



Reporting the News in a Post-Truth Era

Official Transcript

Jodi Enda (CNN) serves as moderator for panelists Naftali Bendavid (*Wall Street Journal*), Elisabeth Bumiller (*New York Times*), and Dana Milbank (*Washington Post*) as they discuss current events and answer audience questions.

This program was made possible by contributions to the Temple Micah Innovation Fund.

Rabbi Zemel: The best cue I know for getting people quiet in this room is to say Shabbat Shalom, but okay. No photographs.

Jodi Enda: Cellphones off.

Rabbi Zemel: And, cellphones off. Anything else coming? Okay. Rabbi [Foreign Language 00:00:44]. Rabbi Simon taught that world stands on three things, justice, truth, and peace, as it says. Execute the judgment of truth, justice, and peace in your gates. Quoting [inaudible 00:01:08]. Although Rabbi [Shimon 00:01:10] reverses the order of justice and truth, I believe that the Prophet Zakariya had it correct, "Truth has to go first. Justice is dependent on truth, and without justice there can be no peace in the world." Very soon after this past fall's election is Rabbi Shimon and Zakariya's words reverberated within me on an almost daily basis. I knew that at the Synagogue were morally bound to reverently embrace and embody the words of our forebearers. As reformed Jews, we are doubly bound for our Judaism is a Judaism of the enlightenment and glorifies the enlightenment's own passion and search for truth.

This morning's discussion, therefore, is a must for the American Synagogue today I wanted Temple Micah to foster this conversation and I knew that I would be very easy to find the journalist to make it happen. I needed just to stand in the lobby for a couple of weeks and invite these fine people as they walked through the door, so thank you Jodi, Naftali, Dana, and Elisabeth for being here this morning. Thank you for what you do and thank you also for being part of Temple Micah and I really, really-

Audience: [Crosstalk 00:02:28].

Rabbi Zemel: I truly mean that for all of you, so just thank you. I'll introduce Jodi who will, in turn, introduce the rest of the panel. Jodi's the assistant managing editor for CNN Politics and was the editor of CNN's book on the 2016 presidential race, Unprecedented: The Election That Changed Everything. Although we know Jodi is past president of the congregation and is a dear friend, outside of these walls Jodi is a nationally-known award-winning journalist specializing in politics and policy who's covered the White House, Congress, and presidential campaigns. She's former president of Journalism and Women's Symposium and a graduate of the University of Illinois and a Washington National's fan. Finally, I'd like to note that this morning's event marks the very first project that is being funded by our Temple Micah Innovation Fund.

Thank you to all of those who have contributed to that fund. The entire session is being professionally video recorded as you can see. It will then be transcribed and then edited to a 20-minute film version of highlights. All three, the full version, the transcribed that you'll be able to read, and the film version in 20 minutes will all be available on our website. This is an effort to respond to the requests to make what we do here at Micah available to the wider world. Finally, thank you, all of you, for being here as well.

Jodi Enda: Thank you Rabbi Zemel. I didn't realize until you started talking that we were supposed to do this in Hebrew and I might have forgotten to tell the panelists that, so ... Just a little bit of housekeeping first. You are all being given, or have been given, little cards to write down questions that we'll get to toward the end of this discussion. Once you've written down your question, please pass them to the outside aisles. People will collect them in about a half hour and Rabbi Zemel will be our editor and decide which questions I should ask in what order, so you have to make them really good. I want to introduce our esteemed panelists, and you are in luck because we really got the crème de la crème here today.

First on the far end we have Dana Milbank. Dana is a nationally syndicated op-ed columnist with the Washington Post. I'm sure most of you have read and chuckled along, or been horrified, by his columns. His column generally appears four times a week in the Post and in 275 other newspapers. Dana provides political commentary on TV and radio outlets and he's the author of three books on politics. Before joining the Post, Dana was a senior editor at The New Republic where he covered the Clinton White House with me, and was a reporter for the Wall Street Journal where covered Congress and was a London-based correspondent, and he's about to get married.

Dana Milbank: He's the Rabbi.

Jodi Enda: Yes, the officiant is right here. If only the bride were here we could do it right now.

Dana Milbank: Get it over with.

Jodi Enda: Elisabeth Bumiller is the Washington Bureau Chief of the New York Times. As a Times correspondent, she's covered the Pentagon, John McCain's 2008 presidential campaign, and the White House, a beat she began on ... Get this ... September 10, 2001. During her five years covering the Bush Administration, Elisabeth also wrote a weekly column, called White House Letter, about people in behind-the-scenes events of the presidency. Earlier in her career Elisabeth worked for the Washington Post in Washington, New Delhi, Tokyo, and New York, and she, also, is the author of three books. Next to me is Naftali Bendavi. He's an editor in the Wall Street Journal's Washington Bureau and formerly spent many years at the Chicago Tribune. He also has covered the White House, Congress and the courts and did a stint in Brussels covering the European Union.

Naftali was a long-time regular on the Diane Rehm show and now appears regularly on 1A with Joshua Johnson. Welcome to all of you and thank you so much for being here. I'd like to start by talking about this whole question of post-truth. When Rabbi Zemel said to me, "We want to do a panel on the post-truth era," I thought, "Wait a minute, we're still trying to tell the truth. What's this all about?" So, I did some reporting on it, and found out that the Oxford Dictionary declared that post-truth was the word of the year in 2016. They said that use of the word post-truth increased by approximately 2,000% over it's

usage in 2015 and attributed that to Brexit and the U.S. presidential race. Here is how the Oxford English Dictionary defines post-truth. They say, "It's an adjective relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief."

Interestingly, they don't define it as after the truth, they talk about it as, "Belonging to a time in which this concept is unimportant or irrelevant." So, I'd like to start by asking the panelists if you agree that we're in a post-truth era, and if so, in what way? Why don't I start with you, Naftali?

Naftali Bendavi:

To me, that would be a little bit too sweeping to talk about this being a post-truth era. One thing that occurs to me is, if I'm mistaken, I think the circulation of all of our publications jumped right after Donald Trump was elected. To me, that says that there's still a great number of people, I would, without proof, think it's a majority of the people who are still very interested in verifiable, confirmed facts and the kind of work we do where nothing we report hasn't been carefully ascertained and vetted and edited and scrutinized. To me that sounds too sort of grand to talk about this being a post-truth era.

That said, I do find it a little bit disturbing or disconcerting that there does seem to be a certain segment of the population and a certain number of the leaders of various factions that are, I think, all too willing to discount facts that either come from sources that they don't like or that make them uncomfortable and don't fit in their world view and the way they like to see things. I do find that it, I guess, disconcerting phenomenon even while I guess I still have faith that here's large numbers and majorities of people who still really want to find out the reality as it is.

Jodi Enda:

You raise an interesting point that people now often look to publications, websites, television stations with which they agree, and they often now are in more of a bubble than in the old days when there were three networks and everybody read the newspaper. Elisabeth, do you find that that changes the way we in the main ... What we call the main-stream media, do our jobs and does it do damage to what we are trying to do?

