

**U.S. COMEDY ARTS FESTIVAL 2003**

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**INDUSTRY SEMINAR:**

**WHO'S FUNNIER—THE LEFT OR THE RIGHT?**

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ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen, your host this morning, former White House Chief of Staff to President Clinton, the President and CEO of the New Center for American Progress, John Podesta. [applause]

JOHN PODESTA: Good morning. Good morning. Boy, standing out here on a comedy stage... I actually haven't been this nervous since the last time I was in the grand jury. [laughter] I do want to welcome you here this morning. I looked at the program for this comedy festival, and for four days, no program started before 2 o'clock in the afternoon. Now you can answer that question for yourself, why was that.

So I really want to thank you for getting up and getting out of bed so early this morning. I want to thank HBO for giving us the opportunity to sponsor this. We are a new progressive think tank in Washington, we want to try to do some things different than have been done before. I assume some people in the audience are asking, what's a "think tank," especially one based in Washington, [laughter] doing at a comedy arts festival.

We thought about that and we decided that we needed to come out and come to a community that it actually benefited from President Bush's tax cuts. So here we are in Aspen. [laughter] Our goal is to provide new progressive ideas, a new direction for the country. You have some material on your chair, we provide a hard critique of the radical right and the conservative direction we see the country going in. But we want to do things that form a new basis for communicating with the American public, and that's what we're doing here today.

With any new venture, the one thing I learned working for President Clinton is you never say anything without first having a poll. So I want to give you one number, which is from a recent Pugh poll, which found that 20% of the people of – Americans 18-to-30-years-old, actually get their political news from watching TV comedy shows. But they're not getting their spin, they're not getting their attitude, they're actually getting their facts about politics from watching TV comedy.

Now that may be a good news or a bad news story, depending on your point of view. Comedy in politics can bury you, or it could be anecdote, or a cure for whatever ails you. During my time in the White House I had more experience with the former rather than the latter. [laughter] But I would say that those of us who come from the world of policy

and politics start by asking questions, how are we going to communicate in this new media environment, how are we going to reach young people today.

I think probably from the world of entertainment, they must be asking themselves, what are the journalistic ethics of producing fake news. So our panel is going to begin to explore the intersection of comedy and politics, and of course, we're going to answer the question: "Who's Funnier – Left or Right?"

And to do that I want to introduce our moderator, Campbell Brown. Campbell is a veteran of politics in America. She's covered most of the people who make fools of themselves during this campaign season. She's been a White House correspondent, covering both the Clinton and the Bush White Houses. She covered the Bush campaign, she now is the anchor of the "Weekend Today" show, and she manages still to get out there and cover the primaries. Fortunately for us, she got off the campaign trail and is here today to guide us in our discussion. So please join me in welcoming me, Campbell Brown. [applause]

BROWN: Thank you. People came. See John, I told you. It wasn't too early. Thank you very much for that. Thank God Edwards dropped out, or I wouldn't have made it. [laughter] On this panel this morning we have an amazing group. They are a combination of the most brilliant political minds from the Left and the Right, as well some of the people who take a look at the often self-important, sometimes overly earnest politicians, as well as the people who cover them, and remind us, through comedy, that they are hilariously human.

So, let me introduce our panel. Beginning with Greg Proops, best known for his appearance on "Who's Line Is It Anyway?" The comedy talk show host. Hi. [applause]

*Time* magazine's White House correspondent and also winner of Washington's funniest non-celebrity, Matt Cooper from *Time* magazine. [applause]

Host of the hit nationally syndicated talk show, Phil Hendrie. [applause]

The senior strategist to John McCain and Arnold Schwarzenegger's campaign, and writer and producer of CNBC's "The Dennis Miller Show," Mike Murphy. [applause]

Senior correspondent for the Peabody Award winning "Daily Show with Jon Stewart," Stephen Colbert. [applause]

And someone I'm sure you aren't at all familiar with, the co-creator, writer and executive producer, and the star of "The Drew Carey Show," Drew Carey. [applause]

And the first comic strip artist to ever be awarded the Pulitzer Prize, creator of “Doonesbury,” Garry Trudeau. [applause]

So before we start, we’re going to set up our discussion with a little look back at some of our favorite moments in political humor from both the Left and the Right, brought to you by some of the people on stage with us today.

[CLIPS SHOWN: POLITICAL HUMOR ON TELEVISION]

BROWN: So let’s start with the obvious question. Who’s funnier? Drew?

DREW CAREY: Oh, I don’t think either one is. I think you just have to make fun of – make sure you’re making fun of your targets right and getting laughs. I don’t think there is a funnier Left or Right, honestly. I don’t think there’s an answer to the question.

STEPHEN COLBERT: Can I follow up on that? [laughter]

BROWN: By all means.

COLBERT: Can I just sort of steal it? Did you mean, who’s funnier to mock or who is funnier at mocking? [laughter]

BROWN: To mock. Let’s start with “to mock.”

COLBERT: Who is more mockable?

BROWN: Yes.

COLBERT: I think the Right is more mockable, because they’re higher status. And you know, it’s always more fun to attack the guy on top. And right now the Republicans control the legislature, the executive and the judicial branch, so there’s hardly another game in town.

