differences in this country. I mean some of the differences that we see in Washington are based on real disagreements over policy.

If you look at where the American people stand on some issues, they are far apart. I mean Republicans are over here, for example, on some questions having to do with religion, having to do with national security, Democrats are over there. So some of what we're seeing really does reflect genuine disagreement.

Having said that, and we're going to talk about that in a minute, Geoff Cowan, you're out there with a microphone.

Dean Geoffrey Cowan: We have such an amazing audience here, let's see if we can get any perspectives that – that people want to share, who have been in Washington. Where is Tom Campbell sitting?

Judy Woodruff: He's over there, I think.

Dean Geoffrey Cowan: Where are you? Can I – where is he? Can – where is the Tom Campbell – are you Tom Campbell?

Judy Woodruff: He was here.

Dean Geoffrey Cowan: I want to see if there's somebody – Matthew Dowd, you've just written about this, you know, sort of struggled with this, having been inside the White House, is there something you'd like to say about it?

Matthew Dowd: [Inaudible – off mic.]

Unidentified Speaker: Stand up.

Matthew Dowd: I'm not going to stand up, but since I've already made various people in Washington upset, I actually believe that part of the problem, and as I listen to this and part of the problem in Washington, is that every discussion we have is a right/wrong discussion. Every single discussion we have is a right/wrong discussion.

And we debate, and debate, and debate the ends, and we never talk about the means, which is interesting if you read the Constitution of the United States, because most of the Constitution of the United States was written about the means. It wasn't like how we're going to solve healthcare, it wasn't how we're going to defend the country, it wasn't all of that, it was how are we going to put together a system where people regardless of what your ideas are, the end result of a good means will be a good end. The end result of people having a conversation like tonight or people sitting down in Kansas, or people, whatever, we don't care – if you just forget the end and say, "Let's figure out the means." And I think, I mean one of the – it's not – the President, obviously –

Judy Woodruff: Give me an example of that, and then finish.

Matthew Dowd: I think the presidential campaign, how many times do we in the press say, "What's your position paper on healthcare? What's your position paper on how are you going to deal with Alcheida? What's your position paper on the Iraq War?" And we don't ask them the question, "How are you going to make sure that Democrats and Republicans have a conversation in order to come to the table and figure out what's -- the result is."

And I think the President, obviously who I have some familiarity with, didn't run – ran on the same platform that we're talking about tonight. He ran – the reason why he got elected in 2000 was he was a uniter, not a divider. He was – did in Austin, Texas what everybody wants to do in Washington, and then something happened.

Judy Woodruff: What happened?

Matthew Dowd: It's not – what happened was it's not totally the President – it's not one individual's problem, it's many individuals in Washington's problems, it's the presses problem, it's – it's Congress' problem.

Judy Woodruff: Are you saying that no matter who is elected, it's going to – it's going to –

Matthew Dowd: I think that we have now put ourselves in play, which I hope doesn't happen, we've now put ourselves in this same situation where the nominees of both parties are going to feel beholden and feel like they owe, if they're elected or if they're nominated, to a polarized electorate. And they're going to go to Washington and they're going to go and say, "This is what I did, and this is what I'm owed, and this is what I have to do, and this is what I did." And they can have a great heart, but they get to Washington and something happens. And something – Bill Clinton, we talk about how great Bill Clinton did – Bill Clinton –

Judy Woodruff: Let's talk about what the "something" is because it's –

Matthew Dowd: I actually – and we'll have this conversation tomorrow, I actually believe that elected officials aren't the answer. I actually believe that the answer is leaders never really lead, leaders always follow where the country is. And at some point leaders are going to recognize that the country is tired. And as – and wants something different.

It's not going to be changing, although it might help, changing campaign finance law. And it's not going to be setting up different committee hearings, and it's not going to be all that, it's going to be somebody's heart changes, somebody's heart changes, and then that person says, "I'm not going to do this anymore, that what happens in Washington is not what happens at my kitchen table."

And I honestly believe we're going to sit here, and we may tomorrow debate the ends more. We may say,

“Well, how are we going to do this, how are we going to do this?” And the press refuses and most people that are in the America that are involved in the state refuse to have a discussion about the means.

Dean Geoffrey Cowan: Just, one person I know wants to speak for a second, Judy, if I could – is Maria Shriver, who, after all, Maria is part of a bipartisan. I thought I saw you waving at me. Maria, you’ll think of something to say –

Judy Woodruff: Bipartisan –

Dean Geoffrey Cowan: -- about bipartisanship and families, parties and states.