Elisabeth:

Sure, first I'd like to say that I think any political campaign is a part of the post-truth era because a lot of ... Most political campaigns appeal to emotions and passions. We saw it on steroids in this last election, obviously, but it certainly has changed the way we do things at the New York Times. We have just employed a full-time fact-check writer. You've had one for a long time, but we have a stable now, but we have a person in the Washington Bureau. She came from PolitiFact and she writes three, four times a week, just ... We're trying to, now actually, because we focus so much on Donald Trump and the Republicans. We're trying to focus a little bit on the Democrats but the Republicans are keeping us very busy, so we've changed the way we do things. We have also changed, just briefly, we have done it twice now in the headlines and in lead

stories in the times written that the President lied, which is a new road for us. It was a decision made way above my pay grade, but-

Audience: [Inaudible 00:11:33].

Male: We can't hear back here.

Dana Milbank: Oh, I see. We're not being amplified.

Elisabeth: Oh, we're not amplified.

Audience: [Crosstalk 00:11:44].

Dana Milbank: We're just being recorded.

Male: I am.

Elisabeth: Can you hear me now?

Audience: [Crosstalk 00:11:46].

Elisabeth: Do I have ... I guess I-

Dana Milbank: Want us to speak in here?

Elisabeth: Okay, I have to talk louder?

Audience: [Crosstalk 00:11:51].

Elisabeth: Can you hear me now?

Audience: Yeah.

Elisabeth: I'm going to have to shout? Okay. There's nothing to be done about the microphone?

Male: We're working on it.

Elisabeth: You're working on it, okay.

Male: [Crosstalk 00:11:58].

Elisabeth: Okay, I will talk very loudly. This is the first time, as I said, that we've written in headlines and in the lead stories in the times, "The President lied," and that has ... Can you hear me now? Is that better?

Audience: That's better.

Elisabeth: Okay, and that has changed ... That's a big change. In the past if we would say, "The president uttered a falsehood," or, "It was inaccurate," but it was decision made by the Executive Editor, Dean Baquet in New York that there were two cases. The first was when the President continued to say that Obama was not born in the United States. The decision was made that this was so ... He had done it so often, it was so sustained over such a long period of time and it was against all evidence that it was time to call it a lie. We did the same thing more recently when the President said that, "Three million people had voted illegally in 2016, in the election." Again, that was a decision made in New York. It was a sustained assertion over a long period of time and we just called it like that, so that's very different. I could go on but let me-

Jodi Enda: I want to-

Elisabeth: [Crosstalk 00:13:04]-

Jodi Enda: Yes, and I'm going to want to come back to that, but Dana, you are the only person here who actually is paid to have an opinion.

Dana Milbank: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, the rest of us do it for free.

Jodi Enda: Yes, that's right. So, tell us a little bit about how you deal with a lot of us can only sometimes call a lie. We've used all kinds of euphemisms, falsehoods, evidence-free, baseless, these kinds of descriptions, but you cut right to the chase. How has your life changed?

Dana Milbank: I'm here because they needed somebody on this panel to defend Donald Trump, and that's what I'm going to do and say, "I disagree with the New York Times decision to say, 'He's lying.'" I don't think he is, and let me explain why. I did a piece on this very early in the administration. I think it was that Saturday or Sunday after the Inauguration. He was talking to the CIA and he said ... He's giving this Inaugural Speech and there were some drops of rain. He's like, "Oh, no, this is going to be bad." He said, "And then the rain stopped and there was bright sunshine." I was there like 20 feet from him and it was raining on me so I got in touch with the capital weather gang at the Washington Post for some satellite imagery and the rain maps and the weather maps to see that, no, there was unbroken cloud cover from here to West Virginia during that period of time.

Then there was also a 360 degree camera so you could actually look at the sky through the entire speech, which I did also. I think what this shows is that it's not nec- To lie, it means first of all it has to be untrue, and second of all, you have to know it's untrue. I'm concerned that the President doesn't think he's lying because he believes what he's saying when he's saying it. His biographer who did the ... Or the guy who did The Art of the Deal with him said that, "More

than any human being he's ever met, Donald Trump has the ability to believe that whatever the last thing to come out of his mouth is true, or at least, ought to be true." I think that's the difficulty in saying it's a lie because I think it's worse than that, in that is I think that he doesn't actually think he's lying.

Jodi Enda: You would never say that he lies.

Dana Milbank: I'm sure if I said that, now, you'd go back and find some instance where I said that.

Jodi Enda: Then you'd have to eat another column, right?

Dana Milbank: Right, so I'm not going to be absolute and take any such risk but it is possible that there's something else going on here and that's a different kind of madness than somebody who knows he's saying something [crosstalk 00:16:09].

Naftali Bendavi: This shows how circumstances have changed for us in ways that we never envisioned. We always have to make these calls, I think all of us do, when the President says something, or people close to him, or other well-placed individuals, that seem untrue or widely implausible or has no evidence to back it up. We have to learn how to frame because we do try to be careful. I happened to working on Saturday when there was the Tweet about President Obama having wiretapped him and he being a sick and bad person. It seemed wildly implausible, it didn't seem like it could be true. The president can't individually order wiretaps of people so it had to have been some kind of incredible conspiracy for this to be correct, but there we were. It's hard to prove him negative in the 10 minutes you have before the story has to go online, so you're trying to craft things like, "Unsubstantiated," or "Without evidence," and explaining how the system really works.

Do you say, "Widely discredited," or do you say, "False," and at what point is it okay to sort of change the adjective? We have endless deliberations within the newsroom in an attempt to get it exactly right and to frame what's been said with what ... Against what we know to be true and particularly if the assertion has been repeated in the face of contrary evidence, you know, how do you frame that? It's just not something we've really had to deal with in journalism before.

Jodi Enda: You at the Journal also have a standard having to do with intent, do you not?

Naftali Bendavi: This is the lie thing that has come up and I don't ... In a way I don't think we should put too much emphasis on this debate about whether or not you use 'lie' or you don't. We're all trying to make the best calls we can. I think our editor felt like that was a level of intentionality that we didn't want to get into. That if we say that something is false and it's been repeated in the face of contrary evidence, our readers can figure out whether ... They're smart enough to figure out whether they think it was a lie or it wasn't a lie. I think the broader point is

just that we're all trying to wrestle with how to frame the situation where people in the White House in senior positions are saying things that just seem to be contrary to the evidence.

If we're talking about a post-truth era, it isn't just the White House, there's this whole conspiracy group out there that thinks that Sandy Hook, this massacre of these children at [inaudible 00:18:20] elementary school was a hoax. There's the Comet Pizza thing. I think this is a sort of a broader issue than just what's going on at the White House.

Jodi Enda: Elisabeth, you famously said in 2004-

Elisabeth: You [crosstalk 00:18:33].

Jodi Enda: You probably know where I'm going, right?

Elisabeth: Which, this, I know and I have paid the price of saying it.