The only reason anyone’s attacking the Democrats is because they’re sticking their neck out for the campaign. If there wasn’t a political campaign, you wouldn’t hear about the Democrats from comedians probably at all. Because – well, they’re not pumping themselves up.

PHIL HENDRIE: They’re not doing anything in other words. [laughter]

BROWN: Well Phil, jump in.

HENDRIE: My microphone's not working. There it is. They're dull, they're not doing anything. [laughter]

BROWN: You support President Bush?

HENDRIE: I do. And I'm a Democrat who supports President Bush. But I only support President Bush... [audience boo's] and I'll tell you why.

BROWN: No boo'ing. No boo'ing.

HENDRIE: And I anticipated that response. [laughter] First of all, I think the Democrats are hysterical. But really, it's not the Democrats, it's sort of the liberal tree hug, whatever you want to call it, they're a riot. I mean, I do a character on my show named Dean Wheeler, who is a real pansy ass when it comes to...

First of all, I'm a Democrat who believes that it's okay to own a gun – I think it's in the Constitution that we can. In fact, in the world we live today, you're an idiot if you are a responsible citizen and you don't have a gun in your home. If you are a responsible... [audience boo's] Why is that a "boo"? It's in the Constitution, you may have it. If you look at your wife or your daughter being pistol whipped in front of your very eyes, you wouldn't reach for a gun?

BROWN: Okay, Phil... this panel is "Who's Funnier – The Left or the Right."

HENDRIE: You wouldn't reach for a gun? Hey, this is a comedy show and I'm going to keep thinking it's funny here. [laughter] Now let's talk about your wife and daughter getting pistol whipped. Let's reach for a gun.

GREG PROOPS: There is really nothing funnier than your wife or daughter getting pistol whipped. [laughter] I have to agree with Phil on that one. [laughter]

HENDRIE: On second thought, I wouldn't reach for a gun. I'd get a video camera.

PROOPS: You can reach for a Pop Tart or a drink is what I'd do. Man, let's sit back and enjoy this pistol whipping. [laughter] Gosh, I wish I had a gun right now. I wish I had the prescience to be a fascist and have a gun. [laughter]

HENDRIE: A fascist. Yeah, that's right. Yeah. What the hell. Let my wife die, I don't want to be a fascist.

COLBERT: I'd like to apologize for taking the question away. [laughter]

HENDRIE: Yeah, why in the hell did you start... [laughter]

COLBERT: You were doing a very good job and I apologize.

CAREY: I can't get – I'm feeling so tired. [laughter] Whoever is puffed up, the Democrats are puffed – a lot of Democrats and liberals are really like self-righteous and we're here to save you, and they have that vibe going, that's easy to make fun of them because you can knock them down real easy. And so many Republicans are like, oh we know it's moral and you don't, and we're going to protect you and your family – you can knock them down real easy because they're so fuckin' pompous.

COLBERT: But isn't comedy mostly about like attacking, you know, the status quo?

CAREY: Yeah.

COLBERT: Isn't comedy basically how the liberalities do it?

HENDRIE: Pistol whipping the status quo, I want to get back to that. [laughter]

COLBERT: Or shooting them while they—

HENDRIE: Yeah, exactly. While the status quo is beating your wife and mother.

CAREY: I know. But you always want to attack people that are higher than you, or think they're higher than you.

COLBERT: Right.

CAREY: So that's a lot of liberals and a lot of conservatives who think—

HENDRIE: Right.

CAREY: --they're better than everybody else in the country because they're so paternal in their attitudes. So good, I love to knock those people down.

GARRY TRUDEAU: Yeah, I think satire has always been this kind of disorganized resistance to established power. If you go back a few hundred years, the court jester pulled the king's beard, he didn't go out and randomly criticize the serfs. [laughter]

HENDRIE: Giving crap to the serfs.

PROOPS: Can I ask you if some queen was being ass whipped at that point?

[voices overlap]

PROOPS: Or sword whipped or anything like that? We may be re-creating that society.

TRUDEAU: This is why Dennis Miller I think has had trouble getting a little traction. Is that what's he going to do? I mean, go after the Democrats? These guys are so not in power.

MURPHY: We're going to—

TRUDEAU: That's very amusing. They are so not screwing up the world the way the Republicans are right now.

MURPHY: I think there's some proof to that. I mean... [applause] the bigger you are—

HENDRIE: Yeah, but don't worry—

MURPHY: Exactly. It's coming. It's coming. When we meet Mrs. Kerry, I guarantee you – a comic goldmine. [laughter] I agree actually with what Drew said. It's equivalent. There is a certain absurdity inherent in all politics. And the closer you get to any politician, you can find just a little tinge of that insanity or weirdness that makes it funny. And when you're in the White House, you're the king of the heap, you're the most interesting person to focus on. And I think satire does have that kind of – that interest in challenging those who are powerful.

But now that the primaries are over and we're getting to the real thing, I think there's going to be an elevation of Kerry. You know, I think they'll both be interesting and funny, and they're both easy to make fun of.

BROWN: Well, let's get specific. What exactly is funny about John Kerry?

