

**CENTER FOR
STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (CSIS)**

**SUNDAY SHOW SUMMIT:
A CONVERSATION WITH
SCHIEFFER, STEPHANOPOULOS, AND GREGORY**

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H. ANDREW SCHWARTZ: Good evening, good evening. Thank you all for coming to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. I'm Andrew Schwartz. I'm vice president of external relations here at CSIS and have the pleasure of hosting the Schieffer series with Bob Schieffer and the Texas Christian University – TCU – School of Journalism. I'd like to acknowledge some of our colleagues from TCU who made it up here from Fort Worth. And we're really looking forward to this terrific panel tonight.

I also have the pleasure of announcing that tonight from here on, we have great company. United Technologies has agreed to sponsor this series going forward. You may know United Technologies; they're a diversified company that makes elevators – Otis elevators and escalators, Sikorsky aircraft, all these kinds of things – and we're just so lucky to have them on board to help this series continue to be great and to be able to host you all. With that, I'd like to throw it over to Bob and let everybody get started.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. I would like to tell you that we do have the first team from TCU here today. And I'll just introduce them as they're seated here. John Lumpkin is the new director of the Schieffer School – hold your applause until the end. (Laughter.) Victor Boschini is the new – he's not new, he's been there. He is our esteemed chancellor of Texas Christian University. That's Bonnie Melhart, who is the associate provost. There's Nowell Donovan who's the provost of the university. There's – I often introduce as the cute, little blonde – Pat Schieffer, who is the trustee of TCU. She's right there. (Chuckles, applause.) And sitting next to Pat is Dariya Fadeeva, who is a Russian student at TCU who is doing an internship this summer at CSIS, and she's also taking Chinese at night over at Johns Hopkins. Dariya, just stand up and let everybody see you. (Chuckles, applause.)

Well, I thought it wouldn't be fair – and I must say I want to thank both of you all. I know you didn't have much to do this afternoon. There's not much going on and I really do appreciate you taking this time at the busiest time of the day for those of us in television to come and talk about journalism and the Sunday shows, and what's going on. You know, our old friend Tim Russert used to say that when he was named moderator of "Meet the Press", he said he'd felt that he'd been appointed the curator of a national treasure, and I thought that was exactly right because these Sunday shows really are – not to put too fine a point on it – but they are really something special. Sunday mornings on television is a different time of the day and it's a different time period from any other time period because these broadcasts are information-driven. They're not about show-off anchors. They're not about gotcha questions.

GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS: Even when we do.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Even when we do. (Laughter.) They are about getting information and trying to advance the story. And you know, "Meet the Press" is the oldest program on television. CBS's "Face the Nation" was started I guess about seven years after "Meet the Press" was started, for the sole reason that Frank Stanton, who was the president of CBS, said, we need

something to compete with “Meet the Press” because they had the only live interview show. While they’re the oldest – ABC came along some years after that.

But while these shows are the oldest continuous shows on television – of all the programming on television – I would say they’ve changed the least. Basically, we do today exactly what we did in those early shows and that is get the key people involved in the top story of the week, sit them down at the table, turn on the lights and ask questions. That’s what they were doing back then, and we have better technology now, but that’s basically what we’re doing today.

Let’s just talk a little bit about the news, first. This was a pretty heavy day for all of us. The president held a news conference. We’ve got the situation building in Iran. George, what did you think of what the president said today? He denied deep in the news conference that he had ratcheted up the rhetoric, but I think he’s probably a minority of one on that because he clearly did.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: Well, yeah. He’s got the disease that infects every single president. They’re all convinced no matter what their press is like that they’re getting the worst press that any president ever got, and it’s just objectively not true here. And I don’t understand why he was so intent on convincing people that he hadn’t changed his position.

You know, clearly, if you go at the 10 days, he hasn’t changed the underlying position of engaging with Iran no matter what but Saturday, for the first time, he called for an end to the violence. Saturday, for the first time, he used the word justice when he talked about the side that the protestors were on. And today he – for the first time, he used the word outrageous and I think abominable and outrageous. And that was clearly – the White House is watching this. I think they’ve been surprised by the strength of the protest movement and they are calibrating their response. I hesitate to say anything about intelligence with Mike Hayden sitting in the second row.

(Laughter.)

DAVID GREGORY: I noticed that, too.

MR. SCHIEFFER: You can see who he’s got sitting right next to him.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: And he’s got Senator Warner right next to him. I’m not getting ahead on foreign armed services issues, either. (Laughter.) But I think it’s in part – and I beg you to correct me if I’m wrong – I think part of the reason they’re so surprised is that we don’t have that much good intelligence about what’s happening underground in Iran. We haven’t had good human intelligence; we had to leave in ’79. And we don’t really know how the forces are coalescing, fighting, competing inside that top council of clerics and I think that’s part of the reason why they’ve had a hard time figuring out exactly what to say on any given day.

MR. SCHIEFFER: And there’s no question this is extremely sensitive. We’re walking a very fine line here. I mean, the United States cannot come out and say, storm the Bastille here.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: It won't help.

MR. SCHIEFFER: And then if they do, it's not going to help. A lot of people will get killed and then you have to ask the question, well what do you do after that?

MR. GREGORY: Well, precisely – what do you do after that if there's an even bloodier crackdown than we've seen? I mean, I think it's interesting – and you can chart this throughout the week – that once the regime got more aggressive, then the response got more aggressive in kind. But what do you do if there's even more violence?

Plus, I just think as a practical matter – I mean, look, this is a pragmatic, compromise-driven, realist-driven president who said to our guy at the White House Chuck Todd today, I'm not going to talk about what the repercussions might be because we don't know how all this is going to play out. I mean, I don't think they're much in the business of regime change at this White House.

They've seen that movie and it hadn't worked out so well for the previous administration. I think they want to be in the business of coming to some sort of agreement on nuclear weapons – that's the game here. And I think he is biding his time to see what and who and how strong a figure he's dealing with.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, one thing he did say – he said, what happens in the streets is going to determine how we deal with Iran in the future. So if he was trying to, you know, hold a little bit of a stick up there I guess you could say that was it. But I mean, when you come down to options, we're extremely limited in what we could do here. I mean, what would we do – invade?

MR. GREGORY: Well, and Joe Biden –

MR. SCHIEFFER: What would we do if we decide to bomb? I mean, what kind of a message would that be to the world? We're going to bomb a country if we don't like –

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: That would unite them pretty quickly.

(Chuckles.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: – if we don't like the way the election came out?