Jodi Enda: Tell everybody what you said.

Elisabeth: It was at a Northwestern Alumni post-election panel, The National Press Club, and people were in a rage because it was a Democratic audience that John Kerry had lost, that Bush had won, despite the Iraq war. There was shouting and people said ... And I said there, "You can't just say the President is lying," because at that time ... And people turned on me. It's still on my Wikipedia page. You'd think I was this horrible little mouse who was afraid of the President. Dana remembers, and so that was the rule then. What I meant was you can't say in the New York Times in 2004, "The President lied." You can say, "It's false. There were no weapons. There was no evidence," etc., etc., but at that time it was intent and we didn't know intent and so things have changed.

Jodi Enda: They certainly have. We now have a president who has described journalists as enemies of the American people and whose staff has described us as the opposition. My question to you is how do reporters deal with that kind of diatribe and how does that affect coverage? Naftali, do you want to start?

Naftali Bendavi: Yeah. I think there's something particular going on here and in some ways I think Bannon's comment about us being the opposition party is almost more telling than the President's comment about us being enemies of the American people. I think there's an attempt ... We see ourselves, and maybe this is a little bit self-aggrandizing, but we see ourselves as being non-partisan, not having an agenda. We're not trying to get legislation passed, we're not trying to win an election. We're trying to scrutinize not just both parties but everyone, all parties, all sources of power and put them under the same kind of spotlight. I think there's a group of people that want to make us combatants in the political arena just like everybody else. There's the Democrats, the Republicans, the Green Party, there's the press, just as though we're part of the battle.

I think it's really important for us to resist that. I think we need to maintain our role as people who do try to scrutinize everyone, try to confirm facts as best we can. We're not trying to spin things. Now, we make mistakes. I feel like sometimes in these conversations it can come off as though we think we're perfect and very, very far from that. At least our goal is to try to put everybody under the same kind of scrutiny and get it all right. I just, I think there's a ... That kind of language I think is an attempt to shift the landscape in a way that we have to resist.

Jodi Enda: Dana, do you want to defend those comments, as well?

Dana Milbank: Oh, sure. I would like to say that I think the skepticism that the media's telling the truth and our skepticism that people are covering and telling truth goes back a long ways. I'll mention that there was time in the first years of the George W. Bush Administration and Elisabeth and Jodi and I were all covering the White House at the same time. I will give you an example of just how suspicious they were of us reporters. We were at an event, I think it was-

Jodi Enda: I know.

Dana Milbank: In Philadelphia we were going through the magnetometers and Jodi apparently set it off. The Secret Service Agent said he wanted her to lift up her shirt to see what was under it. What was under it was Alana, who is now 16?

Jodi Enda: I was eight months pregnant.

Dana Milbank: She's now 16, so even then they thought this pregnant lady was trying to sneak some contraband into [crosstalk 00:22:20]-

Jodi Enda: You've been dining out on that story ever since, and-

Dana Milbank: That's right. It's a long time now. It's a long time now and then in the Bush year, what this discussion made me think of. In the Bush years in 2002 I wrote a piece that ran on the front page and headlines said, "For Bush the facts are malleable." We used every euphemism under the sun for 'lying,' but we couldn't actually say that-

Jodi Enda: Yeah, that's right.

Dana Milbank: Because that pre-supposed motive. I thought I'd also introduce into the discussion the notion that I don't think we're necessarily post-truth, I think the truth is just on a holiday right now and it'll come back at some point. There was a Quinnipiac University poll last month and no reason to think it would change. If you look overall at the country I think it was ... I may be making this up, this may be fake news but it's pretty close. 52% said they believe the news media more than Donald Trump and 37% said they believe Donald Trump more than the news media, so it's 37% of country that's sort of the Alex Jones, grassy-knoll

crowd here, which is larger than we ever thought. If you look at it by party, 78% of Republicans believe Donald Trump more than the news media.

So, how does that change, because they're not ... 78% of Republicans aren't crazy? It's sort of partisan reflex response to defend the President. What'll happen is people begin to see with their eyes that it's not true. It won't be somebody's word against another. Over time you'll see that he's not bringing coal jobs back to West Virginia and manufacturing back to the Midwest. I think that's when truth returns from its long sojourn that is now on.

Elisabeth: I just want to say, they obviously, need us as an opposition party, it's really important. He doesn't have an opponent right now. He's got the Democrats but he doesn't have somebody ... He's not running against anybody right now and he needs that and we're pretty good, we're a good target. It's, as you know, as we all know, in many ways, yes we're the enemies of the people, we're the opposition party. They're very accessible to us. They call us a lot. Trump called New York Times and the Washington Post on Friday. His first call was to spin that, "Oh, it was all the Democrats' fault." He called our reporters. We need to know the reality. Steve Bannon, the whole gang in there, extremely accessible," so if we're the fake news media, they're certainly treating us somewhat seriously.

Naftali Bendavi: There's another point which is that they're happy to attack us when they don't like things we report but they're just as quick to cite us when we report something that fits into the message that they're trying to make.

Elisabeth: Right, which is a problem too.

Naftali Bendavi: You see them quote the New York Times on a regular basis if it fits into the message they're trying to put out there. To add a layer to what Elisabeth is saying, it's true that every president ... I don't know if a president ever liked the press. That just doesn't seem to be the way things work and it's probably not the way things should work. This current President has an added mechanism which is Twitter, so that he doesn't need us to get out his message in the same way that previous presidents have. I looked at his feed the other day, I think he has got 27 million followers. We're one of the biggest papers in the country, we have like 2 million subscribers, so it gives you a sense of the scope. I think there's a way in which, even though he does deal with us all the time, he also feels that he has this completely different unfiltered way of getting his message out, at least to his followers.

Jodi Enda: Do you worry that his demonizing of the media, even though it is true that he is talking to us, will have larger ramifications in terms of the media's credibility that can go beyond the length of this administration. Elisabeth?

Elisabeth: I agree with Dana that I think that, first of all, as Naftali said, this has been ... In terms of our readers it's been the golden era, right?

Jodi Enda: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Elisabeth: Every time he says, "The failing New York Times," we get more subscribers so that's working for us, you know we don't ... It's given, I think, the media renewed sense of mission about what we do for a living, which is holding administrations accountable, but I think ... Yeah, I worry about it. I do worry about it. I don't know whether those 78% of Republicans who don't believe us, it's seems like it's an awful large number of [crosstalk 00:26:51]-

Dana Milbank: On the positive side, it can't get much higher.

Elisabeth: I do think that all of these fake websites is very disturbing, as well, it's ... You go out in the country and you talk to people and they just absolutely believe that Hilary Clinton had a sex ring and that Comet ... You know, it's just distressing.

Jodi Enda: Right, and as we've seen, that can be dangerous. Naftali?