MATTHEW COOPER: The guy is a target rich environment for comics. I mean, you picture – he's so stiff, you sort of picture him sitting at home wearing a powdered wig, watching C-Span, too. [laughter] I mean, he told one of my colleagues at *Time* that he actually thought of himself as a rebel. [laughter] I mean, John Kerry being rebellious is having red wine with fish. [laughter] You know, when he gets elevated, we'll have our shots.

TRUDEAU: Don't you think there will be real parody in this election in that sense, that both these guys—

COOPER: Absolutely.

TRUDEAU: --that both these guys—

HENDRIE: Yeah, John Kerry doesn't stand for anything. I mean, right there that's mockable, he doesn't stand for a thing. He's just anti-Bush, which is why the Democrats really – I'm so ashamed of my party because it's an anti-Bush party, it doesn't stand for a bloody thing. Now pistol whipping... [laughter]

COOPER: The President's war on English...

HENDRIE: Huh?

COOPER: The President's war on English is a goldmine. [laughter]

HENDRIE: This is good. Yes. But the John Kerry makeover, you can't beat that. Well yeah, you can.

COOPER: But you're right. For Bush to try to shed his patrician roots is—

CAREY: You know what's great about what Bush does is he makes fun of his own problem. Like he does on "Saturday Night Live," he makes jokes about them all the time, and right away, you forgive it. You know what I mean?

PROOPS: No, right away you forgive it. [laughter] I think you'll find he's not quite as self-effacing and a man of the people as some people might imagine.

COLBERT: I'm still waiting for Bush to make a self-effacing joke about executing the retarded.

HENDRIE: But that's funny. That's funny.

CAREY: It's not like – well, it's not like they plucked a retarded guy off the street and go, "we're going to shoot you."

COLBERT: It's not like they retarded him. [laughter] It just happened.

CAREY: The guy was available.

PROOPS: Now if the retarded person had been a bird, then he would have definitely been shot.

CAREY: Well, when the retarded guy kills somebody in your family, we'll see if you change your tune.

COLBERT: I'm looking forward to it.

MURPHY: Now this retarded person, send him right to Phil's house. We'll make him the middle man.

BROWN: Let me try to bring us back sort of [laughter] to the subject matter. John Podesta, you were in the White House during the Clinton-Lewinsky period, where late-night comedians were having a field day. Were you watching? Were you able to find humor in this moment? Or were you too close to it?

CAREY: Did you get any leftovers? [laughter]

PODESTA: Well, I actually don't think Letterman and Leno had anything on our 7:47 staff meeting, really in the morning. And I watched Anderson Cooper get himself really in trouble talking about oral sex yesterday, so I think I'm going to avoid going down that path and just leave it to the imagination.

But I'd say two things about it really. One is having humor in the White House leavened the situation, made people have the capacity to actually go do their job because they could laugh about it a little on the inside. But I do think it robbed the President of something that Drew mentioned with regard to President Bush. Which is it robbed him of the ability to use humor – you know, you couldn't go from his grand jury testimony on to Leno and start joking around about it.

And so there was a period probably for a year in which I think President Clinton had a harder time actually using humor, which he was so good at during other parts of his tenure.

TRUDEAU: It did take away a very important tool out of his tool kit. He just had to stop. It was impossible for him to, as you say, go on any of these shows and make fun of himself. And this is – you know, that's what those clips that we just looked at were all about. Is these guys trying to buy themselves some immunity.

BROWN: But for comedians, can anything match the Clinton era, in terms of material?

COOPER: Campbell—

HENDRIE: I think the assassination of John Kennedy was a goldmine. [laughter] And from there we have civil rights, Vietnam, Nixon – please...

PROOPS: We also had Dan Quayle at one point, and that was clearly fresh. [laughter] I'll tell you. You can recycle those Dan Quayle jokes and make them W. jokes, and it's awesome.

PROOPS: How can we allow – obviously, it was so funny that Clinton had a sexual incident, and that that was endlessly entertaining. And yet all the things that Bush has done, people go, “you still have to respect the office and all that.” I hear that all the time. And crowds go “ooh,” if you make fun of him.

HENDRIE: What did he do?

PROOPS: Sorry?

HENDRIE: What did he do?

PROOPS: George W. Bush? Aside from—

HENDRIE: Other than go to war, what...

PROOPS: Oh other than go to war. [laughter]

HENDRIE: I'm a big fan, as you know.

PROOPS: Other than pistol whipping the Iraqis. [laughter]

BROWN: Matt, you were going to say something.

HENDRIE: You bring up guns and everybody's like scared? Come on.

PROOPS: Not in Colorado they're not. [laughter]

BROWN: Matt Cooper!

COOPER: I think you all can see there's nothing funny as pistol whipping—

HENDRIE: Are you doing an impression? [laughter]

COOPER: [Clinton impersonation] “Campbell, you are lovely this evening.” [laughter]

BROWN: Why do I call on you?

COLBERT: I think President Clinton should have just claimed that having sex with an intern was a joke. [laughter] And then said, “Don’t you get it? [laughter] That’s just... with an intern in the Oval Office! Hilarious! [laughter] I guess I’m just too hip for the room.” [applause]

PODESTA: Where was Stephen when we needed him? [laughter]

BROWN: Mike Murphy...