MR. GREGORY: Right, also – but they'll maintain that engagement with Iran is not going to be a reward for good behavior, so certainly there hasn't been any good behavior to reward here in the past week-and-a-half. I think the question is whether the Iranian regime is weaker, more defensive, more isolated and does that make them more or less willing to deal with the United States? Their whole strategy here – that's why this Russia meeting is important – is to peel off all the patrons, kind of like the healthcare debate. You peel off all the patrons away from Ahmadinejad and then maybe, you know – maybe he's got fewer places to turn.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: And that may be the question, even setting aside what the Iranians because we have so little control over them, given what they've revealed about themselves in the last two weeks, are Russia and China more likely now to go to the stage of really imposing tough sanctions on the Iranians now that they've been revealed? We don't know the answer to that. And I think that's the other reason the president is biding his time.

MR. SCHIEFFER: I thought one of the more interesting things in the news conference today just as a long-time watcher of news conferences is that the second question went to the Huffington Post and the president said in the news conference he was calling on the Huffington Post correspondent because he understood that a lot of people in Iran are getting their news off the Internet.

MR. GREGORY: And let me just add, as somebody who was in the White House Press Corps who was accused – not personally but, you know, we were always getting questions about whether Bush had the questions in advance for the press conferences, which he never did and there was never any discussion to that effect. The president, today, called on Nico from Huffington Post and seemed to indicate, you know, exactly – he knew what he was going to ask –

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, he sort of gave him the question.

MR. GREGORY: He gave him the question. He said, I know you've got questions coming from Iran. It just struck me as a little odd.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: I thought it was beyond odd.

MR. GREGORY: Yeah.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: I thought it was – there's nothing wrong with calling on Nico Pitney. There's nothing wrong with calling on the Huffington Post. There's nothing wrong with going and reading his live blog, which anybody could have done, and seen him say, I'm going to ask a question about Iran. But the president basically told him what question to ask.

MR. GREGORY: Yeah, right.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: And that just had the feel of, you know, kind of state-managed media.

MR. SCHIEFFER: I think what he was trying to do is to try to underline –

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: I agree. I totally agree.

MR. SCHIEFFER: – he's trying to get through to those Iranian protestors in the street. But I agree with you. I think at best, it was somewhat awkward in the way he did it. Another thing to note here, which I found quite interesting today is that, for the first time that I can ever

recall at a presidential news conference, the president did not call on The New York Times, The Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times, the Chicago Tribune, the Philadelphia Enquirer – it was almost like he was going over the big-city media. What was that about?

MR. GREGORY: Well, I mean, I'd say a couple things: One, clearly this White House doesn't like New York Times. No, no. (Laughter.) No, I think in this case, you know, he's out there, he's doing a lot of stuff and I think that he does want to highlight the fact that he's somebody who's more engaged with social media, more engaged with the Internet and that he will, you know, pick these opportunities to hopscotch around, you know, the media landscape, you know, with a fair degree of savvy.

He's not going to be boxed in by that. I mean, I do think it's striking, you know, that he would go out of his way to do that. But I gather they would say, look, you know, we're out here doing this enough that it's not like we're overlooking anybody.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, how does he pick the people he chooses, George?

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: I'm not inside there but I'm struck by how disciplined it is and how choreographed it is. There is zero spontaneity at a White House press conference right now. I mean, he goes in with a list of 18 – whatever it is –

MR. GREGORY: And in the order.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: And he asks them in direct order. He knows exactly who he's calling on.

MR. GREGORY: Because Bush – you'd give Bush the list of who was there and then he kind of –

MR. SCHIEFFER: And a seating chart.

MR. GREGORY: – AP man.

(Laughter.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: You know, he also does a great – (inaudible, background noise).

(Laughter.)

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: I'm mostly envious because we could never get Clinton to call on who he was supposed to call on.

MR. GREGORY: Is that right?

(Laughter.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: I mean, what ever happened to the old days when people, you know, raised their hands and who stopped that? I guess it was Bush I, didn't he? He thought it was just too undignified or something. I sort of liked it when people jumped up to be recognized and –

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: Listen, we didn't – I mean, in the Clinton White House, we didn't have – we had – he would go to the first row, the television correspondents first and the AP –

MR. SCHIEFFER: And the AP.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: Beyond that, he basically did what he wanted.

MR. SCHIEFFER: And, you know, the other great tradition that has just sort of gone away without remark is that the AP person – the wire service person, the senior person – used to always say thank you. And now it is the person holding the news conference that says thank you. I remember when I used to cover the White House and these unctuous aides would try to cut off a news conference – thank you, thank you. And I'd always say, excuse me, I'll say thank you.

(Laughter.)

MR. GREGORY: Well, you know, another tradition along those lines: When you're on Air Force One, it's traditional that if there's really big news, the wires can have the operator onboard Air Force One make a call to the wires and get the news out. And I was flying and I'd always get in arguments with AP and I'd say, listen Terry – to Terry Hunt – I would say, those days are over, okay? Those days of you the wires dominating – I said, you've got organizations out here with, you know, 24-hour cable operations.

If we're going to make a call, we're all making the call. (Laughter.) And we went back and forth and – actually, it was not Terry. It was somebody else who actually let it happen. Terry said he would've never let it happen but, you know, this is the big debate about whether – who could call from the plane.

MR. SCHIEFFER: I don't think it's fair for me to grill you guys, so George, you ask the questions for a while.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: Wow.

(Laughter.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: This is your one and only chance.

(Laughter.)

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: It is my only chance. Well, I'll ask you I guess, since you have been doing this the longest and I've only come up in a world where I expect – from being

on both sides – expect anybody who comes on to be perfectly prepared, know exactly what they want to say, know exactly what they don't want to say. And we saw a lot of that with the president, today. I guess my question is, how different is it?

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, it is different. You know, when I came to Washington and I came in 1969 – which if you want to add that up that'd be 40 years – 40 years ago. When I came to Washington, most members of Congress didn't even have press secretaries. It was so informal in those days and the other part of it was there were not nearly as many reporters in those days as there are now. We're getting ready to see a lot fewer reporters – that's for sure – with newspapers in the kinds of trouble that they are.

But it was much more informal. You had a much better opportunity to have face-to-face, you know, contact with people. When we used to go on these White House trips, that was where you really got to develop your sources and really got to have dinner with people. And now, as you all know, sometimes you can go on a White House trip and never get within three miles of the president. Most of it is covered – and this is because of the increased security and all of that.

But, I mean, I often tell this story: When I was a rookie reporter and I was sent over to the White House one Sunday morning. People forget this, but Richard Nixon actually held church services in the east room of the White House the first year of his presidency and they'd have a visiting evangelist and they'd sing some hymns and then at the end, everybody would go up in a little receiving line and they'd shake hands with the president. And one time, Helen Thomas – old Helen and I were always there.

