

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH JUDY WOODRUFF AND GWEN IFILL

SUBJECT: LEGENDARY JOURNALISTS JUDY WOODRUFF AND GWEN IFILL, CO-ANCHORS OF PBS NEWSHOUR'S 2012 ELECTION COVERAGE, WILL ANALYZE THE COMPLEX ISSUES IN PLAY IN THE RUN UP TO THE NOV. 6 GENERAL ELECTION

MODERATOR: THERESA WERNER, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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**THERESA WERNER:** (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Theresa Werner, and I am the 105<sup>th</sup> president of the National Press Club. We are the world's leading professional organization for journalists, committed to our profession's future through our programming with events such as these, while fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, please visit our website at [www.press.org](http://www.press.org). To donate to programs offered to the public through the non-profit National Press Club Journalism Institute, please visit [www.press.org/institute](http://www.press.org/institute).

On behalf of our members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speakers and those of you attending today's event. Our head table includes guests of our speaker as well as working journalists who are Club members. And, if you hear applause in our audience, please note that members of the general public are attending. So it is not necessarily evidence of a lack of journalistic objectivity.

I'd also like to welcome our C-SPAN and our Public Radio audiences. Our luncheons are also featured on our member-produced weekly Podcast from the National Press Club, available on iTunes. You can also follow the action on Twitter using hashtag #NPCLunch. After our guest speech concludes, we'll have a Q and A. And I will ask as many questions as time permits.

Now I would like to introduce our head table guests. And I'd ask each of you here to stand up briefly as your name is announced. From your right, April Ryan, White House correspondent and bureau chief, American Urban Radio Networks. Bo Jones, President and CEO, MacNeil-Lehrer Productions. Jamila Bay, host and reporter for Voice of Russia Radio and contributor to the Washington Post Blog, *She the People*. Paula Kerger, President and CEO of PBS. Mary Milliken, top news editor, Reuters.

And I'm going to skip our speakers for just a moment. Allison Fitzgerald, freelance reporter and chairwoman of the Speakers Committee. [00:03:51] that speaker. Donna Leinwand Leger, reporter, USA Today and 2009 National Press Club President and Speaker Committee who organized today's luncheon. Linda Winslow, executive producer, PBS Newshour. Glen Martis, freelance TV writer and producer. Susan Page, USA Today Washington Bureau Chief. And Dana Ritter, producer, CBN. Thank you all for joining us.

[applause]

And as always, we have a wonderful head table here today. But right now, before I give our introduction, I'd like to make a special mention of someone who has done an extraordinary work for almost a half a century here at the National Press Club, Mr. Andrew Price has served Presidents, royalties, politicians, and movie actors. Today is his last luncheon here at the National Press Club.

[applause]

He's going to enjoy retirement. We are certainly going to miss him. And thank you, sir, for your service.

[applause]

Just about a month from now, when the Republican Convention convenes in Tampa, Florida, two women on this dais will make journalism history, becoming the first all-female team in broadcast news history to anchor a networks convention coverage. Given the caliber of the women involved, it's really not a surprise at all. Judy Woodruff and Gwen Ifill make a formidable team. Ifill is moderator and managing editor of Washington Week, the longest-running primetime news and public affairs program on television, as well as senior correspondent and anchor for the PBS Newshour. She is also the best-selling author of *The Breakthrough: Politics and Race in the Age of Obama*.

Woodruff has covered politics and other news for more than three decades at CNN, NBC, and PBS. She regularly co-anchors the newly redesigned PBS Newshour since her turn to PBS in 2007. Both journalists have covered, well, just about everything. Woodruff knows politics inside and out. For 12 years, Woodruff anchored CNN'S weekly political program *Inside Politics*. She also played a central role in the network's political coverage of other major news stories. At PBS for a decade, she was a Washington correspondent for the MacNeil-Lehrer Newshour.

She also anchored PBS's award-winning weekly documentary, *Frontline With Judy Woodruff*. One of Woodruff's most influential projects was her documentary on American youth and politics, *Generation Next: Speak Up and Be Heard*, which explored the views of the 42 million 16 to 25 year olds who enter young adulthood amid the terrorism of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the violence of Virginia Tech and the emergence of social media. As the Millennials would text, YGG. For everyone else, "You go, girl." [laughter]

Politicians, heads of states, generals and CEOs have withered under Ifill's unquenching questions. She has covered six Presidential campaigns and moderated two vice-presidential debates, including 2004 debate between Republican Dick Cheney and Democrat John Edwards, and at the 2008 debate between and at the 2008 debate between Democrat Joe Biden and Republican Sarah Palin.

Ifill began her journalism career in newspapers. She has covered the White House for the New York Times and local and national politics for the *Washington Post*. She has also reported for the *Baltimore Evening Sun* and the *Boston Herald American*. Today we are looking forward to hearing from sharp political insight on the upcoming election. Please join me in giving them a warm welcome. Judy.

[applause]

**JUDY WOODRUFF:** Thank you Theresa. It is an honor to be here at this storied National Press Club. Gwen and I both are incredibly honored by this invitation. So thank you, and thank you to all of you for being here to talk about and to hear us talk about this extraordinary election.

I want to thank the members of the PBS and the Newshour family who are here. Theresa introduced them. You heard PBS President Paula Kerger is here, PBS Vice-President Michael Jones is here, seated right here. As you heard, Bo Jones, who's the President of MacNeil-Lehrer Productions. And Linda Winslow, who is our executive producer of the Newshour. We're all part of a family. And, in the best sense of the term, that's what makes us go, because we are a family. We support one another. And I know it means a lot to both Gwen and me to have all of you here. So thank you.

I have covered so many Press Club events that it feels a little strange to be on the other side of the microphone. But I am very excited to be here to talk about this extraordinary election and to talk a little bit about what PBS and the PBS Newshour are going to be doing to cover it.

