

Colleen Brown introducing Fred Barnes

Introduction of the Executive Editor of *The Weekly Standard* and FOX News commentator Fred Barnes by Colleen Brown, President & CEO of Fisher Communications, at Washington Policy Center's 2008 Annual Dinner on October 1, 2008 at the Seattle Sheraton Hotel.

Thank you, Susan [Hutchison], thank you. Our speaker tonight is Fred Barnes. Fred co-founded and is executive editor of *The Weekly Standard* and is co-host of "The Beltway Boys" on the Fox Cable News Channel. He also appears regularly on Fox's "Special Report with Bret Hume" and I've actually seen him, I believe, holding his own against Bill O'Reilly on "The Factor", is that so? Yes.

He has served as a Senior White House Correspondent for *The New Republic*, as a regular panelist on "the McLaughlin Group" and has appeared on ABC's "Nightline", NBC's "Meet The Press", CBS's "Face The Nation", and PBS's "News Hour with Jim Lehrer". I think it's safe to say he's been on all of the alphabet networks.

Today, Fred is going to talk about, no surprise, the elections. Obviously, an important and extremely timely subject. This election will have a great impact on the direction of our country and on the direction of the world. As the Washington Policy Center continues its bipartisan goal, as a free market think tank, the impact of this election, whatever the outcome, will have an influence on our great State. We are fortunate to have

Fred with us tonight since following tonight's speech, he jumps on a red-eye to D.C. to cover tomorrow night's very interesting and, hopefully, promising debate between Vice President Joe Biden and Sarah Palin.

So please help me welcome Fred Barnes. [applause]



Fred Barnes commenting on the 2008 election

Speech by Fred Barnes, the Executive Editor of The Weekly Standard and FOX News Commentator at Washington Policy Center's 2008 Annual Dinner on October 1, 2008 at the Seattle Sheraton Hotel

Thank you Colleen, I am delighted to be here with the Washington Policy Center. I'm sorry I'm interrupting everybody's dinner, but I am delighted to be here. I'm not only familiar with the Washington Policy Center and state free market and conservative think tanks. I'm a great admirer of them. They have become indispensable in a number of states and now, I understand, there are these think tanks in all 50 states.

But, of course, the Washington Policy Center was right at the forefront of this movement and starting 20 years ago, way ahead of a lot of them. But they have become crucial, indispensable in influencing state governments in favor of freedom and against stateism. So I congratulate the Washington Policy Center for being a part of this tremendous movement across America of conservative and free market state think tanks, it's just a wonderful thing that's happened in recent years.

Now I don't know about you all in Seattle but inside the Beltway in Washington, and almost everywhere I go, conservatives of all stripes; economic, social conservatives, foreign policy conservatives, libertarians, are somewhat down in the dumps these days. Depressed over the presidential campaign in the last couple of weeks, the economy, the financial crisis, the media; a lot of things.

Now, my spirits get lifted just when I leave Washington DC. Particularly now, I remember, there's this famous line that goes back about a half century by Stuart Symington who was a Democratic Senator from Missouri who said that Washington is the only place he knows where the inmates run the asylum. A lot of truth in that, particularly now.

Ronald Reagan always described Washington as an island surrounded on all sides by reality.

So before I go on to talk about some about the presidential campaign and John McCain and Barack Obama, I want to make a couple of points and I'll tell you a couple of stories. My first point is this; don't worry about Sarah Palin.

I've spent time with Sarah Palin, about a year ago, spent an hour and a half having lunch with her at the governor's mansion in Juneau. She's smart, she's self confident, she knows domestic issues anyway and is learning foreign policy issues. She doesn't need to pretend that she knows more than she does. She's an extraordinarily appealing person and I'm not worried at all about how she'll perform in the debate tomorrow night against Joe Biden. For one thing, she's smarter than Joe Biden.

Now here's what the problem has been in the last couple of weeks. The handlers who were sent in to deal with her after her incredibly impressive appearance and speech at the Republican Convention in St. Paul, decided that they just had to make sure of one thing; that she didn't say anything that might be a mistake or that might differ from something that John McCain had said. I don't why that was important; they're both mavericks, they can say whatever they want.

But basically, and if you saw on the television interviews with Charles Gibson and Katie Couric, they crushed the life out of her. The star quality, the appeal that she has and they turned her into someone, basically, uninteresting and unappealing. But those handlers have been replaced.