I was a rookie and I'd get sent over there. If there'd been any news, I'd have to go back and give it to Dan Rather who was the White House – (inaudible, laughter) – but there never was. And so I would go over there just to make sure nothing happened. And one Sunday, we were actually over there and Helen said, get in the line. And I said, Helen, we're not supposed to get in the line. I said, that's where – no, get in the line; we'll ask him some questions. (Laughter.) Well, I don't have any questions. And she said, we'll ask him about those advisors.

Well, there was this story going around that Nixon was going to bring in some new advisors. People didn't know if they were coming from outside the government or inside the government. So I got up there and Helen said, ask him. And I said, Mr. President, these advisors – will these be in-house advisors? Oh no, he said, these will be outhouse advisors. (Laughter.) And then he said, "oh no, you know what I mean," and he went on about his business, but because of that, I can honestly say I've interviewed every president since Nixon. (Laughter.) Nobody but my mother and I think that was an interview, but my mother thought it was a great question.

I see Senator Sasser out there, former ambassador to China. I didn't see you, Senator. How are you today? But it was just – you know, with the more people that come and with every administration, I think every administration learns from the previous one and it becomes more organized. You know, we've become very sophisticated in this country on how we deal with information and everybody has a line but, you know, you stick to the line. You don't say anything except what you came there to say.

I think people do a real disservice when they come on these Sunday shows and don't have something to say. Sam Nunn, who's the chairman of CSIS, is still my favorite guest because you would call Sam and say, you want to be on "Face the Nation?" And he'd say, Bob, I really don't have anything to say this Sunday. I wish everybody who didn't have anything to say – (laughter) – would follow Sam Nunn. And I think it really helps. I think you really hurt yourself when you come on there –

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: And we can clearly feel the difference.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Exactly.

MR. GREGORY: And the audience, I think, is pretty sophisticated, too.

MR. SCHIEFFER: And people know. They're smart. They know when you're not answering the questions. You look evasive and it just doesn't help you at all. I mean, if you – my advice is if you've got something to say, know what you want to say, that's okay. But be willing to answer questions about it, and if you don't have anything to say, stay home and watch on television.

(Laughter.)

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: I agree. Well, then I'll ask David: What's surprised you most, six months in?

MR. GREGORY: Well, you know – look, I don't think it's – I don't know that I've been surprised but I think, you know, it is magnified. Certainly, taking over a program like this – becoming a custodian of a program like this – after Tim's death has been difficult. You know, it's the kind of transition that nobody's prepared to make, organizations aren't prepared to make. And even though there's transition in TV news, you don't see it. You don't see it like this.

And so, you know, it's a big challenge when you have a figure who loomed so large. And so I still think that that's something that I am reckoning with. But I tell you, in terms of the surprise is, I guess, two things: how impactful the programs are. And it goes to your point, which is we have this incredible luxury of sitting down and doing interviews for anywhere from 20 to 30 minutes and people are sitting down and they are watching these programs and they are listening. They are not usually engaged in some other activity like they are with some of the other programming.

So that sort of impact, what you say and the kind of news you can make through this forum is like nothing I've ever experienced before. And then I'd say the other surprise – I remember if I would ever fill in for Tim or if I'd be on the program, I'd thought, wow, you've got 45 minutes, or thereabouts, of talk time; that is an enormous amount of time. And then you get it and you still realize you're having to throw stuff out because you're running out of time and I thought, wow, what an adjustment that you can make so quickly to do this much time.

But God, there's nothing better than to prepare for and have an opportunity for this kind of length and for this kind of depth. And to the point that you made, Bob, earlier which is that for however dramatic the landscape has changed, however dramatically that's happened, there is still this place where people say, yes, I'm getting information from lots of other sources, but this is still a place in time that I want to dedicate time to really hear somebody out and perhaps learn something.

MR. SCHIEFFER: So you get a chance.

MR. GREGORY: Well, I guess I'd ask both of you – I mean, the other big story today the president dealt with was health care and, you know, we've all seen this play out before during the Clinton years. What's different now?

MR. SCHIEFFER: I think we're just at the very – it's like we're in this big forest, you know, and we've just taken the first two steps into the forest and really all you can see is the forest here. I don't think at this point anybody knows how this thing is going to come out. Can you have health care for everyone on top of what the government is already doing with the stimulus package, with help to the auto companies, with climate change and all of that? I don't know that this is going to get done.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: I don't think health care for everyone is going to get done. I think we already see that it's just going to be almost impossible, given the economic constraints. Once you say – I mean, it's a lot of money. But once you say it's limited to a trillion dollars, you're pretty much saying you're not going to cover everyone, at least right away. And that's the one bottom line coming out of the president's press conference today was basically, this was going to be – I am sorry. I only left my phone on in case they called –

MR. SCHIEFFER: It's Mrs. Giuliani, right?

(Laughter.)

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: Right. (Chuckles.) The only bottom lines the president said were, I want something that is going to control costs and that is paid for. Basically he wants to expand access and expand the number of insured, but he didn't say cover everyone. In fact, I thought significantly today, the president – he gave an impassioned defense of this public health insurance option but he didn't say, I wouldn't sign a bill that didn't have it.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Mm-hmm. He didn't.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: And he said all I'll say is that it makes sense. But to answer your question directly, I think there are at least three big changes from '93 and 1994. Number one, the problem for a lot of Americans has gotten worse – marginal increase in the number of uninsured; costs have definitely gone up for most Americans.

Number two – and this is I think something that helps the president – the Democrats in Congress are not at the end of a 40-year ride of being in charge in the final days of their majority.

They're a majority that has been tempered by being in the minority for eight to 10 years and I think that has made them more open to compromise.

And then third – and I think this is the squishiest one – it's clear that the business community feels a need to be on the side of acting like they're for being part of the solution at the front end of this process. I'm not sure they're all going to stick around to the back end. I think that's where a lot of the play is, over the next couple months. But going in, it's a big, big difference to have them say – at least suggesting they're going to be on the side of reform.

MR. SCHIEFFER: I just think we're so not in this enough that you can even – until we know how we're going to pay for it, until we have some idea of what shape it's going to take, I don't think you can say, right now, how this is going to come out.

MR. GREGORY: Well, and I think one of the other problems is that the central argument that the president makes is that ultimately controlling government costs is about controlling healthcare costs. But he's just a little far behind in making that argument. You know, you can't have government intervention to this extent. You can't have an \$800 billion stimulus bill and then talk about a trillion-dollar healthcare plan and say, no, but this is the thing that really saves the government money down the road.

I mean, look, there's obviously substance to that argument. But it seems to me, Bob, from the point of view of Republicans – Republicans who have virtually no strength at the moment, nevertheless have something of a roadmap here, not only to oppose this, but to start to opposed the president on the opaqueness of his exit strategy in terms of government intervention.