Now, if you're wondering why I'm going first, I can let you in on a little secret. Like the perfect ladies that we are, Gwen and I arm-wrestled over it. [laughter] It's the way we settle most of our disagreements. Now I would be less than candid if I didn't acknowledge there is some tension between Gwen and me, especially over one issue: what color we're wearing. [laughter] Things got really tense yesterday when we both

showed up at the office in the morning wearing bright yellow. Gwen ended up going home to change clothes. [laughter] I was going to volunteer.

The truth is, no, that I am the luckiest person in television news because I get to work with Gwen Ifill every day. There is no better journalist in America, a woman who has excelled, as you heard, at the highest levels of newspaper, broadcast network news, and at public television. She elevates all of our game. So I'm going to ask you, again, to honor my colleague Gwen Ifill.

[applause]

And, of course, both of us are fortunate to have been able to work for so many years alongside Jim Lehrer. And before him, Robin MacNeil. They truly set the standard for the work that we do at the Newshour, we and our colleagues are able to do, the work that we're able to do, every single day.

This is, if you weren't counting, my tenth Presidential election. That is, if you don't count sneaking into the Democratic Convention back in 1972 in Miami without a pass, as a local reporter for the CBS Atlanta affiliate station. I was able to get into the outer rim off the floor, talk to some members of the Georgia delegation, which is what I was covering, after they had had a big fight over whether to support George McGovern.

Since then, if you don't count that one, since then, there have been some seminal moments in election coverage. One afternoon in the summer of 1976 I met my future husband in Plains, Georgia, on the high school softball field, as the staff of then-candidate Jimmy Carter played the press. Now we forget how competitive President Carter was. He always got the Secret Service on the campaign staff team. [laughter] So they clobbered the reporters every game. Now, little did we know what those agents might be up to later. [laughter]

Anyway, I would like to tell you that Al and I had a romantic dinner after that first game. Unfortunately, he immediately drove to Atlanta because he had a date with an airline attendant. [laughter] Or those unforgettable moments in anchoring election night coverage for CNN in 2000-- hanging chads, Florida called for one and then for the other, and then for neither. I just wish I would have had the presence of our dear friend, Gwen's and my dear friend, Tim Russert, the late Tim Russert to transcend technology with a simple chalkboard.

So what about 2012? There are several different ways to look at this year's election. And virtually all of them lead to the conclusion that there's going to be a very close outcome. As the cross-currents, the competing claims that we see in every election, are more stark this year than usual.

And I'll list just a few of them. The conditions versus the candidates. A decided majority of American voters think the country is on the wrong track. And most believe that they're not better off than they were four years ago. That's bad news for an

incumbent. Check Romney. Meanwhile, even many Republicans acknowledge that, as of today, Obama is a much better political candidate than his opponent. Romney has the highest negative ratings of any recent challenger at this point. When the opposition party's negatives are higher than that of the incumbent, it loses. Check Obama.

What about demographics versus the economy? The voter profile gets friendlier to Democrats as middle aged and senior white males become a smaller part of the electorate. And Latinos and other minorities become a larger part, as is happening right now. Check Obama.

On the other hand, no President has ever been elected, since World War II, with an unemployment rate over eight percent. At this stage, eight percent on election day would be on the optimistic side of most economists' expectations. So check Romney.

Money versus mobilization. With Citizens United and the proliferation of political action committees, and the so-called 501C4s, the Republicans, unlike last time, will have a money advantage in 2012. Groups like Karl Rove's, and the Chamber of Commerce, are going to be swamping Democratic resources in some of the swing states, if not many of them. Check Romney.

But, if the number of undecided voters, or persuadables is as small as some pollsters believe it'll be, this election may be more about delivering turnout, or about mobilizing supporters, in experience, in technology, the Obama team is ahead of its opponents. Check Obama.

And finally, 1984 versus 2004. Is this election a repeat of the Reagan-Carter election, when voters ultimately decided things were going so poorly that all the challenger had to do was meet a minimum threshold as the clamor for change was so great? If so, check Romney. Or, is it more like eight years ago, when despite dissatisfaction with where the country was headed, more voters liked the incumbent and decided the challenger didn't offer a compelling case for change? If that's the case, check Obama.

So these are all very real contrasts and contradictions. And they're just another reminder of why most analysts expect this election to be so close. But one other thing I want to do is just quickly share a couple of lessons I've learned, from decades, decades, and decades-- [laughter]-- of covering elections.

Both of them are going to be perfectly obvious to you, but it took me a while to get them. First. Number one. It's not about us in the news media, except when it is. In 1976, Jimmy Carter had come roaring out of the Iowa Caucuses, was the hot new thing, as he campaigned across New Hampshire. I happened to be following him into a big five-and-dime store as he worked his way from one end of the store to the other, from the front to the back.

Suddenly, I noticed all the customers who had been hovering around Carter were heading off in another direction, until he was standing there alone. I was curious, of course. So I went to check it out. Who would come into the store? Well, there we found none other than the then-iconic CBS news anchor, Walter Cronkite. He was trying to be a reporter and see for himself, following this phenom candidate from Georgia. But, as Walter Cronkite told me a few years later, very sadly, he said, "I can't follow the candidates anymore, because I distract from them." So most of us-- My point is, most of us are not Walter Cronkite. And it's not about us.

The second lesson, I guess you could say that I learned, is that big moments don't always turn out to be consequential. I was the moderator back in 1988 when two Senators, Republican Dan Quayle and Democrat Lloyd Benson faced off at the Vice-Presidential debate during an election Bush versus Dukakis, the first Bush, that had become pretty personal.

