

Center for Strategic and International Studies

**Bob Schieffer's "About the News" with H. Andrew Schwartz
Podcast**

**Subject: "Ciquizza and The Fix: Changing Media in an Era of
Outrageous Politics"**

**Speaker:
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**Hosts:
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*Transcript By
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(Music plays.)

BOB SCHIEFFER: I'm Bob Schieffer.

H. ANDREW SCHWARTZ: And I'm Andrew Schwartz.

MR. SCHIEFFER: And these are conversations about the news. We are in the midst of a communications revolution. We have access to more information than any people in history. But are we more informed, or just overwhelmed by so much information we can't process it?

MR. SCHWARTZ: These conversations are a year-long collaboration of the Bob Schieffer College of Communication at Texas Christian University and the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

(Music plays.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: Today we have with us Chris Cillizza, The Washington Post reporter, blogger, and social media connoisseur. He's known for his clever and insightful commentary. He was named one of Washingtonian's top's journalists in 2009, where he was described as the model of what the next generation of Washington reporter will look like. He started his career with the Cook Political Report. After that, Roll Call. After joining The Washington Post, he was the first White House correspondent of a major news source to do online work. He also launched the widely popular weblog, The Fix, which focuses on American electoral politics. He appears on television as a political analyst for MSNBC. To round out his resume, just this September he launched the Ciquizza, The Fix podcast, a new quiz show podcast with The Washington Post.

Chris, we're delighted to have you. And this shows just how magnanimous we are here, because we're having one of our competitors on. You have a podcast. We have a podcast.

CHRIS CILLIZZA: There was a time when I was 13- or 14-years old where I thought I will have made it in life if Bob Schieffer says the word "Ciquizza." So I feel like I've really accomplished something there. Thank you for having me.

MR. SCHIEFFER: (Laughs.) I'm still working on that.

MR. CILLIZZA: Long-time admirer.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, it's great to have you, Chris.

So you know, we're just coming to know about this whole business of the podcast, which all of a sudden is a very important part of the journalism landscape. I mean, five years ago people said if you're going to do something on the web, do it short. People don't want long. Now we're finding they want long.

MR. CILLIZZA: First of all, to your point, Bob, I think conventional wisdom about what people want as it relates to content via the internet, however that's delivered, changes about every 20 minutes. I mean, I've now been at the post for 10 years and I can remember literally diametrically opposed advice being given to me. We need to do this. And then six months later no, it's this. So I'm always hesitant when people say we know what they want, because we're not sure what they want. It's an evolving thing.

I think what you've found is that what's happening in content and people consuming content is what's happened in the country more broadly economically. OK, so economically what we know is that the rich have gotten richer, the poor have gotten poorer, the middle class is hard to define and less robust, certainly, than it was 25 years ago, 50 years ago. I think content is like the same thing.

You have – short is very appealing. Short and pithy and funny and smart, whether that's video or audio or the written word. And we've learned really long can be appealing. Sites like long reads. Podcasts that go for an hour and 25 minutes, two hours. The danger zone, I think, for content now is that middle space. For print journalism it's 25-inch stories, stories that are about 800 words – 800 to 1,000. People tend not to read them.

They're willing to invest in something long if they like it, right? If it's a topic they're interested in. If it's a voice like yours that they're interested in. Hopefully if it's a voice like mine that they're interested in they'll invest in long. Short is easy. You get it on social media. You look at it. It's a Vine that makes you laugh. It's a BuzzFeed list. The middle, Bob Schieffer and Chris Cillizza sat down today, the topics discussed were – there's so much less interest in that. And I think that's where we've spent a lot of time journalistically over the years, is that middle ground. And that middle ground I feel like is eroding out, and we need to change for that reason.

MR. SCHIEFFER: You know, it reminds me so much of what Leslie Moonves – who is the chairman of the CBS Corporation – people were talking about, you know, how do we do stuff for the web and so forth. And he once said, look, if it's not good on the big screen it's not good on the little screen. And what he said was – it is just what you're talking about – it is about content. If it's good, people are going to read it. They're going to listen to it. If it's not good, they're going to turn the page.