MR. SCHIEFFER: How do you – I mean, the president argued today that yes, indeed, private insurance companies can compete with the government and a government health plan. Help me with that argument, George. I mean, I have no idea what your thoughts on it – but I mean, how can something that's in business to turn a profit or at least break even compete with a government that doesn't have to turn a profit?

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: Well, I think it depends on how much money the government is willing to put into the plan and then how much money the government's willing to put behind it and subsidize it so that the premiums are lower –

MR. SCHIEFFER: And where does the government get the money for this?

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: Well, that gets back to your other point of, you know, the one place where this is falling apart is every single idea so far to raise revenue to pay for this has been knocked down. Now, they may end up coming back to some of the ideas that have been knocked down but no idea that's been – (inaudible, background noise) – to get \$200, \$300, \$400 billion has survived more than two or three days of debate on Capitol Hill.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Do either of you think the climate bill is going to be acted on this year?

MR. GREGORY: It seems to me it's got a little bit more momentum behind it but it seems to me that, you know, everything is now locked in behind health care, that I could see that slipping. It doesn't seem like it has the same priority that health care does.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: I think it'll pass the House. I think it could pass the House maybe even this week. I mean, they're hoping it's going to pass the House this week. Then the question will be, you know, how – and its fate is tied to healthcare reform and I completely agree that right now, healthcare reform has the priority. It's not out of the question that if health starts to fade, you'll actually see the chances of climate change starting to rise, although that's a big tax increase.

MR. GREGORY: Because what I think it – right. But I think what's important here is that what the president needs is a signature legislative achievement, and the stimulus bill is not going to count. I mean, he needs something on the domestic agenda that he actually achieves here. And that's why I think health care is the big game for him.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: And that's why I think he'll be willing to compromise just about anything to have a bill he can sign. Talk about lessons learned from the Clinton experience. I mean, that was clearly a case where going in, there were 22 Republican senators for universal health care at the beginning of that process. They had all bled away by the end, in part because we took too hard a line in the Clinton White House.

I vividly remember a day when the president was going to give a speech where he said – he was suggesting that he would accept 95 percent coverage. And First Lady and a lot of other people in the White House came down hard and said, that's just absolutely unacceptable. It was taken off the table. You look back 15 years and say you could have gotten 95 percent of what you wanted, you'd take it in a heartbeat. And that's – I think this White House has internalized that lesson. I think Rahm's line is the only non-negotiable principle here is success. (Laughter.) And that's why I think part of their game will be saying that whatever they get is a victory, signing it and moving on.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Let's talk about journalism and where it stands right now. There's no question newspapers are really having a hard time. David, do you think newspapers are going to make it?

MR. GREGORY: Well, I hope they do. I think they've got a huge challenge and I think that it's like what the broadcast networks are going through as well. I mean, I think that some of the model has to change and they've got to find different ways to make money but I still think that there's a fundamental demand for not only, you know, as Ben Bradlee says, having a paper that really is tied into a community and can represent a community and provide the kind of information and context and perspective that you can't get anywhere else.

So I think they – look, whether it's newspapers or magazines, they're all struggling to find a way to stay afloat. I think it is so important to have major newspapers like The New York Times or The Washington Post who have – you know, whether they've got the resources or not –

certainly still have the reach to put people all over the world and to provide the kind of reporting that, you know, a lot of the networks have had to step away from.

MR. SCHIEFFER: What do you think, George?

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: News organizations are going to survive. I don't know if the actual hard, paper copy – which I love; I mean, I love nothing more than getting up early in the morning and seeing that blue-wrapped New York Times on my doorstep – you know, I'm not sure if it's going to survive in the same way. But I think that people will figure out a way to make money on the Web. They're going to have to. And you know, it might take relaxing some antitrust laws –

MR. SCHIEFFER: See, that's –

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: – to make it really work because I mean –

MR. GREGORY: Allow more partnership.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: Yeah, allow more partnership.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, to where you can go back to the days when the same people or the same company could own the newspaper and the television station in town. That may be one way out of this, but you know – and I agree with you. I hope these national newspapers can survive but I also hope these smaller papers can survive because if they don't, if we don't have somebody that goes to the police station every day, that goes to the courthouse every day, not that goes there when there's a story, not when they think something is happening but every day, we will have corruption in this country in local and state governments –

MR. GREGORY: And not only that –

MR. SCHIEFFER: – like we have never seen before.

MR. GREGORY: – you also are going to have complete detachment from your actual communities. I mean, if you think about the strength – because local news is also in so much trouble. The auto industry's big advertisers for local news so they're feeling it, so if you don't have a newspaper or a local news organization with some reach, you've got no real tie to your community at all – the good news and the bad news and the government news – so that's a real threat.

MR. SCHIEFFER: The other thing that I think is very important to keep in mind: It's not so much, I think, whether it's printed on a piece of paper or you read it online. It's the information there – is it accurate? Is it the kind of product that newspapers turn out today? Newspapers cost a lot of money to produce, because it takes a lot of people to do it. You need editors, you need reporters, you have to send somebody to all these places every day, even when there's not news going on.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: And even though there are endless debates about – and whether the mainstream media is liberal or conservative or whatever, there has to be a place where people at least try not to put a political spin.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Yeah, and where people can agree on the facts, and that is the important thing. And, I mean, to put a – say, well, the Daily Bugle is going online – that's fine, if it's the same Daily Bugle that's printing the newspaper. But if it's 10 guys on a blog that just got up in the middle of the night and decided to write something, then that is not a newspaper. And that is the thing that I think what we have to remember – it's the product that they're putting out. And you can only do that when you have a large staff that can do what we expect from newspapers today. Well, let's take some questions from the audience. All right, there's one right there.

Q: Well, that was a good introduction because I'm an online publisher –

MR. SCHIEFFER: Good, well we'd like to know who you are because we like to know who comes, so tell us.

Q: In addition to – my name is Paula Gordon. I have a brand new Web site that will be accessible by domain name on Thursday called eligibilityquestions.com. And my question – one of the things it'll focus on is why the media – mainstream media, including the right-wing cable networks – have not focused on eligibility questions – a whole host of various eligibility questions –

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: What do you mean by that?

MR. SCHIEFFER: What – eligibility for what?

Q: For the presidency.

MR. SCHIEFFER: For what?

Q: For the presidency.

MR. SCHIEFFER: For the presidency?

Q: Questions surrounding the presidency, yes.

MR. SCHIEFFER: In other words –

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: You can be 30 instead of 35?

Q: Pardon me?

MR. SCHIEFFER: You mean what you have to do to be qualified to be president, or what?

