MARVIN KALB: Hello. Welcome to the National Press Club and to another edition of The Kalb Report. I'm Marvin Kalb. Our subject tonight, The Great Debates, where they’ve been and where they may be going. Our panelists are Sander Vanocur, an independent journalist who has worked for The New York Times, The Washington Post, NBC News and ABC News. He’s done it all and won many prizes in his stellar career.

Bob Schieffer, Chief Washington Correspondent for CBS News, anchor of Face the Nation. And, for a time in 2005 and ’06, filled in between the Rather era and the Couric era as anchor of the CBS Evening News. He’s also won just about every prize journalism offers.

And representing the Commission on Presidential Debates, Janet Brown. She's Executive Director of the Commission, established in 1987, to sponsor and produce presidential and vice presidential debates. She was a Reagan Administration official and also worked for Republican Senator John Danforth.

Finally, Mike McCurry, the Democratic co-chair of the Commission. He’s now a partner at Public Strategies Washington, a public affairs firm in the nation’s capital. McCurry was White House spokesman for President Clinton, and for a time Director of Communications for the Democratic National Committee.

Tonight, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first televised presidential debate between then Vice President Richard Nixon and his Democratic challenger, Senator John Kennedy of Massachusetts. It was a debate that would forever change the way Americans select their presidents.

[VIDEO CLIP]
September 26, 1960. Never before had two presidential candidates faced off at a general election debate. Television cameras brought this historic event to nearly 70 million Americans. Senator Kennedy appeared at ease under the harsh television lights while his opponent, Vice President Nixon, looked nervous. Pale, sweaty and at times uncomfortable. Senator Kennedy got the first word. Senator Kennedy: “I think the question before the American people is are we doing as much as we can do? Are we as strong as we should be?”

In his opening statement, Nixon seemed on the defensive. Vice President Nixon: “Is it true that this administration, that Senator Kennedy has charged, has been an administration of retreat, of defeat, of stagnation?”

A panel of network correspondents took turns questioning the candidates. “I'm Sander Vanocur, NBC News.” Their questions were quite direct. “President Eisenhower was asked to give one example of a major idea of yours that he adopted. His reply was, and I'm quoting, ‘If you give me a week, I might think of one. I don't remember.’ Now, that was a month ago, sir, and the President hasn't brought it up since. And I'm wondering, sir, if you can clarify which version is correct; the one put out by Republican campaign leaders, or the one put out by President Eisenhower?” Richard Nixon: “Well, I would suggest, Mr. Vanocur, that if you know the President, that was probably a facetious remark.”

The historic evening set off another debate. Would image be more important than substance in the television age? “Thank you very much for permitting us to present the next President of the United States on this unique program.” Sandy Vanocur, we have just established that you were there in 1960. Did you realize at the time that you were really involved in something that special?
SANDER VANOCUR: No. I was covering Richard Nixon in Mississippi, called by the desk in New York at NBC, told to get to Chicago, where I was based. I got on the Panama Limited, run by the Illinois Central, sat in a lovely dining car and wrote out my questions. And went into the studio on Monday where Don Hewitt took me and my colleagues and just had us turn around and introduce ourselves, and that was the rehearsal. And went back to my apartment and came back that night and waited for the two candidates to show up.

Nixon showed up first. What we didn't realize is he’d banged his knee getting out of the car, and he had been suffering from a staph infection that he got in Georgia and was in pain. Then Kennedy came in, they were very cordial to us. They were friends, and Christopher Matthews has written a book about the two of them in Congress. And they sat down and made their opening statements and then it came to us. And then when it was over, the place just cleared out. There were no handlers around to tell you what you had seen. What Groucho Marx used to say, “Who you going to believe, me or your lying eyes?”

The place cleared out in 15 minutes and there wasn't much aftermath to the whole thing because nobody had ever done this before. So honestly, I don't think we knew what we were involved in.

MARVIN KALB: Mike McCurry, what about the candidates then, did they think? What do you think they thought about whether they were getting involved in something?

MIKE MCCURRY: What a difference 50 years makes now thinking of all the architecture that goes around in one of these debates and what the candidates do to prepare for these, just so different. There's something fresh and original about what Sandy just described, and I think we would like to reestablish in American politics. But
from the memoirs that we've seen from Don Hewitt’s account and others, they all knew this was significant. And surely, John F. Kennedy knew it was significant. We often say, by the way, that people who heard the debate on radio had a much different impression than people who saw it on television, although there's great dispute, apparently now, about that among historians.

But it just reminds us that this is a relatively fresh medium. Fifty years is not a long time, and you look back and that looks like ancient history. But we are still inventing the right way in which we have our candidates encounter each other in this kind of setting. And it’s a great part of our noble experiment in self government.

**MARVIN KALB:** Janet, in your view, what did this presidential debate and the idea of one of these things, bringing the two candidates together, having them on television, what did it do for the whole nature over the next 50 years, I guess, of the way in which campaigns were covered, the way in which candidates began to think of the use of television? What happened?

**JANET BROWN:** This single continuing theme in debates that started in ’60, Marvin, is the notion that this is the only time when the candidates come together and are in one forum answering the same questions with no handlers, no advance knowledge of what's going to be asked. And that all of the trappings of the campaign and advertisements are stripped away. That's what's continued, and that's what's really interesting, is that in our country, and increasingly abroad, is seen as being a uniquely valuable piece of the general election that cannot be replicated by any other interviews or appearances or any kind of features that are now a part of campaigns. Which has lasted, and interestingly is the single strongest argument, continues to be the single strongest argument for debates.
MARVIN KALB: And Bob Schieffer, at the same time after 1960, we didn't have another presidential debate until 1976. Why do you think that was the case? Why the lapse?

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, because the candidates, one candidate or the other up until that point, did not think it was in his interest to take part in a debate. These debates had happened when they've happened because both candidates thought, number one, they couldn't escape it; or number two, it was in their interest to do it.

But, you know, think back. I mean, most people were still getting-- the majority of Americans still got their news from newspapers in those days. No one understood until Kennedy came to the White House the power of television because he was really the first president that mastered television in the way that Franklin Roosevelt had figured out and understood radio, which was one of the dominant, maybe, of that time. It was not until the assassination of Jack Kennedy that the whole nation watched that one story at the same time. And from that weekend on, until we got to the internet, most people then depended on television for their news.

We didn't know about the power of this. Jack Kennedy hadn't had those presidential news conferences. The first news conferences that were broadcast live, you know Eisenhower allowed cameras, but they couldn't broadcast it until after the Press Secretary, Jim Haggerty, had reviewed the entire transcript. They were afraid the president might make a slip of the tongue and would set off another war. So we didn't really know that much about television when this debate was held. I was very interested to hear what Sandy said, because I bet you didn't realize just how important this was.

SANDER VANOCUR: To reinforce what you said, I met his father, Ambassador Kennedy, at the home of Sarge and Eunice Shriver in Chicago. Shriver was managing the
Merchandise Mart, which Joe Kennedy owned, and he told me he keeps saying to Jack, “You guys,” pointing to me, “are the future.” Kennedy was very diffident about the use of television until I think the first debate. Now, the country knew about him through probably the Los Angeles convention, but they didn't know much else about him. And Ted Sorenson points out in his book about Kennedy, except that he was an Irish Catholic.