Senator Quayle was facing a lot of heat over his qualifications to be President. And, in an effort to defend himself, he compared himself to President Kennedy, at which point Senator Benson paused, looked at him, and said, "Senator, I served with Jack Kennedy. Jack Kennedy was a friend of mine. Senator, you are no Jack Kennedy." At which point the room exploded, and that became "the quote" from the debate. It was one of the most memorable lines in modern American politics. And it had absolutely no bearing on the election. [laughter]

So why am I saying this? What elections are about is about the voters, and they're about the issues. Fiscal challenges, certainly this year. Taxes. Healthcare. The size and the scope of government. China. Iran. The Supreme Court appointments. With the partnership at PBS. With programs like Frontline, the amazing documentary series that we do, programs like *Need to Know*, we at the Newshour and our friends and partners, as part of this big family, plan to cover both, the voters and the issues, online and on the air.

We plan to cover it through the perspective of real voters, real people, like this gentleman I interviewed-- I was in South Florida at the end of last week, covering some of the President's campaign, trying to talk to voters. And I ran across one gentleman. And I later had to Tweet about this because the quote was too good not to Tweet about.

He said, "Yes"-- because we had been talking to a lot of people who voted for President Obama four years ago. And they're not sure they're going to vote for him again. It was a really good window into what the challenges are the President faces. But this young man said, "Yeah, I guess I'll vote for him again." Not with a lot of enthusiasm. No prompting from me. He explained, "Hey, if you've got a choice between a sandwich with salami and a sandwich with no meat, you're going to go for the one with salami." [laughter] I said, "Okay."

So our hope is to talk to many more voters like the sandwich voter, to find out-- seriously, to find out their hopes, their fears, their frustrations, and the huge stakes and

divides of this election, talking to experts of course, talking to the candidates when we can.

A long time ago, Robin MacNeil said of the Newshour, "We dare to be dull." He didn't really mean it. We aren't. But we will dare to treat this election and this electorate seriously. And we have an amazing team supporting us at the PBS Newshour, both online and on the air. In fact, the two have become one in our shop. We couldn't do what we do - and I know Gwen joins me in this sentiment-- we could not do what we do without their amazing talent and their dedication.

So I expect we are going to have a lot of fun in the process over the next four months. I know that I'm going to have a lot of fun covering this with a fabulous partner in Gwen Ifill. Please welcome her.

[applause]

**GWEN IFILL:** I'm very tempted to say what she said and sit down. But if I did that, I couldn't acknowledge my friends here from WETA, Dalton Delan and Jeff Beaver, Mary Stewart, the folks who keep us on the air, not only at Washington Week, but also at the Newshour. And trust me, it is hard work every single day. So thank you all for your support. And thank you all for being here today.

You know, Judy and I generally do this. We finish each other's words. So it's kind of perfect that we're going to be sitting next to each other, not in matching canary yellow, however. [laughter]

Here are the things which are true and which we share in common. When we finish each other's sentences, because we believe this so much. And part of it is because Judy and I both come from the same types of background, which is we know what it's like to be on the dark side in commercial television. So we know the latitude that we have now, to do what we really want to do.

We believe that life is more important than heat. That there's a way to have a discussion about gun control, as we did last night on the Newshour, that there's a smart way to have it, not just have the same fight all over again. Hopefully teach people at home that there's a more complicated, more nuanced way to think about these issues which obsess us, than just having a fight. That's what people come to us for. And that's what we do.

We believe that the architecture of democracy matters. That's why we are covering these conventions exhaustively. C-SPAN is great at pointing a camera. We too will point a camera, but we're going to tell you what it is you're seeing and why. We're going to bring in the smartest people we know. And we're going to try, as Judy mentioned, to talk to voters about what they really want to hear from these conventions.

It's great to go inside the convention halls. I'm a complete junky. First time I ever stood on the floor when balloons fell, I was in heaven. [laughter] Nerd child I was. [laughter] But the truth is, that in the end, the people inside are the most informed and the most engaged. The people who are going to decide the election are not the people inside those rooms in Atlanta-- I mean in Tampa and Charlotte.

So, what we really want to do, and what we've been doing all year, is getting out and talking to as many people as possible. We have an online project called "Listen to Me," where we literally just stick a camera, a microphone in someone's face and ask them about their concerns. And if you go on our website, you will see an incredible quilt of discussion which we're going to continue doing all year. Because it's one thing to read a poll and say, "This is what the polls say the people think." It's another thing to hear their voices. That's what I mean by the architecture of democracy.

Conventions, for us, are a rare way to get inside that. It's a handy place to put everybody. And even though I say the people in the room are the most engaged, they're also the most interesting. They're not just the party hacks. They're just not the secret fundraisers. They're also folks who really care enough to give up some of their time to be engaged in the world around them. So we want to talk to them. We want to find out what's driving them.

When we go to a Republican Convention, we want to know who the Tea Party people are who are the most engaged in shaping what this party is today. When we go to the Democratic Convention, we want to talk to the people who are complete avid Obama partisans and the ones who are not so certain anymore. We want to hear what the country is doing and what they're thinking. Conventions provide a handy way for us to do that.

But, in the end, we know that it's voters that matter. Judy and I could tell stories for days about the people we run into when we go. The best part, by the way, about working for PBS-- and I know Judy has this experience too-- is that, if I go and just stand in the middle of a-- I don't know, a fair, say, or an apple butter festival, people will walk up to me and say, "I know you. You are from PBS. Or you're from Washington Week. Or you're from the Newshour." And they'll start to say smart things. I just turn on the camera and let it roll.

It makes my job so simple, because our viewers are so smart. And, if they recognize us, they immediately are engaged. And it makes my life much interesting. But occasionally, you can not hear what people are saying to you. I remember in 2004, after I had moderated the Kerry-Edwards-- I mean the Cheney-Edwards debate, which I think about it and think, "Wow, what questions would I ask today?" [laughter] Completely different.

But it was in Ohio. And we went out and searched. The producer and I went out and searched for people to talk to. And I remember walking into like a Piggly-Wiggly store, one of those supermarkets, and walking up to a guy, a middle-aged guy, wearing a leather bomber jacket. Said he was a steel worker. He had been laid off for 11 months.