Q: Yes, the constitutional qualifications that require a natural-born citizen to be president. This is not being covered and the fact that – it strikes me as a real mystery why the right wing and the left wing of the mainstream media –

MR. SCHIEFFER: Are you driving to the point that you think the current president is not eligible to be president, or –

Q: I'm driving to – the point is, there are questions. For instance, Bobby Jindal – his parentage – his parents were not naturalized citizens at the time of his birth. Well, there are questions, you know, whether or not an individual is eligible.

MR. SCHIEFFER: All right, well, I take your point. Maybe that's something we ought to focus on more. I would have to say I think we're handling that okay but –

(Laughter.)

Q: Well –

MR. SCHIEFFER: That's what we have here in America –

Q: There are several hundred thousand people thinking, who have petitioned, who think that the questions are not being addressed.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, I mean, there are some people who think we didn't go to the moon, but I mean, you know –

(Laughter.)

Q: No, well this isn't a conspiracy thing.

MR. SCHIEFFER: That's sort of how it is. We're a country that doesn't always agree on everything.

Q: Thank you.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Here's another question. Yes?

Q: Thank you very much. My name's Edie Wilson and I actually came to ask a question.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Okay.

Q: We lived through a really long political campaign and a really big financial crisis. And I watched, religiously by the way, both of these shows – in fact all three of them – TiVo's a wonderful thing – I kept wanting to figure out what I thought of the balance between the

economic coverage and the political coverage. And I want to know what you think of it, both during the election, and now.

When I reflect on it, I thought I saw a lot more political process – who did what to whom and who’s up in what primary and what’s going on with whatever – which seemed less important than taking the premise – and I take the premise that these are important programs – of talking about economic issues with the world and with the American people. So it’s a hard thing to get right; how do you feel you did?

MR. GREGORY: Well look, I think political campaigns are sort of notorious for a lot of horse-race coverage, a lot of process coverage. It’s what a lot of people are interested in. It’s also a really important part of the process. But I wasn’t at the helm of “Meet the Press” during the campaign, but nevertheless, I think for all the programs, there’s still more depth on economic matters in the course of the campaign than you’re going to get throughout most of the other landscape of political coverage.

And since the president has been in office, this has really been unique and I think our level of coverage and detail into the financial crisis and the complexities of the financial system has been appropriately deep. Now, let’s stipulate one point and that is that most people – I don’t really like the term mainstream media because it’s used kind of pejoratively – but the point is that most people in journalism do not understand how our financial system works, okay?

But I got news for you. There are a lot of people in the financial system, evidently – (laughter) – who didn’t have a keen understanding either. So we had to really step up. We had to step up and do our homework and dig deep – both so we could understand and explain in a way that was accessible and that we could also hold our leaders accountable. And that’s no small thing.

But in the course of that, you really do recognize that, A, you’ve got people on Wall Street who don’t ever have the experience of having to speak to Americans in real terms, in layman’s terms, about what they do; about what the complexities are. And you have those challenges faced by government officials as well, including the Treasury secretary, who’s had enormous difficulty speaking to the American people about these issues.

So I think, certainly, in the past six months, you have seen great depth. But let’s also – you know, don’t just turn this on us. It seems like you’re quite interested in these issues and that’s important. But it’s important for everybody who demands all of this depth that you show up and that you watch and that you really take notice because there’re a lot of people who say, oh, well, listen, why aren’t you covering, you know, mark to market accounting? And then we do it and where are you? Suddenly you’re not in the room watching TV. So I think it’s an important point all the way around.

And I think that, certainly, since this president’s gotten into office, you have seen enormous depth. I think you see people getting into this topic who have not been into it before. And it’s been important. I’ll speak for myself – it’s been important to go and try to achieve that level of depth because the impact of it is so great.

MR. SCHIEFFER: I couldn't agree with David more. I have made the point in several talks lately that I've been a reporter now for 52 years. And in that time, I have covered everything from hubcap thieves to arms control negotiations – (laughter) – and I could never remember a story where I didn't feel that I had a point of view on whether the government was doing the right thing or the wrong thing.

But when this financial crisis hit and we became, again, to see these problems unfold, I felt that I simply didn't have the technical expertise to know whether what the government was doing was the right thing or the wrong thing. I mean, did we need a stimulus? Yes, I think we did. But did we have the right combination? Was this the right way to go about it? These are very, very complex issues. And I agree with you, David, I think we're all learning and still trying to learn. I think, I mean, I like to think I probably know more about politics than I do about covering finance because I've spent my life covering politics.

I would say on the coverage of the politics side of it, I thought we did a very good job. I think, and not so much because of the press, but because of the campaign. I have always been one of those who believes it is the candidates who make the campaign. We just show up and write about it and ask questions about it. It's the candidates, in the end, who make the campaign.

I thought we had two excellent candidates this year – three excellent candidates – I thought Hillary Clinton was quite a good candidate. And I thought she really advanced the cause of women. I mean, she's the first woman who was taken seriously as a presidential candidate and the way she conducted herself in that campaign is going to make it a lot easier for my children and grandchildren – who are all girls – (laughter) – if they decide that they want to run for president. So I feel very indebted to her for the way she cleared the way for women.

And I thought Barack Obama – it was historic in every way – it seems to me. And not just for the fact that he was the first African-American. I mean, the fact that we, again, saw that words count, that rhetoric counts. I mean, when did we, somehow, in this country, get the idea that it was not important to be able to make a speech or talk to people or connect with people?

We also found for the first time in a long time that crowds count. Remember in the beginning when everybody said, oh, he's just a celebrity, those crowds don't amount to anything? Well, I think we now understand that they do. And if you go back and look, when Barack Obama started to draw big crowds, then the other candidates started to draw big crowds. People somehow remembered it's kind of fun to go out and see a candidate in person. So I thought it was a wonderful campaign. And I must say, it's my view, and you know where I'm coming from, but I thought we did a good job.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: I would just add – we're all sitting here defending our turf. (Chuckles.) I completely agree with both of what Bob and David said. I would just add one other point. And I do bristle a little bit when I hear of this dichotomy between – here's the politics on the one hand and the policy and the substance on the other because they are inextricably linked. And every decision made in a White House or the Congress is going to try

to balance out what people believe is the right thing to do; what will work and what can get done; what can get through the process.

And part of our job is to make sure people are getting both sides in balance. And I'm sure there are days when we fall too far on one side or the other. But I don't think we're doing our job unless we show how those two sides go together.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Okay? Right here. We need to have a guy. We've got to have gender equality here – (laughter.)