MARVIN KALB: You know, I'm thinking about that time between 1960 and ’76, good chunk of that time taken up with the Vietnam War. And I would imagine that Lyndon Johnson as President and trapped as he was in the war, would not want to have his position challenged. Wouldn’t those thoughts be running through his mind, Mike?

MIKE MCCURRY: Well, certainly no president incumbent had wanted to give a platform for a challenger to come along and begin to challenge the record. So that was a big part of why these debates did not get institutionalized. But we have to fast forward and give credit to two incredible party chairmen, Frank Fahrenkopf, the Republican Chairman, and Paul Kirk, who decided in 1992 that they would create this commission, which Janet has been the Executive Director of, and say we're going to institutionalize these debates so that nobody can refuse. So it would become politically too costly to say, “We're not going to participate in what are the traditional debates that we've now come to know.”

MARVIN KALB: But I want, before we jump that far, just to point out, for example, I was one of the reporters in the 1984 debate between President Reagan and former Vice President Walter Mondale. And I remember at that time that my call came from the League of Women Voters. They were the ones who organized the debates in ’76 and ’80 and ’84. But Janet, your organization, the Commission on Presidential Debates, got started in 1987. So you were in charge starting in 1988. Why did it get started, who
started it? You mentioned the two people here. Was it just those two, was it the parties? Why?

**JANET BROWN:** There were two studies that were done, Marvin, one by CSIS when it was still part of Georgetown in 1986, and one done at the Institute of Politics in 1986 at Harvard. Both examined a lot of very serious issues about the general election to try to understand what could be reexamined, draining from exit polls to the debates. And the consensus of the one at CSIS, which was chaired by Mel Laird and Robert Strauss, a group of 40 nationally recognized leaders, was that there should be one entity in charge of debates that did nothing else; did not poll, did not lobby, did not represent the position of the candidates. It had no conflict. It was dedicated to this one issue.

**MARVIN KALB:** Totally apolitical?

**JANET BROWN:** Exactly. And the Institute of Politics study, which was chaired by Newton Minow, former Chairman of the FCC, basically produced a blueprint for this entity which then Paul Kirk and Frank Fahrenkopf took steps to establish in ’87. The rationale was very simple, which is this is an incredibly important undertaking. It needs to be done by an organization that doesn't have any other agenda.

**MARVIN KALB:** Where did you get the money?

**JANET BROWN:** The commission is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) in order to conform to Federal Election Commission guidelines. And so the money is all raised privately, as most (c) (3)s do.

**MARVIN KALB:** Sandy?
SANDER VANOCUR: What Janet didn't say, nobody in Washington would argue with anything that Bob Strauss and Mel Laird said.

MIKE MCCURRY: And the other answer I think is important is the networks, the news organizations that wanted to bring these debates to the American people, defrayed the cost of the production and bringing the cameras. And I think that was a very, very important part of the deal there, that they didn't have to negotiate with the candidates and the campaigns over what the arrangements would be. The commission would establish these debates, and then that's what would happen. And it really is a remarkable story that these things have now become institutionalized, I think.

MARVIN KALB: Bob Schieffer, in 1960, what we saw was a moderator, a panel of reporters, the two candidates. In recent presidential debates, I think starting in ’92, the panel of reporters was dropped and then you had the moderator and the candidates. Why do you think that change took place?

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, these debates as they evolved, and as the candidates got better at it and understood more about it, they take part in these debates because they believe it’s in their interest to take part in them. They're not there to give lessons on good government. I mean, let’s make that clear from the beginning. And so you begin to have these negotiations about when will you have follow-ups, when will you not have follow-ups, how long do you stay on one subject, and all of that. And so out of that, I think it finally-- I think the commission decided to kind of simplify it. It would probably be easier just to go to one moderator. I mean, Janet would probably know more about that than I do.

But the format became so important. You know, when I did the debate in 2004, with George Bush and John Kerry, both candidates were so afraid that the other would show
the other up with an unexpected follow-up question that it was almost impossible to ask follow-ups. When I did the last debate in 2008, which I think was the best format that we've ever had, we sat the two candidates down at a small table with me. We could all touch one another, we were that close. And we just divided it up. We said the moderator will ask a question and we’ll spend five minutes talking about it. I mean, that's basically--and it, to me, was certainly the best one that I took part in. It was also the most fun, to just be that close to these two people who are competing for this. And just to be at the same table, it was very exciting.

MARVIN KALB: Sandy, what other changes do you think will now take place? And I have in mind the new technology with Facebook and You this and Twitter, and whatever. [laughter] Is it possible that with the new technology the journalist becomes expendable?

SANDER VANOCUR: I hope so.

MARVIN KALB: Because?

SANDER VANOCUR: What Bob said, I was a debater at Northwestern, team won the national championship, but a debate was a moderator and two others. So, I want the journalists out of it because I simply want to return it to what the--

MARVIN KALB: But isn't the moderator a journalist?

SANDER VANOCUR: A moderator can be a journalist or a moderator can be a preacher, but just as long as the moderator is fair.

MARVIN KALB: And yet, Janet Brown, you've decided that the fairness is going to be exercised by a journalist?
JANET BROWN: You know, the reason it’s been a journalist is rather pragmatic, which is that I know Bob and Sandy would agree, a presidential debate is not the place to make your TV debut. There are a lot of moving parts, and what we have looked for and has worked very well is to find somebody who has spent a lot of time on television. And when they have the producer in their ear, and they have two or more candidates on the stage and time limits to try to exercise to make sure it’s fair, and perhaps the unexpected going on, that's an enormous amount to keep track of. So that finding somebody that has done that professionally for a long time is highly advisable.

BOB SCHIEFFER: I've just got to say, Marvin, I think journalists still perform a noble and a vital function in helping inform the American people. [applause]

SANDER VANOCUR: That line was written for him by Spiro Agnew. [laughter]

BOB SCHIEFFER: I still believe that the gatekeepers, there's something good to be said for gatekeepers. And that is to have a person who’s there moderating and asking the questions, who’s familiar with the issues, number one. Who has spent some time thinking about what are the most important things we need to talk about here tonight? I don’t see anything wrong with that. And I know we have Tweets and I know we have Facebook and all of that, and I know everybody out there is just as smart as I am. But I still think it helps to have somebody to funnel this all down and put some priority on what questions to raise.

MIKE MCCURRY: Marvin, a little historical anecdote. In 1988, I worked in a primary campaign with Bruce Babbitt, Governor of Arizona, who was running for president then. And we staged a debate with Governor Pierre DuPont of Delaware. And they did it what was called Oxford style; no moderator. The two candidates stood up and one presented a
position, the other rebutted and they went back and forth and it was a wonderful, wonderful occasion. You could do it with those two because it was that kind of environment.

But in the context of a nationally televised debate where millions and millions of Americans are watching and it's down to the final choice that they have to make, I kind of agree with Bob. You need that independent editorial moderator to make sure that you stay on the subjects that are most of concern to the American people and don’t let the candidates kind of slip into their own spin, their own propaganda. So I would back the role that the moderator plays.

