

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH NEWT GINGRICH, FORMER SPEAKER OF THE
HOUSE
OF REPRESENTATIVES

MODERATOR: JERRY ZREMSKI

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MR. ZREMSKI: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the
National Press Club. My name is Jerry Zremski, and I'm the Washington
bureau chief for the Buffalo News and president of the Press Club.

I'd like to welcome our club members and their guests who are
with this today, as well as those of you who are watching on C-SPAN.
We're looking forward to today's speech, and afterwards, I'll ask as
many questions as time permits.

Please hold your applause during the speech so that we have as
much time for questions as possible. For our broadcast audience, I'd
like to explain that if you hear applause during the speech, it may be
from the guests and members of the general public who attend our
luncheons and not necessarily from the working press.

I'd like now to introduce our head table guests, and ask them to
stand briefly when their names are called.

From your right, Jackie Kucinich, a reporter for The Hill
newspaper; Rhodes Cook, editor and publisher of The Rhodes Cook
Letter; Charlotte Grimes, formerly of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch
Washington bureau and now holder of the Knight Chair in Political
Reporting at the Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse

University; David Broder of The Washington Post; Eleanor Clift of Newsweek Magazine; Marvin Kalb, the Edwin R. Murrow professor of Practice, Emeritus at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, last year's winner of the National Press Club's Fourth Estate Award and the host of the Kalb Report here at the Press Club; skipping over the podium, Melissa Charbonneau of CBN News, the vice chair of the NPC Speakers Committee; skipping over the speaker for just one second, Calista Gingrich, the wife of our speaker; Ken Delecki, a freelance reporter and editor and a member of the Speakers Committee who helped arranged today's lunch; Sylvia Smith, Washington correspondent for the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette and the secretary of the National Press Club; Morgan Felchner is editor of Campaigns & Elections magazine; Clarence Page, nationally syndicated columnist for the Chicago Tribune; and David Hess, correspondent for the National Journal, CongressDaily and a former president of the National Press Club. (Applause.)

Before introducing our main speaker, I would like a great member and friend of the National Press Club to say a few words. Without him this event today wouldn't be possible. Marvin Kalb has had an extraordinary career that won him the Press Club's Fourth Estate Award in 2006. He was an award-winning journalist for CBS and NBC before becoming an author, and now he teaches at the Joan Shorenstein Center on Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. In addition, he hosts The Kalb Report, a periodic discussion of contemporary issues hosted here at the National Press Club in conjunction with the Shorenstein Center and George Washington University.

Ladies and gentlemen, Marvin Kalb.

MARVIN KALB (The Kalb Report): (Applause.) Thank you very much. I will try to be as brief as possible and get to Newt as quickly as possible.

I think I'm here simply to set the stage on an idea. After the 1988 campaign, Roger Ailes, who was at that time a Republican consultant, used an expression which I've never forgotten. He said, "If you didn't like '88, you're going to hate '92." (Laughter.) And what he had in mind at that time was the feeling of disgust that many reporters and even politicians had about the way in which the '88 campaign was conducted.

So, in '90 a number of us -- journalists, scholars, politicians -- got together at the Shorenstein Center to try to come up with a better idea. The idea that we came up with was something that we called Nine Sundays. It was as follows: That there are nine weeks between Labor Day and Election Day; if a network or a group of networks were to set aside each week one hour or an hour and a half for a discussion of a single major issue before the country -- let us say right now it would be clearly Iraq -- and that debate between the presidential candidates would take place focusing on a single issue for that 90-minute period of time, and this would be nine Sundays that this would happen.

Well, we put it out, and I must say all of the candidates -- all of the candidates -- were extremely pleased with the proposal. None

of them, however, accepted. (Laughter.) They patted us on the back and sent us out the door. And we tried again in '96, but it clearly didn't work.

At the beginning of this year, our principal speaker and former governor from New York, Mario Cuomo, began to speak at the Cooper Union place in New York about a new way of approaching speaking, this whole idea of a presidential debate. Let's get serious. We certainly haven't had any and the country certainly needs it. So let's get serious. Let's try to come up with a better idea. And Newt had a good idea, and I hope he lays it out for us today.

Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. ZREMSKI: Our speaker today is no stranger to the National Press Club. This is his fourth National Press Club Luncheon appearance, and he has been here for many other events over the years. Newt Gingrich was elected to the House in 1978 and reelected until resigning in 1999. He is widely credited with spearheading the GOP's rise from 40 years in the minority to the majority in 1994, thanks in part to the Contract With America, which outlined how the Republicans would govern in Congress.

Currently he is the chairman of the Gingrich Group, a communications and consulting firm, and general chairman of American Solutions for Winning the Future. He is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and a distinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution. He is the author of nine books, and most importantly, he is a man of many interests and many ideas. Recently he has given thought to this idea of improving our presidential debates. Critics of past debates contend that they're too superficial to provide the kind of in-depth knowledge of the nominees -- of the nominees the voters need to make informed choices.

Speaker Gingrich will talk today about a proposal he thinks makes more sense. It's a plan in which he may have a very personal interest in that he could be a late entrant into the race.

Please join me in welcoming Newt Gingrich to the National Press Club. (Applause.)

MR. GINGRICH: Thank you very, very much. And I thank all of you. Calista and I are delighted to be here.

I want to thank Marvin Kalb, who really sparked this particular event by calling me out of the blue and saying that he had seen what Mario Cuomo and I had talked about and he was glad that we had, a mere 16 years later, picked up on his idea. (Laughter.) And really it was a wonderful and a very encouraging conversation at the time that it happened.