MR. CILLIZZA: That's exactly it. People always say to me, what's the secret to succeeding on the internet? And I'm like, it's the same secret that was the key to your career, and the key to anyone's career who succeeds in the content business, you make the content better than the content being offered by your rivals. Like, it's not – in many ways, so much has changed in journalism, but really nothing at the core of it has changed, which is it has to be better reporting, better analysis, you know?

And then the thing that has changed is you have to make sure that your delivering it to people in a much more proactive way. It used to be a passive way in which people consumed news – you either watched it or night or you got your local paper that morning and read it. Now people are actively seeking news out from a million different sources. So you have to go out and

push it to them. But good doesn't change. That's why I like journalism. It's largely a meritocracy. If you're good at it, and you produce good and interesting things, you tend to do well.

MR. SCHIEFFER: News is what is relevant to people's lives. That's my rule. And if they don't know it's relevant, the journalist's role is to tell them why it's relevant. It seems that all of what we do comes down to that.

MR. CILLIZZA: And I think we need to get out of something that we still do some of, not as much, the dutiful reporter – like, I guess I'll do this 20-inch – don't do it. Because if you feel it's dutiful, then the user, reader, viewer, watcher, will feel it's dutiful. If you can't find an angle to make it revealing, interesting, relevant to someone's life, then don't do it. It doesn't mean it doesn't exist, but if you can't do it then you should take a pass on that.

MR. SCHIEFFER: I want to talk about your blog.

MR. CILLIZZA: Sure.

MR. SCHIEFFER: The Fix, it's not just popular, it's wildly popular. You're receiving – and I want to hear these numbers from you. How many hits, unique visitors, how do you measure how many people see this thing?

MR. CILLIZZA: Well, I measure it in a lot of ways when it's going well and less ways when it's not going well. (Laughter.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: That reminds me of an industry I'm somewhat familiar with.

MR. CILLIZZA: Yeah, it's like ratings. Exactly right. (Laughter.) Well, what if we slice and dice this quarter hour?

Right now has been – I started it in 2006 by myself, at a time when most news organizations, major, didn't have anything like this. So the first three or four years, I always say, if we had the analytics to measure traffic that they have now, they would have gotten rid of it a long time ago, because it didn't do anything then. It was years before it did anything. Last week, obviously helped by the first presidential debate, we did 7 ½ million unique visitors. We – in the month of July, busy month politically, both conventions – we, and that's myself as well as a person who edits the day-to-day copy and four other reporters, got more traffic than all of Politico.

So it's – the traffic and the attention via the web is a means to an end, right? It's not an end in and of itself. I always say, the traffic is wonderful. It allows us to do things. It gives – you know, it lets us build, try things. But in the end, traffic is just traffic if you can't – the reason that we are getting it, I hope, is because we're doing interesting, fresh angles in the news cycle on things. So the traffic is a byproduct of that. And the traffic is not a means – it's not an end in and of itself. You have to figure out, OK, well, we got this traffic, now can we experiment?

What can we do with it, because, you know, I think too much of journalism right now is focused on the – just the raw number. To me the engagement is more important. How long are people staying on The Fix?

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, explain that to me. What is a unique visitor?

MR. CILLIZZA: Someone who – if you, Bob Schieffer, go to the fix and read something, you are a unique visitor. Page views would be you come and you click on five things on The Fix, or you click through a bunch of articles. So that – the page number is always going to be bigger than the unique visitor number. Unique visitors is, I think, increasingly more important, because it's the number of people who are coming, right? Just rawly. You figure if they come, you can get them to read more stuff over time.

I actually think the most important metric that we don't focus enough on is time on site. This is the same – I mean, this is like the number of people who watch 18 minutes of the evening news versus the number of people who watch one minute. I would argue that the 18 minutes is much more important in the environment we live in now, which is I'm not sure you need vast, broad support. Look, there's 320 million people in this country. The fact that 7 ½ million read a piece of my content, it's wonderful, but it's a drop in the bucket. There's still a lot of people who don't have any clue about what we do.

But you can take that 7 ½ million people and say, over time, hey, what if we – would you want this podcast? Would you want if Chris did a web show? Would you be interested in paying \$1.99 to stream that? In terms of a business model, depth of commitment I think is much more important than breadth of commitment at this point. So I – again, the metrics shift so much of what's important that I think it's hard – the big numbers are easy to be attracted to.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Let's bring in Andrew Schwartz of CSIS, who is a connoisseur of the web and digital traffic.