I thought to myself, “Okay, this is clear what’s about to happen here. He must be a Kerry-Edwards voter, because this is the perfect example of the stressed out, Democratic-leaning, unemployed, middle of America/Ohio steel worker.” And, when I asked him who he was going to vote for, he said, “Oh, I’m voting for George W. Bush.” And I said, “Why?” He said, “I trust him.”

Now a month later, when Americans cast their vote, I realized what had happened, which is that a lot of people were voting based on that. Even though it may not have seemed obvious to us what their interests were, these people were thinking about this in a more fundamental way. And it reminded me that, when you go and you talk to voters, all they want to know is that you're going to speak to them, and that you're going to speak for them. And whoever wins this election is going to be the one who makes that case the best.

We occasionally on the Newshour do a thing where we go out around the country and do spotlight cities, where we go to towns, and we sit people down, and ask them to talk to each other, people who don’t normally talk to each other. You know, we live in a world of silo politics, where people watch one cable network or the other. And they only listen to people they already agreed with.

Well, we get them all in one room. And, in this case, we were in the middle of the healthcare debate. And we were in Tampa, Florida. And there were people arguing with each other about what their meaning and their understanding of the healthcare bill was at that time. It turned out that the fight that they were having-- and it wasn’t a fight-- the disagreements they were having were emblematic of what was going on around the country. And even these years later, we can still see those divisions are still alive.

We have discovered along the way that character matters. We can spend a lot of time talking to candidates about, you know, “If you were a tree, what would you be?” But, in the end, when you come back down to it, voters want to know who you are, what your values are, and whether it squares with who they are, and what their values are. In the end, that also matters.

And that’s-- By the way, our partners at Frontline are doing a special that they do every year called *The Choice*, in which, just before the election, you actually see laid out in documentary fashion, who these people are, what your vote is about, and what their backgrounds are. It tells you something on the air, in depth, without commercial interruption, that you're only going to get in bits and pieces everywhere else.

Policy matters. People want to know how these policies are going to affect their lives. They want to know whether their taxes are going to go up. They want to know whether their kids are going to be able to afford to repay their college loans. They want to know whether their kids should even go to college. They want to know whether their kids can survive high school when they think about going to the *Batman* movie and not being able to come home.

Americans live, right now, in a time in incredible stress: economic stress, personal stress. And whoever in this campaign finds a way to speak to that in the most authentic way, whether it's through campaign advertising, or whether it's through just a handshake or a hug in a hospital room, that person has the upper hand.

And, in the end, the question becomes connection. Who speaks to me? Now this is why I think that PBS is the place to come, to find out the answers to all these questions. We have the luxury of time. We can tell you at length what it is that you should be thinking about. And we make a point not to interrupt and to cut you off before you finish the question. We have the luxury of analysis.

When I sit around the table on Friday nights at Washington Week, I call it my sandbox. Because I bring all my smartest reporter friends around. And, if it works the way I want it to work, you feel like you're eavesdropping on a really cool dinner party, with very smart people. And I learn something, and they learn something every single week, from something someone else has said around the table.

It's the smartest-- And, you know, the interesting thing about Washington Week, I find that people who watch it invariably walk up to me and say, "Well, I pour a glass of wine and then I watch Washington Week on Friday nights." [laughter] So I'm a little worried about the audience. [laughter] I said to someone once, "Well, I don't get to drink while I'm doing the show." And he sent me half a case of wine. So-- [laughter] I'm not unhappy about this.

We think it's important, however, to get away from that table, to reach outside the bubble. In 2008, a little boasting, we won a George Peabody Award for taking the show on the road to ten different cities, in a critical election year, in which we not only had our panelists in the audience with people around the country, but also did another half an hour on the web where we talked to them. And we took their Q and A. And it was a very good way of doing what we say we like to do, which was getting out and engaging with the people who are usually just watching us passively.

We're going to do nine of those shows this year. But the difference is, half of them are going to be online. And if you go on our website at Washington Week now, you'll see we've done a lot. We've gone from Tampa to San Diego. Actually, we're not doing Tampa. We're doing Tampa for real. We're doing the virtual San Diego and Denver and Portland. And it's really kind of a way to bring people in, for the issues they care about, the way we want it to be.

We are there for the critical decisions. We are going to explain the healthcare bill to you. We're going to explain the law. We're going to explain the money. We're going to explain everything that you need to know, to be casting an informed vote by the time this election rolls around. And the conventions are where it begins.

I'm going to stop there and take your questions. I only have one request for you. And Judy will join me as we take your questions. I only have one request for you, which is, please do not address it to Queen Latifah. Thank you very much. [laughter]

[applause]

**Q:** Well Gwen, actually I just can't resist now. As you alluded to 2008, Queen Latifah played you in a Saturday Night Live skit. Do you think she did a better job than Tina Fey as Sarah Palin? [laughter]

**GWEN IFILL:** Queen Latifah played me twice, in 2004 and 2008. And I never had met her. And, when I met her at a screening in between the two, I walked up and said, "So"-- this may be in 2006 or something-- and I said, "So, do you think you can ever play me again?" She said, "Well give me some material." [laughter] And then Sarah Palin came along. So I'm saying that Tina Fey clearly knocked it out of the park. But I get to be a real hit on college campuses now.

[laughter]

**Q:** Some people say this Presidential campaign is more negative than previous ones. Since you've both covered many campaigns, what do you think?

**JUDY WOODRUFF:** Well many campaigns is right. Two things. I think the country is as divided as I've ever seen it. I think Washington is as dysfunctional as I've ever seen it. That's one side of the story. The other side of the story is that politics has always been ugly. If you go back and read what the founding fathers said about one another, it was pretty personal and down and dirty.