I also want to thank Governor Cuomo, who agreed to the 90-minute discussion at Cooper Union, which you can see if you go to AmericanSolutions.com. It is still posted there. And I want to thank Tim Russert, who agreed to come up and be the moderator that night, and who really added a lot to the event and to its impact.

But Governor Cuomo was remarkably generous. And it was totally appropriate that he would be the person to join me at Cooper Union, because it was his press secretary who got me thinking about this. Some of you may know Harold Holzer, who is a remarkable figure in his own right.

He was Bella Abzug's press secretary, then he was Mario Cuomo's press secretary -- as you can tell, somebody who obviously is somebody I'd hang out with. (Laughter.) He's now the vice president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

But he is a great Lincoln scholar. He edited, for C-SPAN, the most accurate edition of the Lincoln-Douglas debates ever published. And it is really worth your reading his introduction to understand the complexity of those debates and their importance in American history. He then wrote a book which I think is a work of genius, one of the best strategy books I've ever read, called simply "Lincoln at Cooper Union."

And he makes the case in both these works, both about the Lincoln-Douglas debates and about Cooper Union, that Abraham Lincoln understood that America was at a crossroads from which it might never recover, that he had been drawn into politics by the Supreme Court's stunningly wrong decision that slavery could be extended everywhere in the country -- the Dred Scott case. And he was determined to stop the spread of slavery and to stand for freedom, even at the risk of war. And he understood that this was not a topic you discussed in a vaudeville room, that this was a topic for adults, discussed by adults in an adult setting.

He and Douglas had known each other for many, many years. They both served in the legislature. Illinois was not that big a state. Douglas was a very successful United States senator, and Lincoln decided to take him on and nagged him to debate. And everywhere -- Douglas didn't want to debate because he was the incumbent senator. Lincoln was a well-known and very successful lawyer but nonetheless, why if you're the incumbent take the risk?

And so Lincoln adopted the practice of going one day behind Douglas. If Douglas was in Springfield, the next day, Lincoln was in Springfield. If Douglas was in Chicago, the next day, Lincoln was in Chicago. If Douglas went to Peoria, the next day, Lincoln went to Peoria. And after about three weeks of this, Douglas finally said, all right, let's just agree to the debates; I got it; I mean, I'm tired of you following me. (Laughter.)

And they ultimately agreed to seven. The debates lasted three hours each. They had a timekeeper but no moderator -- one of the points when we get to questions that Marv and I don't totally agree on. I represent the political leadership model that says the two guys running for power should in fact be responsible for deciding their own topics. He legitimately represents a different interest, which believes the news media might have some role in that.

But in the case of the Lincoln-Douglas debates, everything in the debates was decided by Lincoln and Douglas. And by the way if you

read them, they're much more partisan, much more narrow. But there are those brief moments of brilliance that are stunningly historic.

Lincoln won the popular vote but lost the election, because the legislature picked the senator. And the way it was gerrymandered, the Democrats kept control of the legislature. However, Lincoln thought the debates were good enough. They happened to be published the following day -- following year. And they introduced Lincoln to the nation as a serious political leader based on thought.

He campaigned everywhere in 1859 that Douglas went, across Indiana, Ohio, Wisconsin, Michigan. And everywhere -- they had a lot of off-year elections back then. Everywhere they both campaigned in November of 1859, the Republicans won. He was then invited the day after the election to come to New York to speak, originally at a church, but then they decided it would be too big a crowd. And they moved it to Cooper Union, which is a great workingman's college that had just been founded a few years earlier.

And this is what I want to pose for you to think about. I'm walking you through this to understand what serious leaders do when they think their country's in serious trouble. Lincoln personally spent three months at the Illinois State Library researching one speech, which he personally wrote, came east -- sign of the technology of the times -- he had to change trains eight times, because the track widths were different in these different states -- arrives in New York City and delivers a 7,300 word, two-hour speech.

After the speech, he goes down to the major newspapers to make sure they get it edited correctly. (Laughter.) And because they're all printing the complete text. By -- he goes on to Rhode Island, Massachusetts and New Hampshire, gives the same speech once in each state, goes home in early March. And the next speech Lincoln gives is the farewell address at Springfield on the way to being inaugurated -- does not give another speech the entire year.

And when people come to him, he says, read the speech. I'm not going to give you an answer you can take out of context. Read the speech. The estimate is that one-third of the adults in the North read the speech before the election. And it's a very, very sober speech because it is at the crux of the survival of America as a country.

Now reading that -- I'm encouraged by my good friend Barry Castleman, who is a wonderful populist idealist -- I reached the following proposition.

The current political system is not working. I had not heard the Roger Ailes story, but the truth is, Roger was right. What was not all that happy in 1988 was worse in '92, even worse in '96, stunningly bad in 2000, and in 2004 was almost unendurable.

For the most powerful nation on Earth to have an election in which swiftboat veterans versus National Guard papers becomes a major theme verges on insane. I mean, it's just -- and to watch those debates I found painful, for both people. They're both smarter than the debates.

But here's what's happened. We have invented a system where we replace big-city machine bosses with consultant bosses. Read the newspaper coverage. Who's your pollster? What advertising firm have you hired? Who's your consultant? Who did you hire in Iowa? Who did you hire in South Carolina? This is the new Boston.

And what's the job of the candidate in this world? The job of the candidate is to raise the money, to hire the consultants, to do the focus groups, to figure out the 30-second answers to be memorized by the candidate. This is stunningly dangerous.

When your leaders shrink -- I used a term there that was actually a quote from General de Gaulle. I talked about pygmies. I was referring to General de Gaulle describing the Fourth Republic. But the fact is -- and I wasn't referring to Republican candidates. I was referring to a process by which candidates spend more and more time raising less and less money, and that's maniacally how we count it. Who came in first last quarter? How many consultants can they hire?

