

**USC Annenberg
Ceasefire! Bridging the Political Divide
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9:00AM Discussion:

Identifying the Problem: The Political Divide

Jay Carney, *Washington Bureau Chief, Time*

Matthew Dowd, *Brand Strategist*

Michael Kinsley, *Founding Editor, Slate*

Lawrence O'Donnell, *Senior Political Analyst, MSNBC*

John Podesta, *President and CEO, Center for American Progress*

Moderator: Juan Williams, *Senior Correspondent, National Public Radio and Political Analyst, Fox News*

Additional Participants

Vic Vansagel; *Publisher, The West Side Chronicle*

Susan Kennedy; *Schwarzenegger/Chief of Staff*

Janet Napolitano; *Governor of Arizona*

Willie Brown; *Former Mayor of San Francisco*

Discussion

Juan Williams: Thank you very much, Geoff, and good morning to all of you. It's good to be here for this Ceasefire Conference, hosted by USC and the Annenberg School.

This session identifying the problem will focus on the media's role in perpetuating the polarized, partisan politics that we've heard lamented in Mayor Bloomberg and then Mayor Villaraigosa's speeches. This session will also focus on the media's role, potential role, I should say, in unraveling the Gordian Knot of political partisanship and paralysis that results from politics driven by the extremes.

Mayor Bloomberg, last night, condemned a media in which insults too often pass for insights, a media in which mean people replace people with something meaningful to say. Mayor Villaraigosa this morning talked about the media's role in accelerating the cycle, of mean-spirited partisanship, and simply amplifying the hate.

This regular crossfire, if you will, on cable news, but also in print and on radio, as well as on the internet, stirs the partisanship until you have walls that divide the players in American politics and may compromise the ability to cross the divide, really impossible. Anyone willing to do it, therefore, is condemned, is weak, and even – even cowardly.

Every political voice in the press or on broadcast is neatly put in a box labeled “Right or Left, Liberal or Conservative, Republican or Democrat.” I might also add “white or black or Hispanic, male, female, Christian, Muslim.”

I remember – I think you'll hear some of this from Mike Kinsley later when we're doing Crossfire, I often thought that the producers would have been just thrilled if they could have had a race discussion in which you would have had the guest someone like a David Duke versus a Lewis Faracon, and invited the audience to identify with one or the other. It's that kind of simpleminded programming that so often passes for media today.

All of these boxes and categories lead to fractures in the press, cable channels for Republicans, cable

channels for Democrats, editorial page and columnists, defined not by the quality of their reporting or writing, but as Liberals and Conservatives. Talk radio and the blogosphere have followed, with the result that we have more narrow casting to specific audiences than we do have broadcasting, telling stories, inviting ideas, and conversation among all Americans.

To try to explore this territory today, we have an extremely fine Panel, and I want to begin introducing them now. Jay Carney is the Washington Bureau Chief for Time Magazine which, as you know, has on the cover Mayor Bloomberg and Governor Schwarzenegger. Jay was named Times Washington Bureau Chief in 2005. He oversees the Magazine's political and national coverage, and many of you may know him better because of his contributions to Time.com's political blog, Swampland. Please welcome Jay Carney.

[Applause.]

Michael Kinsley is a Columnist for Time Magazine. Michael is also the Founding Editor of Slate, which is now owned by The Washington Post Company. He's also been the Editor of the New Republic twice, Editor of Harper's, American Department Editor of the Economist, Managing Editor of The Washington Monthly, and for all of you here in Los Angeles, Editorial and Opinion Editor of the Los Angeles Times. Please join me in welcoming Michael Kinsley.

[Applause.]

Lawrence O'Donnell, Jr. is an Emmy winning Executive Producer of NBC's The West Wing. The West Wing episode he co wrote on the death penalty won the 2000 Humanitus Prize for Writing that "communicates value which most enrich the human person." Mr. O'Donnell is also MSNBC's Senior Political Analyst and a Panelist on the McLaughlin Group. Please join me in welcoming Lawrence O'Donnell.

[Applause.]

John Podesta, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Center for American Progress. John is a Professor, Visiting Professor, I should say, of Law at Georgetown University, but I think all of us in this room best know John from the time he served as Chief of Staff to President Clinton from October of '98 to January of 2001. He coordinated the work of Cabinet agencies with a particular emphasis on the development of Federal budget and tax policy. Please join me in welcoming John.

[Applause.]

And Matthew Dowd. Matthew is head of Brand Strategies. During the past 25 years he's helped to shape political strategies, campaigns for CEOs, corporations, foundations, candidates, and, of course, for President Bush. He's a founding partner of [Via Nova], an international brand positioning firm. His recent political work includes serving as Chief Strategist on two winning reelection efforts, one for Governor Schwarzenegger in '06, and, of course, for President Bush. His innovative approach on the '04 and 2000 campaigns led the bipartisan American Association of Political Consultants to name him their "Strategist of the Year." So please join me in welcoming Matthew Dowd.

[Applause.]

So the way that I want to begin this, as you notice, I put the – Matthew suggests a hug, a group hug – what I've done is I've put the political strategists, Republican and Democrat on this side, and put the political players, so to speak, on this side, although I think, Lawrence, you may be a cross – there you go,

cross dresser in this party.

But let me start with Jay Carney, because Jay I want to start on a serious note and talk a little bit about what you do and what people like you do. You're the head of the Washington Bureau Time Magazine, and how you go about covering politics oftentimes sets the agenda for what the opinion people and what the American people understand is taking place in Washington.

Recently, we've seen in the kind of I'd say hardball politics, people like Tom Delay, Dennis Hastard, decide that what they're going to do on Capitol Hill is going to be the result of the majority, of the majority, the majority of the Republicans on the Hill, this is before the Democratic takeover, and they've essentially marginalized, therefore, moderate to liberal Republicans and excluded Democrats.

When you cover politics does that mean that you no longer have a need to cover the Democrats? No longer have a need to cover those moderate Republicans, and you're simply focused on the power players who make the decisions and, therefore, contribute to the kind of partisan divide that we've been discussing here today?

Jay Carney: Well, in a word, yes. I think that you cover, as Margaret Carlson said last night I thought very well, referring to her father-in-law who asked, you know, "Why don't you cover the planes that land, as opposed to just the ones that crash?" There is, I mean journalism is, you know, it's a narrative about conflict, largely. And conflict is not necessarily a bad thing, so I don't think, you know, I'll probably – you'll probably hear me more than once sort of put up a hand in support of some partisanship, because partisanship is in some ways what generates the ideas and the discussion, because if we all agreed on everything we probably wouldn't get anything done.

But you're right that we tend to be very reactive in the media, and what – when – when Tom Delay and Newt Gingrich, and they had a particular strategy about running the House, you know, we reported on it as though, well, that's just the way it's done, because we're also very focused on the here and now instead of taking historic perspectives. Everything seems like the way it should be at that moment.