Naftali Bendavi: That's the thing, we talk about fake news and so forth, but one of the real issues of concern is a lot of the fake news stories seem to be targeting an individual or a group, whether it's Hilary Clinton, whether it's Muslims, whoever it is. Those things can have consequences as we saw in the Come Pizza case. I do think the Internet and the way it's framed, and I hasten to say here that I think a proliferation of voices is all too the good and I think it's great that there's all these blogs and other organizations out there. The truth is that it used to be that you knew what you watching if you were watching the CBS Evening News or holding a copy of one of our newspapers.

Now it's easy to craft a website that looks kind of like the New York Times website. I think, just, there's something about that that makes it easier to blur the organizations to go to great lengths to at least try to get it right. When we make mistakes, correct it immediately and fully and organizations that just put information out there when we know it.

Jodi Enda: Dana?

Dana Milbank: The thing that I worry about is during some point when the truth is still on holiday that there is some, a crisis, like God forbid, a huge terrorist attack. Then all of this that we've sort of been laying this predicate that you can't believe anything out there, and so when there is this crisis and he comes out and makes up some story about who's responsible as a justification for saying, "Rounding up all Muslims in America." That's what I'm afraid of occurring. It's not the stuff we've been hearing so far about the wiretapping or the size of the inauguration crowd or the people voting illegally. I think that's all preparing for something that could happen that's much larger and that's what scary, not what's happened so far.

Jodi Enda: Do you think there's something that media should be doing to guard against that, to prepare, to make sure that we can get the truth out?

Dana Milbank: We're not doing some sort of advocacy, we just to keep doing our jobs and we're not out there to do a campaign so we never defend ourselves. There was this great protest sign, right after the inauguration that said, "Fact checkers of the world unite." It's like, "Well, what are we going to do?"

Elisabeth: We do, there's small things we do different ... Well, big things that we do differently. Recently, I can't remember what Trump had said. What was it? He had said that ... Oh, right, "The undocumented workers, the undocumented were responsible for more crimes than anybody else." That's false, and so I held up the story until we had ... We called on our faction. Just to insert a line in the story saying, "Actually, studies show that native-born Americans commit more crimes," and I just ... You have to be vigilant against that kind of stuff. You just don't want his statements to go unadulterated into the print when they're absolutely false.

Jodi Enda: One thing that's he's been quite good at is when we are writing these stories and things aren't looking so good for him, he manages to change the subject often with an early morning Tweet. We write about that, so how much do you have to pivot when he pivots and how do you keep the focus on what it should be on?

Elisabeth: This is near and dear to me because we now have six White House reporters, it's an all-time high. The Post has the same, because of the 6:00 A.M. Tweets to the midnight Tweets to the total unpredictability of his days and so we need two people on during the day and we always have a duty reporter. Now we have two duty reporters who somebody starts early and somebody goes late because somebody has to be up looking for Tweets. Now, we treat the Tweets like press releases, like old-fashioned White House press releases. You look at them and say, "Eh?" Or, "There's news here," or, "We need to cover this." We treat them like news events and a lot of them we ignore.

The problem is, too, when he Tweets, again, it's a lot of fact-checking involved, it's 6:15, it's a struggle, but we do it and but we do often say, "There is no substance to this." For example that early, that 6:30 A.M. wiretapping Tweet on Saturday, we wrote pretty quickly, "Unsubstantiated, no evidence." We were pretty sure he was-

Naftali Bendavi: Yeah, but I think we're more ready for it now. I think to the extent that things have changed. I feel like early on maybe we're a little bit taken aback, for example, with the voter fraud thing. Even though, of course, there had been some incidences during the campaign, there was a way in which maybe we were conditioned but the White House wasn't going to come out with something that was demonstrably false and then repeat it. I think now, we're more ready. They beefed up our White House staff, as well. We have people on all the time. Part

of it is an unpredictability element. You just don't know when something's going to come out or what subject it's going to be on so you really have to be ready. I think we are more ready to challenge them instantly and it's definitely a different way of going about things.

I think we tend to have the resources to be able to cover what we were covering and cover the new thing, but this has been an issue from time immemorial. The president, always to some degree had the ability to change the subject and they've all used it. The difference is, now, he can do it more quickly. He could do it at 6:00 in the morning with a quick Tweet, and all of a sudden it's something we sometimes really do have to cover.

Jodi Enda: Oh, I'm being signaled. Please pass your questions to the far sides. They will be collected and given to Rabbi Zemel to sift through. Make sure they're sharp.

Audience: [Crosstalk 00:33:10].

Jodi Enda: Thank you. Elisabeth, you mentioned that the White House still does talk to the New York Times and all of the publications here that the president did call you on Friday. His staff also talks to everybody. Every president rails about leaks, and every White House leaks. This one seems to leak an awful lot. Even as the President talks about these anonymous sources who don't actually exist, we know they do exist.

Elisabeth: Yeah, they're down the hall from him, right?

Jodi Enda: Right, so but some people in the White House, in addition to the President, have talked in falsehoods.

Elisabeth: Right.

Jodi Enda: So, how do you deal with those people? Do you continue to talk to those people? Do you treat them any differently?

Elisabeth: We're really careful, it's really hard. You can ask the same question of two very senior staff members ... This happens with our [wires 00:34:17] correspondents, and you get completely opposite answers and who was lying, who's got a knife after who? It's very hard to discern; it's much harder to report. There's a lot of factions inside the White House right now, more than we're used to. There's much more warfare between the staff and so you just have to ... We do a lot of reporting and sometimes it's just on one hand someone's saying this, the other person's saying that. It's just really hard to know what's going on in there. I can think of one thing where it happens, just over this weekend, there was something we were chasing and we checked it out. I can't get into it but let me tell you something, it was ... You check it with the FBI, you check it around with other parts of the administration. You definitely have to be super careful.

Jodi Enda: Does there ever come a point for any of you where you just are going to stop talking to a certain person because they tell too many untruths?

Dana Milbank: Maybe I'm giving away a little too much here but I don't have a lot of really great sources in the Trump White House. [Crosstalk 00:35:33]-

Jodi Enda: I thought they loved you, don't they?

Dana Milbank: I was, I was kind of friendly with Sean Spicer before he became a madman. I don't know what happened. He seemed perfectly normal so I don't have to deal with that problem of being lied to since I'm not being spoken to.

Jodi Enda: Dana Milbank, "The White House doesn't lie to me."

Dana Milbank: That's it, right, right, right. They never lie to me. Certainly, the notion of people lying on background, is something that's always occurred and that's the best place to do it because there's no penalty for it and it can't be traced. That sort of thing, I think is not necessarily new. Now what's new is the Bowling Green massacre and other things that his advisors are saying on the record which shows that they've essentially learned from the boss.

Naftali Bendavi: To answer your question, we would never not talk to somebody. I think it's a little bit different in television where it's giving somebody, to some degree, an unfiltered opportunity to say what they want to say. I can interview somebody for an hour. I don't have to use anything they say if I think that it's not true or I could say that, "They said something untrue, but here's what the reality is." I can't see a situation in which we would just decide we're not even going to talk to somebody who's in a position of power and authority because they have a record of untruths. We would exercise, perhaps, a little more caution. Again, I think that might apply a little more to television where maybe in some cases there's a reluctance just to give somebody a platform.