We don't say: Who has thought -- it was actually captured -- Tim Russert asked Governor Cuomo at one point, "Who would be your party's best candidate?" And instantly Mario turned and said, "Tim, shouldn't you ask me who I think would be the best president?" Let's think about the difference.

Then you combine this stultifying, exhausting shrinking process with the way that these auditions have occurred. These aren't debates. This is a cross between "The Bachelor," "American Idol," and "Who's Smarter Than a Fifth Grader?" (sic; "Are You Smarter Than a Fifth Grader?"). (Laughter, applause.)

And on top of that, you have the challenge of the news media, which unfortunately was taught by a cross between H.L. Mencken's cynicism and Theodore White's wonderful writing but focused far too much on politics as a horse race, and on an unavoidable desire for "Gotcha!" And what does that do? It turns the candidates into rigidity, because if a candidate says something in March of 2007, and in the course of the campaign they learn something fundamentally different, and they mature, and they change, and in August or September or October, they adopt a new position based on having grown during the year, they will promptly have flip-flopped.

And so you begin to trap people -- as the campaigns get longer, you're asking a person who's going to be sworn in, in January of 2009 to tell you what they'll do in January of 2007 when they haven't got a clue, because they don't know what the world will be like. And you're suggesting they won't learn anything through the two years of campaigning.

It was John F. Kennedy, campaigning in West Virginia, being horrified by poverty, which profoundly changed him in 1960.

And so we now have a system that is overly focused on money, overly delegated to technicians, and in which candidates are held to a rigidity standard that is very dangerous, while their answers are held to a sound bite and 30-second standard, which is just frankly absurd.

What's your answer on Iraq, in 30 seconds? What's your answer on health care, in 30 seconds?

Now I believe this is really, really serious. First of all, when you start getting into these 30-second processes, you end up doing what Senator Obama did the other day, which is say a very insightful thing in a very dangerous way, when he pointed out, correctly, that Pakistan is enormously dangerous, that we need to have a strategy for Pakistan, but it came out that he -- came out with him saying he'd use military force. Now I don't think he would have said that in a more thoughtful setting with more preparation.

And I don't know that it's very good training to be president to see how quick people are on their feet when they're tossed a question with no preparation, because I don't frankly want to have a president who gets up and decides off the cuff what they'll do about a major public policy problem.

But what's more difficult is the answer was to attack Senator Obama, not to explore the underlying kernel of what he said, which is a very important kernel, which is we do not today have a strategy large enough to match the problems that we are facing in the war on terrorism. And Pakistan is a great case study of the mismatch between strategy and reality. And that's an important conversation, but it's not a 30-second answer in an audition.

Let me carry it one step further then describe what we're trying to do, and we're trying to lay all of this out, at American Solutions, where we'll have nationwide workshops on September 27th until September 29th on the Internet. They'll be available to everybody at no charge, and all of the polling we do at American Solutions is made available to all the candidates in both parties. But our goal is try to create on the Internet a solutions lab where people can participate almost like a wikipedia, and they can be -- and they can focus on solutions. And I think this country is so sick of red versus blue, and the country's so ready to go back to being red, white and blue that it is -- that there's an enormous gap between the political news media system and the average American.

I also think there's something else at stake here that I think we have to put on the table. I believe we are in a Lincoln kind of period. I believe the challenges we face as a country are larger than the Cold War, larger than the Second World War, larger than the Great Depression. I believe if you list all the different major challenges we face, they are larger than any period in American history since the 1850s. We're going to have economic competition from China and India for which we are not prepared. To compete in an age when we're going to have four to seven times as much new science in the next 25 years as we had in the last 25 years while competing in the world market with China and India, we have to sow fundamentally overall our learning system, which is so carefully protected today by an entrenched unionized bureaucracy that it is staggering.

The Detroit Public Schools, according to a Gates Foundation financed report, graduate 25 percent of their entering freshmen on time. They cheat three out of every four entering students. At a time when, if you're an African-American male and you drop out of high

school, you face a 73 percent unemployment rate in your 20s and a 60 percent chance of going to jail. We have a war here at home between organized crime, many of which comes through international gangs, drug dealing. More young Americans are killed in the United States every month than were killed in Iraq last year, and nobody's talking about

it in a serious way. The right thinks it's not its job to talk about it, and the left doesn't want to take on its own allies, and so we stumble forward. And we're going to compete with China under those circumstances?

New York, it is projected by a McKenzie Study, will be replaced by London as the center of world finance by the end of the decade. The answer of this Congress is to raise taxes in the financial sector. Our visa system is a nightmare. People go -- people now go from around the world to London to do business, even though it's dramatically more expensive, because they're so insulted by the American visa system, and we do nothing.

The fact is that there's a real parallel between the collapse of the bridge in Minneapolis and the collapse of the levees in New Orleans -- bureaucratic government does not work. It is collapsing all around you. The federal highway system obviously didn't inspect very well and the state highway system obviously didn't as well. Maybe I'm being too radical, but I want to state a proposition. None of us believe we grew up in an America where levees broke and bridges fell, and today we live in a country where it is a fiasco. Furthermore, they're now talking about taking till the end of next year to replace the bridge -- totally bureaucratic.

I'll give you a specific example. When the Northridge earthquake shattered a bridge in California, the most heavily-traveled bridge in the world, they went to an incentivized contractor. Sacramento, the state highway department said it would take two years and two months to fix the bridge. They offered an incentive contract, where the contractor actually could make more money by getting done quickly than he could make out of the entire contract normally -- they finished the bridge in two months and two days. Now, here you have two months and two days; here you have two years and two months.