In the last few days they basically, practicing for the debate, have let Sarah Palin be Sarah Palin. That's who I believe we're going to see tomorrow night. The Sarah Palin full of self-confidence, knowledgeable, attractive, and always with that great quality she had before; always in a good mood. A lot of people aren't; it's appealing,



always in a good mood. I think the good mood is back. So don't worry about her.

My second point is; the bailout's not going to be quite as bad as we think. It passed the Senate tonight, just a few minutes ago, I think 74-25, that's not the hard part; of course, it's the House of Representatives where it will be a tighter vote than that. But the bill is better than it would have been if John McCain hadn't intervened, if house Republicans hadn't intervened, and even, though I was not in favor of this myself, even if house Republicans and 95 Democrats hadn't voted down the bill on Monday. It did create quite a market tumble. No question about that but it is a better bill and Congress does have to act.

When Wachovia, the third biggest bank in America stock dropped from \$54 a share to \$2 and money market funds face a run on them, and, of course, you all know about Washington Mutual, there's a problem. And it's not just a question of bailing out companies that may not deserve it. There's one thing in this bill that has been put in by Republicans actually to get some of the payment for the rescue paid for by the companies and the banks that get rid of the bad loans that they have.

But the reason for urgent action is because the collateral damage that may happen injuring millions and millions of innocent people if the financial crisis became an economic crisis. So, we need this piece of legislation, I think.

Now, let me tell you a couple of stories including my favorite story from the presidential campaign this year that I heard from that great American humorist, Mitt Romney. Mitt Romney, I believe he was campaigning in New Hampshire where there are all these town hall meetings and the candidates go all of them before the primary.

In one of them, he told this story; I happened to be there and he told this story about a couple, a married couple, each 50 years old walking on the beach in Florida one day when they come upon an Aladdin lamp, one of those lamps and a genie pops out. Really this is Mitt Romney telling this story. A 50 year old couple and the genie says to the couple, each of you can have one wish, anything you want, one wish. And he turns first to the wife and she says, I've always admired all that wonderful jewelry that you see in museums, it was worn by Queen Victoria and Katherine the Great, and Queen Elizabeth and I'd just love to have some and just like that, she's decked out in it. Then the genie turns to the husband and says, sir, what would you like? You're one wish? He says, I'm a little embarrassed to say this right in front of my wife, she's here, but look, I'm going to tell you what I've really always wanted and that's to be married to a woman who's 30 years younger. And just like that he's 80.

Mitt Romney, really. How could I make that up? President Bush once explained, I love this explanation, he once explained, this was early in his administration actually, but he explained what his strategy was for winning elections. And he was pretty good at winning elections and he said it was simply this, you can fool some of the people all of the time, and he concentrated on those people. He was joking. Some of my friends in Washington, they say, oh, no, no, stolen moment of candor; no, I don't think so. There's not much call for President Bush stories these days but I'm going to tell you one anyway.



It has the advantage of being true. That's not a necessity but it helps. This is a story about President Bush and his very close friend now, Bono. Now some of you all know who Bono is, I'm sure some of you don't'. Bono is a famous rock star, probably next to Mick Jaeger the most famous rock star, maybe the most famous person in the world. He's with that Irish band U2 and he's a very unusual rock star in that he is interested in world affairs and particularly, relieving third world debt and getting medicine to Africa in particular, to deal with AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and all those diseases in Africa. Bono has won incredible political trait and that is

that he is able to get in become friends with leaders all over the world.

He became a great friend with Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina and, obviously, people like Prime Minister Gordon Brown of England and before that, Tony Blair, the President of France, and President Bush. Well, the first time he came to the White House, Bono was to meet with Josh Bolten, in the first term, a domestic policy aide, now he's the White House Chief of Staff, and before that meeting Josh Bolten happened to be in the Oval Office with the President on another subject.

When that meeting that ended, he said to the President, Mr. President, I leave here now, I'm going to go meet with Bono, do you know who Bono is? And President Bush said, of course I know who Bono, everybody knows who Bono is, he's that famous rock star. Josh Bolten was actually quite surprised as I would have been that the president knew something like that and he said, That's very good, Mr. President, I'm impressed.

Josh Bolten turns to leave and as he's walking out the door of the Oval Office, he hears the President say, of course I know who Bono is, he's that guy that used to be married to Cher. Now the question is, is whether you think the President was joking or not. I don't.