Jodi Enda: I'd like to talk for a minute about Trump supporters. The media were roundly criticized, and criticized themselves, after the election for failing to capture the mood of the country, failing to understand why people were supporting Donald Trump, and a lot of those people continue to support Donald Trump. I'm wondering ... We all work for organizations that often are called the elite media, how you try to change that? How you try to make sure you're adequately and accurately reflecting what's really going on in the country?

Elisabeth: We now go out much more often to parts of the country where there's a lot of Trump supporters and talk to them. Those stories tend to have, until recently, they've tended to have the same story over and over again, that no matter what he does, we love him. There's a certain one-note aspect to these stories. I think more recently we're seeing that people are saying, "Well, I really like my healthcare, let me see what he really does," or, "I don't know." You're getting a little bit of that, so we are just paying more attention. I don't know that the

answer's going out to Louisiana every two weeks and talking to people who love Donald Trump and aren't following the news that much.

Dana Milbank: Also, there's always a danger in these situations that you sound defensive, but we all sent people out to Trump country constantly during the campaign and we ... I mean, the fact is the stories were even parodied at some point because you'd go to some little town where Main Street was boarded up and the factory had closed. We'd quote some person about how angry they were and how they were going to vote for Trump. Clumsy as it may have been, there were plenty of attempts we all made. We got the election wrong and I certainly wouldn't want to sugarcoat that and so did everybody else. I would argue that the Trump Campaign didn't think they were going to win and that is something that really requires you-

Elisabeth: Actually, can I just interject? The poles were right. Hilary Clinton won by two percentage points with the popular vote, just to get that on the record.

Jodi Enda: Yeah, I agree-

Naftali Bendavi: That's true.

Jodi Enda: It was the state-by-state polls-

Naftali Bendavi: We should have-

Jodi Enda: That got it wrong.

Naftali Bendavi: Yeah, we should have been sophisticated enough to know that even if she ... Anyway, the point is I think that does require some self-scrutiny and I think we really do need to wrestle with why we did get that wrong. If there's a broader question about whether people who work at our sorts of organizations live in big cities and live on the East Coast and there's this whole, huge population out there that doesn't share some of our values. I think those are worthwhile questions to ask. I don't think they justify anybody ignoring facts that we put out there because we're not culturally like them. I think there's a lot sort of going on there in terms of the questions.

Jodi Enda: One question may be whether they are actually paying attention to our news organizations or focusing on ones that they agree with, which is true on, I think both sides of the equation. Dana, I see you furrowing your brow over there-

Naftali Bendavi: Yeah, I-

Jodi Enda: I want to be sure that you have a chance too.

Naftali Bendavi: Well, I'll unfurrow now, but they ... I'm not saying my fellow panelists are but I don't buy into the self-flagellation that's been going in the media about just

being completely blindsided by this phenomenon that nobody had any idea as Elisabeth pointed out. What, the final polls were three or four points for Clinton and she won by two?

Jodi Enda: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Naftali Bendavi: Obviously, everybody was aware of this phenomenon out there. If you're aware of a phenomenon that's 44% and turned out to be 41%, that doesn't mean you weren't aware of the phenomenon. There's a lot of self-criticism for saying, "We're not taking Trump supporters seriously, you know, mocking them. I do mockery, but certainly, I don't think you'll find anything I was writing, or for that matter would anybody else was writing, was mocking the very real economic concerns that were going on, that are going on around the country and have been going on for some time and have gotten worse, and we did a great deal about that.

Now, when the support for Trump was expressed in terms of outright racism and bigotry, well, yeah, then I would ... I and I think others would say, "No that was unacceptable and that's not okay." That's not accepting the legitimate beliefs of millions of Americans. That's saying, "No, and this bigotry isn't okay no matter who's doing it and how many of you are doing it."

Jodi Enda: Do you think we miss another story, and perhaps underplayed another story which had to do with Russia during the campaign? The Clinton Campaign did try to get all of us to spend more time focusing on the role of Russian and hacking John Podesta's emails and the DNC's emails? It was written about but it was never really elevated to a particularly high level. What do you all think? Elisabeth, what do you think about that?

Elisabeth: We were involved in both stories. The Russia story became clear much later in the campaign. That's the truth. In September there was this ... We've written about it so I can talk about it. There was the FBI was alarmed over this back channel between ... Supposed back channel between the Alfa-Bank in Moscow and the Trump organization in New York. We spent weeks on that, weeks and weeks and weeks and looking at it. The FBI cooled to it after a while and, ultimately, if you don't know what it is, which we didn't, and now we're not sure what it was and it doesn't seem to be what we thought it was or the FBI thought, so yeah, we ... I know the Democrats are going to be furious about this forever but we just didn't have the facts to go with the big story on that at the time. Again, the Clinton email investigation began much the summer before 2015.

It was a criminal investigation, and it played out over a much longer period of time, and the Russian investigation got going much later and we didn't know about it until much later. So, yes, I can see that anger among the Democrats but we were not ... I can assure you that we focused on it in Washington and wrote as much as we could and we're still continuing, obviously, to write about it now.

Jodi Enda: At his press conferences, particularly those with foreign leaders, the President has called primarily on reporters from conservative news organizations. Sometimes we've had to rely on the foreign press to ask the toughest questions of our own President. Is there a way that you can deal with that? Is that anything to do?

Naftali Bendavi: I guess the first question is whether there's anything wrong with it?

Jodi Enda: Is there?

Naftali Bendavi: I covered the White House for the Chicago Tribune and it pissed me off that sometimes that the favorable treatment that the Journal and the Times and the Post got. I am not somebody who's going to say that organizations that don't have a certain profile shouldn't be called on and shouldn't get to ask questions. The thing that I do think is of concern is if those are softball questions. I think that no matter who the president is, what the administration is, they're going to have a lot of events where everyone tells them how great they are. Some of the few events where people are going to ask them difficult questions is press conferences and press availabilities. I do get concerned when I see questions coming from whoever it is, the foreign media. Here was another thing they do during Sean Spicer's briefings where they now bring in, via video, local reporters.

Female: [Crosstalk 00:45:01].

Naftali Bendavi: Again, that's great, as long as those don't tend to be extremely positive softball questions. My concern would be less who's being called on than just the fact that the tough, difficult questions are being asked. They certainly are not always being asked in the circumstances that you're talking about.

Dana Milbank: I've been amused by the piping in the questioners from local outlets. I was listening to the briefing one day and I think it was Montana Day or something, it was like ... Their first question was like, "Are you going to build a wall with Canada?" The second question, "Are you going to build a wall with Canada?" Even Spicer started laugh at what he had produced here, but so, no I'm not concerned. I enjoy it when the President or the press, everybody passes over the TV networks and goes to somebody in the back row. That's because they're all not going to get their airtime, that's fine. What's not fine was when Spicer invited select groups for a gaggle, select organizations, in his office and that was protested and I think properly so.