**MARVIN KALB:** Yeah, I back that role, too. But as a practical matter here, and I turn to Janet on this, isn't it true that it’s not only the reporter and the anchor, the moderator, who is accomplished at dealing with the world of television, but the candidates are now just as accomplished at dealing with the world of television. And also in the manipulation of that world. So we are dealing with an instrument, a very powerful instrument in the midst of a presidential campaign in which the candidate may end up with significantly more authority and power in the environment of the debate than the moderator. Is that not true?

**JANET BROWN:** I think, actually, it shakes out by the time the dynamics of the debate come together. It’s very interesting. We've done an oral history of the presidential debates with the participants because their views, up until recently, were not as well known about their own participation in the debates as other people’s views of their performances. And it’s fascinating listening to their thoughts about what it meant to get on the stage with the person that they were challenging, in many cases an incumbent. In many cases, somebody they admired for what they had done. And I think Bob would agree that particularly now the electricity that attaches to that live forum and knowing there is no
five second delay and there is no tape editing, that actually it has a way of equalizing things. There will always be people that are more comfortable with this medium than others, but that the whole idea is to have the moderator make it an even playing field.

**BOB SCHIEFFER:** But Marvin, I mean you go back and look at the-- this is not all about me, but to go back and look at the debate that I moderated. I didn't do much. I posed a question and then let them fight it out. And when I thought they were getting off the track, I would try to guide them back to it. But I said at the beginning, “I'm going to ask the question, and I hope you don’t hear anything from me until I say, ‘Time’s up, we've got to move on.’” And for a good part of it, it turned out just that way. But you've just got to have somebody there. I mean, you can’t have a football game without a referee. You can’t have a baseball game without an umpire. You've got to have somebody there that's going to run the thing and keep it from going off the tracks.

**MARVIN KALB:** Isn't it possible at this point in the history of presidential debates, Sandy, that a candidate can say, “No, I don’t want to participate in this debate.”

**SANDER VANOCUR:** When’s the last time you heard anybody on television say, “I don't know.”

**MARVIN KALB:** No, not on television, before he goes on television?

**SANDER VANOCUR:** I don't think a candidate can say no.

**MARVIN KALB:** Well, why not?

**SANDER VANOCUR:** Because I think it would be misconstrued, or construed as that he is unwilling and unfair to the other candidate, that he has an obligation to debate his
opponent and will start throwing in, even though these are not presidential debates, Douglas and Lincoln. It's become part of our life now. You know, in 1960, television was in its infancy. I think television started covering political conventions in 1948, so this was a novelty. Nixon was known by television because of the Checkers speech, and then by his debate in the kitchen in Moscow with Khrushchev. Kennedy was not known. Some people had seen him at the Los Angeles convention, but he was not known.

MARVIN KALB: So from Kennedy’s point of view, it’s very much to his advantage to get on the stage with Nixon.

SANDER VANOCUR: Of course.

MARVIN KALB: But it isn’t to Nixon's advantage to allow him to do that?

SANDER VANOCUR: But Nixon, I think, thought he could take him and he was not-- I'm being subjective-- at ease that night. Kennedy made one mistake, he didn't get up when he started his opening statement. And Howard K. Smith, the moderator, urged him to do it. But he looked into the camera, he seemed at ease and subjective on my part, Nixon seemed to be looking at Kennedy for approval. Plus the fact he wore a gray suit.

MARVIN KALB: That's no good?

SANDER VANOCUR: Well, remember--

MARVIN KALB: You're all in dark suits, I notice.

SANDER VANOCUR: Those of us on the panel did not see the debate. People say, “What do you mean?” We saw them with our naked eyes. People who saw it on
television saw Nixon against a gray background. And on the 40th anniversary, I wrote something for the Boston Globe saying, “After 40 years of deep thought and rumination, I've come to this important conclusion. If you're a presidential candidate in a televised debate, don’t wear a gray suit.” [laughter]

MARVIN KALB: Let me just take a moment now to remind our radio and television audiences that this is The Kalb Report. I'm Marvin Kalb, and we're discussing presidential debates with Sandy Vanocur, Bob Schieffer, Mike McCurry and Janet Brown of the Commission on Presidential Debates. Janet, what has been the most popular presidential debate measured in terms of the number of people who watched?

JANET BROWN: It was the first presidential debate in ’92 with three candidates, and the first of four debates in an eight-day period, each of which used a different format. Talk about tricks you should not try at home.

MIKE MCCURRY: Janet, given how young some people are, remind us who the three candidates were?

JANET BROWN: I was going to say, the candidates were Mr. Bush, Mr. Clinton, and Mr. Perot. And there was enormous fascination with Mr. Perot, who had been in the campaign in the spring, then had withdrawn and came back. And he was seen as someone that was only concerned with one issue, the deficit, and there was great curiosity as to whether or not he would have positions on other issues and would actually be able to join the conversation on all of the other topics that were going to be discussed.

MARVIN KALB: And give us, if you can, behind the scenes. What are those negotiations like? I'm impressed by the fact that candidates often send either their chief of
staff, their number one lawyer, a guy like Jim Baker for Bush, for example. Why? And what goes on there that's that important? And Bob was alluding to this earlier.

**JANET BROWN:** It's not just the debates themselves, and all the things that we've learned looking back on 1960 that turn out to be important, some of which you know and some of which you can only guess at. It is live, it is unusual. They are pivot points in a very short period of time between Labor Day and the general election. But they also, which is where I will pitch the ball to Mike, they've become a part of campaign strategy. And so the discussing of how the debates are going to look becomes something that is actually a part of campaigns trying to get in each other’s heads. And for that reason, you send your A team to start these discussions.

**MARVIN KALB:** When you say how they're going to look, you mean literally how they're going to appear?

**JANET BROWN:** The fine points, although it’s been lost--

**MARVIN KALB:** None of this gray background with a gray suit?

**JANET BROWN:** No gray background. What's been lost in the discussion, and this was a big part of why the commission was established, was to get away from the discussion of whether or not they would happen, and whether or not they would happen in a professional way that would be eminently fair to the candidates and would give everybody the same high quality of coverage during the debate. A moderator that was totally fair and knowledgeable and prepared to be dignified and substantive. No gotchas, no game playing.
So, the short story, and the good story, for the public is the dates and venues and formats that the commission has, and the moderators, that the commission has chosen and announced early on have not changed in a very long time. The fine points, which candidates have every right to be concerned about in terms of exactly what they do and how they do it on the stage should be discussed, and they are.

A small anecdote from behind the scenes that showed the transition from the League of Women Voters, which had done a wonderful job to the commission. I'll never forget when a campaign chairman came to me at our first debate in 1988 and said, “When will you be putting the index cards on the podium?” And I said, “What index cards?” And he said, “Well, the previous sponsor had always insisted on uniform cards that the candidates use to take their notes.” I said, “With all due respect to everybody, bring your own notepads. I don’t care what you write on. I think you should write on whatever you would like to write on.” And those are things that actually affect the television production and are discussed.

**BOB SCHIEFFER:** Janet, let me just inject one thing.

**MARVIN KALB:** Go ahead, Bob.

**BOB SCHIEFFER:** When you talk about how they look, you literally mean how they look. Is one going to appear taller than the other? Does one guy get to stand on a little box?