Well, let me talk a little bit about the campaign and they're really, presidential campaigns have different episodes, chapters, parts, segments. And there's some, there's six that we know of, the pre-primary, the primaries, the summer, the conventions, the debates, the end of the campaign. I may have left something out but then they're unscheduled events that happen that have a big impact.

We had the summer Barack Obama was supposed to open up a big lead in the presidential race, at least, almost everybody in the political community thought so. He didn't. And then we came to the conventions and we had that spectacular speech at a football stadium in Invesco Field in Denver by Barack Obama, remember, with the columns behind it and the fireworks afterwards. I happened to be in the stadium, it really was unlike anything I'd ever been to in a convention or any other political event actually.

But about 12 hours later, something more important happened; 12, maybe 14 hours later a bigger thing happened. And that's when John McCain announced that Sarah Palin, the governor of Alaska, would be his running mate. Now, this reminded me of a story that one of my colleagues on the McLaughlin Group many years ago, Jack Germond, now retired used to tell. Jack was a great fan of the racetrack, now retired, lives right near one in West Virginia actually.

His story involved a horse player. He would always tell this story in his speeches. A horse player who had never done well at the race track and was always just hoping that one day the gods of the race track would like kindly on him and send him a clue or something; a sign, a signal, something so he'd know how to be at the track and make a lot of money. Never happened before.

Wakes up one morning and the number five is in his mind. He looks at his clock, it's 5:55 a.m., it's his 55th birthday, May 5th. This is something he notices. He's a salesman, he has a sales meeting at 9 a.m., he can't just rush off to the track then and has breakfast, reads the paper, calls the taxis to take him down to the Johnson Building where he has a meeting and he looks at the registration number for the cab driver and it's number 55-55.

When he gets down to the Johnson Building, he realized what he's forgotten and his meeting is at 555 5th Avenue and the session's on the 5th floor. It's too much for him. It's the morning, the horses don't run until the afternoon. He goes to the track anyway, waits around until the fifth race, bets \$5,000 on horse number 5 who comes in 5th.

Of course, the moral of the story is, you don't always get what you expect at the racetrack, in life, but particularly in politics. My way of saying it is, the future in politics is never a straight line projection of the present. Things happen. Sarah Palin happened, but events can happen and Sarah Palin had a really explosive affect on the campaign in ways that I don't believe John McCain could have expected.

But he's a lucky man who likes to take chances. Sarah Palin basically put John McCain back in the presidential race. Changed the trajectory of the campaign and did really five things. She obviously, thrilled conservatives; I even talked to some tonight here who thought more of John McCain as a result of his having picked Sarah Palin. She broadened the appeal of the Republican ticket; no question about that, particularly among working class people, many of whom are women who voted for Hilary Clinton.

You go to a Palin event now and there are a lot, well, there are actually a lot more women than men; although

polls show men like her better than women. You can figure that one out. A lot of them are people wearing Hilary badges at her events. She improved the Republican brand as a reformer, someone enormously popular in Alaska and she made the ticket more interesting. It does matter and everybody knows John McCain so well that there's not that much new we can learn about him. But with Sarah Palin there, that changed.

Then there came an intervening event about three years ago; three weeks ago and that was the financial crisis and that is basically taken away the Sarah Palin bounce and been a disaster for the John McCain ticket. The first week of the financial disaster, if you follow tracking polls, McCain was losing a point a day. It's not quite that bad anymore but he hasn't recovered.

The problem wasn't whether his ideas were better than in the beginning on the bailout, or the rescue, or whatever you want to call it. It's not that his ideas were any better than Barack Obama's, he had some, Obama didn't, but it was the styles that mattered. Obama was cool and unruffled, passive, didn't say much. And McCain was more hot and angry and hot tempered. Now, that was fine when we had hot tempered presidents in the past. Andrew Jackson was one, Theodore Roosevelt was one. That was pre-TV. Now cool and even temperedness works better. Think of John F.