What's not fine is the secretary of state taking one reporter from a favorable outlet on his plane to showing the world, showing the Chinese, that this is the proper way to deal with media in a free society, so that's not okay. In terms of questions getting asked, the questions get asked.

Jodi Enda: Regarding the gaggle that some of our news organizations were excluded from and some of the other treatment, a lot of people have asked me, "Why don't you all just not go? Why doesn't everybody just not go to a background briefing? Why didn't everybody walk out of that gaggle?" Elisabeth, can you explain the problem there.

Elisabeth: It was very confused. People didn't know. The people who were ... We were excluded along with you and who else was it?

Naftali Bendavi: The Post didn't even show up.

Dana Milbank: BuzzFeed.

Elisabeth: BuzzFeed.

Dana Milbank: It wasn't deliberate.

Elisabeth: I think they were eating lunch.

Jodi Enda: We melted that in the meantime. I think POLITICO and BuzzFeed.

Elisabeth: That's right, yeah, so-

Jodi Enda: Were excluded.

Elisabeth: I think that the problem was that it was supposed to be an open briefing for everybody and then all of a sudden they shut it down and invited just who they wanted and so that was the problem. Then the other, the people who went in who didn't protest later said, I think the Journal said, that they didn't realize what was happening so [crosstalk 00:47:42]-

Naftali Bendavi: Then we wouldn't go. I think we put out a statement saying, "We're not going to do this, if this comes up in the future." It was, as Elisabeth said, sort of this confused situation. People didn't know exactly what was happening the moment. I don't think they've done it again since then.

Elisabeth: They got such grief for it, I do not think they will do it again, unless they ... Unless the circumstance, they get really angry about something but you've noticed they haven't done it.

Jodi Enda: Naftali, you work for an organization that is ... You knew this was coming.

Naftali Bendavi: I did know it was coming.

Jodi Enda: That I know owned by somebody who is friendly with the President. I'm wondering, does that put you under any kind of different constraints? Does it make your jobs any more difficult or less difficult?

Naftali Bendavi: I don't think it puts under particular constraints. The thing I always feel like I need to say, most people know this, not everyone does, is that we are completely separate for the editorial pages. The news operation and the editorial page, it is what it is, they do what they do. I don't talk to that, I rarely even read what they write and we just try to do our job as best we can and I just ... I think we've been pretty tough on Trump. I think if you were to read our coverage of this administration, we've broken stories, we've written tough pieces about the disarray in the White House, and we just, I think, held him to account as much as we could.

Jodi Enda: In addition to attacking news outlets, a lot of news outlets, the president and, particularly as a candidate, sometimes singled out individual reporters. There have been a lot of very nasty Tweets, racial, anti-Semitic ... Not by him, but by readers, viewers, attacking these reporters. It seemed to have created this echo chamber of hatred and I'm wondering if any of you are concerned either for your own safety or for those of other of your reporters and have you had to take steps to protect them?

Elisabeth: Not so far. There have been a few things, but not so far, and it's stopped since the campaign. Largely, we had an incident ... There's been a couple with some of the Jewish reporters in the bureau and but it goes, it starts on Twitter, it gets very, very ugly. It gets really scary but then it abates so right now we keep an eye on it.

Naftali Bendavi: The sad truth is, is this is not a Trump phenomenon in a sense that there's been this concern about safety of the press for some time now and we were all very aware of the Charlie Hebdo incident in Paris. We've certainly beefed up security over the years. I don't think we beefed it up particularly because of what's happened in the last few months but over time, it's something we've had to think about.

Jodi Enda: I think we're going to move onto some of your excellent questions, which probably are better than my questions so-

Rabbi Zemel: These are all [inaudible 00:50:53].

Jodi Enda: Okay.

Rabbi Zemel: [Inaudible 00:50:56].

Jodi Enda: Okay, all right. I'm sure we'll have more coming my way. All right, this one says, "Please characterize the sources who are providing, quote-unquote, truths to the press from inside the Trump Administration and the Republican Congress-

Elisabeth: [Crosstalk 00:51:21] list all our sources.

Jodi Enda: And what are their agendas?" Who wants to take that?

Elisabeth: I'm not going to announce all of our sources here at the ... Maybe-

Jodi Enda: I brought a pen to write them down.

Dana Milbank: I would ask the New York Times sources.

Elisabeth: Would you do that, please? That'd be great.

Jodi Enda: Maybe, is there a way to characterize?

Elisabeth: They're very senior aides to the President and senior aides to people on the Hill. We don't use, "He's a horrible person," said a senior White House advisor. We don't do that anymore. We are not allowed to, we don't use background information in quotes, we can characterize it. We almost always characterize the agenda of the source and there is ... Our readers just hate background anonymous sources in the New York Times where we ... Our public editor goes after us all the time about it. That said, it would be very hard to report anything in Washington without talking to people on background. If you talk to 20 people for a story, you're in a pretty good shape of characterizing the lay of the land and the state of play and a certain issue and a certain controversy at the White House, so that's my answer.

Naftali Bendavi: Also, we quote sources who know what they're talking about. I mean-

Elisabeth: Yeah, thank you for saying that.

Naftali Bendavi: I think there's this idea sometimes-

Dana Milbank: Speak for yourself.

Naftali Bendavi: Other than Dana, in other words I think there's this idea sometimes that we talk to somebody who might have heard something from somebody else and then that's a source. Then another guy who heard from the same guy, and that's another source. We try to be really ... A source is someone with firsthand knowledge of something that happened. We use this phrasing now, people familiar with the matter, which sounds a little awkward but I think it's our way of saying, "Not just a guy who heard something." We have multiple sources for sensitive stories and, yeah, there tend to be pretty ... In this White House they do ... Many of them are fairly highly-placed and we try to be pretty careful about it.

Jodi Enda: A couple of people asked, "How we actually get sources to talk to us?"

Elisabeth: Oh, that's fun.

Jodi Enda: Yeah, so-

Elisabeth: The sources aren't doing it out of the goodness of their hearts; they have agendas. They have a story line they want to drive. This is a transactional relationship, this is not about friendship and it is ... Now you can develop sources, a source has to be comfortable with the reporter so some of the best reporters in Washington Bureau, they've been there for a long time. They've had sources deep within the national security apparatuses, sort of permanent government that's been there for a long time. They have sources on the Hill, they've got sources all over town and that's the result of ... First of all, people want to talk to ... Many people want to talk to the New York Times. Let's be honest, they want to drive a message into the Times, or try to. Number two, they develop trust with certain reporters who it's lunches, it's dinners, it's drinks, it's just developing a trust that you can talk to this reporter.

He or she is not going to blow your cover, he's not, you know, whatever, it's a long ... Erick Schmidt, fabulous, covers counter-terrorism for us, has sources embedded throughout the Pentagon, the National Security Council, overseas he's got lots of resources. He's an astonishing reporter so that's kind of ... Then Carl Hulse has been covering the Hill forever, he's our chief Washington correspondent, has sources all over The Hill. It's just, you know, good reporters have what used to be called a very fat Rolodex.

