

**Center for Strategic and International Studies**

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

**Subject: "We're Not the Opposition Party: NBC News Chairman  
Andrew Lack"**

**Speaker:  
Andrew Lack,  
Chairman,  
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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: With us this time by Andrew Lack, who is the chairman of NBC News. He rejoined the network in 2015. This is his second time around at NBC in a leadership role. He first joined the network in 1993 as president of the News Division, and led the network through many successful years and ratings successes. I first knew Andrew in the 1970s, when he was a producer at CBS News. During those years, he was a producer at "60 Minutes," the senior producer of "CBS Reports," and among other things won an astounding 16 Emmys and four duPont Awards. I'm proud to say that Andy and I shared one Emmy for a five-party documentary, "The Defense of the United States." Between CBS and NBC, Andy Lack was CEO of Bloomberg's Global Media Group, and chairman and CEO of Sony Music. So, with that kind of resume, I think it's fair to say that Andrew Lack knows a thing or two about broadcast journalism.

Andy, welcome very much. We really appreciate your doing this.

ANDREW LACK: Oh, thank you, Bob. Thank you. That's very kind of you. That introduction is very sweet. Thank you.

MR. SCHIEFFER: We're going to start this interview in the very early weeks of the Trump administration. And I'll just ask you flat out: What do you make of what we've seen so far? And what does it portend for journalism and the way we do our jobs?

MR. LACK: Well, that's a good one. It's an extraordinary time – extraordinary time to be at NBC News, extraordinary time to be in journalism. In my lifetime covering news, and you touched on it, I go back to really – and it comes to politics and political campaigns; 1980 was my first campaign. I don't think in 35 years 2016 was anything like any of the others during that period. And 2000 was in there, and that certainly was a rollercoaster ride. But the level of disruption and change that this president has brought to office, brought to his campaign, is I think for, if you look over that period of 35 years, unparalleled.

We witnessed the Trump candidacy in a way that we never imagined how it would affect the Republican Party. We never imagined how it would affect us tracking him, covering him, reporting on him. And then, ultimately, as he and others and all of us have pointed out, we sure did get it wrong election night. We did not see the shot that he had at the presidency that day, and that he was going to become the president. Election night we – and early, relatively speaking – we knew pretty much by 9:00, 9:30 that pattern was daunting for Hillary Clinton to overcome as the states started to topple his way.

And he has made good on everything he said in the campaign in this first week of his presidency. He has talked about that wall. He has talked about that immigration ban. He has signed executive orders – what, 20 of them, I think, in 10 days. That is a heck of a level of output from a new president, and we're used to new presidents asserting themselves, as you know so well, as quickly as they can once they enter the White House. I think this president is breaking new ground even on that front, and we feel it as journalists every day.

And it's – I hesitate to say this because people may misunderstand. If you're in our line of work, it's exciting as hell to come to work every day. If you didn't vote for Donald Trump, you might have a different view of what's happening in the country. But he is – he is responding to the people who elected him, and he is demonstrating every day that he has them in mind, and he has come to the White House to prove it.

MR. SCHIEFFER: So what are you telling your people about dealing with Donald Trump?

MR. LACK: Well, I'm telling them stay cool. Stay – as our friend Tom Brokaw said the other night on NBC on his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary retrospective of the years he's been here at NBC, we should be immune to the contentiousness, the hostility, the challenges that the Trump administration are throwing at us in terms of their feelings about us. Steve Bannon has made very clear his feelings about us: “shut up.” We are not the opposition party. We are an independent group of fellows and a diverse group, and we pride ourselves on our independence, we journalists. And that doesn't comport well with this White House.

We've seen this before, Bob. I know you remember, and I certainly as a student of journalism, you got a – you're about a generation and a half, I think, ahead of me – but this attitude towards the press which Trump is so sharp and so clear on is not unfamiliar ground, this president. And you need only go back, of course, to the Nixon administration, where you see similar expressions, similar action as it relates to the press. Heck, I was just thinking about this last night, of course, because suddenly you were hearing references to Nixon's Saturday Night Massacre in Trump's firing of the acting attorney general. We had historian Michael Beschloss on our air, for example. We had Laurence Tribe on our air, the noted Supreme Court observer and professor at Harvard, I believe. These are well-known observers of the presidency and the press in the presidency. And it was a little bit of déjà vu all over again when you start talking – when you hear Chuck Schumer on the floor of the Senate last night talking about the Monday Night Massacre. (Chuckles.)

What does it all mean? We're in the hunt every day to try to sort that out for our viewers,

for our readers, users. And that's a very unique opportunity for us in this moment in time because this presidency is going to be a test of character, I think, for many news organizations. I certainly feel it. This road we've been on through 2016 has been a test of character.