**MARVIN KALB:** Would you then show the box?

**BOB SCHIEFFER:** I don't know.
MARVIN KALB: Would you then show the box?

JANET BROWN: We show very subtly it was not a box, it was a pitcher's mound.

BOB SCHIEFFER: But also, I mean the question I would have, in the debate in 2008, the last one, how did you get them to agree to sit at a small table like that? Because Barack Obama is a lot taller than John McCain. My guess is he would have wanted people to know he was taller?

MARVIN KALB: Mike?

MIKE MCCURRY: Just an inside the campaign, because I helped do some preparation for some of these. In fact, Bob and Sandy will appreciate this, my role in 1996 when I worked for President Clinton was to play Jim Lehrer. And I was not nearly as nice or as congenial as Mr. Lehrer was. But, the campaigns spend an enormous amount of time trying to scope out and game out every little aspect of this. But if we think back to what we really remember about all these debates, they are the unscripted, unrehearsed moments that nobody could have anticipated.

I happen to have worked for Lloyd Bentsen in 1988 when he ran for vice president. And, of course, the famous debate moment with him and Dan Quayle. And there are plenty of--

MARVIN KALB: Tell everybody about that.

MIKE MCCURRY: Well, there are plenty of people when Dan Quayle was the-- had been around the country speaking about how he was representative of a new generation and carrying the torch that was going to pass on, since we've been talking about John F.
Kennedy tonight, evoking the memory of John F. Kennedy. And in our debate preparation, Dennis Eckart, former Congressman from Ohio, and I alternated playing the role of Dan Quayle. And we would kind of go through and read one of these torched past speeches and Senator Bentsen would sit there and say, “He cannot possibly compare himself to John F. Kennedy.” And we said, “Yes sir, he does. It's in this speech here.” He would say, “He’s no more John F. Kennedy than the man in the moon.” And something triggered in there, and there are plenty of people-- so that was a moment, and someone said-- and we had a whole team helping in the preparation of the debate. And some people said, “If there's an opportunity to draw that distinction, you actually knew John F. Kennedy, you can make that moment.”

MARVIN KALB: So it wasn't unplanned?

MIKE MCCURRY: It was not unplanned, but it was not rehearsed. That's the key thing.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Tell them exactly what he said.

MIKE MCCURRY: He said, when the proper moment came on, he said, “Senator, I knew John F. Kennedy. John F. Kennedy was a friend of mine. Senator, you're no John F. Kennedy.” [laughter] Well, a little bit more, because this picks up on a point that was made earlier, the power of that moment in that debate was not that Bentsen said it, it was that the camera was on Dan Quayle when he said it. Had the camera in the-- this goes back to Sandy’s point about what the different reaction is of people in the room-- people in the room thought that Senator Bentsen might have come off as a little too angry and a little too crotchety and maybe a little over the edge. And so they came streaming out saying, “Boy, was that too much of a harsh comment.” And, of course, the camera angle
had belied that. That was the sound bite of the campaign and the perception was within 24 hours that Bentsen had won the debate.

SANDER VANOCUR: The camera was on Quayle. He said it, and the picture of Quayle versus John F. Kennedy, this is something Walter Lippmann wrote about public opinion, the pictures in our heads, they speak for themselves, they have their own stories.

MIKE MCCURRY: Sandy, that is exactly the point, that it was-- something authentic and genuine was revealed in that moment. It's just the famous Reagan saying, “There you go again,” all the comments that are legendary in these debates are something that sort of crystallizes for the American public what the choices that they're trying to make. That's the whole point of these debates, is to help people make these choices.

MARVIN KALB: Mike, what you're saying here is that if that was the one authentic moment, then everything else was not authentic, that the rest of it was kind of phony?

MIKE MCCURRY: Everything else was-- look, that's not fair. That's not fair.

MARVIN KALB: Or staged. Staged.

MIKE MCCURRY: Everything else was the presentation of what are the arguments we're trying to make, what are we saying on healthcare, what are we saying on education, and there's enormous amount of effort that goes into making sure how do we get down into 90 seconds what you're trying to say about the economy, your foreign policy, or these other issues. And that's important. And that is substantive. But it's these revealing glimpses that count so much in these debates.
BOB SCHIEFFER: What this goes to, Marvin, is it brings us back to the fact that the vote we cast for president is different than any other vote that we can. You vote for a city councilman because he’s the guy who wants to keep the liquor stores open on Sunday, or he wants to close them. Or he wants to put the mini warehouses in somebody else’s neighborhood and not yours. People vote for the person for the office of presidency that they would feel most comfortable with in a time of crisis. And it’s these kinds of moments that are so revealing. It happened to Richard Nixon in 1960. We saw it in 1984 when Ronald Reagan, people thought the old fellow had lost his marbles and suddenly Mondale tried to make an issue of it. And he said, “I will not hold my opponents youth and inexperience against him. I will not let age be an issue in this campaign.” That election was won that moment.

MARVIN KALB: But let me point out to you that while that is absolutely true, the Nixon line, as well as the Bentsen line, Nixon in ’60 and Bentsen in ’88, they lost. So, the great line is terribly important and it’s a wonderful moment in the world of television. But It's not necessarily a determining factor at all.

SANDER VANOCUR: But sometimes you don't know what's going to come up. The first Nixon/Kennedy debate was about foreign policy. The second was about domestic policy. Then the third and fourth, the subject of Quemoy and Matsu came up. And they chewed it to death. Most people thought it was a Chinese dance act.

MARVIN KALB: Most people were very well aware of that.

BOB SCHIEFFER: The other part is, Marvin, Bentsen was number two on the ticket. Some people think if he’d been on the top of the ticket and in the caucus, and been in the second spot, that maybe it would have been a different election.
MIKE MCCURRY: I mean, the point of that is it did draw the distinction that was a factor in some Americans consideration.

BOB SCHIEFFER: He certainly won that debate, there's no question about it.

MARVIN KALB: Let’s talk a little bit about questions and the way that they are asked and the way that they're prepared for. Now, a number of people have said to me in preparation for this, by the way, that Sandy’s question of Nixon was the first gotcha question. I don't think so. I think it was an extremely legitimate question. But the issue that comes up increasingly as we go more and more into this sophisticated use of television is how do you manage a gotcha question? How, for example, would you, Mike, have prepared Clinton, of all people, for a gotcha question?

MIKE MCCURRY: Well, I did it the wrong way because I did prepare questions. They had a big team preparing President Clinton for his encounter with Senator Bob Dole in 1996, and my job was to stay out of the room and just imagine that I was Jim Lehrer. So you can all appreciate that.

BOB SCHIEFFER: How’d that go for you?

MIKE MCCURRY: I had a great time. I hung around and relaxed. I put myself into that Jim Lehrer kind of zone.

BOB SCHIEFFER: He wrote a couple of novels telling you about that, yes.