Dana Milbank: Since I don't have any sources, I feel that I'm on safe ground sort of explaining how it all works. What's going on here is there's a lot of axes to grind here, so you've got people, factions in the White House trying to get their word out. Folks on the Hill are not, and Republicans on the Hill are not at all in line with what the White House is doing so they want to get their word in there. The President has basically declared war on the intelligence community so they have a real incentive to be speaking up. Then for every faction in the White House, each of those persons talks to all their friends who then talk to reporters at our organization so there's always this huge web. Now, people have a lot of anger and scores to settle so it makes it much easier.

Naftali Bendavi: A couple quick things, so first of all what that does is it makes it incumbent upon us to understand the agenda of the person who's talking to us and to ... I mean, information's, information; if it's true, it's true for whatever reason they gave it to us but sometimes it helps to know. Also, I've been amazed at how many people talk to us just because they want to ... Somebody's interested in what they know and it's extraordinary to me.

Elisabeth: That's a great point. I remember I ... Charlie Black, do you remember?

Jodi Enda: Yes.

Elisabeth: He was a consultant on the McCain campaign and it was a long campaign. I remember it was late in the campaign, McCain wasn't doing very well. We were having drinks after the campaign day and he said ... I finally said to him, "Why do you all talk to us?" He said, "You know why we talk to you?" He said,

"Because you're interested in what we do. At the end of the day, you are hanging onto every word that I'm telling you." It was this insight after all those years in journalism, I thought, "Oh, right. We're deeply interested."

Naftali Bendavi: Then they open the paper the next day and it's like, "Ooo, I'm a person familiar with that." There's something about that. About that somebody's really interested in what you're saying and then it's going to give that widespread exposure. There are all the agendas we need to be aware of but there's also this basic human thing that I am continually surprised by and how people want to talk just because you want to listen.

Jodi Enda: Right, and I'm glad that you brought up that it's transactional though because I think that really is important. Along those lines, somebody had asked about Steve Bannon and his influence within this White House. Who wants to talk about Steve? Or do I have to?

Naftali Bendavi: What's the question exactly?

Elisabeth: What's the question? Yeah.

Jodi Enda: The question is what is your estimation on Bannon's influence? Talk about it in terms of the best truthiness." I'm just the reader.

Elisabeth: He's got enormous influence right now; enormous influence on the President. We'll see how long he stays in that job but right now it doesn't look like he's going anywhere. Maggie Haberman can talk more about this than I can because she deals with everybody over there more directly, also, the other White House correspondents. He and Trump, they're both sort of outsiders, anti-elites in a strange way. Trump coming from Queens trying to make it in Manhattan. Steve Bannon the same way, feeling put down by the elites. There's a tie there right now and Bannon's quite smart in some ways, so I ... You want to go with [crosstalk 00:59:00]?

Naftali Bendavi: He seems to reassure Trump in certain ways about what he's doing and the cause that he is ostensibly advancing. As other's have alluded to there is a tremendous amount of factionalism, I think, in this White House. There is in, perhaps, every White House but more than in most and he's the leader or at least a big player in one faction. The factions don't always align the way you might think, but he clearly represents this sort of, "I'm coming to Washington to break things up and change the way things are done and I represent the people," and that sort of part of the Trump coalition.

Jodi Enda: Do you think there's anybody in the White House-

Dana Milbank: Oh, wait a minute, don't you want to hear from sources?

Jodi Enda: Oh, yes! What do your sources say about Steve?

Dana Milbank: My sources tell me, by which I mean my colleagues, right, in the Washington Post, that ... We had originally been thinking that, "Okay, Ryan's [inaudible 00:59:51] the establishment would be this counterweight to Steve Bannon, but now they've formed essentially an alliance so there is not that counterweight. To the extent there's any counterweight to Steve Bannon it's sort of the Jared Kushner, Gary Cohen Wall Street types, but they don't seem to have anywhere near the influence, so it's Steve Bannon's world and we're all just living in it.

Jodi Enda: Another question that several people asked is about the healthcare issue and whether you ... Where you think it will go from here and how what happened this week will impact the rest of Trump's agenda?

Elisabeth: I can take that, because that's the question we're asking ourselves right now is, "What does Trump do now?" You saw the Paul Ryan said, "Obamacare's going to stay for the foreseeable future." It's quite extraordinary. The question is, does Trump and the White House and the HHS, do they sabotage the existing law in some way and then ... There's ways they can do it, and then do they then turn around in a year when it falls apart and blame the Democrats? I think that's a pretty risky strategy because after you've been president for more than a year to suddenly say, "It's all Obama's fault," or they could just leave it alone. It's a good question. Right no there's a lawsuit, the House versus the Administration; the Obama Administration was fighting it. House members said that the subsidies for the healthcare were unauthorized.

If that lawsuit goes forward and the House wins, that completely, that really hurts the law because all of a sudden you'd lose all the subsidies. The question is ... Here's the big question, will the Trump Administration fight that lawsuit or let it go and just let healthcare collapse? It's the big question of the day. What do you think?

Naftali Bendavi: I also think it raises questions about the rest of the agenda and-

Elisabeth: [Crosstalk 01:01:58].

Naftali Bendavi: Let's not forget the President said, "We're voting, and it's now or never, do or die," and Ryan and his team said, "This will happen. We have the votes." Those things proved to be pretty dramatically wrong and I think that weakens their credibility among their own people. I think the Freedom Caucus has shown that they can stand up kind of with impunity and change the agenda as they see fit, and so I think this also undermines a lot of what they're going to try to do going forward. They talk a lot about how, "Well, okay, this didn't work out. On to tax reform." Good luck. I just think this was supposed to-

Elisabeth: The whole reason for doing healthcare first was so you could get revenue, get lower ... Lower the cost of healthcare, get some revenue and then you do the tax cuts. That makes ... Now it's even harder.

Naftali Bendavi: Right, and in some ways it was supposed to be the easy one because it's something the whole party agreed on. They've been talking about it forever, they'll just get this done and then they'll move onto the real, more complicated agenda of tax reform. So, they're left in the situation where it's not ... What I found striking about it is I thought maybe they'd have trouble getting into the Senate. I certainly thought they'd have trouble coming together between the House and the Senate. The one thing I really didn't think is that with a big majority and no procedural stalling tactics that the other side can use, that they'd have trouble getting it through the House. The fact that they couldn't even come together to do that on something they've been talking about for all these years, I think really weakens them going forward.

Dana Milbank: I agree that the momentum is significant here. Once you have a big policy failure, it's very hard to pick up and do other things. We saw this in the second Bush term after the failure of the Social Security reform. We really couldn't get anything going after that. I want to add something to what Elisabeth was saying and that's I think they already sabotaging. That's been the policy all along and just suspending the advertising for the enrollment, putting out an executive order, basically making it sound like nobody's going to be punished if they don't fulfill the individual mandate, getting rid of the risk corridors. Other things just to make it collapse.