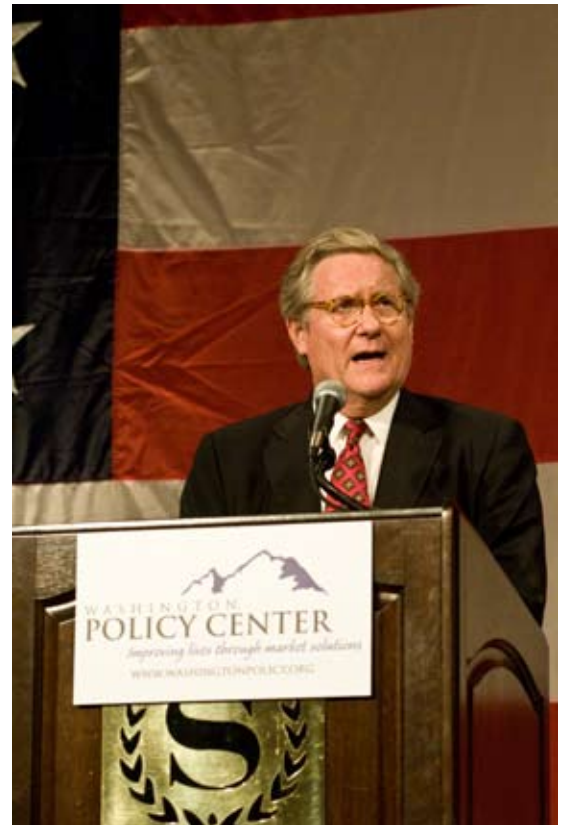
Kennedy, think of Ronald Reagan. As a result Obama, that was one of the reasons why Obama went up in polls and McCain went down and cool and passive beat active and hot. The crisis overpowered the McCain campaign and now we're in the debate phase. Now this is an important phase; debates are usually not decisive in campaigns but they can help. Certainly the one tomorrow night with Sarah Palin and Joe Biden is one where if she does well, and I certainly think she will, is one that could rejuvenate the McCain campaign in ways that vice presidential debates usually don't do. They're usually not that exciting, this one will have an enormous audience for the same reason Sarah Palin gets enormous crowds. She's attractive and an awful lot of people are curious about her and want to learn more about her. I happened to be a panelist in the 1984 Reagan/Mondale debate, the first one, where Reagan did so poorly, one of the worst debate performance anybody's ever seen, affected the result not at all. He still won by 19 points, so debates are usually not decisive. McCain did extraordinarily well last Friday, I thought, and won that debate better than I thought he would do. He did at least marginally better than Barack Obama but you have to remember one thing about debates that's extremely important; they're not just about substance. In fact, in some debates, they're not at all about substance, they're all about, in particular, making people, voters, feel comfortable with you. It's something that Ronald Reagan was obviously very good at doing. Obama did a pretty good job with that last Friday night.

There was an interesting poll in 2004 which answers this question about who made people more comfortable. And it was poll that asked this; would you rather have the Bush's or the Kerry's move in next door and be your neighbors? Overwhelmingly 6, 7, 8 to 1 they preferred the Bush's as their neighbors. Comfort level matters a lot.

You know there are really three overriding factors; I've always thought that politics is pretty simple. Of course, I don't have to run for office or raise money or get phone banks going or anything like that. So, it seems easy to me. My son now is working for a campaign in Ohio and he knows all that stuff.

But anyway, three things, one the quality of the candidates, secondly the status of the parties and three the political circumstances, the lay of the land. Start with the candidates; obviously Barack Obama and John McCain are quite different ideologically. Obama's extremely liberal; he's for generally government solutions and more government spending.

In foreign policy he's for more use of soft power which means peace through diplomacy. McCain is more



conservative, more free market oriented, more in favor of hard power which means peace through strength. Of course, McCain having been in the Senate a much longer time has many more accomplishments and experiences.

Then there's the difference in style and personality. There's a famous book that was written, it may not be famous, but at least I've read it. A book called *The Warrior and The Priest* by a University of Wisconsin professor and he's drawing the distinction between Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson who actually ran against each other in 1912 with a third candidate in there. You could see it as the warrior and the professor but, the guy who wrote the book called it *The Warrior and the Priest*. McCain is a warrior. He's active, he always wants to be in the arena, he's restless. If you've ever spent any time around him, you'll see he's a hard guy to interview because he's always thinking about a lot of different things.

He's hot tempered, emotional, extremely practical. Then those Obama who's much more passive, aloof, unruffled, rarely rattled, even tempered, someone who wants to be a visionary. Obama has one problem and Bush has one advantage that's hard to pin down, I just call it, he's lucky. Helps to be lucky. He's lucky to be alive after having been a POW at the Hanoi Hilton for five and half years. He's lucky to have gotten the Republican nomination. He got it after all the other candidates collapsed and he was the last guy standing.