Think about what Lyndon Johnson, the ad that he ran against Barry Goldwater, the little girl with the daisy, the nuclear explosion. Think about what happened to Michael Dukakis, the ad, the Willie Horton ad. I mean today, these guys are saying, you know, he's sending jobs offshore. And he didn't keep up-- he didn't live up to his promises. I think it's pretty tame compared to what we've seen in the past. The election is not over. We've got four months to go. But America has seen some pretty tough politics throughout our lifetime.

**Q:** Why is it such a persistent charge that Americans are apathetic about their political system and process? Does that fly in the face of your experiences you have in interviewing voters?

**GWEN IFILL:** Not PBS viewers, of course. [laughter] But, I do think there is a concern. I think to the extent that Americans are apathetic, it's because people are not speaking to their concerns. And often, that's the case. Sometimes we can point the finger back at ourselves in the media, which is to say that if we're only really concerned about *The Real Housewives* of one place or another, that may not be the thing that people-- that is really driving people's lives.

I find-- I was kidding a little bit when I said not PBS viewers, because we do speak to a self-selected group of people who have decided they want to know more, who have made an affirmative decision that, in a crazy world of a million different channels, where you can watch the news any way you want-- or, I should say, get information everywhere you want-- it's not necessarily news-- that people can be turned off by what we deliver to them.

I don't think it's hopeless at all. I find the most helpful possibilities on college campuses and in high schools. In high schools, I'm involved with a group called The News Literacy Project, where we're very interested in making sure young people understand what the news actually is, as opposed to what they've been force-fed all these years, and treated as news.

But, in addition to that, I find that people really are trying to be engaged. They come up to me, these young people, and they say, "You know, I only watch Jon Stewart." And I think that's supposed to be an insult. I don't take it as one because I also watch Jon Stewart. But, what I also tell them is they need to watch Jon Stewart and us. Because, if they do that, they'll find out that the truth is, Jon Stewart watches me, which is actually true. He watches us.

Because Jon Stewart, in order to tell a joke that's funny, that you get, you have to know that who Nancy Pelosi is. You have to understand the meaning of the joke and why it's funny. And, in order to do that, you have to have some understanding of the way government works, the way the world works. And so I think he actually helps to drive people to better information. And, for that reason, you know, I thank all the comedians of the world. [laughter]

**Q:** How would you grade the media on its coverage of the candidates' records and statements on issues important to women?

**JUDY WOODRUFF:** I was listening. And then, when you said the last word-- [laughter] I don't think-- You know, I think that has yet to unfold. You know, there's certainly been-- it's certainly been an element of the campaign so far, the Obama campaign would certainly like to take advantage of the President's position on some of the social issues that they think are going to be more appealing to many women.

The republicans are going to, to the extent republicans and this candidate, Mitt Romney, is more appealing to married women, that's really the divide that we see these days. It's the divide, not so much men/women-- that exists. But it's also the married women versus single women. Democrats tend to do better with single women. Republicans do better with married women, for a whole lot of reasons.

So I think both of them think about this. It certainly is a part of the calculus, as they go out and campaign. There's a lot of conversation right now about how the soccer moms have come back. Those were the-- they were a chunk of the vote that Barack

Obama was able to pull to his side in 2008. And the argument now is that many of them are up for grabs and looking around. But I don't see a really clearly articulated pitch to women voters, per se. And perhaps we'll see that in the next four months.

**GWEN IFILL:** Well, I would just add to that, that we have had to kind of go through this speechless war on women argument. Speechless because no one defines it. No one says what that's really about. So it's kind of our job to try to figure out, what do you mean when you say that? I have seen some ads on the air in which they attack each other over what are supposed to be women's issues, like abortion. I call them family issues. I don't know that it's only limited to women, because women bear the children.

But I do think that there is-- that both candidates are pitching very specifically to women voters this year. And what I would think we're able to do, and I know that Judy sees things the way I do, which is not to boil it down to simplistic ideas about what a woman's issue is, or what an issue is for Latinos. Latinos care about the economy too, and care about jobs, not just about immigration. So the extent that we can expand this understanding of what these demographics are and what they care about, and explain it in that larger way, I think we can do a service.

**Q:** Given the attacks by many Republicans on government funding for public radio and TV, and the general need for spending cuts ahead, how secure is the future of programs like PBS Newshour? And could you survive without government funding?

**JUDY WOODRUFF:** Well it's certainly a tougher environment than it's ever been. A lot of that has to do with the economy. Some of it has to do with the political argument. Smaller government. Government needs to be involved in fewer things. So it's a tougher environment. But we think the value of public broadcasting is as clear and as necessary as it's ever been. It just means we have to work a little harder to raise money at the Newshour, to find the kind of funding that we need to stay on the air.

Could we survive without government funding? It would clearly be tougher for us. It is a portion of the money that we get. But do I think we could do it? Yes. I don't think something like that is imminent. My understanding is that, you know, for any kind of change to happen, it would be-- there would be a glide path over several years. But I don't see that happening. I mean you know, when we talk to-- when Gwen and I talk to members of Congress who vote on these things, I hear supportive things about public broadcasting, from members of both parties.

So it's not something we frankly can spend a whole lot of time worrying about. Both of us, you know, come to work every day to do our job. And it's up to others to spend more time thinking about this. But my great hope is that the work we do sells us and tells our story better than anything else. And that makes the case in a way that-- that, you know, that better than anybody else in any other way could.

**GWEN IFILL:** You'll notice Judy and I are wearing lovely Ifill/Woodruff convention badges. We can make them available for you for a small price. [laughter]

We'll make you the Friends of the Newshour, Friends of Washington Week. We can find ways to make this pay off for you. And in buying that, we have lovely tote bags.  
[laughter]

**Q:** This question says that they have heard complaints from the public, actually from their parents, that Presidential campaigns drag on too long and that voters become numb to it. What do you think? Do you think we have campaign fatigue?

[laughter]

**JUDY WOODRUFF:** Well I'm a political junky and a campaign junky. And I love talking to voters about the issues, and about what's on their minds. So I'd be happy if they went on all the time, I think. I mean we all need a break every once in a while. But I think there is a case to be made that, you know, this idea that the day after the election we start speculating about who's going to run in four years.