And what's interesting now with the Democrats in control of the House is – and the Senate, but in particular the House, is to watch how they handle that dynamic, because Nancy Pelosi and the leadership are dealing with a lot of pressure from the Left Wing of the Democratic Party to be complete purists. And, in fact, there's a great deal of unhappiness right now with Pelosi because, contrary to some of the warnings from the Republicans, she has not thus far led the House from the Left. She's led it more from the center Left, which has really ticked off a lot of Democrats, especially activists in the blogosphere.

Juan Williams: Well, let me go to Michael Kinsley. And, Michael, you have so much experience as an editor, and I wanted to ask you about columnists and voices that appear in terms of determining or setting the agenda in terms of public opinion in this country. And I'm thinking to myself not only of you as a preeminent columnist, but thinking of people like George Will, Charles Krauthammer, Tom Friedman.

Is it the case that when you're the editor of the editorial page of, say, the LA Times, you're picking people out because you're saying this is the Left voice, this is the Right voice, this is going to satisfy the readers, or are you trying to focus on people who are bringing new ideas and trying to cross the divide?

Michael Kinsley: Do I get to talk about crossfire, at all?

Juan Williams: Sure.

Michael Kinsley: All right. I'm just – briefly about columns, yes, when you're running an [op ed] page,

you do try for balance, and that doesn't seem wrong to me. I think that's okay. You also look for new voices. And you try to sort of it's like boulebase, you try to cook-up a nice spicy stew.

Now, Crossfire is a little different. It's – it had a very odd history. You know a year-and-a-half ago, Jon Stewart went on Crossfire, and he made basically the same complaints that bring us here today, and the head of CNN immediately took Crossfire off the air and said, “We only -- we're tired of all this opinionizing and arguing, you know, we want reporting and facts.” Then a few months later Anderson Cooper burst into tears and Lou Dobbs had a stroke or whatever, and all of a sudden there's more opinion on CNN than ever before. So I can't explain that.

Crossfire has gotten a bum wrap. It wasn't name-calling, largely, and, Juan, you were on it. We asked very difficult questions of politicians that they didn't get even, you know, on Meet The Press.

What Crossfire lacked was any hope of dialectical progress. You know, you had your thesis and you had your antithesis, but you weren't allowed to have a synthesis. You know, people started to agree, they went to a commercial.

So -- so my thought was the way to maybe try to achieve some of the things that people here seem to want is not for everybody to get all cozy and lovey-dovey, but to get – to have a TV show, or it doesn't even have to be, whatever, this concept of Ceasefire would be that there are techniques used in labor negotiation or -- and in marriage counseling, and people in this room might have experience with one or the other of those, which are not lovey-dovey, they're very tough, and they can even be entertaining, and use that to get people on both sides to agree to things, and that – if anyone here wants to start crossfire – a ceasefire in any medium, I think that would be great. It's an idea that's yours for free.

I've heard a lot that, in the past day or so, that the people are sick and tired of the – of all the arguing and the name-calling. I doubt it. Because, you know, I think we should be a little bit cynical about the people, while we're being cynical about the press and the politicians. It's not as if, you know, the Republicans have a coherent vision and the Democrats have a coherent vision, and, you know, people can't decide between. Both sides or all sides in our politics make incompatible demands, you know, people want to be told that they can have their Social Security and they can have their healthcare and they're not going to have to pay more taxes. And, you know, I think to some extent it's the self-indulgence of the citizens that leads the politicians to make these incompatible promises.

And just one more short point. To me, what is missing from our political debate is intellectual honesty. It's slightly different from fibbing. It means, intellectual honesty means when you take a position do you really mean it or do you mean something else, have you considered the alternatives, and do you have reasons why you don't – and are you willing – this is the real key one, sauce for the goose – are you willing to apply whatever principle you're stating in situations where it might not be quite as advantageous to your side? And that, to me, is the big missing link in our politics.

Juan Williams: Thanks, Michael.

Lawrence O'Donnell, I wanted to ask you, given your experience with West Wing, about communicating the idea of being compromising, willing to work towards really solving problems in terms of American meeting, so let's look at TV, let's look at dramas, let's extend it then to the documentary world where, let's say, a Michael Moore comes out, and clearly it's one-sided and one point of view, or let's go on then to the kind of shows then that Michael was just talking about, Crossfire, or you have O'Reilly or Keith Olbermann, or anybody who is driving a perspective, personality driven delivery of the news. Does that contribute to crossfire or ceasefire?

Lawrence O'Donnell: Well, let me begin with this crossfire issue, and as a regular on Keith Olbermann's highly biased show. And I've been with MSNBC since the first hour of the first day it went on the air. I rise, figuratively here, in defense of cable news shout shows. My defense is twofold. It begins with the very simple fact that everybody upstairs in this building understands, and that is that no one is watching, no one. We're talking about a maximum audience of about 1.5% of the American public. That's how many people, the total universe of viewers of political chat shows is right around that number. So that's nobody.

You know, that's a total universe, about 4 million viewers, they're not all watching at the same time. The people upstairs in this building can't keep their shows on the air if they don't have 15 million viewers. The biggest shows, you know, in commercial TV now, 25 million viewers. So this thing, this yelling that we do on TV, is ignored except by this tiny subculture. And we know something about them, the people who watch that TV.

If you watch public affairs television, survey data has told us that you have your mind made-up about every single issue discussed on TV before you bought your TV. So my second piece of defense is it does no harm. We're talking to people who have their minds made-up, they're impervious to anything I say at anytime. I've never changed the mind of anyone watching TV, I never will. We do it for the money, and we think we look better in makeup, and so that's what gets guys to do this in Washington, so it's completely harmless.

The – what – what the other side of the world, the entertainment side of the world is doing with this, and I would put Michael Moore as in exactly the same business as other moviemakers and *The West Wing*, which is a commercial business, which is trying to get viewers to an entertainment product. And that system works the same whether your material is about, you know, bored housewives in the suburbs, or people working in the White House, you have to deliver an entertaining product.

When we were doing *The West Wing* I think we had about five episodes written before they went on the air. And I was walking around the Warner Brothers lot thinking, this thing doesn't have a chance, because it's just guys in neckties, and nicely dressed women arguing. There's no baby dying in the emergency room, and there's no one facing the death penalty, and the cops aren't chasing or arresting anybody, and there's nothing happening in it that fits any of the conventions of hour-long TV, so why will the audience stick with us, you know, past the first commercial.

And they did because I think what we were trying to deliver, and I think at our best we did, especially in the last couple of years when we had a real live, real Republican, on the show, Schwarzenegger kind of Republican, Alan Alda playing a California Senator. What we were showing there was, especially in the behind the scenes life of those people, was their authenticity. We were showing you that these people were really trying to be true to their own values, to be intellectually honest, what Michael was talking about, to actually use all of the values Michael was talking about at the end of his comments there.