Obama's problem is that there's a chunk of the Democratic party, particularly in the mid-west, in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Indiana, states like that that really hasn't lined up behind him. A lot of them were Hillary voters. Lot of them are working class voters, they're still available. That weakness though on Obama's part is offset by the condition of the Democratic party which is a lot stronger than the Republican party.

Over the last four years, the Democratic party has grown, the Republican party has shrunk a little. Democratic registration is up, Republican registration down. Democratic party ID in other words, ask people which party to they indentify with? Democrats have an advantage. You ask people which party, do you look favorably on? Republicans are doing better than they did in 2006, but they're still behind.

It's an unpopular Republican President. I happen to like him, but I guess that's not enough, he's still unpopular. Then there's the political conditions which also favor Democrats. I think there's really no way to get around it. We have a weak economy with a financial crisis now which may end if this bailout passes the House of Representatives. I guess it will come up tomorrow or Friday.

The political cycle, you know, we do have cycles, you have liberal/conservative cycles, Republican and Democratic cycles. You ask people do you think the country is going in the right direction or the wrong direction and by two or three to one they say, wrong direction. It's a change election whatever that means. I'm not really sure what it means. I'm not sure people who say they want change know what they mean. I'm not sure Barack Obama knows what he means when he talks about change you can count on. I'm much more in favor of improvement rather than change.

But it's not a status quo election. It's a change election and I could go on. There are other things that favor the Democrats. Now here's what's particularly at threat in this election, other than the White House and that is the most valuable tool that has been able to be used in the last two years to block liberal legislation, most of which certainly not expand the free market the conservatives oppose. If it hadn't been the veto, as I suspect everybody in the room knows, that President Bush has not vetoed many pieces of legislation. Particularly the spending ones. It's the filibuster. Where you can block legislation in the Senate by getting 41 votes. If everybody's there, 100 Senators, 41 you can block it. Now, it's pretty easy to get



41 Republicans, when you have 49 of them in the Senate. But in the next Senate, there are not going to be 49 of them. And when you get down below 45, it's hard to come up with 41.

You always lose a few, one way or another. There's some slippage. If Republicans lose five or more Senate seats, and they could. I live in Virginia, going to lose one there. You could have a filibuster-proof Senate that's Democratic and Liberal, and a House that's Democratic and Liberal, and a Democratic and Liberal president. And then what might happen? Well, this is the worst-case scenario, just to get your spirits up. National health care, that would be quite expensive, and would be a giant step toward single-payer, government-run health care. The Freedom of Choice Act.

Now, Barack Obama has said he hopes that the first legislation he would sign would be the Freedom of Choice Act, which would eliminate any restriction on abortion, anywhere in the country. Federal law, state law, partial birth abortion, anything. Card check. You know what this is? This allows unions to organize without ever having a secret ballot election.

I remember, years ago, when I got out of college; my first job was as a checker at Safeway. A good job. And some union came around. I knew I was leaving, I was going to go to graduate school, which wasn't a great success either, but they were trying to organize Safeway, and I signed the card. Because I knew I was leaving immediately, and I just wanted to get away from the union guy.

All you need is a majority of those cards being signed and you can declare that you've organized the plant and the owner will have to recognize the union. No secret ballot. That's what Card Check is. Of course, we know about the tax hikes on capital gains, on dividends, on individual income, and so on. And then the return of the Fairness Doctrine.

The most striking feature of the Fairness Doctrine is how unfair it is. The Fairness Doctrine is aimed at one thing, and that is killing conservative talk radio. That's the only thing it's aimed at. I happened to have a tie on that I borrowed from Dave Boze. I was doing his show and I had forgotten my tie. He gave me his. So I'm very pro-conservative talk radio]. I was anyway. But the Fairness Doctrine that could easily be passed, what it would say is, it's really aimed at killing not only David's show, but Rush Limbaugh. If you have him on for three hours, you have to turn over three hours of time on your radio station for somebody to respond for free. Well, radio stations are not going to do that, because they would be losing money if they did it.

Those are the things that could happen. We'll see. They will depend on the outcome of an election that is not over yet. In America, when we elect a president, we don't elect a party leader. In England, if the Conservative Party wins the most seats in Parliament, the leader of the party, elected only in one small district or constituency will become the Prime Minister. But that's not the way it works here. In America we separately elect a president and it is the one election that people pay the most attention to. I think they probably know more about the presidential candidates than they do about Senate candidates, House candidates. It's one where they pay more attention to the intangibles, the traits, the characteristics of the candidates.