MR. CILLIZZA: Sure.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Thank you, Bob. And, Chris, thanks for being here. And you mentioned, you have some terrific reporters on your staff at The Fix. One of them we have to a shout out to, Amber Phillips, who is an alumni of the Schieffer School of Journalism. She's done fantastic work. She writes the newsletter, The 5-Minute Fix.

MR. CILLIZZA: And just a quick brag on Amber, we started that with 25,000 subscribers off of our various lists and in the last year she's built that to 80,000 subscribers. And I would love to tell you I have anything to do with it. I don't. That is her and a woman named Terri Rupert who's our digital editor for national who handle all that, and they do a great job. Again, theory being, give people the news that you want them to use where they want it. Some people – newsletters – you want to talk about podcasts and newsletters are the two hottest things in journalism right now, which is fascinating to me because newsletters – it's everything that's old is new again. Ten years ago newsletters were a big deal. And now they're sort of coming back into vogue.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Well, you know, the late David Carr of the Times said it's so old it's new. And it works because busy people like to get curated content that's sent to their, you know, inbox, that they can absolutely use.

MR. CILLIZZA: And this is what Bob was talking about, the sort of everything – that content matters. There's nothing new under the sun here. Why did you succeed, Bob? Why did any journalist succeed? People trusted you to guide them through the noise, right? There's so much – there's more now, but there's always been a lot – so much noise, so much just out there, out there, out there. And they don't have – they don't do it like me or you did, full time every day, right? They have 15 minutes, 20 minutes, five minutes. And they need to be able to go to people who they know they will get it straightforward, honest, with analysis in it. Nothing has changed there. That's the same thing as always.

MR. SCHIEFFER: And, you know, when we first at CBS News began to understand what our new role was in this new journalist landscape was on 9/11, when we had to correct mistakes that other people were making. And as you know, Chris, in journalism, traditionally if your organization makes a mistake, you correct it. If someone else does, you ignore it. But we found out on 9/11 that if we didn't correct some of this stuff that was getting out there – another plane headed to the Sears Tower in Chicago – if we didn't correct that immediately we ran the risk of setting off pandemonium and just mass hysteria. Our job now – I think more and more – we talk about fact checking in these debates. Our job more and more is just fact checking news in general.

MR. CILLIZZA: Yeah, and I think that both the big brands, like the CBSs of the world, and the smaller brands, like The Fixes of the world, your brand is both more important now than ever because there are so many options that you need to be able to distinguish yourself as a trusted source, and all brands are more tenuous than ever because of the 24-hour news cycle and the way in which things were. I always say to my wife: This is my job today. If I tweet something really stupid, which I'm not planning to do, but you know, that could be it for me. You know? I mean, like, you have to –

MR. SCHWARTZ: If you tweet something really stupid it could also propel you to the presidency of the United States. (Laughter.)

MR. CILLIZZA: It's true. So I'm not running currently, but I can think about it. But, I mean, there is – there is a tenuousness of brand stability at a time in which your ability to be a reliable brand is coin of the realm stuff. I mean, it's difficult. I mean, it's a high wire act, I feel like.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Let's talk about this campaign.

MR. CILLIZZA: Hah!

MR. SCHIEFFER: I mean, I won't even ask you the question have you ever seen anything like this, because I know you haven't.

MR. CILLIZZA: Have you? Have you?

MR. SCHIEFFER: No. No.

MR. CILLIZZA: I mean, I haven't. But I –

MR. SCHIEFFER: No. No.

MR. CILLIZZA: There is – there is no – and I've spent a lot of time thinking and reading about this. Obviously I haven't seen every campaign ever. But there is no analogue for what Trump has done in winning the Republican primary. There just isn't one. People say, oh, I can't believe the media didn't see it coming. To which I say, fine, I'm not immune to criticism. There was no way to see it coming. Nothing we know about how this works would have predicted this person being the nominee.

Now, that means we have to analyze how this works, which is a very fair conversation to have. But this idea that – like, everybody saw Donald Trump coming a year afterward. No one saw him coming, because there was no way to see him coming. It was – he is *sui generis* in that way. I mean, literally birthed himself against all rules that we know about.

MR. SCHIEFFER: So how do you think he did it?