They didn't always succeed at it. In fact, I really enjoyed showing them fail at it. I mean one principle I had and when I was writing any of the characters of the show, whether it would be [Marty Sheen] or [Jimmy Smitzer] or Alan Alda, or anyone in the show is whenever they ended up in what looked like a noble choice, I always made sure it was a last resort. I always made sure they tried sleazier things first and just couldn't pull it off, wouldn't get away with it, and so they fell back on honesty because there was nothing left.

And that, to me, was a much more realistic trip about how politicians in the real world get there. Now, having worked in the Senate for seven years, I can't remember very many moments where any one of the

Senators' first choice was let me do the noble and honest thing, well, without checking polls or anything else.

And so, you know, we – we got I think probably too much credit at the West Wing for delivering politics as it really is. I don't think we did. I think we were delivering much more of an idealized version of it, and in many ways what this group and what this discussion is hoping to achieve in our real politics.

Juan Williams: Let me go to John Podesta. John, as I had mentioned when I was introducing you, Chief of Staff to President Clinton, and I talked about the idea that you were involved in process in terms of budget, in terms of dealing with tax policy.

And I want to ask you when you hear all these guys talk about this kind of show, that kind of show, the pressures on Jay as he's trying to cover the news and people who are making the real decisions, what difference does it make what's going on in this media? Would you say what Mayor Villaraigosa, what Mayor Bloomberg said about the media poisoning the well and making it more difficult to achieve real solutions that are not ideologically driven, is that true, or do you find that you have to play the media as part of your strategy in order to achieve any process strategic goal?

John Podesta: Well, I don't subscribe to the Tony Blair School. I don't whine about the media. I think that it's a fact of life, you take what media – you know, the media changed substantially over the time that we're in the White House, and it's changed substantially more since I've been out of the White House and doing what I'm doing now.

And I think that it is – it's a vehicle for delivering news to the American people. It's also I think to some extent it's a consumer that needs to be fed by the White House. I think that when we were – let me give you an example about sort of framing, I suppose, that comes from the – from my White House experience. In – when the -- Clinton was faced with the budget crisis with Newt Gingrich, a high moment of partisanship, governments being shut-down over half a dozen, almost a half a dozen times, I think.

And he went out and said, "We want to balance the budget but we want to do it by preserving our values, we want to protect Medicare and Medicaid, environment, education." That set a framework, I think, that was both – that both created leverage against what the Republicans were trying to do, but it also created a sphere or an openness towards a bipartisan compromise, which ultimately after the election in '96 we achieved in '97.

That was a conscious choice about how to present the argument to the American people. It was a conscious idea about using the media to give the public a sense of what this fight was really all about, that it wasn't just, you know, a partisan scrap in the middle of – in the middle of Washington that had no impact or affect on their lives. And I think it was a successful attempt to use the media to shape the event.

If I could just say one more thing about what Lawrence said about The West Wing, which I, you know, West Wing got started when we were there, and I became particularly good friends with John, the late John Spencer, who was probably a better Chief of Staff than I was in the White House.

And the one thing about The West Wing that I think was really different than most political commentary in the popular media is that the people weren't cynical. And I actually do believe that that does characterize the way Democrats or Republicans come to the White House. People come to work thinking they're trying to do the best job they can for the American people.

Now, I disagreed with most of the policy choices made by this White House, but I never really and, you know, and I objected to some extent to the way the campaigns were run and the cynicism in those

campaigns, but I always thought that they actually thought they were right. I think history has proven me right, but I think they thought they were right, and were trying to pursue what – from their perspective what America needed. And I think that that’s rarely portrayed in the popular media and, quite frankly, rarely portrayed in at least the cable talk shows, but I accept Lawrence’s two very compelling points about it – that doesn’t matter anyway.

Juan Williams: Well, you’ve done a fine job of setting up, Matthew, Matthew Dowd. And, Matthew, I just would want you to talk a little bit then, we’ve gone from process here with John, to talking a little bit about the politics and the campaigning, and using media in that way.

I know last night you, in commenting on some of Mayor Bloomberg’s speech, talked about the difficulty. You said, you know, in fact, Governor Bush of Texas was a guy who was crossing the partisan divide, gets to Washington and the politics becomes intensely partisan. I think, I’d be interested to know, I know you’re pals with Karl Rove, that I think Rove drove the politics a lot.

Matthew Dowd: I don’t know if you could describe that –

Juan Williams: Not any longer, huh?

Matthew Dowd: Anymore.

Juan Williams: But you drove, but Rove was driving the politics to the base, and using media to energize the base to keep his guy’s numbers up. How do you think about media as we’ve been describing it, you’ve heard it described here today, is it a force that’s inhibiting real conversation about political solutions, or is it something that you believe is a natural and necessary part of a democracy?

Matthew Dowd: Well, I actually think the question is a very broad question. And, first, just to correct, I’ve told people the other day that, you know, former Democrat, now former Republican, I told someone I’m going to change my first name to “former.”

So I don’t know exactly where I, today, from a partisan perspective, it’s actually interesting, sit. It’s actually my own personal standpoint, a commentary on the inability to not get into this fight, and trying to figure out a place or people, and being unsuccessful at that in the structure that we have, in my own personal and why I’ve sort of drawn back from it, because I really am concerned about the difficulty to not have a unifying way in society as opposed to this duality that we participate in, whether it’s in a campaign, whether it’s in holding office.

But I mean the reality of Governor Bush, and I think it’s actually a commentary on him to a degree but also a commentary on Washington and also a commentary on the Democrats in Washington, because if you’ve looked, if you think about the success of politicians, Democrats and Republicans in this country who are able to cross the divide and able to bring consensus, one, it takes a huge, a huge amount of strength and discipline to be able to do that because you’re going to have to confront your own base along the way.

Two, it takes somebody on the opposite side that is as strong and knows how to communicate and that is as vocal and that is as courageous as you are. And, three, it takes a press coverage to be able to allow that discussion to happen without somebody saying, “Oh, wait a sec, you know, he didn’t stick to his principles, his own principles he compromised,” which is what happens in Washington. We all, everybody talks about why can’t anything get done, but then as soon as somebody compromises in Washington, we accuse them of something, we accuse them of not sticking by the principles.

That system, as I've described, when he was Governor of Texas was different. He had a Democratic Lieutenant Governor, Bob Bullock, whose passed away. He's an old friend of mine, who I worked for, and that's how I got to meet the then Governor, who basically was a very stout pillar that could fight, that could battle him. And then through that battle they got a friendship, and then through that friendship and that battle they were able to bring a consensus.

You also have a different kind of press coverage in most cities and most states in this country that basically doesn't sort of put you in a position that if you – they basically, most state press coverage celebrates compromise. Washington, to a large degree, doesn't celebrate consensus or compromise.