MURPHY: Yes.

BROWN: You have advised and worked for natural performers: Schwarzenegger, John McCain. Who could use—

MURPHY: Sure.

BROWN: --humor very successfully. You’ve also worked for some real stiffs.

MURPHY: Absolutely. [laughter]

BROWN: What do you say to these guys—

MURPHY: They prefer to be called “governor” and “senator” by the way. [laughter]

BROWN: How do you teach them to be funny?

MURPHY: Drugs and alcohol. No... [laughter]

HENDRIE: You did a good job.

MURPHY: Yeah. Yeah. So far. There was actually a true story. Once a senate candidate was actually doped up for his statewide debate by the media advisor – not me – who was nervous, and unbeknownst to the candidate, doped up the water glass on the podium.

CAREY: Who was it?

MURPHY: Oh, you know, it’s one of the secrets I have to die with. He’s no longer in office – lost that election.

HENDRIE: He got—

MURPHY: Right. Exactly. No, the truth is, the worst thing you can do is take an unfunny person and try to make them funny, because they'll never be good at it. And that's a mistake I think they might make with Kerry. Kind of get him off Easter Island, you know, and try to make him humor. [laughter] It's going to be hard.

I think Drew made a good point earlier, the President is aware that he's awful funny to a lot of people, and I think he will do self-deprecating things all the way through. But if you have an unfunny person, you don't try to make them funny, you go self-serious. You know, we don't need a clown in the White House or in the Senate, or in the city council, or whatever. You know, serious times demand this boring character.

BROWN: But why do we expect this from our politicians? It's almost a rite of passage that they have to go on "Leno," that they have to do "The Daily Show."

MURPHY: Pop culture rules everything now. I mean, look at Arnold. Who would have "thunk" it, you know? [laughter]

PROOPS: Well, I had a nightmare about it before it happened. [laughter]

MURPHY: Yeah, Lou Ferrigno is getting ideas now. We're a little worried. [laughter]

PROOPS: When I see Oklahoma stand up and nominate Jean-Claude Van Damme as their governor, then I'll know. [laughter]

MURPHY: There's a difference. I'll tell you, somebody was behind the scenes on the Arnold thing. I went in with low expectations, I was very impressed with the guy. He is somebody who knows what the underplay is, and to always be underestimated. And he's been underestimated all the way to the top of Hollywood with an unpronounceable name, and now to the largest governorship in the country.

But I do think pop culture has become so important in politics, that those of us who are going out running political campaigns, would much rather go put the candidate there, where's quick wide publicity and acceptance, than sit in a Tim Russert hot seat and have to do, you know, trigonometry on Sunday mornings. [laughter] You know, pop culture is so powerful, you know, we own it.

PROOPS: I think it was just Bush that made it look like trigonometry. [laughter] You've got your simple mathematical question: All that stuff, where is it? [laughter] "Someone took it. A shadowy figure took it to another country" or something like that. I'm going to go pistol whip an Iraqi. [laughter]

BROWN: Hey Phil, let me ask you—

HENDRIE: Yes.

BROWN: --because you have very definite opinions.

HENDRIE: Yes I do.

BROWN: Do you think that using comedy polarizes Americans? Are you in a sense – when you talk to your audience, are you preaching to the choir? Or are you—

HENDRIE: Probably. I mean, we probably all are. People come to see you, or people tune you in, obviously they feel or think the way you do. Although I do comedy and then I do commentary, and I do piss off people when I suddenly start talking about stuff – they'd rather hear me do funny voices, you know.

But polarize people? No. Because I can do a bit where – this character I have, Dean Wheeler, who is this liberal Northern Californian imbecile, and even Democrats think he's a riot, because they recognize him, you know, there's a guy like that. So, you can get away with a lot if you just learn to do voices, which is maybe something that John Kerry can do. [laughter] President Bush, you know...

BROWN: Drew?

CAREY: If he put on a stovepipe hat he could maybe do Lincoln, you know.

HENDRIE: Unfortunately Kerry won't have that opportunity. But... oh boy, I didn't hear that gasp escaping like I did the last time I said pistol whip. So if you are preaching to the choir, if you throw a zinger at them, they will get kind of upset with you, if they don't recognize it—

CAREY: And dep—

HENDRIE: Go ahead, Drew.

CAREY: The only problem I have with like people that call themselves like “local comedians,” is they're so – they count a “whoop” or an applause as a laugh. If they get the crowd who say they're liberals, and they have a roomful of liberals, and they go, “Ah, Bush is a shithead,” and everybody, “Whoop! Yeah!” Then they're backstage and they're go, “Man, I really killed.” [laughter] You know, you have to be funny no matter who you're making fun of, you know.

And you know you're funny when people that support the guy you're making fun of laugh at it. So, that's the only rule, and it doesn't have to be polarizing. Otherwise, it is polarizing. You're just up there bashing and not trying to be funny about it. And you're counting noise as laughter, than so what? [pause]

BROWN: Stephen... [then laughter] That was a good effort.

COLBERT: It's 9:30 in the morning, Drew.

BROWN: We know how much sleep you got.

COLBERT: It's 9:30.