MR. CILLIZZA: Uniqueness of his celebrity, which is vast. I think he is more famous today than he was a year ago. But a year ago, he was very famous. He could go to most places in the world and be recognized. And celebrity, we know how, is sort of cache for many people. It almost doesn't matter why you're famous. It's just that you're famous. I think in the early going of people who went to his rallies it was more just curiosity. He hadn't outlined anything he believed. So it's – with the possible exception of the wall and immigration. But by and large, most of these people who were showing up to these rallies had no clue who he was, other than this is a guy I've seen on TV and I like seeing people on TV. I'm sure you walk through an airport you get stopped a billion times, because people recognize you. He had that.

Then he had the piece we didn't account for as much, which is this huge social media following, by which he could – politicians have been trying to end-run the mainstream media forever. They just have more tools to do it now. Obama really pioneered in that regard – much to my chagrin – but pioneered in end-running what they would call the media filter, what I would call, like, the fourth estate. Trump is able to do that even more directly with his Twitter feed, drive news stories, drive narrative, fact check the fact checking, create an entire separate reality that his supporters believed always existed, and he was sort of at the top.

So remarkable, his message, that populist message, these people are doing things not only that screw you, but they're doing those things on purpose to feather their own nests, is very powerful. Obviously you have to separate with him that powerful message, and the messenger, who's obviously – this is not breaking news – deeply flawed to carry that message.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Well, you know, Chris, you talk about brand. And, of course, Trump has a unique brand. You talk about brand when it comes to The Washington Post, when it comes to sub-brands within The Washington Post, like The Fix, like PowerPost, 202. PowerPost and 202 and The Fix have really driven a lot of traffic in terms of the Post's readership, propelling the Post forward as one of those news outlets that really leads in terms of the unique visitor.

You created The Fix. And something's really – I read something really interesting about The Fix the other day that one of your reporters, Phil Bump, wrote.

MR. CILLIZZA: Love him, by the way.

MR. SCHWARTZ: He's terrific.

MR. CILLIZZA: He's been really wonderful. I think the future of journalism.

MR. SCHWARTZ: And an analyst of polls and –

MR. CILLIZZA: Can build things. Used to work for Adobe. Can build charts, maps. He built this amazing thing that pulls in all the latest polls and updates an electoral map. I mean, like it's things that I literally –

MR. SCHWARTZ: In real time.

MR. CILLIZZA: In real time. Things that I just don't understand. I mean, I'm 40. I don't feel like I'm like, well, the internet thing. But, like, he can do things that I just don't – they amaze me.

MR. SCHWARTZ: He created a word that I saw the other day called "now-ish." We know now-ish what the polls say, because he's really in that moment so quickly. But he wrote the other day in your space, in The Fix: We've entered a phase of the presidential contest in this social media powered age, when a mindboggling percentage of Americans demand of everyone around them new information about the likely outcome, even when it's obvious that nothing has actually changed. This is the moment for which The Fix was created. What did he mean by that?

MR. CILLIZZA: (Laughs.) When we started The Fix, this was pre-Twitter. This was pre-Vine, pre-Tumblr. I mean, this was pre-many of the things that now govern politics. And I still remember in the 2008 campaign I was in Denver at the Democratic convention and someone was like, you should try this Twitter thing. It might be fun. We were just looking for alternate ways to tell stories because the speeches were happening at night, and obviously we had Dan Balz and some of our big-name reporters writing the, like, Barack Obama accepted the Democratic nomination – you know, the big sort of lead-all, in our jargon in our business, stories.

I didn't really want to recreate this. And they weren't, like, asking me to write that story

with them. So I was trying to figure out ways – and Twitter was a way to do something different than what we were doing, complementary. Technology has moved and people's consumption habits have moved that things like The Fix, lucky for us, have become so central in that it used to be that you would – the debate would happen. The story in the next day's paper would be Tim Kaine and Mike Pence debated and they, you know, parried, attacked – whatever, you know, the whole – the language there. And then the following day we would do a big takeout analysis piece – who helped one another, who hurt one another, right?