I don't love – as any of us would say, whether we were journalists or voters or just proud of our country and struggling with the divisiveness that is so ever-present every day, dysfunction in Congress that we've observed over the last six, seven years in particular have been tough to watch. And I think the country's deeply frustrated by that, and this election demonstrated how deep those frustrations go.

And President Trump won this election, and he has come to Washington to take the mandate he got from those who voted for him and press his case. In his view, we journalists are part of the problem, not – (chuckles) – and we know, of course, we're not there to flatter him, and we know how presidents feel when they don't get flattered by the press or they feel we've treated them unfairly. It gets pretty harsh pretty quickly.

My view of that is that comes with this territory. Take a breath. Steady as she goes. Stay balanced. Stay sharp. Don't be distracted. But every day we go to work determined to try to shine a light in every dark corner we can and try to get the best reporting from the best team of reporters we can assemble at NBC and go chase good stories.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, I think you're exactly right, Andy, when you say this is really nothing new, because those of us who were here when President Nixon was president, we remember Vice President Agnew, who was assigned to basically attack the media. He talked about the “nattering nabobs of negativity” and all of that.

MR. LACK: Yeah, that was the first time I heard the “media elite,” as I recall, that Eastern, Ivy League media elite.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Yeah.

MR. LACK: And here we are again with that phrase. Go ahead. Sorry, I didn't mean to

MR. SCHIEFFER: Yeah. And at the time – we always used to make a joke at CBS that at that time, when we were accused of being the Ivy League elite, all four of the anchors at – (chuckles) – at CBS were from Texas, and there was no ivy growing on any wall of any university – (laughter) – that any of us attended. In fact, Hughes Rudd, who was doing the morning news in those days, didn't even go to college; he was a graduate of Waco High School.

But let me ask you this. Almost daily, we hear President Trump disparaging the media. But do you see this as someone who may be a little thin-skinned, or is just blowing off steam? Or do you think it runs deeper than that? Is this a strategy?

MR. LACK: I do think it runs deep, and I do think it is a strategy. And I do think intimidating journalists is a – is a well-known – (chuckles) – approach when you're unhappy

with the coverage you're getting. He saw that early on.

Look, there is great skepticism out there about the media amongst ordinary Americans from all walks of life. And there has always been, as you know so well – we've experienced it when we were at CBS, we've experienced it over the years, I have now at NBC many times – we're seen as being biased and we report the story through that bias. And we haven't been called out on it quite the way this administration feels we should be. And so that's the territory we're in, and we got to understand that and not be pushed back by it, but acknowledge it, deal with it.

I know as I travel the country – I'm curious what you hear – that is what people feel. They question whether we're reporting accurately what's really happening. And if you go ask them – we were talking about this on our air this morning on the "Morning Joe" show. Joe was saying – Joe Scarborough was saying – and he is, as you know, a well-known conservative by his own definition – he talks to his people out there about these executive orders, his friends, his family. He made eight or 10 phone calls last night, he was talking about – talking about it this morning. Unanimously, they said, well, that's what we expected he would be doing: pushing back on you guys and signing these orders. These are – these are good things. These are good – this is what we hoped for.

That's what you got to keep in mind when you're covering this story. You got to go report on not just what's going on in Washington and Washington's reaction to this president and these last 10 days, but what is the country's reaction. And part of that reaction is, of course, the protests that we've seen all over the country. We got our work cut out for us to cut through the complexities of these orders and their impact, and we have a responsibility every day to keep coming in and try to make sense out of it for our viewers and for readers and so forth. And every news organization, I think, worth its salt is looking at it similarly.

MR. SCHIEFFER: The surveys really do back up what you say. In September, Gallup released a poll that showed only 32 percent of Americans have a great deal or a fair amount of trust in the mass media. I guess my question is, do you see that as just one part of the public's growing distrust of all institutions, or does it go beyond that?

MR. LACK: Well, two things I'd say about that. First, of course, as it relates to the news media and journalism in general, we've never been in a popularity contest. (Chuckles.) We don't – we don't win those, nor should we. That's not our role, as you know so well. And so I'm not fussed about our – you know, people's attitude towards us generally. I think we get uncomfortable in journalism because journalism now is represented online by lots of, in our view, very bad actors. And of course, just the term – and we don't maybe want to get bogged down in it in this discussion, because it's a half-hour discussion in and of itself – but "fake news" has taken on new meaning in a digital world. And the use of fake news is a serious issue for us, both those of us who in the media work very hard every day to be as transparent and as honest and as clear as we possibly can about the work that we're doing. It's an assault on all of us, whether you're a journalist or whatever line of work you're in, to be mixing the levels of information that are now loosely described as "news" into one basket of information. And it's – we're going to – it's going to take a while to work through how the digital world finds their

information and trusts it. (Chuckles.)