And we start, you know, spotlighting who the up and coming whoevers are for the next election, we probably overdo that to a fair amount. I don't know what we can do to stop it, though. There's just a natural tendency to want to think about what's next, what's next. It's kind of the American way. But no, I mean I thrive on this. Gwen and I, you know, we go to sleep every night thinking about politics. And it's the first thing we think about every morning. [laughter]

**GWEN IFILL:** So not, but okay. [laughter] Okay, fine Judy, whatever.  
[laughter] No we actually think that-- we think that if you do it the right way, that you can use elections as a way to tell us more about America, to peel back the onion. It's such an interesting and complex place. And every time I leave the office and go out and report a story, I always learn more about this nation. It is so interesting.

And the secret, and the reason people get tired of it is we keep writing about it in the same way, and covering it in the same way. And we don't explain the whys. And I think that really-- if we do stay up at night thinking how to do this right, we think about ways to transcend the way of doing it.

Now I like a horse race as much as anybody. I'll read a poll within an inch of its life. But I also want to read it with an eye toward how can this tell me more about our country at this point in history, that I get to be a witness to? It's such a privilege. And so, for that reason, that's the way I think about elections. They're fun. They're furious. They're crazy. We get chased in bright and shiny objects from week to week that don't matter a week from now. But all in all, at the end, we end up finding out a lot more. And it's worth doing.

**Q:** As was mentioned with the Lloyd Benson/Jack Kennedy moment, sound bites don't necessarily impact the election. Yet reporters love them and viewers eat them up. How do you delve deep and get away from sound bites without losing your audience?

**GWEN IFILL:** Oh great.

**JUDY WOODRUFF:** We could arm wrestle.

**GWEN IFILL:** Yeah, we could. I'd lose. You just do. You just keep asking. I mean it's funny. We spend a tremendous amount of time before we go on the air every night with research, and talking to various people who might find out who will be the best person to tell the story we want to tell. But, in the end, when it comes right down to it, it requires native curiosity.

If I come up and sit at the desk with a list of 10 questions, and I only ask those 10 questions, that is a rare night. I also-- this is a concept-- listen to the answers and hope that it will take me and the listeners somewhere else. So yeah, there are sound bites. But the sound bites have to illustrate something. They have to take you someplace, not just leave you there.

And I think that that's the difference. Sound bites can be useful. They tell you something about what the speaker intended and what it means. And I think that we can do that. I think we just all have to ride ourselves a little harder to stay curious and keep asking new questions.

**Q:** What do you think of the talk about one of the Presidential debates being devoted solely to the issue of national debt?

**JUDY WOODRUFF:** Sure. I mean I think it probably will be. I mean certainly devoted to the economy. And I'm assuming all three commission-sponsored Presidential debates will, in one measure or another, be about the economy. That's absolutely what's on the mind of American voters, as Gwen has been talking about for the last several minutes here. You know, people are concerned. They're anxious across the country. We see it when we go out.

And it's not just numbers on a piece of paper. It's not just this group fix the debt that launched-- I guess its next effort here at the Press Club last week-- where they are calling on the politicians to come together to do something about, not just the debt, but the so-called fiscal cliff, the fiscal challenges that the country faces at the end of the year, the tax increases that are inevitably going to happen if the Bush era tax cuts expire, which they are legally bound to do. All of those things are so central to what this election is about.

So at least one of the debates should be about the debt and the economy. And, in my view, it should be a part of every conversation. Because we want to know. These candidates are not telling us, with great specificity, what they would do. We know the outlines, but we don't know specifics. And it's going to be tough to get those specifics. And so, I for one am looking to the debates, to try to pin both of them down on these and other questions.

**Q:** Some media outlets regret not having covered more thoroughly Candidate Obama's track record in 2008. What do you think is shaping up to be the big undercover story this year?

**GWEN IFILL:** Do we ever know what they are, until we undercover them? [laughter] I always look back and think, "Oh, well I wish I had asked that question. Or I wish I had dug deeper." And generally, I don't know until it's over. I would love to know who those news organizations are who thought we didn't dig deep enough, because I really felt like we did, in the end, do a decent job of explaining who he was, where he came from, and what he meant to do.

Now it may be that there was disillusionment after he was elected among some people who heard something differently than they expected. Certainly among some Democrats who thought he was more liberal, or among some Republicans who thought he was more-- he was less liberal. I don't know what it was people thought they heard. But I would argue that, not only what we do, but I think in general, we have to consume our news differently.

I grew up watching-- okay, dating myself-- three networks. There were three networks, right. You know who they were. You watched them every night. You watched them in the morning. You read a couple papers in my household. And you knew a lot. Here is the problem. The problem is that, in the end, we have a million places to go now for information. And that's also the advantage. It means we're never going back to the way it was, where this is the sole place you get all your information. It means that if you have a curiosity, if you think the debt is not being talked about enough, there are lots of places you can go to get more information, and actually to get your questions to the campaigns and to the candidates.

So I don't-- I actually think that we over-cover some things, no question about it. And I think we under-cover some things. I would be curious to hear if anybody is going to ask this year about poverty or people who are having-- who are stressed, who aren't in the top one percent. It would be interesting just to hear that conversation and ask the candidates, both of them, to be specific about these issues.

But I really don't think that, in the end, we can go very far where the candidates won't go. And they're awfully disciplined about what they're there to talk about and what they're not there to talk about.

**Q:** Has the advent of social media, like Twitter and Facebook, made a difference in your coverage of the Presidential campaign this year? And how?

**JUDY WOODRUFF:** Yes. You're looking at Twitter Queen, Gwen Ifill, standing behind me, who has how many hundreds of thousands of followers?