What's happened now, and I've noticed this over the last five years or so picking up rapidly – and I'll give you – I'll give you an anecdote from this week that'll inform it – people want their news and their analysis simultaneously now. There's no break. In some ways, they get their news, many of them – not everybody, though. I mean, look, this is our – my target audience, but not the target audience of the world – they get their news from Twitter. They watch the debate; they look on Twitter. When it ends they want someone to tell them, like, I thought this was good and I thought this was bad. So I write something after every debate – a winners and losers. Who did well, who did poorly. And I try – hopefully – try to make it somewhat fun, because in a debate of two people if you just do one winner and one loser it's not terribly interesting.

That piece for the last two years, on big events, has consistently out-performed the lead-all news piece saying, these two people debated and this is what happened. Now, that piece has no background in it. It basically says: I watched the vice presidential debate, with a URL to our main story, linking to our main story. Here's what I thought did well and poorly. That's it. I mean, there's no – but people want that. But people want instant analysis. Now, I try not to make it – I think people equate instant analysis with garbage.

I like to think we're offering something more than that, which is why it's sustained for a decade and why it's done well. But I think that that change from news and then I'll wait a day and then, OK, I'm ready for my analysis now, like I'll have a palate cleanser then my analysis – I can tell you from web trends and traffic, there's no time in between those two. In fact, I think people oftentimes – a news event ends, and they immediately want the analysis. They don't even necessarily want to read about that which they just watched.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, I think that goes to the success of what I call the validation channels on cable, where –

MR. CILLIZZA: Yeah. This is a dangerous part of what I'm talking about.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Where people are not often looking for news. They're looking for validation of their own preconceived notion.

MR. CILLIZZA: Absolutely.

MR. SCHIEFFER: And, you know, they find it. And I used to – people used to talk to me about is the media biased, as they do. You know, we all know about that and that's the oldest charge and all of that. But my response now is, look, you can find – you can find the news

served up any way you like it. It's like going into a restaurant and saying, do I want scrambled eggs or do I want them over easy? You can find somebody that'll do it just the way you want it. And people tend to like that.

MR. CILLIZZA: Which is a challenge for someone like me, because –

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, for someone like me.

MR. CILLIZZA: Well, for all of us. Because increasingly, and it's not just – the media gets blamed for this a little bit – but the truth of the matter is if you look over the last 10 or 15 years, there is a self-sort happening in the country. People are moving, staying put, based on socioeconomics, based on whatever. But the point is, you tend to now live, work, entertain, with and around people who agree with you.

Now, add on top of that, to your point, Bob, siloing of the media – which is you can never leave the careful comforts that you are always right in your opinion, right, because there's – we've got a feed for that. You never need to be confronted with a person that you respect and think is smart who disagrees with you. I always say that the last 10 to 15 years for me is the death of the phrase reasonable people can disagree. That is not the case unfortunately, as it relates to politics. That's the only world I know well enough. Or disagree without being disagreeable. That's another one.

You know, unfortunately, at this point, because of that siloing of the media, because of the self-sort, because this idea that you never run into anyone into anyone who disagrees with you, people who do disagree with you are cast as at best dumb – that's the best possible reason – and at worst maliciously intended. Purposefully misunderstanding or misreading situations for their own partisan benefit, which is a, you know, depressing conversation about the state of our democracy.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, let me tell you, it's not just the siloing of information like that. It's the siloing of our society. And I mean, one of the things I always loved about living in Washington, when we first came here – you know, I basically always covered politics, whatever the beat I was on. And we would have Republicans over and Democrats over for dinner. They would all know one another. Their wives knew one another. Their kids all went to school together. And you know, you would have these great discussions where somebody would be on one side and somebody would be on the other. I don't know if you've noticed this or not, Chris, but now they don't like to come to the same parties. They don't want the folks back home to think –

MR. CILLIZZA: Nope, they don't interact with one another.

MR. SCHIEFFER: – that they're consorting with the enemy. They really don't know each other anymore because they're spending all their time back home, because they have to, to raise money. The families don't live here. And what used to be these great across the aisle relationships is now an argument among strangers. And I don't care what the subject is, when you're arguing with somebody you don't know it's different than when you're arguing with

someone that you do know. And that's part of what's going wrong here.

MR. CILLIZZA: Absolutely.

MR. SCHIEFFER: And again, it's siloing, I mean.