And I just want to take one minute to drive this home. There is a world that works and there's a world that fails. And you can see this as a YouTube -- three and a half minutes we did called FedEx versus Federal Bureaucracy. (Laughter.) And it's very straightforward. How many of you have gone online to check a package at UPS or FedEx? Just raise your hand. Look around the room. This is not -- and I want to drive this home for the news media -- this is not a theory, this is not Gingrich having interesting, unrealistic ideas. It is an objective fact in the world that works that if you invest in technology, you reward competence -- there are consequences for incompetence -- you focus on the customer, you have market signals, you have the Toyota production system, Six Sigma, Lee Manufacturing, the writing of Drucker, Deming, Juran and Womack -- it works, right?

Now, UPS tracks 15 million packages a day. A UPS truck has more computing power than Apollo 13. (Laughter.) FedEx tracks 8 million

packages a day. That's the world that works. Here's the world that failed -- the federal government. The United States government today cannot find between 12 and 20 million illegal immigrants when they're sitting still. (Light laughter.) So just take those two comparisons. My answer, frankly, as a policy proposal, is that we spend a couple hundred million dollars, send a package to every illegal immigrant. (Laughter.) (Applause.) When they deliver it, we'll know where they are. (Laughter.)

Let me carry you just two stages further to understand the scale of change. We are going to live longer than any generation in human history. That has clear consequences for retirement, clear consequences for health care, clear consequences for quality of life. And where's the dialogue? I mean, I helped co-chair with Bob Kerrey a quality long-term care commission. We are working on projects at the Center for Health Transformation. But this needs to be a fundamental national conversation because no society in history -- and by the way, this is mostly about success. I'm now 64. I regard living longer as good. This is not a problem -- you know, the crisis of aging, no. There'd be a crisis of dying. We need to think through the opportunity of aging, and we need to figure out what are we going to do realistically to make it sustainable, affordable and fair to everybody.

And finally, we have, I think, a real crisis -- and I said something the other day that seemed to be confusing to people, so let me put it in context. There's a terrific new book out called "Troublesome Young Men," which is a study of the younger Tories who spent two years trying to drive Chamberlain out of office. It was very striking in reading the book, which I did shortly after the British prime minister found it impossible to be candid about the eight people they arrested in Great Britain. It was very -- six of them, by the way, were medical doctors working for the National Health Service.

It was very striking to read a book in which Chamberlain was so committed to not fighting Hitler that even after war was declared in September 3rd, 1939, they fought what was called a "phony war," and I always thought the phony war was bureaucratic passivity. It wasn't. It was a deliberate policy of the Chamberlain government. They asked the British media not to be offensive to the Germans. They dropped leaflets rather than bombs. They moved at half speed to prepare for war. And during the entire time they were doing nothing, the German army was preparing for the onslaught against Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg and France.

And as I read that, I thought, I can't find a better historical parallel to what we've been through for six years. Compared to the scale of the challenge, we are engaged in a phony war -- now not the young men and women in Iraq and Afghanistan, they're actually at war every morning, but the rest of the society. You pick up six people in New Jersey, two people in South Carolina yesterday, four people who wanted to blow up JFK, eight people in Great Britain; you lose Gaza to Hamas; you have Pakistan totally uncontrollable, all of Northwestern Pakistan is a sanctuary. We're not going to win this war until we have an honest conversation, and it's going to be a frightening

conversation, and it's going to be a difficult conversation.

This is going to be much harder than the Cold War, and we're not ready even to have this conversation. That cannot be captured in 30-second answers for 12 people standing in a row.

Here's the proposal, which is exactly parallel to Marvin. I believe that every candidate should be challenged to commit that if they are their party's nominee, they will agree to meet once a week -- and Sunday night would be fine -- once a week with their main opponent, and the two of them would have a dialogue. Now, Marvin, I disagree with you slightly; I'd like to have a time keeper and require that the two candidates to pick the topics and require the two candidates to have a conversation without being interrupted except for fairness on time. He'd like to have some more role for the media. We can talk out the details.

There are two core premises. The first is that it has to be open-ended. You should give the answer the length your answer should be. And the second is, it should be focused on a series of large questions around which people would be expected to bring solutions. And I believe two things would happen. I believe, first of all, an amazing percent of the American people would watch, and in the age of the Internet, all of the dialogue would be cached and people could go back to it. People would analyze it, people would take it apart. I believe, second, that candidates would grow and change.

And I think the American people would have a very good sense -- after nine 90-minute conversations in their living room, the American people would have a remarkable sense of the two personalities and which person they thought had the right ideas, the right character, the right capacity to be a leader.

Now this requires the candidates to take a risk. But I want to close with this thought. The Founding Fathers did not invent this process for the enrichment of consultants, for the cynical maneuvering of those who seek power. The Founding Fathers invented this process to enable the American people to determine who they would lend power to.

And the process should start with what is the kind of campaign the American people need in order to have the kind of country the American people deserve, in order to give our children and grandchildren the kind of future that our parents and grandparents worked and fought to give us. I think that ought to be the challenge for every candidate in both parties, and I do think committing to nine dialogues, one a week, for 90 minutes, for nine weeks, would remarkably improve the quality of the system and remarkably improve the training of the candidates.

Thank you very, very much. (Applause.)

MR. ZREMSKI: Thank you. Thank you.

We have many, many questions, some about debates, some about other issues.

First of all, your proposal puts a great deal of emphasis on debating skills, which would be something that you would be good at, something that Bill Clinton was good at. Under your proposal, might we miss out on good -- great presidents who just aren't good debaters?

MR. GINGRICH: Well, first of all, any system offers some advantage for some sets of skills. I think the -- I used the word "dialogues" in the sense that I think if you have two people for 90 minutes in the kind of setting I'm describing, you have an adult conversation. And the first one of them that acted in less than an adult way would be punished by the country, which would say, "That's not fair. That's not right. That person's cheating."