MIKE MCCURRY: That's right. [laughter] But, you know, the problem was I then wrote a lot of gotcha questions, and that was wrong. Because what the brilliance of Lehrer, and I'd argue Schieffer falls in that category and the best of the moderators of
these debates, is that they don’t interject themselves with those kinds of questions. They
don’t try to make a point. They don’t put their personality forward. Because they're, and
Bob said it, he gets the credit, and said it earlier, but we ought to pay tribute to that, the
moderator is there to help these candidates say what they have to say and to keep them on
track, make sure that-- you know, you're the surrogate for the American public. You're
there to say, “What's on the mind of the American people?” And the best questions are,
“So what do you think about that, Senator?” “What do you think about that, Mr.
President?”

MARVIN KALB: But Mike, that's very nice. Let me switch to--

MIKE MCCURRY: But that's true. That's true. Don’t leave that on the floor.

MARVIN KALB: No, but a moderator in 1988, Bernie Shaw, CNN, asked Governor
Dukakis a question which still rings around classrooms. And that is, “Governor, do you
still oppose the death penalty? If a man came into your house, raped your wife, murdered
your wife, wouldn't you want to see that person killed?” And he gave a very contained,
controlled answer.

SANDER VANOCUR: Some answer. He just said, “I'd kill him.”

MARVIN KALB: That's a very nice thing. But what I'm getting at is that the moderator
also has been known to do that.

SANDER VANOCUR: Yeah, but that's an issue.

MARVIN KALB: All right, but let me ask the two reporters here. Do you think that that
question, you've sort of answered it already, was a bad question, was not a fair question?
SANDER VANOCUR: It's a fair question, just like you referred to a question I asked Nixon. Stuart Novins had asked that question before me. It came from a question Charlie Mohr, I think he was *The New York Times*, asked Eisenhower in August, and Eisenhower didn't answer it. So the thing was just hanging there and had to be--

MARVIN KALB: No, I say it’s a very legitimate question. What I'm asking is what do you think, was that a fair question on Bernie’s part?

BOB SCHIEFFER: I think it was a fair question. I think he gave a bad answer. It's probably not a question that I would have asked. I mean, most of my questions were, “What did you mean by that?” That's the basic question that I generally ask. But, different reporters have different styles, and what Michael Dukakis could have said, “Well of course I would want to kill him, but that's why we have laws. This is a nation of laws, and that's why we have to abide by the law.” That was the answer to that question. I think he just gave a bad answer.

SANDER VANOCUR: But what hurt Dukakis more, the answer to that question or him in the tank?

BOB SCHIEFFER: Probably in the tank. Probably in the tank. Probably the picture in the tank. Because, again, people want someone they feel comfortable with in times of crisis. The person who understood all that was Ronald Reagan.

SANDER VANOCUR: Oh, boy.
**BOB SCHIEFFER:** Ronald Reagan understood that that's what the presidency was about. You never saw a bad picture of Ronald Reagan and it was a great political skill that he exercised.

**SANDER VANOCUR:** He admired Roosevelt because Roosevelt was a magician. Henry Wallace, his Secretary of Agriculture and vice presidential candidate, once said Roosevelt’s genius was his ability to have everyone’s balls in the air except his own. [laughter]

**MARVIN KALB:** Moving right along. Janet?

**JANET BROWN:** Sir?

**MARVIN KALB:** In the new age of the internet--

**BOB SCHIEFFER:** Did you want to comment, Janet, on that?

**MIKE MCCURRY:** This whole report was worth it for that one line.

**MARVIN KALB:** Moving right along-- [laughter] in this new age of the internet and the many worlds and faces of the internet, I'm wondering whether you have any concern as the head of the Commission on Presidential Debates, whether we may be getting to a point where the technology makes it very difficult to sustain an hour, hour and a half, of serious, substantive talk about policy? We've made a big effort here on the left side of the panel to stress the importance of substance. Let’s join that. But we do live in this age of the internet, and is it possible to be optimistic that we're going to be able to continue that?
JANET BROWN: Definitely. And the fact is the internet is the ultimate multiplier of the educational value of the debate. But as far as the commission is concerned, the way to use it wisely is to take what remains a fundamentally television event and then use technology to enhance people’s access and the utility of the discussion that goes on during the debates.

I don't think you should try to make these events that look like everything to everybody. It’s very interesting, Mike was talking about it’s a short time since 1960. It’s an even shorter time to 1988. When the commission was established, we were talking about how the road blocking of television by the big three, with CNN only joining the fray, was the single most important concern, that you had to have these events on all four networks and that no one could stray. Well now, the multiplicity of the venues through which somebody can watch a debate if they want to, you couldn't count it. And the point is I think those should be encouraged, but they shouldn’t be encouraged in a way that then means you've taken the debate and turned it into something that people turn on and they say, “I don't think this is dignified. I don't think it’s appropriate given the office, and the very short time period that's actually dedicated to this discussion.”

It’s basically if you have three presidential debates, that's 270 minutes to talk about a lot of serious issues and that that time should be dedicated to doing that.

MARVIN KALB: I don't think anyone is arguing that point. I'm certainly not attempting to at all. But in this new age, I believe it was in 2008, Bob correct me if I'm wrong on this, that there was CNN and YouTube did a collaboration and they had folks asking questions. And then one of the people asking a question was dolled up as a kind of snowman and was asking a legitimate question about global warming. But the presentation lost seriousness. And granted, that was not in the concluding presidential
debates. That was in the dozens and dozens of debates preceding that. But you're wearing away the edges there.

MIKE MCCURRY: Well look, here's a way of thinking about this. I think the dignity of these events, and what they represent to the American people, is critical. These have become one of the reasons why they will last, and it would be very hard, going back to one of your earlier questions, for any candidate to bail on these, is because they've become almost like the State of the Union. They've become like the inauguration, they've become one of these signature moments in our life together as a political people when we make decisions. And people know what to expect and they know what the format, roughly, is going to look like. They know there's going to be two candidates, or three candidates, or maybe more, who knows, who are debating.

But the thing that now happens with the new media is that you bring in this incredible, interactive technology where, to answer your question, in a 90 minute debate, and look around this audience. People are going to be Tweeting, they're going to be emailing their friends, “Can you believe he just said that?” There are going to be whole sites on the internet that are devoted to fact checking.

MARVIN KALB: So is that a good thing?

MIKE MCCURRY: Absolutely. Because it enhances this experience for the voter. I mean, it’s all about, at the end of the day, is how do we make this very critical choice? Who are we going to elect the President of the United States of America? What are the criteria that we are going to use together? And the internet, the beauty of it, is that it is so interactive. It brings everyone in. It lets everyone become a pundit instantaneously.

MARVIN KALB: But if everyone’s a pundit, is any pundit worth his or her salt?
MIKE MCCURRY:  The ones that have valuable, interesting opinions that really matter and that resonate with their friends, yes.

BOB SCHIEFFER:  Good ideas last, and bad ideas don't, Marvin. That's been the history of the world.

MIKE MCCURRY:  It does minimize the ability of the professional journalist and pundit class to create their own fictions around what happened because too many people were there and experience it as a live event. Now, we could debate that, but I think that's probably not a bad thing, it's probably a healthy thing.

BOB SCHIEFFER:  There's one other thing to just add to this, Marvin, and that is this. The debates come at the end, which gives them a certain importance. And the American people are pretty smart. They know when it’s time to stop and pay attention. They always have. These debates draw enormous audiences, and I think they'll continue to.