And part of the problem I think we're facing with this presidency and with this – with the campaign that's taken us there is the filters that people effectively applied to how they heard these – this campaign. If you're only getting your news from one source of information, say, I would respectfully submit that you're not getting a good luck at what's going on in the country on any given day, what's being reported. I encourage folks to go get several sources of information, all of which they can then play out in their own reading and viewing to come to their own judgment about what happened – (chuckles) – what really happened on any given day. So you see less of that. At least I fear that there's less of that going on.

But as it relates overall to institutions deteriorating in the public's eye, I think that's certainly true of Washington and politics. And here I'd defer to your judgment. I'd be curious your view: Has Washington ever been more fragile and disrespected because of what they believe certainly led them to this place, whether you were for or against President Trump?

MR. SCHIEFFER: Well, I would say in answer to that probably not. This is a very fractured city right now. I've never seen, you know, opinions so diverse as they are now.

But you know, I'll tell you one thing that never changes. When people inside government disagree with policy, somehow or another that always leaks out. And that really is the way that those of us as journalists – as you know, Andy, that's how we find out what's really going on. We don't always find out exactly what we're looking for. We don't exactly get the full story from the briefings and from the public statements. But when people inside the government have strong disagreements, they make sure that those of us who are reporters find out about it. And you're seeing that in – (chuckles) – I've never seen anything like it over this past week.

The Washington Post today had a story about disagreements within the government over this ban on people coming into the country from certain other countries. There must have been 10 different sources cited as sources, not by name, about the overall confusion and distraction and disagreement going on with the government.

Now let me just bring in Andrew Schwartz, my partner here. Andrew?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Thank you, Bob.

And, Andrew, thanks for being here with us.

When you were chairman of Sony Music, you had to navigate around one of the music business's major challenges, file sharing. I always look at the music business in terms of, you know, what are we going to see next in communication. In the news business, what do you see as the next-biggest challenge or disruption, much like you had to confront the file sharing?

MR. LACK: Well, that's a great question. The digital world is going to pose lots of new and different challenges to our work, but I think it also will be our greatest friend and ally, on the

use of social platforms to really distribute the news we do and gain new audiences. Over this past year – we weren't talking about Snapchat – (laughs) – at the beginning of this year as a platform in which people communicate, see photos, share information. Snapchat's got something they call discover channels. News organizations are going on those channels, distributing their information in ways we didn't even discuss or think about at the beginning of 2016. Now half of young people between 18 and 34 are using Snapchat almost exclusively to get a lot of what they think about every day from those channels and from that platform.

MR. SCHWARTZ: What's really interesting about Snapchat is you personally didn't need to look far to know that Snapchat was right there.

MR. LACK: You mean – (laughs) – you mean because I have a personal connection to Snapchat, are you asking?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Yes.

MR. LACK: Yes. Yes, well, this wasn't a plug for my wife, who is head of global brand strategy for Snapchat. And that's a title I'm sure Schieffer right now is rolling his eyes saying, what the hell does that mean? (Laughter.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: Well, no, we interviewed – we interviewed – one of our first interviews was with Peter Hamby. We think Snapchat is among the most important of all platforms. And in fact, I have two teenage sons and it's the first thing they ever taught me about the news business, as opposed to me teaching them. And so how is NBC and MSNBC now using Snapchat and thinking about things like Snapchat?

MR. LACK: Well, that's not just a family secret, that's a corporate secret at this point. (Laughs.) We, like other news organizations, are increasingly in relationships with Snapchat that are important to us. And the one that we're working through with Snapchat now I'm excited about. Why? Because I know – I can see the power of that platform, and I want to get the good work that our reporters – and this is really what it comes back to, to answer your question – our reporters are using it well-ahead of whether there's any formality around the relationship between NBC News and Snapchat.

Hallie Jackson, Katy Tur, Kasie Hunt – a gang I like to call our road warriors. They really came of age in terms of covering a political campaign in 2016. Imagine that for a second, Bob, if your first political campaign was 2016. For them, that's what it was – and Andrew – it's a new world order for reporters to have all those tools to distribute the information that they're getting, not just with their own news organization but on these social media platforms – Snap, Twitter, Facebook.