And so from a political operative standpoint, what we do, I mean it – as I listened to Lawrence talk about cable and what you do and your entertainment, and we're trying to get ratings, and what we're trying to do, the same is very true of people that are trying to win elections, which is not necessarily a good thing. I don't think it's necessarily a good thing that we say in order to get ratings what we're doing on air and what the things -- does gets ratings, and this battle that we have gets ratings, therefore, it's okay that we do that, and from a political operative standpoint saying that in order to win elections we think the best way to win an election is to put together a coalition of 51% because that's the most efficient way to victory, or 50.5%.

Both parties have done this, both parties have sort of sat down, allocated resources, and how do I get to 51%. And when you have a campaign that's based on 51% or have a media or a news or cable, or whatever it happens to be, that's based on what's going to generate the most friction and ratings, what is the end result of that going to be? The end result of that's going to be is half the country is dissatisfied and during the campaign because you're out appealing to 49% or 48%.

And if you think about the series of elections we've had in this country, you know, the 2004 election of 51-49, 2000 election 51-49, 1996 and basically Bill Clinton wins with 50, 51% of the vote. 1992, a totally bizarre election, but somebody wins with 43% of the vote. 1988, George Bush wins with 52% of the vote. You know, 1984 was the last dominant election, and then if you go before that, Ronald Reagan wins in 1980 with 50% of the vote. Jimmy Carter in 1976 wins with 49% of the vote.

And so we've had a series of campaigns and politics in this country that have basically said from a business standpoint the best way to conduct a business is to go and achieve 51% because if you achieve 51% you've spent your dollars efficiently, and that's all you need for a victory. Like what John F., Joe Kennedy used to say, "Well, I'm going to play for a landslide."

I mean if – if you were sitting there in an election campaign, and say "I could design this campaign, and we're going to get 63% of the vote, and we're going to go and spend all this money, and we're going to win, you know, we're going to win California, or we're going to do all this, and it's like, well, why do we do that, when all we needed was 51%."

That's a problem, that is a big problem. And I think we that participate in that, which is obviously one of the reasons why I've drawn back from it is that the inherent participation in that it is – encourages this problem. The striving for ratings on cable and whatever it happens to be encourages this problem.

And in my view, the only way it – the only way it will stop is if enough people say, "I'm not doing it that way." That may seem like the short-term political strategy or that may seem like the short-term business strategy on media, but that's not the way society and people and human beings ought to interact with each other. And, for me, that's the only way it's going to change. There are enough human beings –

Juan Williams: But there are two things here we're talking about. One is campaigning for office, and

what John was talking about was governing. It's a big difference. And I wonder if you acknowledge the difference?

Matthew Dowd: The difference, I think the difference, that line of difference which we could have a discussion about that, that line of difference, is at best gray. I mean we have an Office of Political Affairs in the White House that operated in the Clinton White House, operated in the Bush White House, operated in another White House whose basic fulltime job is to sit there and say, "How are we going to win the next set of midterm elections?"

Juan Williams: Let me let John jump in here.

John Podesta: Well, I think we've come to a place where there's a perpetual election, and it's not just – it's not just as Matthew described, which is a place where you're thinking about the actual next time that the American public can vote, but you think about it every day, and I think the White House is a particular example of that where the media lives in your house. The West Wing is like a house and their media are there, they're just a – they're kind of the bad relatives who live at one end of the house, and who you, you know, think about what you – throw you a bone too every now and then, and hope --.

Juan Williams: Leftovers.

John Podesta: I guess the press room is under reconstruction so it's slightly different there now. But and every day I think in order to try to make progress, in order to try to win success on a legislative program or on trying to prosecute what the Administration's program is, the most important voice, the most important way to communicate that is through the President, who always commands some presence.

And, you know, so I think that the first meeting I had in the morning after, you know, I got briefed by the CIA, was a communications meeting. What were we doing that day to try to advance the program?

And I think that that's – that is okay if you're making the right choices. It goes back to some extent to what Mayor Bloomberg said last night, if you're held to an accountable standard, if you're open about what you're trying to do, if you're open to trying to find honorable compromise with the other side, then that's a give and take that I think can work and work effectively, and you see it working, you know, California is not a small place.

Juan Williams: No.

John Podesta: So the fact that it works at a big State, means that it can work at a big nation.

Juan Williams: Jay, you know, what we're hearing though is that people are saying, "Wait a second, on a state level I could see it working, more so than on – than in Washington." Right? And you're covering Washington and I remember for [NPR], I know the Washington Editor for NPR, [Ron Elding] is here, we're talking about people like Governor Sebelius in Kansas, going up to Minnesota, over to Rhode Island, where you have states that are supposedly one, red or blue, but governed by someone from the opposing party.

Jay Carney: Right.

Juan Williams: And you see compromise. People saying, "Oh." Governor Napolitano is sitting here, you know what, people see me as someone who cares about education, or I care about the environment, or I care about – and people say, "I'm going to cross political lines in order to support somebody who is really going to get something done on an important issue. And yet in Washington that doesn't seem to

work. I mean, why? And why is the coverage – I guess I’m – you know, it’s a little bit of a condemning question, why is the coverage so driven by the partisanship?

Jay Carney: Well, I think the coverage is a reflection of the partisanship, not – it doesn’t drive the partisanship. And I think what happens is that the national parties, and the national – once you get to Washington, whether you’re a Congressman or a Senator or a President, you immediately become focused on that 51%, whether it’s the 51% you needed in the House, you know, the 218 votes you need to pass something or the 50 plus, the Vice President, you need to pass something in the Senate, you’re always looking for that margin.

And to build that margin, this goes back to the strategy that Matthew and Karl Rove used to win reelection in 2004, is you start from your people, and you try to grow the number of your base supporters just enough to get to the 50%. And the problem is that you then – you’re, you leave behind the potential with picking up, maybe losing some of your most hardcore Republicans or Democrats in order to pick-up some [centras], and they get alienated.

One of the things that’s striking to me about, you know, we have this cover on Time Magazine this week of – which was coincidental and serendipitous that it coincided with this week and this Conference, but the reaction to the cover of putting these guys on is from the Left we’ve been pilloried on my blog for, you know, once again, you know, celebrating the squishy middle of, you know, people and, of course, they’re Republicans, the Left says, “You know, you never celebrate Democrats.” And then from the Right, they say, “Well, those guys aren’t Republicans anyway.”

On National Review Online they say, “Well, you know, Arnold Schwarzeneger is not a Republican and neither is Michael Bloomberg.” And to some extent it’s because they’re looking at it from the prism of national politics, and they’re right about that because and I don’t know if Mayor Bloomberg is still here, but if he does run for President, he’s not running for the Republican nomination because they don’t – they won’t have him. And I’m not sure they’d have Governor Schwarzeneger either. And the expectation of purity in Washington is a lot different than it is in Sacramento or Austin or other states.

Juan Williams: And that’s reflected in the press coverage is what you’re saying?

Jay Carney: And it’s reflected in the press coverage. I mean it’s, you know, we cover the conflict, and that conflict that we’ve had some other discussions is often more intense within the parties than it is between the parties. The purists and the, you know, the squishy [centras]. I mean look at what Joe Lieberman is, you know, an apostate in the Democratic Party because he’s actually worked with President Bush on some things, and – and, you know, we see what – we see what –

Juan Williams: John says not on just some things, but!