BROWN: But Stephen, "The Daily Show" is pretty much an equal opportunity sort of—

COLBERT: We just want to heal through laughter. [laughter] We're trying to heal the riff to the 2000 campaign. Which by the way is a better story than anything ever – could ever be. Like what's funnier than Clinton having sex with interns? The 2000 campaign.

HENDRIE: A hanging chad.

COLBERT: It was important to everyone, and no one died.

BROWN: Garry, let me ask you, because... [laughter]

HENDRIE: You did right there.

COLBERT: You didn't need to interrupt my big moment. [laughter] Wait, I'm made to shine.

BROWN: Do you want to take another?

HENDRIE: I don't know. What's the question? [laughter]

BROWN: No—

TRUDEAU: I think that the whole idea of it being an equal opportunity satirist is kind of a contradiction of terms. That sort of person is more accurately described as a humorist. And that's generally what happens on the late night shows, is that – as you say, they play to one part of the audience, then they play to another, and there's never a sense on the part of someone like Leno that there's ever anything at stake. This is all in good fun, if you don't like the joke, we'll move on to the next one.

I think most good satire comes from a point of view, and most of the guys working in late night don't actually have a point of view. Which is fine, that's what they do, they're entertainers. But if you're shooting a little bit higher, if you're actually trying to illuminate through satire in some way, as pretentious as that probably sounds, it helps if you have a strong point of view. So that as you mow down everything, there's something left standing.

BROWN: And we should point that you do. And have gotten a lot of mileage out of this president, yeah?

TRUDEAU: Out of this president? Oh sure. Yeah. I mean... [laughter] In my position, he is considered the gold standard, and we would be crushed if he lost. [laughter] I've been running this little contest in the strip, offering \$10,000 for someone to come forward and all the, you know, trolling for trash that people have been using to try to establish where Bush was in the summer of '72.

I haven't found any witnesses, but most people say, "why on earth would you want to put \$10,000 at risk?" [laughter] And for me, basically it's I've got cash to burn now. One of the... [laughter] One of the unintended consequences – you know, part of the glow back of Bush's campaign to just give back to the great un-needy is that people like me are now fat cats. [laughter] And I've been just spraying money out on the whole field. [laughter] Everywhere I – I mean, I must be a Ranger or a Centurion or... [laughter] one of those summer camp designees...

COLBERT: Praetorian.

TRUDEAU: Yeah, Praetorian... by now. But Bush – I mean, I would never give – even on some of my interests, to have someone like Bush win, how can you give money to an organization that has raised \$140 million? The waste and fraud over at the committee to re-elect now is appalling. They have spent \$40 million and they've only just wheeled the attack machinery into position this week. So it's shocking.

HENDRIE: It's terrible. It's just terrible. [laughter]

BROWN: I thought you might have something to say.

HENDRIE: Goddamit, I'm a Democrat now. I'm back in the fold. [laughter] I just – because we don't do that, do we? No we don't. We don't steal. We don't cheat. We don't lie. We don't kill. But I do... [laughter]

CAREY: Lyndon Johnson was the most honest president ever.

HENDRIE: Yes. Yes. God bless him, God rest his soul.

COLBERT: You know, Woodrow Wilson once said... [laughter] "That bastard – fuck the League of Nations!" [laughter]

MURPHY: Totally--

COLBERT: It's ridiculous. Let me say something about Warren G. Harding. [laughter]

CAREY: You want corruption?

MURPHY: Look at what they did to Bob Dole? God bless Bob Dole. He got nominated and then boom, a hundred – well not a hundred – actually John might know, a lot of millions of dollars, this guy wants to destroy Social Security. Just clobbered them all summer long, beat them to death. I mean, it's the way American politics is played. You all love it because you're reward it every day at the ballot box. But the idea that there is a Republican attack machine versus a Democrat one, it's ridiculous.

CAREY: Yeah.

MURPHY: The attack worked.

COLBERT: It's just better, that's all.

MURPHY: Well, we're hoping. [laughter]

PODESTA: Or at least better greased.

MURPHY: Well, we'll see. We'll see.

HENDRIE: If I could make just another stupid point here. It's that the Republicans and Democrats, both sides believe in big government.

CAREY: It's the same party. Wake up! [laughter]

COLBERT: Nader!

HENDRIE: They're both big government machines.

CAREY: Jesus Christ!

HENDRIE: The Democratic party – the only reason why I’m disillusioned – here I’ll bring up another name that we may remember, I used to consider myself a Roosevelt Democrat. Meaning, we could care about people and still go out and kick some ass. Now we’re a party of people who just – whatever the Republicans are, we’re not. But Republicans are into—

COOPER: Where did the pistol whipping go?

HENDRIE: Well, you know, you guys are kidding, but I’m telling you, it’s a reality. [laughter] It’s a definite reality.

COLBERT: Stop kidding!

HENDRIE: You know—

COLBERT: It’s a comedy festival! [laughter] Okay!

HENDRIE: That’s why the Democratic party is not going to win in the fall. Because we really can’t anything too seriously with this party anymore. And you’ve got to look at it and the fact of the matter is, we are in a violent world and I don’t know why it is we suddenly sort of wimped out on certain issues.