MARVIN KALB:  Sandy?

SANDER VANOCUR:  I just think it’s the words that the candidate or candidates use. How did, “I want to get this country resonate.” I think it resonated because Sputnik was put up first. Kennedy was furious about that. It was a signal the Russians were ahead of us. But it touched some kind of a nerve. “I want to get this country moving again.” So it’s how you use rhetoric to stir people’s passions.

MARVIN KALB:  You could use rhetoric in an environment such as 1958-60 and it would have a different clout, really, than it would today.
SANDER VANOCUR: Of course.

MARVIN KALB: Because today, everybody is sounding off and what I'm trying to get at is if everybody is sounding off and there is no distinctiveness about a particular event, and I'm trying to say here, too, there are so many presidential “debates” before you get to the real thing.

SANDER VANOCUR: But you see now, we got a 24 hour a day news cycle, not a morning and evening. I call it the electronic tapeworm. It has to be fed all the time.

MARVIN KALB: That's true. [laughter]

SANDER VANOCUR: Anybody who says, “I don't know,” good-bye. It’s almost as if these people are paid by the word.

MIKE MCCURRY: Marvin, let me hazard something on that. Yes, the national audience has disaggregated. All of you knew Walter Cronkite and he could pronounce, “That's the way it is,” and we were all together on the same page at the end of the day.

MARVIN KALB: That's what the way it is, it was the way it is.

MIKE MCCURRY: It was the way it was, was, is. What is. Oh no, I don’t want to go there. [laughter] But, my point is that now these audiences are fragmented across the internet and people, yes they can kind of migrate to where they are comfortable. They hear things that reinforce their own beliefs sometimes. Yes, that's probably not a good thing. They ought to be exposed to more. But the successful candidate is going to be the one that brings all these sub cultures together and brings us back together as a country and figures out how you take this technology and all of the bewildering diffuse quality of
the new media and bring us back together to be one people, to be a one America again. That's the candidate that will really make things happen. And these debates are for that opportunity.

MARVIN KALB: Let me address an adjacent question there, issue rather. You know probably better than anybody on this panel the effect, or the revolutionary changes now under way within the news business itself. Are you comfortable that there will be four years out, eight years out, networks such as CBS that are going to be there to cover these debates? Are there going to be newspapers around who are going to run around and cover campaigns in the way that you did and I did years and years ago?

So what I'm worried about, and I keep getting back to the same point, is there a moment when the expansion of the internet, of our appreciation of the internet, and the collapsing of standards, not ethical standards, but almost structural standards in journalism, reach a point where they're going to intersect in a negative way? I mean, are you comfortable that CBS is even going to be here?

BOB SCHIEFFER: I don't think anybody in journalism, in communications, can say with any certainty where any of this is going. The technology is moving so fast that nobody knows where it's going to come down. There's going to be something invented that we don't even know about yet in the same way that the space program came about. When I was a little boy, they didn't have television. My kids used to ask me, “You wanted to be a TV reporter when you grew up, Dad?” I said, “They didn't have TV when I was a little boy.”

So who knows where that's going to be. The technology will determine that. What we have to be worried about is what you're talking about, the standards of journalism, the standards of communication. I don't know if the newspaper’s going to be printed on paper
or if I'm going to get it on my wristwatch. The important question is, is the information I'm getting held to the same standards, gathered in the same way, that the mainstream media does it now? Basically, we don’t put anything on CBS unless we think it’s true. Now, sometimes we're wrong, but we don’t do it unless we think it’s true. Will the information of tomorrow be gathered and presented by the same standards?

I don't know where journalism is going, but I know this, Marvin. You cannot have a democracy unless its citizens have free and independently gathered information. That's as much a part of democracy as our right to vote. I think we’ll have that, and I think the technology will determine how we present it.

MARVIN KALB: Okay, we've got less than two minutes to go. I want to ask one question of all of you. What was your favorite moment in a presidential debate, going back to ’60, or right up to ’08? And start with Janet Brown? Your favorite moment?

JANET BROWN: As the single most junior staffer in the Ford White House watching what happened in the last debate that year, there was a poignancy we all felt about the urge to rewrite our resumes quickly. [laughter]

MARVIN KALB: Sandy?

SANDER VANOCUR: I think it was the Reagan remark to Mondale.

MARVIN KALB: “I won't take advantage?”

SANDER VANOCUR: Yeah. I just don’t think-- I think Reagan’s genius was his ability to have people underestimate him who were running against him.
MARVIN KALB: Thank you. Go ahead, Mike?

MIKE MCCURRY: Well, mine, unfortunately, is a primary debate. It was when Bruce Babbitt in 1988 in a big multi-candidate debate that Tom Brokaw moderated, stood up and said, “I'm the only one who’s going to stand up here and speak the truth, that we can’t balance the budget unless we do some combination of raising taxes and cutting spending.” And he had a whole program that went along with that. That's as true today as it was then and it was my favorite moment.

MARVIN KALB: Fifteen seconds.

BOB SCHIEFFER: I have to say it was when Janet Brown called me in 1984 and said, “Bob, would you moderate a presidential debate?” I'd always wanted to do it, and no one ever asked. [applause] I was thrilled at that.

MARVIN KALB: That's about the best way you can wrap it up. Because our time is up and I'm very sorry about that. But I want to first thank our wonderful, wonderful audience here. They've been just terrific. And just as important, my thanks to this excellent panel. Interesting, articulate, informative. That's it. I'm Marvin Kalb. And as Ed Murrow used to say, and remember this, good night and good luck. [applause]

MARVIN KALB: What happens now, and I already see a lineup of people on both sides, on both sides there is a microphone and there's already a line of people ready to ask the panel tough questions, not the sort of questions they've gone through in the last hour. And so we'll start on this side here. And I beg you, please, give us your name, ask us a question, don’t make a speech, please.
QUESTION: This is A. R. Hogan, a graduate student at University of Maryland. For Sander Vanocur, can you give us any specific recollections of working with the great, late CBS news producer/director Don Hewitt? When the late Edwin H. Newman, who just passed away, was in position to moderate in 1976, did he come to you or did you go to him to offer any advice? And lastly, why aren't more choices offered in these debates like Ralph Nader, Green Party, Libertarian Party, and so forth, please?

MARVIN KALB: You can only answer one question. Go ahead.

SANDER VANOCUR: I think there aren't any more Ed Newmans around. That's why they're not there. Or, I may add, Don Hewitt, the producer/director from CBS who founded 60 Minutes. There aren't people like that around. Maybe television has caused that, but they're just not around.

MARVIN KALB: Okay. You want to follow up?

MIKE MCCURRY: Do you want to do the criteria question, because I think that is an important question.

SANDER VANOCUR: What?