Jay Carney: Yes, he’s crossed the divide, there’s no question. But look at – look at John McCain who’s – the Republican Right will simply never forgive him.

Juan Williams: I understand.

Jay Carney: Will never buy that.

Juan Williams: Let me come to Michael. Michael, one thing we haven’t talked about is talk radio as the province of the Right, the internet, where you have such a presence, Jay, as the province of the Left, and both driving like politics to the extremes. Now, would you agree with that assessment, or do you think I’m being unfair here?

Michael Kinsley: I – no, I think that’s more or less correct, and, you know, how did it happen? It’s sort of a historical accident, but there’s a nice parallelism there. And it’s great, speaking as someone who is, I guess, more or less on the Left, the blogging has arisen to balance the talk radio. I have to keep reminding myself of that when I occasionally go into Jay’s blog and write something, because the people there are – it’s inspiring in a way that Left Wingers can be even nastier than Right Wingers! And but they are.

Juan Williams: But is – so – but then moving towards the solution part of this Panel then, so you contribute to it; right?

Michael Kinsley: Contribute to blogs?

Juan Williams: Well, I mean and playing that game and then I suppose they pillory you when you don’t hold exactly to your ideological predisposition; right? They say, “Well, you’re varying from the liberal stance, Michael Kinsley, how dare you.

Michael Kinsley: Yes.

Juan Williams: So is there any good to it?

Michael Kinsley: Well, you know, it’s good in a simple, counterbalancing way. You know, I – for my years on Crossfire, actually my entire career in Washington in journalism, I felt like, I felt beleaguered by people on the Right who – I mean this all sounds very partisan, but this is actually how I felt and many others. You know, that they were prepared to do things and say things that people on my side weren’t, and they gained an advantage from that. And now there are people on my side who are doing and saying things just as ruthlessly and it’s not pleasant, but part of me sort of likes it, yes.

Juan Williams: Lawrence O’Donnell, if you were moving towards solutions, and you were talking to people who are producing these talk shows, radio, TV?

Lawrence O’Donnell: I talk to them every day.

Juan Williams: What would you be saying in terms of, “Look, you know what? For the best of the country we need to move towards less of the kind of heated and hateful speech that we seem to truck in these --?”

Lawrence O’Donnell: I wouldn’t waste my time on that conversation. As I’ve said, cable news is utterly harmless, it’s completely ignored, it’s watched only by people who already have their minds made-up about every issue.

Jim Lehrer is doing a great newscast every night for an hour that’s being ignored by even more people than those who ignore cable news. He has interesting guests who have differing opinions, who are sitting right there beside each other, and they’re not screaming, and they seem like they might one day get to a reasonable agreement. Tim Russert does great and substantive interviews every Sunday morning, so does George Stephanopolis. The market has that.

The crazy stuff that we engage in on cable news every night is utterly harmless and meaningless, and no one is watching, no one’s mind has changed, I can’t drill that into you enough. We know this. We have audience information, we know how –

Juan Williams: Hold on, hold on, hold on.

Matthew Dowd: Actually – I actually disagree with that.

Juan Williams: Well, go right ahead then.

Matthew Dowd: Because here's – that may be true, which I've seen all the data, and hardly anybody watches, and people who watch -- but there's two things going on that are having a deleterious affect. The first thing is somebody might watch it and say, "Okay, I agree with that." But what happens when you gather information whether it's through the internet, talk radio, or cable, and over and over and over again you reconfirm your opinion.

And what happens when you do that, which people are doing on cable, is as somebody gathers more and more information, it's human nature, they gather more information and their opinion now becomes fact, because they've now watched so much stuff that it's no longer an opinion, it's a fact. And when somebody believes what their belief is as a fact you can't have a conversation.

Juan Williams: Okay, but let's remember, now –

Matthew Dowd: Wait, wait, let me – a second thing. A second thing, second thing – every single presidential campaign and political operative and person in Washington that is involved in this discussion or trying to attempt policy or people that write about it have every single cable show on all day long, constantly going. Every campaign has TV sets all over their thing, with Fox and CNN and MSNBC. The Democrats do, the Republicans do, at every single level in this country.

And though it may only be part of that 2% or whatever, that has a negative affect. Because what happens is part of the design of a campaign inherently becomes about how do we feed that beast? How do we deal with that?

Juan Williams: Well, let Lawrence respond.

Lawrence O'Donnell: You're wasting your time. Campaigns should be devoted to as, they mostly are, buying their own TV time and putting in their full message for 30 seconds, and you know that's what you get paid for, and that's basically how you win them. The extent –

Matthew Dowd: That's actually not true.

Lawrence O'Donnell: -- the extent to which you're addicted to cable news is crazy. Bill O'Reilly has a maximum audience when the wind is blowing correctly of 2.5 million people; okay? He is opposed in every subject at the same time on MSNBC by Keith Olbermann, who now has boomed his audience all the way up to 700,000, which is the biggest audience in the history of MSNBC; okay? This tiny little number, in a presidential election that has 100 million votes. You couldn't – you couldn't describe a more meaningless affect than that program.

Matthew Dowd: But, see, that is totally –

Lawrence O'Donnell: It's ridiculous.

Matthew Dowd: That's totally not true. That is totally not true.

Juan Williams: Tell us the truth, Matthew? What's the truth?

Matthew Dowd: First of all, first of all, in a presidential election the dominate means by which people get information to decide the election is not through television commercials, it is not through television commercials in a presidential campaign, and that is a very testable, provable proposition.

Juan Williams: So where do they get it – where do they get it?

Matthew Dowd: They get most of it from who they trust in their neighborhood, that is whether they call them an influential person or whatever, that observes the news, that some of them watch cable, and some of them talk to other people, that in a presidential campaign, which is what we figured out was there's 10 million, 15 million, 20 million people in this country that basically decide product, that they decide – they decide movies, and they decide politics. And those people are much more active participants in the information flow.

And you may be totally right about campaigns shouldn't pay attention to all the stuff that's going on on cable, and all that stuff, but it's – it's noise. And people have it on and it's their way – they gauge what's going on, without a thermometer, without a constant ability to have a thermometer, one of the thermometers campaigns utilize, media utilizes, everybody in the media that covers it has it on all the time. One of the thermometers they use is what's happening on cable.

Juan Williams: Well, hang on, let me make a – let me throw this to Jay. Jay, here's one thing I want to say, how many people read Time Magazine?

Jay Carney: We have 3.2 million subscribers –

Juan Williams: Multiples.

Jay Carney: A total readership of about 20 million maybe.

Juan Williams: Right. And I know at NPR if you're talking about drive time, morning edition, you're up to 13 million, 14 million people.

Jay Carney: Right.

Juan Williams: Now, their impact – they're influential's, by the way, Lawrence. And they're – they look at the cable, so it does have impact on mainstream American media.