Q: You, I think, Mr. Schieffer, mentioned at the end of your remarks something about the need to maintain even the small-town media, so that we can agree on the facts – something to that affect. I mean, bringing back that particular point, my perception – I guess it's a big, large issue – that, indeed, with the proliferation of new media – the Internet, all the things that we know – and the availability and the very low entry-point and the bloggers, et cetera – and the decline of the audience of both mainstream network television as well as the big newspapers, as you alluded to in your conversation earlier on.

And the fact that opinion dominates; that now opinion is what makes news, which is sort of a contradiction in terms; that we may get to a point in which, with the proliferation of opinion journalism and all the talk shows, et cetera, or even the fact that on cable news, the anchor asks the person, what do you think about all this? As opposed to, what happened? And so the journalist provides their opinion about what happened – that we may get to a point where we don't have a set of facts that we share and on which, as you do on your talk shows, you can argue and have an intelligent conversation about. Is this a trend? I mean, is this actually happening? Or it just a far-fetched concern?

MR. SCHIEFFER: No, but it's part of how the whole idea of journalism – you know, the fact is that objectivity is a fairly new concept in journalism. (Laughter.) Well, it is! I mean, it probably goes back to, what, about World War II? Or between World War I and II when we began to talk about objectivity and that sort of thing. Up until that point, I mean, every publication had a point of view. In Lincoln's time, you had Republican newspapers, Whig newspapers, and so on. So that's all fairly new.

But what's happening here, and the way the Internet has changed everything – the Internet, if you stop and think about it, is the first vehicle to deliver news we've ever had that doesn't have an editor. The worst newspaper, the smallest radio station, has somebody who knows where the stuff comes from. Stuff pops up on the Internet; you don't know if it's true, you don't know if it's false, you don't know if it's something in between.

You have very reliable Web sites – I like to think the CBS Web site – if you see it there, you know it's been vetted by CBS News. You know it's gone through the same process that we use when we put things on the CBS Evening News or the morning news. New York Times Web site – those are the same products. They have gone through the editing process. And that's what has changed things here. This stuff pops up; it's out there. It used to be the kind of thing that was just whispered in campaigns. Now it's on the Web site.

Look, when Sarah Palin was first chosen as John McCain's running mate, there were all these rumors that were going around. The mainstream media – we were all taking hits – why are you circulating all this stuff? We weren't. We were trying to check it out like you would any news tip – none of that stuff was on any of the networks; any of the major newspapers, until the McCain campaign put out a written press release and said, Sarah Palin's 17-year-old daughter's pregnant, and so on and so forth. Then, of course, we printed that. But the fact that it wasn't in any mainstream publication – the fact was, people still knew about it. It was all over the place. They were having to deal with it. We were having to deal with it. And that's what has really changed things here.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: I just think it also puts a special responsibility for all of us on Sunday. I feel like an editor most of the time, in that a big part of our job in trying to pull together the week that was and the week ahead for people is sifting through all of the stuff that was out there all week long on cable, on the Internet. And we do decide, in some fashion, what needs to be talked about in this hour. It's a big part of our job and the questions and moderating the discussions – is making sure that we bring facts to the table so that then people can feel like they're joining a discussion where there is an agreed-upon –

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, that's what I mean. I think the mainstream media – our role now is to present the facts that people can agree on and I think that's our job. I mean, there was a thing that popped up – this is absolute true – several years ago that popped up on the Internet that said, Jerry Rice, who at that time was a wide receiver for the Oakland Raiders, had showed up at "Face the Nation." And Bob Schieffer was really surprised because he thought Condoleezza Rice – (laughter) – was coming.

Well, somebody had obviously written this as a joke. But it popped up on the Internet and I tell you, if you go by the e-mail that I get, I'll guarantee you a lot of people thought it was true. It went onto say that once I got over my shock, that Jerry Rice had some very interesting things to say – (laughter) – about that. But that's what we're operating in. I mean, this communications revolution we're going through here, it has a downside as well as a good side. Yeah. Good point. Right here, go ahead.

Q: Hi, I'm Miriam Nawabi from America Abroad Media. I host a show that broadcasts in Afghanistan to show American people on issues. I wanted to touch on the issue of war correspondence and war coverage, especially with respect to Iraq and Afghanistan. As you know, there's this need to know about how many bombs went off, and during conflict, but then the stories after – to really get into the complexity of rebuilding and U.S. engagement – don't get as much coverage. How do you think the media has done with respect to covering, let's say, the efforts in Afghanistan after most of the major conflict, and some of it continues in the South?

MR. GREGORY: Look, I think this is a similar point to one of the questions here about the economy, which is there is a sort of desire and a certain expectation that the news media at large is going to stay on every floor of these major stories. And, you know, for resource questions, for just sheer attention spans, it's just not going to happen. And, you know, you talk about the region in Afghanistan and Pakistan – it's as dangerous now, or more dangerous, than

it's ever been. But getting people to really focus on that is difficult, just like it was after America averted its eyes after the engagement in the late '70s.

So there is just a cycle here. We should be paying attention to things that we're not talking about because that could be the next great threat. But it's very difficult to put that on the agenda for people to pay attention to. So yeah, there's a natural degrading of that coverage for things like, what happens after the bombs fall, and the engagement – I think you just get more periodic looks.

But, you know, there is more niche coverage where that kind of thing is going on; where you've got some of the major papers who do have people who are covering it. But in terms of really grabbing the country by the scruff of the neck and saying, focus on Afghanistan – I mean, yeah, it would have been great if President Bill Clinton had given a primetime address saying, there's this group called the Taliban in Afghanistan and it's really, really dangerous. But there was not the political will or attention to really do that. And I think the news media tends to reflect that. And there's sometimes a desire for us to put these things on the agenda. And I think that can be very difficult to do.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Next question? How about here?

Q: Thank you for a very enlightening discussion. I have been following the Sunday news program for a long time. What I see is the sameness of the guests and the sameness of perspective. And on some of the issues, as David Gregory has mentioned – I was a great admirer of Tim Russert. I don't think enough depth, for example, the issue of Iran. There's a criticism of the president; that he is probably a bit timid and he's very pragmatic.

But I think there's not enough perspective given because of the lack of diversity of opinion advising him. Why is he being quiet on Iran? Because his primary focus is on Afghanistan. And Iran has a card to play in Afghanistan, where America wishes to stay for quite some time. And also has a card to play in Iraq, where America wishes to exit. And also, on the core issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iran has a place at the table. So that issue doesn't come out.

On the nuclear issue, again, the views are very American-centric. A broader picture is not given on the other nations who have nuclear programs, which are not being – to use your word – “vetted” adequately. So I wish there is a greater desire to go into depth. On the issue of Chechnya, I don't see that reflected very adequately, which should have been given more, greater attention.