And you got to be careful about that too, because you're a journalist on those platforms by day. By evening, you may be communicating socially with friends and colleagues. And you're in a universe where you're being observed, listened to, questioned in ways that just didn't exist, forget 10 years ago, five years ago, two years ago. And now I don't know what 2017 or

2018 will bring us. So I'm excited about that. My 17-year-old is not excited about his parents' use of Snapchat. And that may be a problem for Snap – but whatever comes next.

MR. SCHWARTZ: How much time are you spending these days thinking about mobile in general?

MR. LACK: Oh, gosh, I – you know, probably half understates it. I get half my information during the course of a day from mobile. I carry around an iPad too, so it's a portable device, so that's all mobility. That's been – that's been a fact of my life for really the better part of the last six, seven years – really, with the introduction of the iPad, which was my preferred portable device over my smartphone, which seven years ago was a BlackBerry not an iPhone. And BlackBerry was for emailing. And now most of my communication is in next. My emailing is confined to broader, more professional communication inside NBC News with colleagues.

And there, again, it's – I don't put a lot of the good work we're doing into email or on any of these social media platforms, but I do communicate regularly and I read a lot of them. So, you know, I can look at the Post, I can look at the Times, I can look at what we're doing, I can look at 15 different news outlets, and often do during the course of a day for different reasons. And I'm intellectually turning over ideas as it relates to the news of the day and stories that I know our news organization is chasing.

All that's been changed because of the power of mobility – that mobile in my hand. It's changed my life. I can't imagine – as we sit here, I could be googling on my smartphone stuff we're talking about and be reading it – if I could multitask well enough – and be infinitely more impressive, quoting Socrates and professors of journalism, while we speak, as if this were coming to me off the top of my head, but it's in my hand. And I can – I got that in my pocket as I go through every day. It's fabulous.

MR. SCHWARTZ: It's a fascinating change. I wonder what you think of this: Music industry business guru observer Bob Lefsetz, who I know you know, has been saying that news and politics are as exciting now as the music business or movies once were. And I think part of that he attributes to what you're talking about, that mobile is so accessible. Do you think – do you believe that?

MR. LACK: Yeah, I do. I don't believe – and here, I'm waiting for Bob to correct me – but I don't believe in my – for me, there's ever been a more exciting time to work in journalism than 2017. I say that to my younger colleagues in particular, because I think they – if they – if they privately didn't vote for President Trump, I could see it on their faces, some of them, and the disorientation that they felt, that having not gone through an election year, let alone any election year like this, they were lost. And as journalists, they should have been – if they'd had a few more years under their belt, they should have been thinking to myself, oh my God, this is the story of my life and I'm so damn lucky to be at NBC News, or whatever news organization you happen to be at, to have the privilege of covering this story.



We're going to have a civics lesson – my view – potentially one like we haven't gotten in a long time, that challenges every question about our courts, about our executive branch, about the Congress, in ways that if I were 25 again and I were at NBC News, I'd be saying I can't get luckier than this. But that's for the work. That's the gig. You know, how you feel personally about the challenges you're going to be facing and the country faces, that's separately. That's a separate matter.

MR. SCHIEFFER: You know, I think you're – I think you're right, Andy. And I would just say, my warning to young journalists is never say this is the story of my life because – (laughs) – there's always another one that comes along.

MR. LACK: Yeah, yeah. That's for sure.

MR. SCHIEFFER: And my time in journalism would certainly be – certainly be an example of that. I thought I would never, ever cover a story that matched the assassination of President Kennedy, and that remains one of the great tragedies of our time, and I still think a period of time that changed America. I don't think we've ever been the same. But when I think about that and then I think about all of the things that have happened since, including 9/11, you never know what the next big story is going to be. And certainly this one is certainly one of the – I don't even know if I'd want to call it exciting – but certainly one of the most interesting stories of my time.

I'm going to ask you, before we let you go, about Megyn Kelly. You hired her away from Fox. How are you going to use her? And when are we going to see her?

MR. LACK: You'll see her this summer. She's – we announced when we announced that she was coming to NBC that she would work this summer on a summer primetime program that would be on Sunday evenings at 7:00. That's still the plan. She'll have a morning show, which we haven't scheduled yet, but sometime in that day part. And that will come on the air in September, at least that's the plan today. That may shift a bit, but not dramatically so. But I'd like to say about Megyn – first of all, I think she's a great journalist and demonstrated that – great anchor, reporter. Her program was – had a lot of impact during 2016. And she drove that good work.

I feel like she chose NBC. She could have gone to any number of places. In my conversations with her it became clear to me that we had – that this could be a good place for her to come, that we would be a good fit with each other. And some of it's chemistry, and some of it's timing, and some of it is having the right platforms, the right opportunities and, in the case of the evening show I've just mentioned and the daytime program, those fit what she was looking for. That's what she wanted to do. So that's how Megyn Kelly came our way.