Lawrence O'Donnell: Or look at the New York Times.

Juan Williams: Right.

Michael Kinsley: How many people read the New York Times, but if you were running a campaign and you could get an article favorable to you on the front page of the New York Times, you would be very pleased, and it wouldn't just be a matter of vanity.

Lawrence O'Donnell: But the reason you care about that is so that other media will pick it up – it's not just –

Michael Kinsley: That's true, that's true.

Unidentified Speaker: That's still true.

Lawrence O'Donnell: Nobody picks up what Keith Olbermann says, nobody. When is the last time you saw Bill O'Reilly on the front page of the New York Times, this is what he said last night? I think no one cares.

Juan Williams: I think we've – we – ceasefire!

John Podesta: We've drilled down too far on primetime cable TV shows. I think there are new news sources. We've democratized the news. We've talked a little bit about blogs. There's information that influences the "mainstream media." That I think is – is on a 24-hour cycle, and I sort of more agree with Matthew about this, but there are a lot of producers of that information, and it's not just coming from Bill O'Reilly. In fact, I think little of it now comes from primetime cable --.

Juan Williams: So where is it coming from?

John Podesta: It – it comes from all kinds of sources, you know, including the blog that we have, which is in the top ten in the world, at the Center For American Progress, and we're pounding it out there every day, probably right now.

Juan Williams: Right.

John Podesta: Watching this show. And it's coming from a variety of source, it's highly opinionated, it's a media structure that looks more like the beginning of the country than it does like the 1950s.

We don't just have three big networks who have a kind of public responsibility for fairness. Everybody is in the game. They're all throwing it out there, and they're all trying to influence what's on the front page of the New York Times, not just the positive story, but a how do you stick it to the other guy. What's on the front page of the LA Times.

Juan Williams: Yes.

John Podesta: What's on NPR. And everybody is competing in a news cycle which creates a fair amount of screaming and chaos. But it also, I think, provides opportunity to reach bigger, to present things in a more – in – again, I come back to the two Mayors' introductory speeches – if you have something to sell, if you have some big ideas, you have a lot more venues and channels and, in fact, allies, to help you be out there and selling.

Juan Williams: All right. Let me just ask the audience if they want to participate in this – I don't know if Susan Kennedy is here from Governor Schwarzenegger's staff? Is Susan in the back? If you'd ask her to come?

But I wanted to ask Michael Kinsley if he would do me a favor, and just, Michael, when you hear this about mainstream media and what John just described as a sort of cacophony of everybody is in there, and if you have a big idea you can get it out.

Why is it striking people that it's not helping because there's more information and more ideas available to the average media consumer? Why do people have the perception that, in fact, it's leading to this kind of paralysis in our political system?

Michael Kinsley: I think they're very wrong if they think that. You know, I mean the famous A.J. Lieblich of Freedom of The Press is for those who own one. Now, everyone can own one. And, and –

Juan Williams: So why is everyone upset that Rupert Murdoch might own the Wall Street Journal?

Michael Kinsley: My impression is that people are not as upset about what's happening on the internet as they are about, about cable TV, which does seem a little old-fashioned.

Juan Williams: Well, what – answer the question I asked about, well, then are they upset about the Wall Street Journal going into the hands of Rupert Murdoch?

Michael Kinsley: Some people are. I would say the percentage of the country that is even aware that the Wall Street Journal might go to Rupert Murdoch is smaller than the numbers Lawrence was kicking around.

Juan Williams: Uh-huh. And, Lawrence, would it bother you if you say no one is watching the cable chat and shout shows, would it bother you then if you have a more partisan presentation of mainstream news coming, let's say, from a Murdoch owned Wall Street Journal?

Lawrence O'Donnell: Yes. Look, I mean the Wall Street Journal already has the structure where the editorial page is arch conservative and the rest of it is a pretty good running hunk of journalism. I wouldn't worry about that very much.

You know, the – one of the things that we've ignored so far in this discussion are the politicians, themselves. Matthew was talking about all these very close presidential elections we've had, where they've gotten – they've won with 43% or 51%.

Who among us thinks that those candidates deserved more votes? Who among us thinks those candidates earned the trust of a larger section of the electorate?

Unidentified Speaker: I agree with you.

Lawrence O'Donnell: I worked for a politician in the State of New York who used to win with 67 or 68% of the vote, and he – while he had a 98% rating from the Liberal groups that would rate these politicians. Now, he won 62 out of 63 counties. Senator Monahan. That's something FDR never did, that's something Bobby Kennedy never did, that's something no one in the history of New York politics had ever done.

Most of those counties north of Harlem are hardcore Republican counties. They knew he was a Liberal, but he won on respect. He would go into those places and he would answer questions the same way he would answer them in [Grenich Village], and they – what they found in him was an authenticity and they found a great intellectual power, and so they were voting for the smart guy they respected. We saw this in other places, Sam Nunn –

Juan Williams: Well, wait, wait – and so why doesn't this work on media? Why don't you just say, "I want to hear smart people—"

Lawrence O'Donnell: But this is an individual thing. This is, you know, Sam Nunn, a southern Democrat, used to win in Georgia with a very big majority of the vote. That State will probably never be able to elect a Democrat to the Senate again unless that person comes in and approaches this with the kind of intellectual honesty, Michael was talking about, some of those qualities that Michael was talking about earlier in this.

And so I'm not going to blame the electorate or blame campaigns, or blame partisanship, for these very close elections in which they're fighting over, you know, a swing group of about 12 million people in the country to figure out who the President is going to be, as long as we're delivering candidates that really don't have the capacity to earn a larger section of the public's trust. I don't think –

Matthew Dowd: I totally agree with that.

Juan Williams: I – I understand, and I think you would agree with this –

Lawrence O'Donnell: -- have earned a bigger vote (inaudible).

Juan Williams: I think you would agree because you (inaudible).

Matthew Dowd: I think it's not – but I extend it bigger than that. I think it's about the human beings involved in the process. The human beings involved in the process. The process will not change human beings. Human beings will change the process, and how they conduct themselves, whether it's in a campaign – and I totally agree with you, they haven't earned the trust, they haven't gone out there and said, "This is who I am, this is how I'm going to do it." They've gone out there and said, "I'm principled, I'm strong, and, you know, I'm going to do this." But they haven't followed through, they haven't done the thing, they haven't practiced the rhetoric, they haven't been disciplined, they haven't – they haven't done any of that at many different levels.

And in the media, the same thing I think is true in the media. We can't let the media off the hook to say, "I'm just covering it. I just cover it." They have a responsibility as human beings in the process, if they want – media should not only be involved in covering conflict. Media has a responsibility in healing the country. If we are – if our basis of all of this is –

Juan Williams: Yes, but it doesn't get numbers is what Lawrence just said.

Matthew Dowd: Well, that's the same thing – I sit here – I can sit here and have a discussion about, "Well, I got 51%, I won the election." Is the country better off? No, the country is not better off, because I got 51% of the election. That's the problem.