MIKE MCCURRY: About how you--

JANET BROWN: The answer on the number of candidates in the debate are that a year before the debate, the criteria are published in terms of how candidates qualify for inclusion. And the standard, basically, is 15 percent support in the polls.
MIKE MCCURRY: The mathematical ability to win the presidency, constitutional eligibility to serve, and then having some demonstrated strength, which is 15 percent in the polls. And I think that protects the American people. They get to see candidates who maybe are emerging, who are not major party candidates or they come from some different tradition. But, they have an opportunity to be heard if they've demonstrated some sufficient national level of support. I think that's very important. It’s very important to acknowledge that the work the commission does is not based on the political parties, it’s based on presenting an opportunity for any candidate who can pass those thresholds to participate.

MARVIN KALB: Okay. Yes, please?

QUESTION: Hi, Connie Lawn, Audio Video News. Do you ever see a day when we’ll return to the electricity and spontaneity that we all had in the early days of our profession? And can you foresee a time when this coming election will be used as a referendum on the wisdom of staying in Afghanistan, for example?

MARVIN KALB: Bob, you want to try it?

BOB SCHIEFFER: I'm not sure I understand exactly what was your question.

QUESTION: You know how controlled it is right now, the news business is absolutely without electricity or spontaneity. Do you see that happening in the upcoming debate? And could the debate be used as a referendum on public policy?

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, I think it will. I think it will. I mean, I think all of these debates that we've had have come-- these have been debates about serious issues. I mean, there's no question about it. Now, mind you, composure, a candidate’s appearance, it all
plays a role in who we choose for president. But yes, I think they're very serious and I think in 2012 if we're still in Afghanistan, I think that's certainly going to be a big part of the debate.

**SANDER VANOCUR:** I think 2012, the best question you could ask in a debate, is any of the candidates, if the subject of Iran comes up, has read Rudyard Kipling.

**MARVIN KALB:** Spell that out a little?

**SANDER VANOCUR:** Well, all you have to read is the poem he wrote after our annexation of the Philippines, *The White Man's Burden*. He understood it. There's never going to be peace in that part of the world, so what the hell are we doing there?

**QUESTION:** Hello, my name is Sloane Dickey from the George Washington University. My question is in today's debates, we're able to have tracking polls and debriefing panels afterwards. And ultimately, there is a winner and a loser of the debate. How do you determine a winner and a loser, and is it fair to determine a winner and a loser of a debate?

**MARVIN KALB:** Janet?

**JANET BROWN:** No. And it’s the reason that years ago that the commission started something that has now been appropriated by lots of other groups, which is great, called Debate Watch, which is an invitation to people, an encouragement to people, to come together with people you do not agree with politically, watch the debate, turn it off immediately following the broadcast, and talk about what you saw and heard. Because hopefully, what you are much more focused on is what you learned as opposed to who won or who lost. I would defer to Mike on the notion of the win/lose aspect of this as
being something that the media love because, in fact, there's a hook to hang your story on.

But what I said about Mr. Ford, for instance, in 1976, was poignant for a lot of reasons, one being that what he said about Soviet domination of eastern Europe, he not only answered purposefully, but he repeated the answer to Max Frankel of *The New York Times*, an incredibly respected journalist, understanding precisely, personally, what he meant. And it was only after the debate and the media coverage for the first 24, 36 hours that all of a sudden it became clear that the media had seized on this as something that showed that the President didn't really understand. And that as this sitting, non-elected incumbent, that he was not in possession of the facts. It came, as we learned in an interview with him, an enormous surprise and disappointment to him that somehow this had not been clearly stated. But had to do with this notion that somehow you had to seize on someone’s having stumbled. I think it’s--

**SANDER VANOCUR:**  This is something. He was injured by Chevy Chase stumbling on *Saturday Night Live*. That's what really did him in.

**JANET BROWN:**  Oh, yeah. I mean, this was a blow to man, and one of the very interesting pieces about this oral history was Mr. Carter talking about the incredible feeling of getting on the stage as a relatively unknown governor with the President of the United States who had done these things that Mr. Carter thought were heroic, and in the best service of the United States. Those are the kind of dynamics going on.

**MIKE MCCURRY:**  You know, the campaigns, and I've been a part of several campaigns, spend an enormous amount of time and effort to try to declare victory at the end of these events. And they have these spin rooms, and it’s totally out of control and crazy. In fact, so much to the point that at one point in 1996, we just elected, we said,
“We're not going to go out and spin. We’ll just declare a no spin zone. The facts spoke for themselves, President Clinton won the debate. We don’t need to go claim victory.” So our spin was no spin.

But, you know, what's changed and will change increasingly, is the fact that these are virtual events. And what Janet just described, this ability for everyone instantaneously assess, have their own opinion, have a multiple exposure to different people having their own view on who said what. That's going to create, I think, a different environment. Because in the past, it was really the media. What was the headline the next day going to be? What was the commentary on the morning television shows going to be? What was the dialogue that began to develop in the aftermath of this debate? It’s also accelerated now, that really we will, we the people, will really form our own opinions much more quickly, I believe, in 2012.

MARVIN KALB: It was interesting, Sandy, when you described all of this you said that after the 1960 debate, people within a couple of minutes just sort of left. There was no spin room, any of that. When did the spinning, Mike, begin? Bob, in your experience, when?

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, every year it becomes more sophisticated. But I think during the Eisenhower administration, they had so little concept or understanding of, for example, television that President Eisenhower had a television advisor named Robert Sherwood, who had been a playwright, and Eisenhower once called him because he was having trouble with his television set. I mean, he didn't know what his television advisor was there to advise upon.

MIKE MCCURRY: I didn't want to interject this earlier, but we were talking about Jim Hagerty, who for the audience’s sake is the gold standard of White House press
secretaries, is considered by far and away the best White House press secretary ever. You were talking about the press conferences that he used to have, and I've looked back at transcripts of Ike’s press conferences, and Hagerty sat on the stage with the President, and there would be sections where they say, “The President pauses to confer with Mr. Hagerty.” And I was just thinking, “Did Bill Clinton ever kind of walk over and say, ‘Mike, what's the right answer to this question?’” It wouldn't happen in the television today.

**BOB SCHIEFFER:** I guess H. R. Haldeman invented the presidential advance. He invented what we now call the photo op, and all of that. You began to see the more consultant-driven advertising techniques used. I mean, the Kennedy people had used a lot of that, but they were not nearly as sophisticated as the Nixon people were. But, what we've seen is we've all become more expert at managing information. Whether you're a kid going out on the pro golf tour, if you qualify to play, the first thing you do the next day is you go to media training school. Most businesses have that. We've just become very sophisticated in this country with the management of information.

I mean, when I came to Washington in 1969, most congressmen didn't have a press secretary. Now, the chairman of the sub committee on hides and skins has a media coach and talking points and game plans, and all of that. We've just become very sophisticated in all of this.

**SANDER VANOCUR:** Mike put his finger on it when he talked about consultants. They didn't have consultants. You know the story of the father takes his kid down to the barn, it’s mating season. The stallion’s on top of the mare and he says, “What's that?”

**MARVIN KALB:** We're off the air now, right?
SANDER VANOCUR: He said, “They're mating.” And then they see another stallion looking at it and the kid says, “Dad, what's that?” The father says, “That's a consultant.” [laughter]

MARVIN KALB: Hold it.