But both sides are big government sides. Republicans believe in large expenditures with regard to perhaps military, et cetera. The Democrats believe in large expenditures with regard to buying votes, i.e., you know, whatever popular program there is for Head Start. And it’s a both party-- [audience reacts to statement]

COLBERT: Those lousy kids!

HENDRIE: How many of those programs have been effective if somebody—

BROWN: Well, we’ve got John Podesta right here. He can answer that.

MURPHY: I’m playing in the Moscow Improv here. Man, are there any Republicans in this room at all? No. Arrested at the gate.

TRUDEAU: We got Head Start and then it kind of goes blank. [laughter]

HENDRIE: He’s just getting material for Jon. Don’t worry about it.

BROWN: We've lost Stephen. Stephen, question for you... and Drew, this will work for you, too. Do you have – if you're doing political humor, do you have a responsibility – do you have any responsibility? [laughter]

COLBERT: Next question.

CAREY: It's nice to be here. All you have to do, if you're doing political humor and you're charging people for a comedy show, you have a responsibility to be funny. I don't want to hear your freakin' speech about – to me there's – you mentioned humorist. A comic is one that gets laughs. A humorist is one that gets, "Oh, yeah, I agree with you," [claps] and applause, you know, and people—

COLBERT: I get you, man. I get you.

CAREY: The only responsibility is to get laughs. If people laugh at it they know it's true, they acknowledge it, you're not throwing any fire bombs or talking about anything somebody doesn't know about, if they're laughing at it.

BROWN: But how do you deal with what John said initially, which is – I can't remember the percentage – of people who are not getting their news, believing "The Daily Show" is news?

COLBERT: I certainly don't believe that statistic. Because I don't think they would come watch the show if they didn't have some idea what the news was already.

CAREY: Right.

COLBERT: Because they wouldn't get the joke. We don't educate them that much, we assume a certain amount of information about a subject before we make the joke. And if they didn't watch the mass media, they also would sort of miss half the joke, because half of our joke is mocking the way news is reported, not just what the news is. So I'm very skeptical of that statistic, which is thrown around all the time now. because it's somehow shocking or something.

TRUDEAU: And also people that probably aren't getting, you know, aren't going to want more news than they're going to get at "The Daily Show" anyway. I mean, there's a good percentage of them who aren't going to go that deep. On "the Today Show" – I mean, "The Tonight Show," they used to say that they could build a joke on the headline, maybe the sub-head, never the lead, and certainly not in the body of the story. That it had to be something you saw passing a newsstand.

HENDRIE: How do you know what was going—

CAREY: I'm more concerned about how many kids can't read--

HENDRIE: Read.

CAREY: --you know. Or how many people can't name their congressman, or name their senate.

HENDRIE: They watch "The Daily Show."

CAREY: There was a comic – I forget the comic's name right now, but he used to – but he had the whole audience sing the "Gillian's Island Theme. "Come out singing – and then he would have them sing "The Brady Bunch Theme."

HENDRIE: Yeah.

CAREY: And then he would say, "okay, who's your congressman." [laughter] And nobody knew. Nobody knew--

COLBERT: Drew—

CAREY: --outside the congressman.

COLBERT: Who's your congressman?

CAREY: Henry Waxman.

HENDRIE: Good for you.

BROWN: Yeah! [applause]

PROOPS: Look at the crestfallen – disappointment with which he said Henry Waxman.

CAREY: Yeah.

PROOPS: That tax and spend liberal. He doesn't want to kick ass! [laughter] I'm a Roosevelt person myself, except I'm a Teddy Roosevelt person. [laughter] I believe in walking softly and hitting people, and pistol whipping them with a big stick. I'd like to go back to something Stephen said, because I have a joke for it. [laughter]

The 2000 election was a remarkably funny event, and for those very reasons. I was surprised that after that election, Haiti didn't invade us to install a democracy. [laughter]

Really. [applause] Phil's points are also well taken, however inconceivably and irretrievably misguided and wrong they are. [laughter] The idea that we're not kicking ass is in itself unbelievably ridiculous, since ass has been kicked all over the world in the last year. I don't know how much more ass we can kick without running out of money to kick ass with. [laughter]

HENDRIE: We've got more.

PROOPS: Yeah, we've got more.

HENDRIE: We have more.

PROOPS: Yeah, don't worry. Because the rich people are hoarding theirs and I'll be happy to—

HENDRIE: The ass you don't kick today, gets bigger tomorrow. So you have to... you know... [laughter]

PROOPS: That's why we quit super sizing. [laughter] That is the real deal.

TRUDEAU: Matt, how is it that the Democrats came to be associated with no ass kicking? Because Democrats started every major war in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Big, brawny, muscular wars that cost millions of dollars, that required sacrifices on the part of the country—

HENDRIE: Yeah, what happened to those days?

TRUDEAU: And a part of the wars were these stunt wars: the Spanish-American War, Grenada—

PODESTA: Panama.

TRUDEAU: Let's find somebody easy to beat up on and let's go in.

HENDRIE: That's what Republicans do is what you're saying?

TRUDEAU: That's what I'm saying. The history of the last 110 years has been that.