Because those matter so much when you're electing the most important political figure in the world, the leader of the free world is the American President. So voters, many of them, a lot of people just vote whether you're a conservative or liberal, and that may be the biggest thing. Or a Republican or a Democrat.

But most of them try to assess the personal qualities, imperfectly as these assessments might be, of the candidates, on the basis of their character, their judgment, their honesty, their knowledge, their likeability, which matters, their vision. All these personal traits matter so much that don't matter in other races. There's a moment in campaigns, in presidential campaigns in particular, that comes toward the end of the campaigns, late in October, maybe early in November.

If one candidate is well-known and experienced and the other is not. Someone who's relatively new on the scene. Someone who has few accomplishments, at least at the national level, to talk about that. There's this moment where millions and millions of voters say, well, I might be inclined to vote for this younger, less experienced candidate, but I just don't know.

I just don't know whether I should do that or not. Whether I can trust him. This is not just something that might happen this year. It's something that happened in 1976. You saw, toward the end of that campaign, between President Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, strong movement toward President Ford at the end and Jimmy Carter still won by a couple of percentage points.

Saw it again in 1992, where there were questions about Bill Clinton, a Governor of Arkansas. There was movement away from him and toward President George Bush, the elder, but Clinton won anyway. We saw it in 2000, when there was a strong trend, surprising, and most pollsters didn't catch it, a strong trend, in the last week away from George Bush and to Al Gore, which is how he won the popular vote.

Now, I suspect this is going to happen in this race. I suspect it's already happening since early voting has begun in many, many places all over the country. In Virginia, large lines in voting, in college towns in particular. But people will be asking this question. I think they'll be asking about Barack Obama who, right now, a majority or near majority of Americans are ready to vote for.

Now I don't know what their verdict's going to be. The three examples I cited: Carter, Clinton, and Bush, the new, younger, less experienced, less accomplished candidate won. It may happen this time. Odds are it will. But there still will be this moment, at the end of the campaign. It may be imperceptible. In fact, I think it probably usually is, because people don't go out and get all together and say, now let's think about this candidate. But it happens. So, for that reason, the race isn't over. We've got a month to go. It's one of the most extraordinary presidential races we've ever had.

I know people worry about, when I hear liberals, and there are a lot of them in Washington, when I hear about it, they just can't stand the idea of what will happen to America if John McCain wins. Of course, when they come to Sarah Palin, they're completely crazed. There are an awful lot of conservatives, and I suspect there are many in this room, who think that, gee, if Barack Obama is elected, America is going to come to an end as we know it. The truth is neither of those things are going to happen. And I've watched over the years and seen how the most resilient and powerful thing is America itself.

If you're a conservative, and your person gets elected, like Ronald Reagan, he may achieve a lot of things, but never all the things you'd want. The same thing goes for liberals. They can never do it because America pulls them more toward a consensus. Though you don't see it much in Washington now and that will happen again. I'll tell you what President Bush thinks, because I've heard him say this; that something will happen. If Barack Obama's elected president, on January 21, 2009, he will get his first intelligence briefing from the director of National Intelligence, who will come in and tell him about the threats to America around the world.

Now, President Bush, who experienced this, obviously, on January 21, 2001, knows what happens to you, at least what happened to him. Remember, he was talking about; we're going to be a humble America that won't project much power around the world. Then he got his first intelligence report, and it changed his thinking about his presidency and the world and then, of course, it changed even more on 9/11. He's convinced that that will happen to Barack Obama, if he's elected president, or would have if Hillary Clinton were running and were elected and then to some extent, even to John McCain if he's elected. Well, all I can say is, I certainly hope so. No question about that.

I want to finish with, I'll tell you about an incident that happened. I used to be on a show, the McLaughlin Group; it's still on the air. It didn't end when I left. John McLaughlin, a former Jesuit priest, is still going in his 80s now. But the last McLaughlin Group event I went to was one where he was having his bachelor party. He was in his 70s, a former Jesuit priest getting married for the second time to a woman half his age. A lovely woman.

I'd never been to such a bachelor party. Maybe some of you all have. It was new to me. We all gave toasts. He rated them between 1 and 10. The best one came from a man named Mort Zuckerman, who owns U.S. News and World Report Magazine, the New York Daily News, and large chunks of property in Boston, New York, and Washington. Mort Zuckerman got up and said, John, your words will be remembered long after Shakespeare's are forgotten, but not until then. I suspect that's true of mine as well. Thank you all very much.