QUESTION: My name is Joe Dukert, I'm a senior associate at CSIS. You had a very interesting conversation about the difference between the people who were present and saw the faces of both Bentsen and Quayle and the TV audience who saw only Quayle’s reaction. I want to remind everybody that the person who decided what the television audience would see was a director in the control room who said, “Take one or take two.” Moving fast forward to 2012, and my question, it seems to me that in 2012, no matter how many tens of millions of people watch the presidential debates on television, that audience will be dwarfed by the people who see excerpts from the presidential debates, and they'll see different excerpts on Fox, and what they see on CNN or the Lehrer News Hour. And perhaps what shows up on YouTube will be completely different, too.

I wonder if you could comment about that difference in 2012? Because at that time, it won’t be just the network or the four network television audience, it will be people who see not the whole debate, not the 90 minutes, but only excerpts?

MARVIN KALB: Thank you, Joe. Janet?

JANET BROWN: The debates are actually covered on a rotating basis by members of the White House pool. So there's actually only one network in the room. They are representing all the members of the White House pool. They have shots from eight different cameras that are going out to those members. But the members, as you point out, decide how they're going to use them. And so, as long as the pool is, in fact, in
existence and is the entity that is sending the signal out, you still have a common product from which those shots are drawn.

Now, how people choose to use them is an entirely different thing. And this goes back to what Marvin asked Bob about what do the networks look like in coming years. It’s important to remember at some level here, all of the things we're talking about, television networks, newspapers, internet, fax machines, email, United States mail, are delivery systems. What the debates are about is creating a substantive discussion that then goes out in lots of different forms to hopefully lots of different audiences here, abroad, in umpteen different languages, you name it.

What's not common understood in this country are the number of people internationally that are watching our debates in real time, because it makes a difference to them who gets elected president in this country. So this is far from a proprietary product to the United States. And I would concur with what Bob said, who knows what this looks like going forward?

**BOB SCHIEFFER:** And Janet and Joe, I think you open up a whole broader question here. Because there was a time when we all pretty much got the same stuff, good or bad. We all got what the three networks put out, and we got what the big newspapers put out and what our hometown newspapers put out. We're not all getting the same stuff anymore. People are now, if you like your news from a conservative point of view, you can watch that channel. If you like it from a liberal point of view, you can watch this channel.

And I think of the reasons that we've seen the partisan divide grow so wide now is because of that. You can’t say you've got too much information. But when you're only getting one side of the argument a lot of the times and you haven't been exposed to the
other side of the argument, it’s almost shocking when you suddenly are confronted with the other side of things.

So it's just part of what politics is dealing with these days. And that is that you're not getting it through three gatekeepers like you used to. You're getting it from a plethora of sources and the citizen, the news consumer, simply has to make sure he listens to a number of places to gather and get his news to make his conclusions.

MIKE MCCURRY: But to reinforce Janet’s point, the sponsor of the debate has the responsibility of providing the content of the debate of the candidates. And it’s up to the editorial choices made by independent news organizations to present how they present the information to you, the discerning public. But the editorial content should not be in the hands of anyone other than the people who have got the protection of the First Amendment and free press.

BOB SCHIEFFER: But what they're saying, Mike, and this is the new thing we're all dealing with, Fox News is probably going to put a different set of clips on the next morning, on their morning show, than MSNBC is, or you might hear on talk radio.

MIKE MCCURRY: But my point earlier, Bob, is that will instantaneously be a part of the story, be a part of the experience that we have together as the American people as we evaluate the campaign.

BOB SCHIEFFER: But we have to understand it’s different.

MIKE MCCURRY: It’s different.
BOB SCHIEFFER: I'm not saying it’s right or wrong, I'm saying it’s different than what we've dealt with before.

MARVIN KALB: Next question, over to the right please?

QUESTION: Hi, my name is Jordan. I'm a senior at George Washington University. And my question is concerning the approval ratings after debates. From what I understand, they don’t really budge that much after debates. And I was wondering, do you agree with that premise, first of all, and is that the main goal of the candidate, to increase their approval ratings?

MARVIN KALB: They don’t much what after--?

QUESTION: They don't budge much, the approval ratings don’t swing that much after the debates.

MARVIN KALB: The approval rating or the--

QUESTION: Approval rating, yeah, of the specific candidates. Is that the main goal?

MARVIN KALB: Is that your experience, Mike?

MIKE MCCURRY: I think it’s different. There is very often a bump that comes from the debates and then it subsides and then you get back into the flow and the content of whatever is happening in the campaign. But a win in a debate can have a measurable impact that improves the candidate’s chances. There's just no question of that. That was certainly true for President Clinton in 1992 in the debates against Bush. That was a critical moment for him because, remember, we were talking about Ross Perot
participating in some of these debates. At one point earlier in the summer, Perot was ahead of Bill Clinton in the polls.

**BOB SCHIEFFER:** I mean, I think that opinion has sometimes changed because of the debate. I think they do. I mean, most people-- we don’t like to admit this-- but most people form their opinions on television commercials, not on what they see on the news broadcast. But it seems to me that we have found in recent years the one counter to that, the one thing that can change opinion, is the debates. And I think they have.

**MARVIN KALB:** Maybe the last question, right here on the left?

**QUESTION:** Hi, my name is Andrew Kaplan. I work at the Justice Department. And a comment that I had for the panel, it’s kind of a suggestion for the debates. I think something that might help make the debates perhaps more compelling, more spontaneous, is if you would allow the candidates to ask questions to each other. And not just here and there, but actually make that-- still have the moderator there refereeing, absolutely, but I've seen other non-presidential debates and those are always the most interesting moments. And they do ask good questions. I was wondering if that's something that you could possibly incorporate?

**JANET BROWN:** We tried. We will continue to try. The short story is that if you don’t have candidates, you don’t have a debate. And if the candidates are basically unwilling to go along with something that you think is going to serve the interest of the viewers and listeners best, then the question is do you just hang firm and you basically say, “If you're not willing to do that, we won't do the debate.” You've seen Bob, you've seen Jim Lehrer try very hard, basically, to retreat in terms of their roles in moderating these and be facilitators of discussion and have these guys talk to each other, question each other, answer each other. We couldn't agree with you more. You have seen senatorial and
gubernatorial debates that did that where candidates were willing to agree to it. It's great television, it’s revealing, it’s instructive. I hope we can get there.

MARVIN KALB: Have you ever considered simply not having a moderator?

JANET BROWN: I think it goes back to what Bob has said, which is if you don’t have anybody there, Marvin, it actually then puts the onus on the candidates, even in some of the best of these kinds of debates that have happened in Massachusetts. Quite frequently, you've had a moderator that continues to change the topic when it looks as though the string has been run on one. There is a valuable function they serve there, just to make sure that things keep moving and that as many topics as can be covered as you can in the space of the whole debate. But there is no question, to come full circle, that when you have a single moderator, you are able to focus the arithmetic of the debate, as we call it, on the candidates. Because the more people you've got on the stage, the more the time needs to be divided. And this should be focused on candidates, nobody else.

MARVIN KALB: It’s a terrifically interesting subject. It combines politics, the media, responsibility to the government, the functioning of democracy today. I apologize to those people here who have not had a chance to ask questions, but we're just out of time now. I want once again to thank all of you for being here. Please thank the panel.

[applause]

END