You have two choices. You can either try to get the candidates together or not get them together. If you're to get them together, what's the best method to have a real opportunity to explore them? And all I want to propose is the kind of stilted -- you know, there were 54 pages of legally agreed rules for the 2004 debates. Now just think about this. You know, Lincoln and Douglas say, "Why don't we get together?" "Okay. We'll do three hours each, seven times. We'll have a timekeeper. Meet you at such-and-such a state." That was it.

Today we have this structured, protected, litigated, consulted baloney where, you know, the two podiums have to be the same height, they have to be the same color, they have to be this, they have to be that. You're not allowed to take notes. Why aren't you allowed to take notes? Or you can't bring notes. Why can't -- I don't care if somebody wants to walk in with a binder. Everybody in the country will then go, "That person needs a binder." (Laughter.)

I mean, you know, the idea -- I mean, this is really serious. The job of the president of the United States is for he or she to be in a position to lead the American people and manage the American government, in that order. Finding that growth inside themselves, to be able to talk with the American people, so the American people decide to invest their hopes in that particular leader, requires people who grow during the campaign process, not people who shrink. And the current process shrinks our leaders in a way that makes it vastly harder for them to achieve anything once they get through the election.

MR. ZREMSKI: How would third-party candidates be treated? Would a Nader or a Perot get equal time?

MR. GINGRICH: No. (Laughter.) I think -- look, let me be quite clear about this. With the singular exception of Theodore Roosevelt, no third party candidate since the 1850s has had a serious chance of winning.

And it's a free country. People get to go play any game they want to. I'd say if you're above 20 or 25 percent in the polls, maybe we ought to consider having you as the third person. But if you're -- and you also have to -- I will also tell you flatly I think third party candidates who purchase the election violate the entire spirit of the United States. So the idea of somebody writing a personal check at a time when we say to middle-class candidates, "You get to

raise \$2,300 at a time, and they get to write a \$500 million check," we're on the edge of a plutocracy, and we need to understand how dangerous the current structure is. (Applause.)

MR. ZREMSKI: In the context of the fragmentation of the news, especially in terms of politics, how will you convince voters to actually watch and pay attention to the nine debates?

MR. GINGRICH: Now, like Jefferson, I actually have faith in the American people. We have segmented news, but I think that's basically mostly irrelevant. But the truth is, people learn things they need to learn with remarkable speed.

And if you were to find out how rapidly did the Minneapolis bridge story spread, it was breathtaking how rapidly the country knew what was going on. Or how rapidly the Katrina spread, except at FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security, which didn't seem to get it. But the country knew.

If you say to the American people, the two people who are going to vie to be your leader for the next four years are available for 90 minutes once a week, between 30 and 60 percent of the American people will watch. And they will talk to the rest. And then as people get interested, they'll go look at it on the Internet and they'll pull it down off of YouTube and they'll do a lot of different things with it. And the conversation will be real.

But I have faith in the American people. I don't think you have to think that -- assume that the American people are so childish and so narrow and so venal that, you know, if we don't put it on every channel simultaneously, then we won't be able to coerce you. The truth is, if we put it on every channel simultaneously, you could either, A, play with your computer, B, play a DVD, or C, turn the TV off, which might be frightening, but it's been done at times. (Laughter.)

So I'm willing to trust that a genuine -- again, I'm relying on the better angels of our spirit. I believe most Americans would relish an adult conversation and are sick of the canned, consulted, commercialized process we're trapped in. (Applause.)

MR. ZREMSKI: There are many so-called debates among the primary candidates these days, and the lesser-known candidates seem to be struggling to get in any time to answer questions during these events. Any suggestions on how the debates could be re-formed during the primary process?

MR. GINGRICH: Well, you know, we -- I watched one of the debates, or I watched part of it. I couldn't take all of it. I personally have tried to avoid watching these because I -- since I'm not a paid news person, I don't have a great obligation to actually have seen all the stuff, and I can't imagine anybody else except a genuine junky -- I mean, a person who -- if you could go out and find the person who's watched every presidential debate so far this year, it will be interesting to find what their social life is like. (Laughter.)

But I was struck in the -- I think it was the Las Vegas Republican debate, we went back and timed it, and the average Republican candidate, in the entire debate, got seven minutes and 20 seconds. And I happened to be on Hannity & Colmes that night right after the debate, and I got 20 minutes. And it wasn't standing in a row, it wasn't waiting patiently for somebody to throw me a question; it was a dialogue. It was, you know, three people talking. And it was a conversation.

So I'd start with the following observation. And I tried to convince the Des Moines Register to do this. First of all, why do we have partisan debates this early? Why don't we have Senator Clinton and Governor Romney? Why don't we have Mayor Giuliani and Senator Edwards? Why don't we have Senator Thompson, if he decides to run, and Senator Obama? Or Governor Huckabee and, you know -- I think the country -- you'd take half the poison out of the system if you made Republicans and Democrats stand on the same platform.

Second, why can't it be a round-robin series of two people chatting for an hour? And over the course of a summer, you'd have a dramatically better conversation.

And the secondary figures would begin to emerge. First of all, you don't know what it would be like to have some of the secondary figures in a one-on-one with the so-called first tier. The first tier is defined by being famous and having lots of money. That's all it is. If you're famous and have lots of money, you're in the first tier. If you're not famous and you don't have lots of money, you're not in the first tier. Jimmy Carter would have had a very hard time rising in that system. And I think you don't know what it would be like. You know, I think it would be very interesting, for example, to have Governor Huckabee and Senator Clinton, who both have had experience in Arkansas, on the same podium for an hour talking about their relative experience reforming education in Arkansas. And it would be totally different than what we've been seeing up till now.