**GWEN IFILL:** A couple.



[laughter]

**JUDY WOODRUFF:** It absolutely has changed. And some of us have had to be dragged kicking and screaming into this world. And we're not kicking and screaming anymore. But we're still-- we're still learning. And I'm talking about me right now, because the idea that we would be, as we are covering a story, constantly whipping out the iPhone, taking pictures-- which is what we now do when we're on the scene of a story and filing constantly, what technology has wrought is truly-- has transformed the coverage of American politics. So it's absolutely making a difference.

And you could-- we can all argue about how much time it takes. And I hear reporters saying, "Gee, I wish, you know, I had a moment to breathe. Because from the morning, from the minute I get up in the morning until the time I go to bed at night, I'm not only filing for this program and that program or that"-- whether they work for a newspaper or wherever, they're filing and filing.

The good part of it is, though, that it brings us in closer touch with the American people. And for those folks who want to follow, who are interested in following the social media, whether it's Facebook, Twitter, the multiple other sources of news and information, I think it's terrific. It's a way, especially I think, of engaging those younger voters who traditionally have not voted in the numbers that their elders have. And this time, there is a way they can stay connected. And I think it's really our job to keep thinking about them and keep filing. Keep Tweeting. Keep participating in Facebook.

**GWEN IFILL:** Actually, I actually find it to be a very useful news gathering tool. It's like I tell college students, that you can start at Wikipedia, but you can't end at Wikipedia. It's the same thing with Twitter and Facebook. It can lead you to places you would not ordinarily go, to sources you might not ordinarily read. But you can do it right on your phone. Or, if you're chained to the anchor desk like me and Judy, you can actually find more information on the days when you don't get out to go around and find it.

All our panelists, I'd say we have, oh I'd say we have two dozen panelists on our regular broadcasts in our panel on Washington Week. And the vast majority of them have Twitter handles. And, if you want to follow me, I'm @PBSGWEN. She's @JUDYWOODRUFF.

**Q:** I'm sensing a little competition here, in that Judy might need some more followers.

**GWEN IFILL:** I think so. [laughter]

**Q:** So you too can friend. [laughter] People complain that there's too much money in politics. However, the leader of one super Pac claims that Americans spend more each year on Halloween. Do you think election spending is excessive?

**JUDY WOODRUFF:** The Supreme Court has spoken. I mean it's not-- I don't think it's our place to say, certainly not my place. Maybe Gwen wants to say whether there's too much money. Clearly, money is awash in American politics. There's more money than ever. They're going to break records. It's going to go into the multiple billions. We know it was a billion two campaigns ago. It's so big. At some point, though, I think the voters are going to be looking at all these ads. And, when there's nothing but political advertising on your local television screen, the question becomes, what am I learning? Am I really hearing something different?

I had a couple of you say to me at the reception beforehand out in the hallway, that you were already really getting tired of some of the ads you're seeing. And it's June and July. So this is something that campaigns have to weigh. And especially, as they run-- this is not what you asked, but the negative ads that they're running, they have to make a calculation. They know they are going to get hurt to some extent by those ads. Is the damage they're trying to do to their opponent going to make it worth it? Is that going to outweigh whatever damage they do to themselves?

So sure, there's a lot of money out there. But I don't see any way to turn it around.

**GWEN IFILL:** Judy is right. The Supreme Court has spoken. And the Supreme Court says money equals speech. Now you can disagree with that or not, but the question then becomes, for us, what is the money spending? Who is spending it? And what they're spending it on? What does it tell us about these candidates? That is always going to be the question that we want to know about anything, which is, what does it tell us about the choice we have to make in the fall?

And frankly, I think how money is spent is just as interesting as how money is raised. And, as long as we have transparency, and we can find out as much as possible about the donors, as well as about who they're spending it on, I think that tells us about character. It tells us about direction. It tells us about-- It may tell us about who's pulling the strings. But, either way, it's more information.

**JUDY WOODRUFF:** The difficulty is, there's not transparency about all the contributions this year. We don't know where a lot of the money is coming from. And I think that's something we have to keep reporting.

**Q:** What is your assessment of the voter suppression issue?

**GWEN IFILL:** Watch the Newshour tonight, because Ray Suarez has spent the week-- he's not there. I was looking at my executive producer to make sure this is true-- yes. Ray Suarez, our colleague, has spent the past week or so in Pennsylvania, doing a story about voter identification and voter suppression, in a place that you haven't heard about in Pennsylvania, which I think I'm actually looking forward to seeing it because I've been following the story very closely. It may all be one of the key tipping point stories of the year.

**Q:** How do you handle interviews with politicians who don't answer questions, and instead spew sound bites, without resorting to ugly confrontations like arm wrestling? [laughter]

**JUDY WOODRUFF:** Gosh, I've never interviewed a politician who didn't want to answer all my questions. [laughter] I mean it's a fact of life. It's what you do covering politics. They want to get their story across that puts them in the best possible light. And you want to get all the information you can, not so much to embarrass them, but just so that the voters, the public has more information. And it's the definition of what reporters do.

We are constantly trying to get information that's important, that helps the public make decisions about what's going on, whether it's at the local, state and national level, whatever-- whatever our beat or our assignment is. And it seems to me that politicians view their job as to be-- is to get reelected.

And two-- and, of course, I don't mean to be cynical about it, it's much more than that. But sure. They all want to tell the positive rosy side of the story, and not share the rest of it. But that's what we do. That's what our job is, to try to coax as much information out of them, and to do other reporting, that then causes them to want to open up.

**GWEN IFILL:** I have great faith in the smarts of the American people. In 2008, when I was moderating the Biden-Palin debate, there came a point in the debate you might recall in which Governor Palin said to me, "I don't have to answer the questions the moderator poses." Which, of course, I thought that was the deal. But I had a couple of choices. [laughter] It turns out not. I had a couple of choices. I could have gone, "What?" [laughter] I could have just let the silence draw out, which would have been awkward. Or, I could do what I decided to do, which was to let her make the case she was making and leave it up to viewers at home to decide whether the question had been answered or not.