MR. CILLIZZA: And I think this is a longer, nerdier conversation about the way in which we elect people to Congress. But what you've also seen is a disincentivizing of any work across the aisle. To your point, it's like – it's not even as though they're strangers, which they are. But if they wanted to get to know one another, if a Republican member of Congress from Oklahoma went to dinner with Nancy Pelosi – maybe they have common cause on an issue that's really not partisan, whatever it is, funding for medical research. That would be an issue. That person would have to be aware of not being photographed with Nancy Pelosi, or a story not being written that they – and again, it could be their child experienced a difficult thing and she has some – it has nothing to do with anything like that.

So we are disincentivizing it. We are – what we are incentivizing is running to your extreme right or your extreme left because of the way we draw the lines in this country. The congressional lines in this country are drawn to elect people who are – occupy the very tips of the two parties. You have no incentive when that is the case to do anything other than play to the people who are on those ends. And people say, well, why can't they get anything done? They don't get anything done because the people who elect them don't want them to get anything done.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Don't you think that's reflected in the political dialogue we're having in these debates that we're having?

MR. CILLIZZA: Yes.

MR. SCHIEFFER: I mean, what is the one thing that's missing from all the – well, the two debates that we've seen so far, one with the presidential candidates and the number twos. It basically is you don't hear anybody talk about reaching across the aisle.

MR. CILLIZZA: Yeah, civility.

MR. SCHIEFFER: You don't talk – hear anybody talking about, look, I can't do this by myself. We've got to find a coalition. And how do you break this gridlock in Washington? There is absolutely zero discussion of that. And I predict there will be zero discussion as we go on through to then next year.

MR. CILLIZZA: And look at – you know, Barack Obama elected in a landmark way, whether you liked him or didn't like him, elected with states like Indiana, North Carolina – states that no president had carried – no Democratic president – since Lyndon Johnson. I would say from Lyndon Johnson to Barack Obama is a pretty big democratic party, right?

So you saw that and you thought, hmm. Like, if there was going to be a moment maybe

this would be it. First African-American president, right? Elected with states – a coalition of states that seem to break the deadlock of Bush v. Gore. And yet, you know, he will leave office as one of the most polarizing presidents. And his allies would argue that's not his fault. I would argue some of it's his fault and some of it was sort of built in. But the system has gotten worse over the eight years. More gridlocked over the last eight years. And if you think that either President Trump or President Clinton, with a divided Congress, because that's almost certainly what either of them would have, if they are going to make things better not worse, I would urge you to reconsider that.

MR. SCHWARTZ: You know, we see – we see bipartisanship dying this writhing death where, you know, guys who we work with here at CSIS, people who we look up to – Sam Nunn, Bill Brock – they couldn't or wouldn't want to exist in this environment where they were reaching across the aisle, getting things done. And in this environment, journalists have to recalibrate as well, of course. One of the things that you've said is, you know, journalism isn't dying, but it's changing faster than most people understand. And what do you mean by that? And how do you bring that to your everyday job?

MR. CILLIZZA: Well, so, this isn't my theory, but a guy named Erik Rydholm, who's the executive producer of Pardon the Interruption – Tony and Mike – Tony Kornheiser and Michael Wilbon's show on ESPN – is a really smart, thoughtful guy about news and how it works. And he long ago, years and years ago, told me that basically you can separate news into three buckets – what, so what, and now what. You know, essentially, obviously we're oversimplifying, but let's just say for – we as an industry spent 99.9 percent of our resources, time, energy, mindshare, on the what – from time immemorial until 10 years ago. Again, these are rough estimates.

But I think increasingly – this goes back to the whole – the desire for analysis and the desire for news being almost married at the same time. I think increasingly – oh, the space I try to occupy is the so what and the now what. Now what, where do we go from here? So what, why does this matter? I think the best journalists – Bob, obviously, does this – you contextualize it. You don't just tell people this happened, you tell them why it happened. Some of that's natural, but I think we have to push more in that regard.

I think some people, including within the Post, aren't thrilled at my conception of news. The thing that I would say about it is I don't ever want the what to go away. You need the what. That's like me being an arm and being like, I don't really need my spine. I'll just go with the arm, right? Of course you need the backbone. Without the what, so what and now what – it's not a thing. We need that newsgathering. My argument is we need a more equitable sharing of resource in terms of how much do we devote to each of these things?