You know, the part of it that I was the most interested in, apart from, you know, getting to know her, and having followed some of her good work, getting to really study it more closely, is that we get to work on some new programs together. And you know, you don't get to do that as much as you would like. (Laughs.) You find yourself servicing and maintaining – or, I'm in a slightly different line of work in the news business than you are. But that said, NBC News

hasn't created new shows. like the ones we're going to start with Megyn going forward, in a while. We don't get to do enough of them.

There was a time when we were making new magazine shows – as you remember – and more documentaries on the broadcast platform, I'm talking about now. On the cable side and on the digital side there's plenty of opportunity for new. But on the broadcast side, you don't see much new programming coming out of news divisions. And there's a lot of desire there, but it's tough on the broadcast side to break new ground. And I'm hopeful that we will. I'm also very realistic about the degree of difficulty – as is she – for us. But NBC News is a big place and these platforms offer lots of opportunity. And we've got the time and the resources to stay at it. So I'm excited to be doing that with her, and so are all of our colleagues here.

MR. SCHIEFFER: It sounds – and I'm not trying to get you to tell us some confidential information – but it sounds to me like you're planning something that comes on after the Today Show for Megyn, maybe a fourth hour of Today. Is that what you have in mind?

MR. LACK: Fourth, fifth, I'm always interested in breaking new – (laughs) – even more new ground. But we've got – you run out of turf in the morning after noontime. And we've kind of determined that the morning will work better for her. But where exactly we're going to put it, we haven't decided.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you, while we're talking about MSNBC, which we really haven't talked about very much – in my view, NBC News plays it down the middle. I put them right there with CBS News. MS is seen as coming from the left. Do you consider it a partisan news source?

MR. LACK: I don't want it to be a partisan news source. I want it to be just as you're describing, a credible news offering that is not partisan. Do we have commentators who have opinions who are to the left or to the right? Yes. Cable, MSNBC, has that. We don't have that on the broadcast platform. Our work, which is driven by NBC News reporting, is central to the identity of MSNBC. But I take your point. It definitely had developed a perception – and understandably so – that it was a, and is a still, to the left – you know, down the middle, balanced news. But we've got Joe in the morning as a conservative for three hours. And, yeah, we got Rachel Maddow and others in the evening who are more identified with Democratic or left-wing.

I want that perception that as a – the totality of the news channel, we're NBC News and proud of it. And whether it's Chris Matthews or Joe Scarborough or anyone else on the channel, they're part of the NBC News family. And we're not running away from who we are at NBC News because of MSNBC or vice versa. But we have to be clear, some of the programming is definably, by the anchors openness about it, either they're conservative or they're liberal. And that's why God made 24-hour news channels. They didn't make a 24-hour news operation for us on the broadcast platform. (Laughs.)

And I wanted very much, when we started MSNBC, to be that 24/7 channel that broadcasters didn't have. I think, frankly, it's one of the great successes that NBC News enjoys, that we have a broadcast platform, a cable platform, a digital platform, and we are all integrated

as NBC News. That is our central nervous system. But I recognize, for some who watch it, may only be watching either Joe or Rachel, say, in the evening, that their perception of the channel is that it's a liberal channel.

And there were periods of time, to be fair to others who described it that way and characterized it that way, that we were a little long on punditry that was positioned to the left as opposed to news – breaking news, gathering news, reporting news, sharing information around the news, analyzing it, yes, but not commenting on it with a left-of-center tilt. And that I think you see has emerged particularly in day-side with a much sharper focus. And I'm looking to expand that identity for the channel, because I want people to think it's the best of NBC News.

But we're very proud of the opinions of some of our broadcasters or anchors who have shows on the channel. Smart is what I hope the thread between – or the connective tissue between MSNBC and NBC News. It's all smart. It's all driven by solid, principled news reporting. But in the 24/7 environment, you have more opportunity for an op-ed page than you do on NBC News.

MR. SCHIEFFER: Andrew Lack. Well, Andrew, I want to thank you for doing this with us today. I have to say, I learned a great deal from you when we worked together, and I continued to learn from you when we were competitors. All the best to you.

MR. LACK: Thanks so much, Bob. Appreciate that.

MR. SCHIEFFER: For Andrew Schwartz, this is Bob Schieffer. Thanks for being with us.

MR. SCHWARTZ: But that's not all, Bob. At the top of this podcast we gave you just a tease of the great music from my friend Aaron Neville's new record, Apache. Let's hear some more from Aaron Neville.

(Music plays.)

(END)