Maria Shriver: Oh, okay. Thank you, Geoff. I think the only thing – I respectfully disagree, just one point that Matthew had, which said that “leaders don’t lead.” I disagree with that.

But I think that everybody up here is a leader, and I think what I’ve learned is that a lot of this comes down to staff, and I think nobody ever talks about the staff. And you can have somebody who is a leader who pronounces, “I want to do this.” And they can get [ported] by staff, who is very partisan. People who work for political leaders spend their lives in government, and they have specific agendas that often aren’t what the principal’s agenda is.

And I think it’s interesting in this presidential campaign that all the people who are running have traditional staffs. And I recall that when Arnold wanted to hire a Democratic chief of staff, it was a disaster. And I think that in Sacramento, at that table, there are Democrats, there are Independents and there are Republicans. And I think until people start doing that in their staffs, no matter who is leading, it won’t happen.

And I’d just be curious as to if the people up there have Democrats, Independents, and Republicans on their staffs, and why when Barack Obama talks about unity, why he doesn’t have any Republicans in his campaign, and why there aren’t people of different political persuasions in any of the presidential campaigns.

And I disagree, also, with Judy to a degree, that I think people are hybrids, and I think there are always people on fringes, but I think we have a lot more in common than we have that separates us. But if all those people aren’t at the table nothing will get done, because I’ve seen how you can have an idea and it can get thwarted if the staff doesn’t want it, and if the staff does want it, it can happen.

And I think it’s curious why the press doesn’t say to Barack Obama, “Where are the Republicans on your staff, if you talk about unity? Where are the Republicans and Democrats in George Bush’s White House, if he talks about unity?” So I’d be curious as to why no one talks about the staff.

[Applause.]

I don’t know where the staff is, but?

Judy Woodruff: Governor Sebelius – we’ll let Governor Sebelius –

Maria Shriver: That’s okay. I think it’s important to –

Judy Woodruff: Kevin Sheekey?

Maria Shriver: Well, Kevin, who works for Mayor Bloomberg is there, schooled with Daniel Monahan,

and but many people who are Democrats, for example, who worked for Mayor Bloomberg, I was interested in trying to hire for Arnold, and wouldn't work for a Republican, and many Democrats won't work for Republican, and visa-versa.

And I think [Daniel Zengowie] and Susan Kennedy can talk about what it's like personally when you make a choice to work for somebody who is not of the same party, or [Bonnie Reese], for that matter, can talk about what happens to you when you support someone of a different party – so, or Kevin Sheekey can discuss it. But it would be interesting to ask the political leaders who are here how many of them have bipartisan staffs?

Judy Woodruff: Mayor Riordan, did you have Democrats on your staff?

Former Mayor Richard Riordan: I think that's all I had!

Maria Shriver: That's probably why you were successful! Here's the mike. I'll go back --

Former Mayor Richard Riordan: 75% of my staff was Democrat and they never betrayed me on any conservative issues I had, and we got along perfectly, and it worked, if you – if you're a good leader and you treat your staff fairly.

Judy Woodruff: Governor Sebelius, do you have Republicans?

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius: We have Republicans, Democrats, and Independents. The head of our Washington Office, our infamous lobbyist office, is a Republican. I have Republicans in my Cabinet.

But I think, back to your point, Judy, it also – there are some serious differences among Republicans on philosophical issues. I mean there certainly are Republicans I would not hire because I don't fundamentally agree with their philosophy, and they don't – they wouldn't work for me. There are Democrats who I probably wouldn't hire for the same kind of reason.

So I think party label doesn't necessarily identify the philosophy and -- but I don't disagree that having an openness is an indication that you're willing to – if your staff is totally partisan, it is somewhat hollow for the leader to say, "We want to work across party lines."

Because I – I would agree, we – we have sort of a zero tolerance policy in our office about going after legislators for certain reasons, and we have a lot of young, enthusiastic Democrats whose favorite thing is to sort of burn Republican legislators, and that doesn't work very well. I mean it's – it makes for a great headline, it makes for terrible -- it's like your one-minute speeches, Harold -- it makes for terrible policy. And I mean we just don't allow that to happen, and if somebody does that they're no longer part of the operation. So I –

Margaret Carlson: Governor Sebelius has -- doesn't apply in Washington because if someone disagrees with you on the supplemental budget for Iraq, they hate the troops, you know. You're unpatriotic, you're a traitor. And people say that to each other. I mean they say it, hand-to-hand combat. You want a different kind of education bill, "Oh, you hate children, I love children. You hate teachers, I don't hate." And so it's very, it's very personal and you're put – it's the opposite of what you've told your staff. It's – it's part of the way of doing it now.