Juan Williams: All right. Let me – let me ask the audience to get involved. Susan, I think you've shown-up here, and I wanted to ask you as someone who deals with media on Governor Schwarzenegger's staff, someone who is a Democratic, gone to work for a Republican, been pilloried, been made an example, if you will, come around here so people can see you, to talk a little bit about what – how you think we could break this Gordian Knot, this cycle that we've described of people campaigning, governing with the next election and using the media to energize their base, and as a result leading to this kind of extreme partisan divide?

Susan Kennedy: Are you tired of all of the men sitting up here, so you needed – or was it because I was wearing yellow?

Juan Williams: Yes.

[Applause.]

Susan Kennedy: That's okay. You're a man with good taste. Like I feel a little bit like Oprah standing here with the microphone, but –

Matthew Dowd: Sit down, oh.

Juan Williams: The gallant Mr. Dowd!

Susan Kennedy: I think – I think there's a bit of a misunderstanding on two levels. One is the role of the media hasn't changed in elections since Thomas Jefferson and John Adams went at it in 1800. I mean so this notion that somehow it's gotten worse or somehow it's got – they're contributing to the demise in American body politic I think is just fundamentally wrong. It is what it is. And trying to say that you – that you're going to change that system is like trying to stop water from going around solid objects.

It – and I also think the second fundamental error is that I mean Howard Dean put to rest the notion that the major media, the broadcast media defines or creates the candidates. I mean the candidates ride a wave of the – what exists in terms of the collection of interests as they rise to a different occasion.

I mean Barack Obama right now has become a phenomenon, if you will, in an otherwise pretty normal election cycle, where you have a lot of unknown candidates or a lot of candidates that are fighting to get some attention. And he rose to stardom, if you will, in this crowded field because he had fundamentally a little bit of a different message, and there was something different about him. It wasn't that he ran a better campaign, it wasn't that he had better access to the media, it wasn't that all the talk show people played him up and turned him into a candidate he wasn't.

It's because he had something that people were paying attention to and it was the reaction on the grassroots level, the reaction outside the medium that made him a phenomena, and then it got picked up by the media. And then – and then the media becomes very, very important because we – the media simplifies the issues and repeats it, and it becomes a megaphone, and then it starts to define what's happening in the election. And then the candidates respond to it.

And so, but I think it's – what I'm hearing is a little bit of blame game in terms of that the media is somehow either responsible for the demise or somehow limits candidates' ability.

Juan Williams: You don't see that, at all, in terms of what you do on a day-to-day basis to try to make policy, to make law in California?

Susan Kennedy: The media is a – is incredibly important, they're not to blame, though.

Juan Williams: Well, wait, let's not just talk in general terms. We've heard – we've sort of, you know, disaggregated it. We talked about cable, we talked about the blogosphere, we've talked about the personality driven cable shows, and New York Times, LA Times as mainstream media – what's helpful, what's not helpful from your point of view?

Susan Kennedy: I think having a – what's not helpful is the kind of instantaneous, gotcha media that has infected a lot of what used to be the more thoughtful venues. I mean the blogosphere has definitely changed the tenor, and it's –

Juan Williams: Worse?

Susan Kennedy: Yes, I think there's definitely a qualitative difference, because you don't have to – you don't have the same responsibility in terms of sources, you don't have the same responsibility in terms of, you know, verifying information. It's about speed.

Juan Williams: And talk radio?

Susan Kennedy: Talk radio is talk radio. I don't think that – I don't think it makes it worse. I – I mean and I've probably been talked about as much on talk radio as candidates for office to some degree, so it's not that I'm fond of it, but I don't think talk radio, I don't think it's a bad thing.

Matthew Dowd: You know, what's interesting about what Susan –

Juan Williams: Give that to Matt – give that microphone –

Matthew Dowd: What Susan's – about Barack Obama, it's actually an interesting story, and I think today it's really interesting. I agree, I think what he's said, and actually speaks, what his words and what he says speaks to exactly where most of the country is, which is we're tired of the labels, we're tired of this, let's get past all this.

But what's interesting about his campaign and what he's doing is the conduct of his campaign keeps running afoul of his words and his rhetoric and the type of leadership he is. And so he's put together a campaign in a very traditional way with people that have conducted campaigns, which is not matching it.

So today or the last three days this sort of opposition research package they did on Hillary Clinton related to Indian gaming or something, tribes or something, he had to apologize. It was an attack piece on that, and it doesn't match – the conduct of his campaign is not matching what his words are, and that I think is going to be a very difficult struggle which goes to this ceasefire, is how does he match his words to the conduct of his campaign? And that's a big problem when you're running a national campaign and you say certain things and you have a war room. It just doesn't – the American public is like, "Wait a second."

Juan Williams: Yes, he would be – he would be, you know, disarming -- one side in the war would be disarming, that would – that doesn't make sense. Everybody has negative research.

Matthew Dowd: Well, I actually think the vision and the power of his ideas and words can overcome that. I think the biggest fault and weakness he could have is trying to run a campaign in the way it's traditionally been done.

Juan Williams: All right.

Matthew Dowd: If he wants to do something differently.

Juan Williams: Governor Napolitano, can I ask you to join in here? I mean in Arizona, what do you think about the press? Does it help or does it hurt?

Janet Napolitano: Well –

Matthew Dowd: Governor!

Janet Napolitano: I'm going to speak a little bit later, so I've been taking notes, but it's very interesting. When I go to work in the morning and I've had a bad article in the print press, and I'll go and I'll say, "Oh, they're banging on me, blah, blah, blah." And my staff will just look at me and say, "Nobody reads the papers. It doesn't matter." Exactly to your point, it doesn't matter.

Juan Williams: Right, right.

Janet Napolitano: But what does –

Juan Williams: What does matter?

Janet Napolitano: What does matter is you have to be out there and you have to speak with people, about the issues they're concerned about, and you have to be out there all the time. You're on all kinds of different media. You can be on the blog, you can be on the radio, you can –

Juan Williams: You have a blog?

Janet Napolitano: We have bloggers.

Juan Williams: Yes, okay.

Janet Napolitano: You know –

Juan Williams: Who work for you as the Governor?

Janet Napolitano: They do not work for me, they work – they like me, there's a difference!

Unidentified Speaker: Allies!

Juan Williams: Yes.

Janet Napolitano: But and to recognize that the people you represent get information in a lot of different ways and they don't have much time to spend on it and process it, so in the end, overall, over time they have to have an impression that you are worrying about things they don't now have to worry about because you're doing that.

Juan Williams: Well, so where do people in Arizona get their impressions of you from, if they're not reading the paper? What does your staff worry about?

Janet Napolitano: I would say – I would say, number one – actually, I would say number one would be radio. Number two, television – but television news doesn't really cover state politics.

Juan Williams: So radio is the local talk radio host?