MR. ZREMSKI: This is the earliest starting and going to be the most expensive primary campaign ever. What, beyond debates, should be done to reform this if it needs reform?

MR. GINGRICH: Well, we have -- look, the McCain-Feingold censorship law -- (scattered laughter) -- is a disaster. The primary consequence of this law is that you can only raise money legally in very small units, so you have to start very early. Go look at all the analysis. Why are people starting early? Because you can't build the organization. What are you building the organization for? So you can raise the money. So here's Senator McCain, who followed all the correct consultant advice, raised \$24 million and spent it.

And I kept telling people -- people run up to you and say, "You've got to make a decision," and I've said very clearly I'm not going to make any decision before the work stops, the American Solutions on September 27th to 29th, and I'll look at it in October. And they say, "Oh, it will be too late." Well, I try to remind people, three weeks before the Iowa caucus in 2004, the Democratic front-runner was Howard Dean. He had raised more money. He had

gotten more magazine covers. Everybody thought he was the front-runner. He had the biggest online contributor base.

And three weeks before the caucus, normal, rational Iowans, who had rigorously avoided politics for the entire previous year, looked up. And they said, he's weird. (Laughter.) And Howard Dean disintegrated in three weeks.

And I keep trying to tell people, for the real -- for the American people, for the average, normal, hardworking, taxpaying American, this election begins after Christmas, no matter what the news media has to cover and no matter what the consultants have to charge for. But we've gotten into a consultant-driven cycle where you go to your favorite consultant and say, when should I start? And they look at you for a second; they say, as soon as possible -- I need a check. (Laughter.)

MR. ZREMSKI: On the topic of campaign finance, one member of the audience writes, "Your analogy of Lincoln's campaign is hardly relevant in this technological era. Isn't the real answer, to countering the interest of private money, public financing of presidential campaigns?"

MR. GINGRICH: No, I don't think so.

First of all, you could design an intelligent 6-to-12-week campaign if we wanted to that would reach every American with great intensity. I mean, how -- figure out whatever the longest Christmas shopping period is. I mean, Americans pay attention just before they make a decision. They don't pay attention -- I mean, the wonks and the paid professionals and -- those folks all pay attention all year round. But the truth is, most Americans are not going to try to make a decision now about something they're going to vote on.

You know, in Florida, they're going to vote, you know, I think, January 29th. The average Floridian will begin sometime after New Year. And there's -- nothing you can do to them between now and then is going to change that. They're just going to think you're strange. So I'd start and say you could have a totally different model campaign.

Second, I think the answer to financing's very simple. Allow unlimited after-tax personal contributions, reported every night on the Internet. Get all of the lawyers, all the regulations, everything else, out of it. You get to look at who give what to whom.

But when you have the senator from New Jersey vote to censor everybody else from a seat he bought and then, after voting for

McCain-Feingold, buy the governorship of New Jersey, there's a -- I just think there's a pattern here of a plutocracy emerging that is very, very dangerous. And instead of trying to strangle the very rich -- I don't mind that Bloomberg spends \$91 a vote. I just want the middle-class opponent to be able to raise the same amount of money to be able to match Bloomberg. And you could do that if you were in a position.

Gene McCarthy could not run today. Because when Gene McCarthy ran, a very small number of very liberal supporters wrote very big checks, because they were so opposed to Lyndon Johnson and the war. That would be virtually impossible today.

MR. ZREMSKI: You have had kind things to say about Fred Thompson as a possible presidential candidate. But his fundraising has lagged, and he's already shaken up his staff and he's been the target of much criticism for his serving as a lobbyist for a pro-abortion -- or a pro-choice group.

Has all of this made you reassess Thompson's chances? And does it encourage you to take another look at the race?

MR. GINGRICH: I rest my case. (Laughter.) I mean, that entire -- I don't mean to be offensive, but that entire question is, you know, the sort of stuff this city has to do. Because it has to fill up a -- you know, fill up the newspapers; you have to fill up the gossip columns; you have to fill up the weekend talk shows.

Senator Thompson, I think, is currently running second in a number of polls, which is pretty remarkable having not yet announced. For one -- for about a third of the country, he's the only candidate on the Republican side who doesn't have an accent, which gives him, I think, a very significant advantage across the South. And he's an attractive guy.

I think we actually have right now four very serious Republican candidates who could be very formidable next year. Mayor Giuliani, Governor Romney, Senator Thompson and Governor Huckabee, who I think is going to emerge as the most interesting dark horse over the next few weeks because he has a level of authenticity and sincerity and candor that I think is beginning to resonate.

Those are all four serious people. Now they're all going to have problems. They're all going to have challenges, but that's what this business is about. And I think Senator Thompson certainly is a formidable person. He has a very significant career. And I wouldn't count him out, as I wouldn't count out the other three.

MR. ZREMSKI: If you were to enter the race in October or later, how could you get organized in the early caucus and primary states? (Laughter.)

MR. GINGRICH: I think it is -- to prove I'm not candidate material, I think it is tautological. If you can't get organized in the early primary states, you can't run. And if you can run, you can get organized in the early primary states.

So presumably if we went out and looked after we were done with our workshops at American Solutions on September 27th and 29th, if there was a large enough vacuum and there were enough people who wanted somebody capable of debating Senator Clinton next fall and there were enough people on the Internet saying, you have to run, you would by definition have had enough people say, you had to run, you should run. Now the trick is to not delude yourself and think that because all of your cousins and relatives wrote you that that was

enough people. But so I think it literally is self-defining.