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius: And, Margaret, we see that, and, again, in our State, those fights are very vicious within the Republican Party. Two-thirds of our Legislature is Republican, but there is a very conservative kind of right wing group of Republicans and a more moderate group. And they are at each

other's throats. So it's not necessarily that you have to cross party lines to get there. There is a ferociousness about philosophy that I would say is bigger than – than a party label, and the kind of battles that go on in Washington are replicated other places.

But I would agree, the language that's used – but, again, I – some of that is leadership. You either insist that people talk about one another in a different way, reintroduce civility, and call people out for doing that, or you use it and the bully pulpit in the White House, and I think a lot of that is what's going on.

Former Congressman Harold Ford: I like Matt a lot, I disagree with him, and I agree with the First Lady. Leadership – I hear where you're going. I think you're right about – I think – I know where you're trying to go. But I just – I just don't buy it. I think that we have accepted things in our national community that we should not accept.

I'll give you an example, this guy down in Alabama, a legislator punched another legislator on the floor on an Alabama General Assembly. He walked outside of the Assembly and said, "He'd do it again if the guy said the same thing, because he deserved the punch." They didn't expel him. There was no action taken.

Don Imus goes on radio, makes the comments he had made, apologized, I think sincerely – he lost his job. Now, we can argue about whether he should have lost his job, but the legislator who punched another legislator on the floor should at least have been expelled for the day or should have been sanctioned.

[Applause.]

The fact that there – the fact that he – he was – he thought that he would be rewarded, Governor Sebelius, for saying, "That guy said something that made me want to punch him." That's where the hearts and minds have to be changed.

I like President Bush, personally. I don't like the way he governs, because he doesn't do what you say, Bloomberg. If something goes right, you reward it. If something goes wrong, you change it. Riordan, you did the same thing. Governor Sebelius, you couldn't win in Kansas, not Governor Bredesen couldn't win in Tennessee. Napolitano, you couldn't succeed in Arizona if you did just awful things over and over again.

You talked about it from the standpoint of investing in things that worked and not in things that don't work. In Washington you can cover this up, you can cover it up a lot easier because you don't always have to present fair budgets or talk honestly about what the budget is, you don't have to talk honestly about the fact that, you know, we have shortchanged veterans in this country.

There's another story in one of these magazines this week that shows how a guy came back, worked at doggone Circuit City, lost his job, and they wanted to give the man his job back, even though Federal Law says they can't fire him while he's gone. It – I would agree with you, a lot of it has to happen outside the political arena, but I just don't believe that leaders can't lead.

You come from a family of leaders, whatever people want to say about the Kennedys, they have done more to enhance the public space, I think, than any family in politics. Why? Because they've been a little courageous about things. Whether you're a Democrat or a Republican, you've got to give them – you've got to give them credit for that.

[Applause.]

I don't say it because I think Clinton was right on top, I took Clinton – I made Podesta and all them a little angry at me at times because I took the President on when I thought he was wrong. I ran against Nancy Pelosi back in 2002 because I wanted my party to be better. I happen to think – I'm not holding myself up as some example of what is right about national politics or Congress, but I think personnel and people who are entering it for the right reasons, you've got two great Mayors who are sponsoring this and another great Governor who is sponsoring this event, and USC, and Cowan and everybody that's doing this thing tonight, who believe in that and subscribe to that.

And if more people, like you, Governor Sebelius, offered themselves to public office to run for Washington – and I'll tell you this, all these jokers that criticize Washington, all of them want to be there. So I don't know of any governor in the country – no disrespect to the ones here, but they – one of them wants us to change the Constitution.

So we can talk all day and night about how Washington is so bad and it's this and that, but everybody wants to be there. Everybody would love to run for President because they think they can do a better job. That's the great thing about the country. The more ideas, the more people – that's why I hope the fellow gets in the race. I hope my former – the former Vice President gets in the race. I hope the former Speaker gets in it, because it's more ideas, more people, more texture. We might get people changing their hearts and minds, we might get back to a real conversation with good staff, who can actually lead the country in a better [way].

[Applause.]

Judy Woodruff: All right. I'm getting the high sign from our leadership here tonight. And is there anybody else, though, who has something they're burning to say? I don't want to stifle anybody. We have a whole morning and into the afternoon of discussion tomorrow.

Unidentified Speaker: Well, we've all agreed it's Margaret's fault -- (inaudible) purpose.

Judy Woodruff: Thanks to everybody on this Panel. Governor Sebelius, Mayor Riordan --

[Applause.]