I have found, time and time again, especially in these debate settings, that when someone doesn't answer a question, people pick up on it. They know the question hasn't been answered. They know that person has been evasive. And they don't need me to chase them around the table to prove the point unless I'm just trying to prove a point.

**Q:** You apparently didn't read the fine print in that moderator contract.

**GWEN IFILL:** No.

**Q:** Okay, I have a new word for you. How do we "PBS-ify" political discourse in this country? And can we get more speaking and less yelling in the rest of the media?

**JUDY WOODRUFF:** That's what we try to do at the Newshour every day. I think the American people like it. Sure, there's an appetite for the food fight. And there's

plenty of places to find it. But, for those Americans who care about learning about the issues, as Gwen started out by saying, we care more about light than we do heat. That's what we're there to do. And I think we just have to keep making the case for that and keep doing it and keep showing that it works.

And I think, you know, that's going to make the case better than anything else. Like I said, there's always going to be plenty of places for people to go if they want to see a food fight, if they want to see people literally throwing their shoe at each other. But that's not what we do. That's not what we're about. And I think there's a real interest and appetite out there for what we do.

**Q:** During the course of your careers, you've seen political reporters go from the boys on the bus to a much more prominence for women. How has that affected the nature of political reporting?

**GWEN IFILL:** We talk about shoes more? I don't know. [laughter] Edit that out C-SPAN. No. In my time covering Presidential politics, I have been very fortunate to be with a lot of great women on the bus, actually. I spent my first campaign covering everybody, because I was the lowest person on the totem pole at the Washington Post. So they would always send me out to cover whoever was about to collapse.

It got to the point the candidates would look at me and go, "Ugh!" [laughter] "It's all over. Gwen's here." But along-- perhaps because we were at the bottom of the totem pole, I met a lot of great women who covered politics. Susan Page, from *USA Today*, Karen Timilty from *Time Magazine*. I had met women along the way-- Judy Woodruff, who I wanted to grow up to be, but it turns out she wasn't that much older-- [laughter]

And so, as a result, I have not been in an experience where I felt like there was an absence of women on the bus. There have been a lot of us out there. We've been engaged. We've been smart. When-- the Vice-President-- the first Vice-Presidential woman candidate--

**JUDY WOODRUFF:** Oh, Ferraro.

**GWEN IFILL:** Thank you. When Geraldine Ferraro got on the bus, a lot of women suddenly got on the bus. When Jesse Jackson got on the bus, a lot of black reporters got on the bus. And so, I mean, I look at people like April Wang(?) who holds it down every day at the White House and does not let them off the hook. There are great women out here doing this work.

So, you know, I don't think it changes the work, it just changes the faces doing the work. And occasionally-- more than occasionally, I think it changes the emphasis of the kinds of questions we ask, and the kind of follow-up that we demand, because we're used to making our husbands and children follow up. And that doesn't work either. [laughter]

**JUDY WOODRUFF:** I'll just say that we have come a long way. I did get into the business of covering politics when there were not very many, as thank goodness there are today. And one of my most memorable lines was from the news director. I had been hired as a secretary in the newsroom of the ABC affiliate in Atlanta. I kept pestering him and pestering him to let me go out and report on some stories. And his answer was, "We already have a woman reporter." We have come a very, very long way since then.

**Q:** What advice do you give journalism students and college undergrads about the future of journalism careers?

**JUDY WOODRUFF:** I tell them, "Jump in. The water is fine. You are-- You are coming into journalism at a time when it's in the middle of a huge transformation and change. None of us knows exactly what it's going to look like in another five years, much less 10, 15, 20 years, when you'd be maturing. But we need smart, curious young people." There will always be questions that need answering.

There will always be public officials who need to be held accountable. There will always be stories that need to be told, whether it's politics across the spectrum, the law, science, the arts. Just think about what a big, complicated, fascinating world that we live in. And we need reporters to help tell those stories, because we individually can't go everywhere and learn everything ourselves. So I tell young people, "Jump in. The salary may not be that great for the first few years. And maybe even longer. You're going to be working really, really hard. But hey, all of us do that. but, if you're curious, if you have a passion for reporting, jump in.

And Gwen, as she said, Gwen talks to a lot of-- we both do. But Gwen, in particular, has been doing a lot out on college campuses. and I know that she agrees with me, that it's-- you know, that the passion is there.

**GWEN IFILL:** I tell them to jump in, and their parents all go, "No! No! They're living in my basement now. Please!" [laughter]

**Q:** Before we get to the last question, I'm sad to say we're almost out of time. But I have a few things that I want to remind you about. We have some upcoming luncheons. On August the 28<sup>th</sup>, General James Amos, the Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps will be here to discuss the role of the Marines as America's crisis response force. On September 6<sup>th</sup>, Kathleen Turner, iconic film and stage star and chair of Planned Parenthood's Board of Advocates will discuss reproductive rights and the state of women's health. And, on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, Secretary Arne Duncan, U.S. Department of Education will be here to speak.

And secondly, I would like to present our guests with our traditional coffee mugs.

[applause]

**Q:** Make sound bites go down much better. And finally, the last question for each of you: Who will, or who should Governor Romney choose as his Vice-President?

**JUDY WOODRUFF:** That's easy. I mean-- [laughter] I mean he wants to lighten it up a little bit. Snookie. [laughter] I don't know.

**GWEN IFILL:** My vote is Big Bird, actually. [laughter] That's all you're going to get out of us. Sorry.

**Q:** Trying to keep it in the family with the PBS? [laughter] Thank you all very much for coming today. I'd also like to thank the National Press Club staff, including the Journalism Institute and Broadcast Center for organizing today's event. Finally, here is a reminder that you can find more information about the National Press Club on our website. And, if you would like to get a copy of today's program, please check out our website at [www.press.org](http://www.press.org). Thank you. And we are adjourned.

[gavel]

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