How much time and resource do we devote to finding the what out? How much do we devote to the so what and the now what? It was 99-1. I think it's probably 70-30 now on the what side. I think it should be about 50-50. I don't know that that will come any time soon, though we're clearly moving in that direction. The argument I always make is, like, we want to reflect what readers, listeners, users are telling us that they want, which is they want their news and their analysis served up. So if we can – together. If we offer that in a way that is consistent

with our Washington Post brand, with what I try to do personally, that's the important thing.

I mean the danger there, of course, is what Bob's talking about, which is, like, you serve up news and analysis and the analysis is essentially, well, Democrats are always bad or Republicans are always bad. You have to stay away from that, but I just mean in terms of timing and in terms of the way we conceptualize stories and how we're going to cover them. I think that is rapidly changing.

MR. SCHIEFFER: You have to – let me – just one thought occurred to me. Do you have to label the commentary part, the analysis part, as commentary and analysis? I mean, if you're writing a news story, do you – do you print the facts in standard type and then italicize the commentary?

MR. CILLIZZA: We've – I mean, I worry less about that online. But the newspaper still struggles with, like, how do you label things. What I would say is I think our industry, and me included, suffered for a very long time under the idea that tone and voice equal bias. And they don't. I mean, I write with a significant amount of tone and voice, but I don't – many people on Twitter would disagree with this – but I don't think that I am biased in one way or the other. Bias to me is I watch a television ad and it's for Donald Trump and I say, well, Republicans are terrible, so that's a bad ad. Tone and voice is, I've watched 10,000 ads in my time doing this job and that one, whatever it looks like, it was on Wayne's World. You can see the boom mike. The audio's bad. There's 50 messages.

That's – we didn't used to say this ad looks like it was made in my parent's basement. We said, well, Donald Trump ran an ad today. But I think people are fine and want you to say I think that this ad is poorly done. Here's why – because I'm a big believer in radical transparency as it relates to my journalism. Remember Gary Hart – didn't work out so well for him – but Gary Hart, follow me around with the whole Donna Rice thing. I always say to people, you can absolutely – the person who hates me the most, whoever that is, as long as you don't, like, try to physically harm me, you can – you can sit next to me at my desk.

You can come with me when I go do things like this. Like, you will be bored. It is not – we are not in some sort of strategic cabal plotting ways – like, I'm just trying to get it right most of the time, that's all. And does that mean you always get it right? No, of course. Because we're human. But the great thing about the web is when you get it wrong my belief is I'm OK if – I don't want to screw something up every day – but I'm OK if we occasionally screw something up, as long as we then say, as soon as we possibly can, we screwed this up. Here's why we screwed it up.

I said in May – just this one quick story – May 2015 I wrote a blog post called “Why You Don't Need to Take Donald Trump Seriously in One Very Simple Chart.” The chart showed CNN – a CNN poll of likely Republican voters. Donald Trump's favorability was 32/65. So 32 favorable, 65 unfavorable. My conclusion was, when you were 100 percent known as a candidate, and two-thirds of the people you need to vote for you already don't like you, that's an unsolvable problem because it had always been an unsolvable problem.

OK, fast forward to August. I write a piece titled, “Boy, Was I Wrong about Donald Trump,” in which I make the point, look – to go back to the beginning of what we were talking about with politics – everything that I know – and that anyone who does this for a living knows – suggested this guy, for lots of reasons, but mostly because most of the people he needed to vote for him didn’t like him, would lose and in fact would go nowhere. Here’s – that’s what this piece was based on. Here is why I was wrong. I owe him an apology.

And I think that you – I actually think that you benefit from that. Rather than pretending, like, no, I knew that Donald Trump was going to win all along, when you can just Google it right up and you can find Chris Cillizza May 2015, why Donald Trump won’t win.

MR. SCHWARTZ: It’s interesting. You know, the environment you’re describing is so different than the normal environment where newspaper reporters would be thinking mostly about where is my story going to land in the print edition.

MR. CILLIZZA: It drives me insane. It drives me – we still have people who do that and it drives me bananas. No one cares. The average user does not care. Good content is good content. I mean, I understand that we built this thing up about the front page, but I think that I have done fine for myself. The last time I was on the front page of The Washington Post was – I can’t even remember. I guess it was an election preview that I got to do with Dan Balz and David Broder before he passed away in 2008. I was part of that, which was amazing.