Jodi Enda: Also, and that, where do you think that goes for them when it collapses?

Dana Milbank: It will collapse at the rate it's going because of what's been going on here. Then the question is will people ... That's a huge gamble, right? Will people actually blame Obamacare and Democrats or will they say, "No, it was on your watch that this thing's collapsed," so that's one heck of a gamble.

Jodi Enda: One smart questioner just pointed out that, "Perhaps this week's news shows that facts actually do play a role in what's going on in Washington and do you agree with that?" Did facts win the day this past week?

Dana Milbank: I thought the Freedom Caucus won.

Naftali Bendavi: Yeah, exactly, I wouldn't go-

Jodi Enda: But is that factual?

Naftali Bendavi: I wouldn't draw that conclusion, necessarily from the events of the day. I think you could argue the opposite that the Freedom Caucus has this idea that somehow they'll prevail in the end and despite what seemed the obvious way to go to repeal at a place Obamacare, that was not what they were interested in. I'm not sure that I'd make that ... I'd draw that conclusion.

Jodi Enda: A couple of questioners asked you to prognosticate, which I know you're in the business of doing, "What's going to happen with the Russia story?" Does anyone want to take a stab at that? Maybe Dana can go out on a limb with that.

Dana Milbank: Since I've got nothing to lose.

Jodi Enda: What do your sources tell you? Has Putin called you recently?

Dana Milbank: Yes, we went horseback riding together.

Jodi Enda: Don't go any further.

Male: [Inaudible 01:05:44].

Dana Milbank: That's okay, on horseback. Look, nobody knows. Nobody knows what the facts are or where it ends. What we did learn in the last week is that, clearly, Devin Nunes and the House Intelligence Committee aren't terribly interested in finding out about it, so and probably not much better in the Senate. The real question is, it's all on the FBI, which is led by a man who none of us can necessarily predict. I can't imagine there's going to be a special prosecutor so, it's a real question of what comes out in the long run.

Jodi Enda: Elisabeth, how about you add something to that.

Elisabeth: I don't want to answer this question. I think that-

Jodi Enda: That's why I called on you.

Elisabeth: We've got a big, we've got an investigative team in the Bureau now looking ... We've been looking into this for along time. I don't know where it's going to go. It could possibly take years because it's a counterintelligence investigation, and sometimes you never know what happens in those so I can't predict. There is a lot there for reporters to look at though, I can say that.

Jodi Enda: Here's an excellent question. "If the Trump Presidency ends in a Constitutional crisis," and in parenthesis it says, "His resignation or impeachment, is it important for national depolarization that hardcore Trump supporters see that Trump is not a victim of the media? If so, how should the media make sure or how can it ensure that he's not seen as a media victim?"

Elisabeth: Why don't you answer that?

Dana Milbank: First of all, the polarization, Donald Trump didn't invent, he's just exploiting it so this has been going on for a generation or so, so I don't think whatever happens to Trump anything changes with that. If you look at the sociology of it all, yes, there would need to be some sort of ritual humiliation but that doesn't occur. Trump will just go away with his supporters, all of them feeling aggrieved and

angry at the system, so I don't see that as a solution. I don't necessarily see any solution on the horizon.

Elisabeth: It depends on what the impeachment is about and what the resignation is about. I think we need to know what drove it before we are assuming, Trump, his supporters will continue to rally around him.

Naftali Bendavi: Leaving this hypothetical impeachment and resignation aside, there's probably a segment of the population that does blame us when things happen to Trump. I don't know what the solution is to that other than just to try to tell the story as best we can and the Democrats do things that questions need to be raised about to do that, as well. I think, again, leaving aside any issue of a constitutional crisis, there's a percentage of the population that's going to blame us.

Jodi Enda: How do we get back to the pre-post-truth era? How do we get back to making sure that people know we are about the truth and getting a greater credibility back? Can we get out of this post-truth, moniker?

Naftali Bendavi: It's a hard thing to do. There's some pretty big social forces at work here that I think asking us how we can change, it's a tall order. Beyond just trying to do the best we can I have noticed this thing where I think all of our organizations are trying to explain a little more what we do and how we do it. We have the series of videos that's how a story was obtained and we've done that for a couple of our big, more impactful, if that's a word, stories.

Jodi Enda: It is now.

Naftali Bendavi: Yeah, it's like post-truth. I've seen that in other organizations as well and just trying to explain it, because I do think that there's a certain ... I mean, not surprisingly, people don't know exactly how we go about doing what we do. The whole architecture that we do put in place to avoid errors and when errors are made, acknowledge them, and correct them, and try to avoid the going forward. Just people have sometimes, I think, this almost demonic impression of the press and what we do, particularly in a lot of parts of the countries, so there's been a little bit of that, trying to explain it. I think, ultimately, we just have to do our jobs the best we can.

Elisabeth: I agree, we're doing things on the ... We have something called Times Insider, which again, explains how we get stories, how certain reporters went to war zones, what they did. It's in the works now to change the way we ... The bylines and the datelines. It turns out that younger readers, many younger readers have no idea what datelines mean. That you say, "Baghdad," and it turns out, "Oh, you're really in Baghdad?" "Yeah, well ... Well, yes." So we're trying to change saying, "Tim Arango in Baghdad," or "Tim ..." You know, and just changing into just more, a more sense of our reporters are there on the ground, we're all over the world, we're all over the country and just drive that home more.

Right now it's we do more first person now and so I don't ... It's more video, people ... We do a lot now with these things called live chats where the little pictures of the reporter comes up. As Trump is speaking we have a panel of our White House correspondents commenting on it without opinion, but say, "Well, that's interesting he said that." That, again, there's much more of an attempted conversation with readers.

Jodi Enda: Dana, I'm going to ask you the last question here. "How do we get the Oxford English Dictionary next year to make post-

Elisabeth: You have to decide.

Jodi Enda: Post-truth, the word of the year?"

Dana Milbank: Actually, is it Merriam-Webster that's been trolling Trump on Twitter? I think that have, with their definitions. It's them, Saturday Night Live, and Teen Vogue. Then the three major forces fighting to save our democracy, so that's what on this side. I don't know, I like what these guys are saying about efforts to demystify what we're doing but I don't really think it's ... Which is good that should be done, but I'm not sure that we can do anything about changing all of this so what either ... People often compare this to the 1850s, and so, "Well, there's one way to reset this," and that didn't work out so well, right, but you know a major crisis could do that, bigger than 911, bigger than the 2008 financial collapse, it'd just reset everything. Or it'll just be a change in generational leadership and something quietly. It has to get better but it's not like there's something we can do. We can do things at the margins and then just keep doing our jobs.

Jodi Enda: Great. Thank you so much.

Rabbi Zemel: Thank you all so much and I just want to repeat what Dana just said, "Keep doing your jobs," and thank you from all of us for doing what you do. Take care.

Female: Thank you.

How did we do?



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