I would never run if there wasn't a large enough demand that we would almost automatically be organized the opening day. But notice, my model is the opposite of the consultant-based model. My model is, you show me enough volunteers, enough people. Ross Perot, when he first announced in '92, in a number of states in the mountain area of the country, had over half the registered voters sign a petition to put him on the ballot with no paid staff. Because it was a genuine, spontaneous uprising of people who were fed up with Washington.

MR. ZREMSKI: Some theorize that you see 2008 as a Democratic year and thus are contemplating holding back for 2012. Is this so?

MR. GINGRICH: Well, I do a newsletter every Tuesday, which I will put in a brief commercial. You can get it for free if you go to newt.org and sign up for it.

And about six weeks ago, I wrote a newsletter entitled "A French Lesson for Republicans." Agnes, it's really -- if you've not paid attention, it's really worth your looking at.

President Chirac was a center-right president for 12 years. He was in relatively deep trouble -- not quite as in much trouble as President Bush, but relatively deep trouble. By any normal political science model, the socialists that nominated an attractive woman in Segolene Royal -- she should have won the election. Nicolas Sarkozy is a remarkable, charismatic leader. He entered politics at 15 years of age. His father migrated to France from Hungary. His mother's grandfather was a Jew from Salonika. He clearly is not a classic French leader. He had risen the hard way. He had been minister of Finance and minister of the Interior in the Chirac government, so this is a man running as the candidate of change while serving in the government everybody wanted to change. Not a -- a nontrivial achievement.

He did two things that made him -- and I think if one of the Republican candidates figures this out, that they will, frankly, win the election next year. He did two things that were really important.

The first is he established 16 channels that were like YouTube and rigorously avoided trying to communicate through the French media. Because the French media starts with The New York Times and goes to the left, and he had no possibility -- (laughter) -- there was no way that Sarkozy could communicate. But he said if I can communicate with you, then the news media can watch our conversation, which is very different than a conversation with the news media which you watch. He did this very disciplined and for three years.

The second thing is he -- he made a very important speech where he said we must have a clean break, and his advisers all said don't do it. Because again, he's serving in Chirac's government, and he's saying we need a clean break. And I would say candidly there's a lot of parallel there. In addition, he then narrowed it down to three things. They're very simple things that will resonate in America.

One, you can come to France but you have to learn to be French.

Two, I will enforce the law. Remember, this is a country that had 15,000 cars burned last year.

But the third one is the most intriguing and the most like what we're trying to do at American Solutions -- the French have a 35-hour workweek, which is impossible to sustain in the world market. Before Margaret Thatcher, the French economy was 25 percent bigger than the British economy; today the British economy is 10 percent bigger than the French economy. As part of London replacing New York as the world finance center, there are now 55,000 French working in London. And Sarkozy wrote a very, very, very good book called "Testimony" -- I recommend to all of you -- in which he describes the situation.

And so he followed Margaret Thatcher's rule, which is first you win the argument then you win the vote. He went to the country and said, you cannot sustain French society on 35 hours a week. You're going to lose purchasing power. When you lose purchasing power, the government's going to lose tax revenue. When the government loses tax revenue, we can't sustain the pensions and the health system. And over a two-year period, he won the argument.

So Segolene Royal running as the candidate of change from Chirac became the candidate of protecting the old bureaucracies and the old unions. Sarkozy became the candidate of real change, and here's what he proposed, which I think is close to genius. It's a(n) FDR-Reagan quality. He didn't say let's go from 35 to 40 hours, which, frankly, Republicans would be inclined to do because it's a suicidally comfortable negatively thing to do -- (laughter) -- he thought -- planned carefully about how do I give you an incentive? And so he said the following: If you will work more than 35 hours, all of your overtime will be tax-free. Well, what's he doing? He's setting up the following argument: I want to reward work, incentivize work, encourage work; they want to punish work, discourage work and demean work. Which do you think's better for you and which do you think's better for France? He won that argument decisively.

Unless the Republicans nominate an agent of change comparable to Sarkozy, they have a very, very hard time winning in 2008. But if they nominate, for example, an agent of change who says that destroying the lives of children in Detroit is a big enough problem; we should replace the current structure of bureaucracy which is failing -- now, nobody in the Democratic ticket can say that, because they have to favor the bureaucracy over the children. And historically, no Republican has had the nerve to say it. But if you have a Sarkozy-like candidate, my guess is that the left will lose the election next year.

MR. ZREMSKI: You noted what a pivotal time this is and what gigantic issues the next president's going to face. Do you see people on both sides of the aisle who are running now who you think will be capable of handling those issues?

MR. GINGRICH: Well, in all fairness, you never know. I mean, nobody would have thought, you know, in the summer of 1944 that Harry Truman would emerge as the person capable of explaining and putting

together a bipartisan coalition to create the American security system for the Cold War. Nobody would have thought in the equivalent of -- you know, this is the equivalent of 1859 -- nobody would have thought

in the summer of 1859 that Lincoln was both going to win the nomination, win the presidency and turn out to be one of the two or three greatest presidents in American history; you wouldn't have known.

I will say this. And I think I sometimes rattle my Republican colleagues. Senator Clinton is a very formidable professional. She works very hard. She has thought a long time about this. And she is a person who, I think, has studied both sitting in the Oval Office with her husband and now sitting in the U.S. Senate for seven years, and I think the suggestion that she would not be capable of this is just wrong.

Mayor Giuliani has enormous capacity. His book "Leadership" is an extraordinary book. Mitt Romney has been extraordinarily successful at business, did a remarkable job turning around the Winter Olympics, has been a governor of a very Democratic state, so he understands having to survive in a bipartisan environment. Senator Thompson has had a long and studied career. As I said earlier, I think governor Huckabee in some ways is really growing every day as he campaigns out there. And I wouldn't take any of those and say they couldn't do it. I don't know Senator Obama or Senator Edwards as well. But of those candidates I'd say to you, you know, in the end the American people are going to pick somebody, and the job of all of us then is to try to make that person succeed. And sometimes you have to put patriotism ahead of partisanship and decide that whoever the next president is, we better help them have this conversation and help them have these decisions and, hopefully, make it work for the whole country. (Applause.)