So that's my point: greater diversity of guests, less sameness and more desire to probe into issues which can cause problems for America and for the rest of the world because, technically, right now we are in the same historic boat. Thank you.

MR. SCHIEFFER: All right. Thank you for your point.

MR. GREGORY: I wish there were tens of millions of people who agreed with you in Chechnya.

(Laughter.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: Go ahead – yes – go ahead. You can be next.

Q: My name's Rebecca Barlay (sp) and I'm a journalist. I'm actually reading your book, "This Just In," right now. And what I get from your book – it both humbles me and empowers me – because you were a dogged reporter with the Star Telegraph for 12 years before you came to Washington.

And so my question to you guys is – I am the next generation of journalists and before this meeting, I was at a meeting at NPR where they were talking about Facebook and Twitter and blogging being the next social medium.

So I'm curious, what is your advice? I can't go work for my local hometown paper anymore. So how can I get the experience in reporting to be, you know, to be you guys one day. (Laughter.) I ask this because I really don't like where media's going and it's my generation that's going to lead it.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, I think that's a very good question, Rebecca. George, talk about that.

(Laughter.)

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: It's tough! You know, I'm probably the least likely person to talk about this because I had a very non-traditional path into journalism even though I did do journalism when I was in college and graduate school.

First of all, there are jobs out there. Now, it is true that a lot of the places that are hiring now are places that are much more focused on the Web – Atlantic Media has really beefed up. Every major news organization, even though they're cutting jobs out of the television side, cutting jobs out of the newspaper side – they're beefing up their digital side. I don't think you should automatically assume that because it's digital it is necessarily an opinion blog or something that you don't want to be a part of, and, necessarily, not the kind of journalism that you want to do. I do think that there are some opportunities out there.

But I also don't want to be Pollyanna-ish about it. You're in a tough job market right now. The economy is in tough shape and journalism is being hit disproportionately hard. So it's very, very difficult. And, you know, one of the things we resist at ABC – and I've always been upset about this – the only way to get experience is to take an unpaid internship, which, unless you're wealthy, you can't afford to do.

And I know we've done a small part – we just don't do them anymore and we have only competitive, paid internships – so at least everyone is on something of an equal footing. But I think that getting that first job right now is very difficult.

MR. SCHIEFFER: I would just add one thing. It is a tough market and George is absolutely right. But the thing to remember is there will always be a need for independently gathered information. There's always going to be a need for reporters. We don't exactly know where all this is going because the technology is moving so fast.

But there is always going to be a need for that. And if you're going into a profession where there's a need for it, you'll eventually find a job. It might not be in the place where you want to live the rest of your life, or doing exactly what you want to do for the rest of your life, but I go along with George.

The main thing to be said about a first job is it's easier to get a job if you have a job. So don't be too discriminatory about that first job offer that you have. You probably ought to just take and use that as a platform to go onto something else.

MR. GREGORY: Can I just say, briefly, I'm often bitter because I missed the go-go '80s in network news – you know, that I hear this guy, and guys like Brokaw talk about – and so, yeah, but you've got to get over it, those days are over – (laughter) – and they're not coming back. And they're not coming back. And I'm going to keep working through that. (Laughter.)

But, no, look, I think you've got to embrace the fact, too, that part of this digital revolution is also a great thing. I mean, don't be down on it – you're in it, it's your generation – embrace it, make it better, go out there – because there are lots of opportunities.

Let me tell you something – I mean, there are stories from 30 years ago – I mean, the networks used to be incredibly hierarchical places who would not hire young people. You couldn't get in unless you were willing to go over to Vietnam, right? So that's how a lot of people broke in. Well, look, I mean, our guy, Richard Engel took a very traditional path, but it sounded untraditional in this modern era, which is, he picked up, he knew Arabic and he just went to the region. And he was stringing and he was writing and he was doing different things – he was at ABC and now NBC.

So there are so many opportunities. So many walls have been knocked down. We've talked about some of the downsides; well, focus on some of the upsides. There's a great big world; it's a lot more connected. And I think there are lots of opportunities and so it's a much more dynamic, changing business. But to Bob's point, people still have expectations of us and still demand and want to consume what we do. So go out there and get it done.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Andrew, did you want to say a word?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Well, I want to use my prerogative as an employee here at CSIS to ask this question. I know there's no competition at all between you all for guests – (laughter) –

but I wanted to know – who is the most sought-after guest in Washington other than the president, and that you would each seek, and why?

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, I think right now, I'd love to hear from Hillary Clinton. George got a little scoop on us there. He had the first interview with her as secretary of state – I'd still like to have her.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: Michelle Obama would be great.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Michelle Obama, and even better would be that dog.

(Laughter.)

MR. GREGORY: No, I agree on Michelle Obama – is great. And the secretary of state, no question. But Michelle Obama has become this really unique figure where, you think about where she was in the course of the campaign and then how she's emerged as both kind of a cultural icon but somebody with great substance as well and seems to have a lot of balance. And is just somebody that people are really interested in.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: But aside from those two or three people, there really are very few. It's really all about the timing and getting the right person on the right week. And, I mean, you had this – you had the best May I've ever seen. Cheney and Powell coming out and just basically debating the future of the Republican Party on your show for two or three weeks in a row and just getting the person when you have somebody to say.

Like you can have – the president's always great. But just about anyone in the Cabinet, if you get them on a week where there's news that they want to talk about that they can explain that they're prepared to take a stand on, any one of them is fantastic. If you get them on a week when they're coming out simply to fill the 20 minutes, there's only so much you can do.

MR. SCHIEFFER: And again, it's not rocket science. You know, it's getting the newsmaker; it's the timing of it, and you, basically – when I look back on it, you ask the basic questions. I always tell journalism students, ask the obvious questions. Young reporters make a great mistake – they say, oh, I don't want to ask that because if I ask that, he'll think I'm dumb. Or I don't need to ask that because I know what he's going to say.

Well, let me tell you something. When I turned to Dick Cheney and we were at the end of that interview and I said to him, now, Rush Limbaugh says that Colin Powell is not a Republican, he ought to get out of the Republican Party; Colin Powell says Rush Limbaugh ought to get out of the Republican Party. How do you come down, Mr. Vice President? And I thought what I would get at the end of the interview was a very artful dodge – maybe a humorous way to evade that question. And he said, well, I have to tell you, as Republicans go, I'd have to go with Rush Limbaugh. (Laughter.)

I've never in my wildest dreams – and I've known Dick Cheney since he was Gerald Ford's chief of staff in the White House when he was 32 years old –

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: No matter what happened the rest of the day, you had a good day.

(Laughter.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: You know, I mean, but that's a good example. Never assume you know what they're going to say.