Janet Napolitano: No, just radio in general. I go on talk radio all the time. I do regular hours on talk radio. I mean I use the radio a lot, and it's a big State, people are driving in their cars a lot, it's a great medium for us.

TVs, I don't know about here, but in Arizona and in most states, television news just doesn't have the capacity to cover most state politics, a sound byte here or there, or a campaign event here or there, but that's about it. The internet is huge, and probably last and least is the traditional print press.

Juan Williams: Right. Is Governor Sebelius here?

Janet Napolitano: No, she had to go.

Juan Williams: She had to go?

Janet Napolitano: Yes.

Juan Williams: Okay. So do we have any questions from the audience? There's a question right here. Hang on, the microphone is coming.

Vic Vansagel: My name is [Vic Vansagel]. I'm a publisher of a small community newspaper called "The West Side Chronicle." My question is does the media create the conflict? Is that the idea? Or the conflict creates the media?

Juan Williams: What would you say, John?

John Podesta: No, I think that we have very real conflicts in this country that are not media creations. I think we've kind of glossed over the biggest one throughout this whole conference, which is that two-thirds of the public want a different course in Iraq. The President doesn't want to change course in Iraq. And I think that is a – that is the basis of a strong partisan divide, and that's why you see that in the respective fights for the presidential nomination now, most of the presidential candidates on the Republican side still supporting the President and the candidates on the Democratic side moving further and further in a different direction. But that's a fundamental and an important disagreement.

Juan Williams: That's a major divide.

John Podesta: And it can't just be bridged I think by sort of ignoring the fact that there's – that there's real substance (inaudible).

Juan Williams: You know, Matt?

Matthew Dowd: Yes, sir.

Juan Williams: You're hiding away, but on this one you've got to appear.

Matthew Dowd: No, I'm trying to be humble.

Juan Williams: I understand, Matthew, but what – but on the war, an area where you've caused some controversy, but on the war you talked about, you know, politicians who hold to principle, who hold to ideals – President Bush says he's holding to his principles, holding to his ideals despite poll numbers, despite the opinion of the American people, and yet it has contributed hugely to this divide in the country and to the idea that people feel he doesn't listen to them, so isn't that contradictory?

Matthew Dowd: Well, I think the problem is is that he and others in Washington think they're smarter than the America public, and that's a problem. That is a huge – when you think you're smarter, when the course – when 300 million Americans believe something and five people in Washington believe something different, I trust 300 million Americans to make that decision.

And I think – I think the idea that principle, like we're going to stand -- I'm going to go all the way off the cliff, and I'm going to go [fall off], but I stood on principle – like we think that's good, like that's a celebration of something good, as opposed to somebody that says, "I was wrong, I screwed up, I made a mistake, this Iraq thing is a mess, we got to do a whole new policy, it's a mess." Which, actually, he would be rewarded if he stood-up and said that, and did that, and said, "Let's – how are we going to figure ourselves out of this mess. I'm sorry. It's a major, a major mess." But we think we're going to stand on principle, we're not going to admit a mistake, we're just going to right off the cliff.

Juan Williams: Well, he's not doing it. Michael?

Michael Kinsley: I don't know about other people in this room, but I want to be governed by people who are smarter than the average American, and I want –

Matthew Dowd: I want to be governed by people that respect the opinions of the Americans.

Michael Kinsley: Oh, sure, sure. But, you know, I think there's a lot of phony humble pie or possibly politicians think it's phony as they say it, but that they – they maybe should be truly humble. They have much to be humble about, as that --.

Lawrence O'Donnell: Well, you know, if we were going to go with this notion then why wouldn't you, Matthew, expect the president to change his position on abortion? You have two-thirds of the country says that we – that Roe vs. Wade is fine. It's roughly the same number that says we've – we've gone wrong in Iraq and should get out. What's he waiting for on changing his opinion about Roe vs. Wade?

Matthew Dowd: Actually –

Lawrence O'Donnell: I don't think this makes a lot of sense if you're talking about something that the President firmly believes in.

Matthew Dowd: The consensus on Roe vs. Wade is not what, first of all, the American public thinks it's a settled issue, so I think anytime a politician talks about it the American public tunes them out because they think it's settled. Most of the public think – doesn't want to sort of have it launched in their living room.

But the – the Roe vs. Wade in the – and where the public is on Roe vs. Wade is basically if you really look at it is split into three camps. It's fine as is, don't do any changes. Make changes, overturn Roe vs. Wade. And a third of the people sitting in the middle saying, "It needs some slight changes. There's probably too much. We don't know what to do on it."

That's very different than Iraq. People see Iraq as major mess, complete disaster, troops are dying every day over there. What are we doing, nobody has got a plan, why do we keep doing this?

And at some point, at some point, somebody in the White House is going to say, "We can't be on the opposite side of two-thirds of the country."

Juan Williams: All right.

Matthew Dowd: At some point.

Juan Williams: We have to wrap this up. Governor Schwarzenegger is approaching, but I wanted to end with the audience. And I see Willie Brown sitting here, and I thought, Willie, we would ask you to have the last word on American media and how we can cut this [now].

[Applause.]

Willie Brown: I must tell you that I have, frankly, enjoyed the discourse, and I think the audience has, as well. I would say, though, as a practicing politician it is far more important for me to define myself rather than any aspect of talk radio, television, or anybody else placing that definition upon me.

In order to do that, it means that I have to go beyond the press. I have to go beyond the media. I have to do every single solitary thing to meet every single solitary person that I'm trying to convince to follow my leadership and vote for me, and I will use whatever it takes to do and achieve that goal.

And to the extent that I do that, no matter what occurs in the press it will have very little affect on the attitude that is held by the voters or by the people making the decisions with reference to me. That's what most politicians should be about, and that's what most politicians I think are about, and I think at that point that's which, you begin to think in terms of ceasefire.

Believe me, I am a product of practically every combination of arrangements that can be made in the world of politics. I had – I got elected Speaker – there were 80 people voting on December 1st, 1980, 80 people voting – I had 28 Republicans for the first time in the history of California that had voted for me, and only 23 Democrats voted for me out of 47, 28 Republicans out of 32. I said, "I assume that all 28 remembered what Lincoln said, and gave me an opportunity." The Democrats still questioned whether or not I was qualified, and that, frankly, gave me total freedom to make arrangements with -- to make arrangements --

Juan Williams: You were able to cross the divide in that.

Willie Brown: -- to make arrangements with Schwarzenegger, to make arrangements with whoever is in charge that's got something I need.

Juan Williams: All right. Thank you so much.

Let me just say thanks to Matthew Dowd, Susan Kennedy for coming out. John Podesta, Lawrence O'Donnell, Michael Kinsley, Jay Carney. Thank you all for listening, and welcome, Governor Schwarzenegger.

Unidentified Speaker: And thank you, Juan, for running such a terrific Panel. "Talk To The Nation" was a great show, and we can all see why. As they say on the television shows now, this – the conversation will continue in the Green Room.

[Applause.]