MR. ZREMSKI: You mentioned that when it comes to the war on terror, it's really far more difficult than we seem to have believed at this point in time. Could you just elaborate on that a little bit and tell us what we can really expect in the next few years in the war on terror and what we would really have to do to win it eventually.

MR. GINGRICH: I am really deeply worried. We have two grandchildren who are 6 and 8, and I believe they are in greater danger of dying from enemy activities than we were in the Cold War. There are thousands of people across this planet who get up every morning actively seeking to destroy the United States. They are spreading their poison by sermons, by the Internet, by a variety of recruiting devices.

Tony Blair said it very well. The people who did the London subway bombings spoke English, were British citizens, lived in British housing and had jobs, and had decided, because of their relationships, that they were engaged in a war against the very country which had given them prosperity and freedom and safety.

When you see the Taliban kidnap 22 Christian South Korean missionaries who are there to help the people of Afghanistan, and nobody gets up and says this is despicable. Where in the Muslim world

has there been any battle cry saying they should be released? Where has anybody gotten up to condemn? When you see a 12-year-old boy in Pakistan saw off a man's head on videotape, where is the condemnation? When you know that the schools recruit suicide bombers. When you know that the Iranian government ran a cartoon last year, for children, aimed at recruiting 10-year-olds to be suicide bombers, on public television. At what point do you have to say enough? When you're lectured by the Saudis about being respectful, when they do not allow any Jew or any Christian to practice their religion in Saudi Arabia, and we tolerate it? When do you draw a line?

Nobody in this society has yet given a speech to outline the scale of this problem, in terms of senior leadership. And yet it's obvious. We haven't won in Afghanistan and we are not currently winning. If you're not winning a guerrilla war, you're gradually losing it. We have not won in Iraq. The Israelis, despite 30 years of work, have not won in either Gaza or the West Bank. And we're sleepwalking. And we've now focused on Baghdad as though somehow we can retreat from history and find an elegant way to get out of this and it won't have terrifying consequences.

I believe we are on the edge of a precipice. The Iranians are desperately trying to build nuclear weapons, and they will use them. This is a state -- look -- read what Ahmadinejad says. He writes poems about the joy of being a martyr nation. He gets to wipe out Tel Aviv; maybe the Israelis use nuclear weapons and wipe out Tehran. He would accept that in a minute because he believes everybody in Tehran goes to heaven and everybody in Tel Aviv doesn't.

We -- it's very hard for secular elites to understand this. Religiously driven people do things that don't calculate in nice academic faculty surroundings, and they don't calculate at the State Department and they don't calculate in a rational way in most of our bureaucracies.

We are in trouble, and somebody had better start talking about it in a blunt way.

I'm going to give a speech at the American Enterprise Institute on September 10th describing the first six years, and it's driven by a simple model. I finished a novel recently called, "Pearl Harbor." You look at the Second World War, from December 7th, 1941 to August 14th 1945 is less than four years. In less than four years, we defeated Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Imperial Japan. Today it takes 23 years to add a fifth runway to the Atlanta airport. We are simply not prepared today to be a serious country.

And my fear is just -- and I gave this speech earlier. I wrote about terrorism and nuclear weapons in a book called, "Window of Opportunity," in 1984. I gave speeches in the '90s on this. I helped create with President Clinton the Hart-Rudman Commission. We warned in March of 2001 about terrorist attacks in American cities. I've been at this a long time. I am genuinely afraid that this political system will not react until we lose a city, and nobody in this country's thought about the threat to our civil liberties the morning after we decide it's that dangerous and how rapidly we will impose ruthlessness on ourselves in that kind of a world.

I think those of you who care about civil liberties had better be thinking through how we win this war before the casualties get so great that the American people voluntarily give up a lot of those liberties. (Applause.)

MR. ZREMSKI: We're almost out of time, but before I ask the last question, we have our gifts: a certificate and our mug. (Laughter.) (Applause.)

And the last question is: If you were rewriting the Contract With America today, what would be the most important item on it?

MR. GINGRICH: Your question is if I were doing a new one today?

MR. ZREMSKI: Yes.

MR. GINGRICH: I don't know. I can't answer that way.

The Contract With America was the culmination in 1994 of 30 years of Reaganism starting with Reagan's great speech in October of 1964, and everything in the contract stood on Ronald Reagan's shoulders. I

think in American solutions we are much closer to where Reagan was between '66 and '70 in beginning to develop a new generation of solutions. But I can tell you the three large themes.

First, we're going to have four to seven times as much new science in the next 25 years, and we need to really rethink the -- and two-thirds of that is going to be outside the U.S -- and we need to really rethink everything from health to national security to education to manufacturing to take advantage of that kind of breakthrough, including energy and the environment.

Second, we currently are trapped in a world that doesn't work, and we need to migrate government to a world that does work. And that's the biggest domestic challenge of this country because our bureaucracies simply don't function anymore.

And third, we have inherited -- this is the 400th anniversary -- a remarkable civilization which believes that your rights come from your Creator. We should be make English the official language of government. We should ensure the courts do not interfere with the right to say, "One nation under God" as part of the pledge. And we should insist both that first-generation immigrants can pass a test in American history and that high school graduates can pass a test in American history.

Thank you very, very much. (Applause.)

MR. ZREMSKI: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you all for coming today. I'd like to thank the National Press Club staff for putting together today's lunch. Thanks. We're adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

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