MR. GREGORY: I had Secretary Gates on one of my initial weeks. And there was this question of how we compare Bush to Obama. And I'd obviously seen that he'd been asked that question and never taken the bait, so I said, no I'm just not going to ask that because he won't go anywhere with it. And then I decided at the last minute to do it, and he sort of brushed it away.

And so the other advice is, don't be afraid of saying nothing, because I sat there and I said, no really, there must be some difference. And I just sat quiet and watched him. And he just sat there – beep-beep-beep – (laughter). And he just said, well, he said, Obama's a lot more analytical than Bush. And kind of went on from there – (laughter) – and then he said, the next, he said he told somebody, well, I wish I hadn't answered that – (laughter.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: But that's what makes these jobs really fun.

MR. GREGORY: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely.

MR. SCHIEFFER: And that's why we all feel very fortunate that we actually have them. You had a question? It's probably getting close to the closing time.

Q: My name is Mark Schoeff. I'm actually a CSIS alum and now a reporter with a business magazine published by Crain Communications. I hope you didn't address this right at the top – I missed the first 10 minutes – but I'd like to get each of your takes on whether the press is tough enough on President Obama –

MR. SCHIEFFER: Oh, we talked about that.

(Laughter.)

Q: Let me ask the other one, then. I actually had two. It's never too early to speculate; it's never too early to do the horse race. With the Republican Party – speaking of taking on President Obama – will Mitch McConnell or John Boehner be able to effectively take on President Obama or do the Republicans have to wait until the presidential campaign starts? And who do you think would be the toughest opponent for Obama?

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: Those are two-hour long seminars but –

MR. GREGORY: On the latter point, I just don't think we know right now. I don't think that the challenge to Obama's going to come from Washington – it'll come from the ranks of

governors. But at this point after George Bush's election, nobody had a sense of who the head of the Democratic Party was. And Barack Obama certainly wasn't on the radar screen. And I think Republicans have work to do before they get it together.

As to whether, you know – I think there's this sort of sliding scale of how tough you are on presidents. I think that – George can tell you – I think Bill Clinton had a much harder ride. But maybe for different reasons. I think that there is a lot of expectation, the history surrounding Obama and a lot of that popularity. But I think he's getting challenged by the press corps. And, you know, look, they said similar things about the Bush White House, as well. I didn't really subscribe to that. So I think that there's this sort of sliding scale of what people mean when they say, being "tough" on the president.

MR. SCHIEFFER: I would say on the Republican Party, the Republican Party right now is in the same place that it was in 1964 when Lyndon Johnson scored that huge then-record landslide over Barry Goldwater. And people said, it's all over, the Republican Party is doomed, and so on. Four years later, of course, Richard Nixon was elected president.

Parties always go through this after a presidential defeat. And what's happening in the Republican Party right now is there is no identifiable leader. It's really too soon for anybody to have broken out of the pack, but, certainly, none of these candidates have. And so that is why you see the Republican Party, now, sometimes getting its leaders mixed up with its cheerleaders. And the cheerleaders are moving out onto the field – (laughter) – rather than the people who are actually the leaders of the party.

I would have to say – and this is just my opinion and it's a total wild guess. I think Tim Pawlenty, the governor of Minnesota, may wind up as the strongest Republican candidate. He has a way of saying things – he can sometimes say the same thing that, say, Rush Limbaugh says, but say it in a way that people kind of nod their heads. He doesn't put as fine an edge on it. But he's a guy with a blue-collar background – he's a very good biography, as it were. He's been the governor of a state; he's sort of been away from some of the things that people hold against the Republican Party in general, right now. I think he's going to be – might well turn out to be – and we're a long way from there – might well turn out to be a formidable candidate.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: He's also north of the Mason-Dixon Line.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Yes. I think it's pretty clear that Romney's going to try again. I don't know where that goes. I guess Mike Huckabee thinks he has a change, again, and he may well. I mean, this is a guy who won the Iowa caucuses the last time out. And there'll be some more – a few governors. But right now, they're just going through what all parties do after they lose. They're trying to get organized.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: But I think it's an open question whether they're actually going through what parties need to do to win, though; whether they're making the kind of changes that the Democrats had to make in the '80s – and whether they really can come up with a candidate that casts a much wider net.

MR. GREGORY: And you haven't heard anybody say that we're going to kind of reform the Republican Party for the future in this way.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: Well, you know, there are some people that try. You know, you have Huntsman come out and say, we have to do it – the president picks him off and sends him to China.

(Laughter.)

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, I mean Democrats did that with the nomination of George McGovern. You know, they were going to reform the party and some people would say they still haven't gotten over that – or at least, they didn't until Clinton was elected.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: I think that's right. But it couldn't be more wide open than it is.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Yeah, I think that's the bottom line.

MR. STEPHANOPOULOS: I actually probably think a little bit more of Romney's chances than you do, if only for one reason: The fact that he went out there and got beat. What you learn in that is invaluable. And especially in the Republican Party. Nixon, Reagan – not Bush – not the second Bush, but the first Bush. They all became president after trying and losing.

On your first question, about the press, beyond everything else, beyond the fact that he was a historic president in getting elected, I think the magnitude of the problems the country faces right now are the president's best friend in terms of the coverage. Because there are so many big things to be dealing with – whether it's the trouble in the economy or unwinding a war in Iraq, intensifying one in Afghanistan, all of the unrest in Iran, the big issues of health care, education, energy – there are so many big things. And he's proposing solutions – whether you agree or disagree with them – to deal with them. You can't get caught up in a lot of trivia with the president. Even when he makes mistakes, they get superseded by other stories pretty quickly and I think that's definitely helping him.

MR. SCHIEFFER: You know, I didn't answer that part of the question and I wasn't trying to evade it. But I would just add this: I think in the end, yes – the president's getting a lot of publicity right now. And a lot of it is favorable. But in the end, it doesn't really matter. In the end, it's policy. Good public relations cannot trump bad policy. And bad public relations will not kill good policy.

And just an example of that, I would offer the presidency of Richard Nixon. Richard Nixon was driven from office. He carried on a war with the press. But when you look back on it, the good things that he did – the opening to China, the arms control work he did with the Soviet Union – they're still seen as significant achievements. The bad things he did are seen for what they were.

So, you know, the spotlight goes back and forth. We'll all remember George Bush looked pretty good when he landed on that aircraft carrier and got out wearing that flight suit. And walked up and there was a big sign that said, "mission accomplished." But in the end, it didn't make any difference. It becomes just a footnote to the presidency. And I think that's generally the way it always is.

Well, I want to thank all of you on behalf of TCU and the Schieffer School of Journalism – my colleagues David Gregory and George Stephanopouls – I really appreciate you coming today. And thank you all for coming.

(Applause.)

(END)