HENDRIE: Is that Republicans go in and beat up on weaklings. And Democrats go in and beat up—

TRUDEAU: So how did it come to be that the Democrats—

HENDRIE: Well, why don't we get Kerry in there and we can invade China. [laughter]

PROOPS: It's just one of those things that Republicans repeat over and over again.

HENDRIE: Get Kerry to invade China.

PROOPS: They're forever saying that Democrats are wimps and the Democrats are tax and spend. Whereas this administration spent more than – if God had this budget, he couldn't spend as much money [laughter] as these Republicans are spending.

HENDRIE: There's a little thing called bailing out Airlines and New York City--

PROOPS: Which I disagreed with. Why should the airline have any money.

HENDRIE: --tax and spend—

MURPHY: War on terrorism got popular.

BROWN: Let's talk about that for a second, about how things become conventional wisdom when you talk about them a lot. Example being I think the – Howard Dean's campaign ended because of one speech.

COLBERT: That's not true.

[voices overlap]

BROWN: Well...

HENDRIE: He was so unelectable from the very start—

BROWN: All right! Okay!

HENDRIE: It was completely insane. The people finally figured it out.

BROWN: But it was crystallized in one moment, which was his speech in Iowa that was then replayed time—

HENDRIE: He was never going to be elected. No, you're wrong.

CAREY: He had a bad month.

HENDRIE: The media thought that guy was bigger than he was. Everybody in *Time* magazine and *Newsweek* thought he was bigger than he was. He was never – he was never speaking for the mainstream.

BROWN: Okay, but—

HENDRIE: And as soon as he got his ass kicked in Iowa--

CAREY: You can't speak for the mainstream.

HENDRIE: --or pistol-whipped in Iowa—

BROWN: But if you're not paying close attention to politics and watching the returns come in on cable news, during the Iowa or New Hampshire primaries, your only familiarity with that might have been the late night talk shows replaying Howard Dean's speech. Fair?

MURPHY: But if you're completely insane on television, and running for president, it's okay to get in trouble for it I think. You know, the guy unscrewed his head on national TV. Generally, you know—

HENDRIE: But he'd already lost the election. So that how could the speech have been – the people – he'd already lost. So what do you mean, that speech did it? People already knew the guy sucked.

COLBERT: Well no, he had already lost one caucus, and the Iowa caucus was never really been that great of a bell weather. And the fact that the speech—

HENDRIE: Not for everybody.

COLBERT: --the speech did something that politicians try to do to each other. Which is there's been a lot of talk lately about Kerry's got to get out there with his money, because the Republicans are going to define him like they defined Dukakis in 1988. And that's the one effect I think that late night comedy can have on a candidate, where sometimes the opponent of a candidate can't. Which is to define the person's personality, to define their character.

Like Al Gore sighing and “lock box,” and I think the way that Kerry's being described as this sort of centurion, very dull person, is going to be something that everyone seems to be picking up on. So that's the definition of his character now. And when that speech got played over and over and over again, and there was no reason for the news to do it other really than for comic effect, because it was hilarious! [laughter]

HENDRIE: Although he didn't do anything—

COLBERT: That it defined him. Whether or not – really even whether it was fair. It could have been a single thing that was not in line with anything else he did. It probably was in line—

HENDRIE: No, he sucked—

COLBERT: --but if it had been isolated, it would have defined him.

HENDRIE: Howard Dean is a psycho. You can see it in his eyes. They interviewed him and they whitened out and he just – I wanted to kick his ass. [laughter]

CAREY: When comics define – when somebody makes fun of you, even personally – if somebody ever makes fun of you, they're pointing out a truth that maybe whether you want to acknowledge that truth or not, when they point to you and say, "hey, your hair is blah," you know, they know – let everybody else know and they're telling you, and that's why everybody laughs. Because nobody will laugh at something if it's not true. So, he is dull.

COLBERT: Two plus two equals four...hilarious.

CAREY: But Dean's defense—

COLBERT: Two plus two equals five...not funny. [laughter]

CAREY: You can't define – you can't define a candidate more than what – sounds like they're making up stuff about a candidate and it's sticking to him and they can't do anything about it.

COLBERT: Yeah, but it can also be—

CAREY: They're just pointing out something true about the guy.

COLBERT: --it can also be something of absolutely no substance or importance whatsoever.

CAREY: Right. [voices overlap] [laughter]

HENDRIE: But also, Howard Dean—if Howard Dean had a message that was resonating with people, they would have – they wouldn't have abandoned that man the

way they did. I mean, he got his – he just got pistol-whipped, ass-whipped, whatever you want to call it. Huge numbers of people deserted this man.

PODESTA: Dean's defense, of course, was to go to late-night television and try to be funny. But it didn't – you know, he couldn't put a tourniquet on the wound once it was bleeding. It was too late.

MURPHY: Well, it's – I mean, it's a little over-dramatic because when you're kind of a puppy candidate at 4%, you're allowed to be a lunatic. It's interesting. You can get to 12% being a lunatic. And entertaining. But when you become the frontrunner, when all of a sudden you're on the on-deck circle to the Oval Office, everything changes about the way you're viewed. And when you are -- the guy was hot, and you get in trouble, and the whole country watches to see how you handle that, and you go ape on national television, it ends.