But my point is that that’s not the be-all, end-all anymore. I’m happy when people who work for me do that, but that should not be our goal. Our goal should be, write interesting, informative, in-the-moment content that speaks to people who are looking for analysis or news, right? If that makes it on the front page or the front page of Yahoo or Matt Drudge, great. But we can only control what we can control.

MR. SCHWARTZ: And so you’re trying to get your staff and your view of how your approaching the news – you’re trying to become – instead of worrying about where the item’s going to land, you’re trying to make it the best it can be through involvement in headlines, involvement in rich media – multimedia experiences. That’s a big departure.

MR. CILLIZZA: Yeah. I always say – and this will seem trite to some people – but I always say we should spend – before you write, especially for the younger people who work with me – before you write, think of the tweet. Now, you will say, like, oh, this is the worst of journalism. I don’t mean think of the most salacious thing that you can say to get people to click on it. What I mean is, Twitter, whether intentionally or unintentionally, in limiting things to 140 characters forces the mind to really hone in. You don’t have 10 paragraphs. You don’t have five minutes of live TV to go through. You got to figure out the one thing that you think is the most important or interesting or sharable, right?

So think of that, and let’s put that somewhere near the top of whatever you’re writing. I think we oftentimes freight it down with all this B-matter. Howard Dean, the former Vermont governor who ran for – no one cares. Just say Howard Dean. You can put the other stuff down below, but let’s get the thing that’s the most interesting right there at the top. So I think it

actually helps focus your mind on, OK, there's a lot – because we've all been trained to do the kind of, like, big buildup, big buildup, big buildup, and news. Or piece of analysis that's insightful.

MR. SCHIEFFER: You know what you're doing? You're going back to the basis of how to be a reporter. When I worked at the Star-Telegram, our city editor – most newspapers in those days – the police reporter didn't write the stories. He'd go out, he was on the scene, there was no typewriter out there. He'd call in the facts. Somebody on the rewrite desk wrote the story. You know, and they put the police reporter as byline. Our city editor always made us compose the lead. He – you know, he said, I want my reporters to know what the lead is when they call in here. And so the first thing you do when you get out of the car at a car wreck is you're saying to yourself, what's the lead here? You're not saying, hey, it's a car wreck.

MR. CILLIZZA: Car accidents happen frequently on American roadways. It's like, that's fine, but –

MR. SCHIEFFER: But he was teaching us to think like a reporter. And I remember once at CBS we had a young reporter that came back from some story and somebody said, what happened? And he launched into this, well, first, he said, and then second. And finally, the evening news producer said, I don't need a transcript here. What I need is for you to tell me what's important. And that's what you're saying with a tweet. What's the lead here?

MR. CILLIZZA: And this is what we're talking about – trusted guides through the noise. What's important? Tell me what matters. Tell me what – I mean, the amount of things written about Donald Trump on a daily basis, there's thousands. So if you want people to read your thing, you need to think carefully about what is the piece of insight, analysis, and then put that thing as close to the top as you can, because otherwise no one's going to read 10 paragraphs about Donald Trump, because there's 10 million paragraphs about Donald Trump out there.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Chris Cillizza, you are doing some great work out there. And you are really a major part, I think, the kind of work you're doing, of kind of this new communications landscape that we have here. The Post, I think, under Marty Baron, is doing it the way that newspapers should be doing it right now. And the way you guys are laying things out, it's a lesson for everybody across the landscape. Thank you so much.

MR. CILLIZZA: As you know, I think, I – you are a titan in this industry.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, I don't know about that.

MR. CILLIZZA: So I appreciate – I appreciate getting the chance to get and talk with you. Thank you both.

MR. SCHIEFFER: And for Andrew Schwartz, this is Bob Schieffer.

MR. SCHWARTZ: But wait, that's not all Bob. It was a pleasure having the very groovy Chris Cillizza with us today. Of course, our listeners couldn't visualize Chris's

grooviness. But I'll say this, the man had some funky blue glasses and was dressed in a splendidly elegant gray suit. We dig that sort of thing on our podcast. After all, Bob does wear purple socks every day. So thanks to Chris for bringing the funk. Speaking of funky, thanks to our friend Aaron Neville for providing our podcast with the best music around, his new record Apache. It's going to win a Grammy, I just know it.

(Music plays.)

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(END)