And it doesn't matter whether it's the first caucus or the fourth one. He had 150 attempts to come back. Remember, he kept in the race, on and on. He was over. Nobody wanted to vote for him. And all late-night television does is magnify what's true, whatever the foible is.

HENDRIE: Garry had a great point, if I could say, Garry, you're absolutely right. Satire comes from a point of view. And the late-night guys are just equal-opportunity, general kind of – you know, Leno, I have no idea how that man stands on anything. I just know that whoever is the president, he's making fun of him.

And you know what? I don't know that that really serves people. Oh, maybe that's good if you're going to grab your news. You can see what's funny about each person. But ultimately, I think satirists are better at highlighting things, specific things about one side or the other.

COLBERT: I think you're right. Because if you don't talk from a place of passion, then you just sound like politicians themselves.

HENDRIE: Right.

COLBERT: Because you're just telling the audience—

CAREY: Yeah.

COLBERT: --you just tell the audience what they want to hear anyway. And maybe they'll laugh, but they'll laugh in the flippant way that Drew was talking about. You

know, jokes like, “Ted Kennedy...’nuff said.” [laughter] You know, there’s no joke there. But it’s funny.

HENDRIE: And the Lewinsky stuff.

CAREY: Quit applauding those people--

COLBERT: Yes.

HENDRIE: I’ll tell you another thing, too. This stuff gets beaten into the ground. The Clinton thing got beat into the ground, man. It was like the most—

CAREY: It was the same – the same joke.

HENDRIE: --freakin’ unfunny thing going, you know, after a while.

CAREY: Yeah, the one bad thing about the Clinton jokes and stuff, it was all the same joke over and over. And you’re like, come on, man, write some new stuff.

COLBERT: Yeah, it was like the bargain bin at Target. It was like all picked over. [laughter] That’s the problem with Schwarzenegger and that was the problem with the first nine months of Bush. It was like, oh, we’re going to make fun of that he says “nuke-u-lar” again?

CAREY: Yeah.

COOPER: It’s all – it’s all personality-driven. I mean, there’s very little comedy that sort of goes after the media. And as a member of the media, I know it’s a rich target. You know, there’s very little that goes after corporate life and, you know, commercialism and things.

TRUDEAU: But don’t you think the one thing that is possibly problematic from the standpoint of late-night TV – late-night TV ratifies those truths that you were talking about. They ratify. But those truths sometimes can be introduced into the conversation—

HENDRIE: Mm-hmm.

CAREY: Yes.

TRUDEAU: --laterally. I mean, let’s face it, Al Gore had a lot of problems, but it wasn’t – lying really wasn’t one of them. And yet that became the narrative. That became the

narrative, and then it became easy then for late-night to ratify that, to put another layer on top of it.

CAREY: Oh, to say like he invented the Internet and all that stuff?

TRUDEAU: Okay – yeah.

COLBERT: And Love Canal, like that story.

TRUDEAU: I mean, he – the lies—

COLBERT: That he discovered Love Canal.

TRUDEAU: No, I mean, if you look at each one of those stories, they got pretty twisted around. [voices overlap]

COLBERT: But that’s my point, that story. If you listened to what he said, he’s not claiming that he discovered Love Canal. Sarah Vowell talked about this in her book, *The Partly Cloudy Patriot*. If you look at what his speech was, what the *Washington Post* said about it, and then I believe there was even a retraction about the report the *Post* had about how he had said that he had found Love Canal. But it was too late. It was too late.

TRUDEAU: And meanwhile, Bush is telling huge lies! “You know, from an environmental standpoint, Texas is the place to be.” [laughter] And – but because his narrative is that he’s stupid—

COLBERT: Right.

TRUDEAU: --everyone says, well, you know, he just doesn’t know.

PODESTA: He doesn’t know what he’s saying.

TRUDEAU: He doesn’t know what he’s saying. [laughter]

COLBERT: Don’t worry. They don’t give him the big football with the suitcase. [laughter] [voices overlap]

COOPER: If you look at the “Saturday Night Live” clip, which is very funny, where he is sort of a likeable imbecile in that portrait of him, they skip – they mention that he has this tax scheme, but, you know, that’s never the subject for humor at the time.

PODESTA: But of course that can't work against the current narrative. So his challenge, I think, to do humor in the new narrative, the one that's coming forward in his campaign ads, is, I think, a much tougher deal. Unless, you know, is he going to go out and make fun of the price Halliburton is charging for hamburgers in Kuwait? You know, he just can't get to it because his image now – I don't know whether Mike agrees with this – his image is not one of being stupid, but one of being, you know, the father to us all. And I think that's a harder place to do humor from, actually.

MURPHY: Yeah, and I – and somebody said a moment ago that Bush appears likeable. That's "golden" politics. Because the average person is not that interested in going down to the library and figuring out the intricacies of the budget act or buying the crap in *Mother Jones* like it's true. So what happens instead—[audience reaction]—I just wanted to wake you up a little, comrades. [laughter] So what they do instead is they pick somebody they like who seems to have some experience, and they trust.

And I disagree about Gore. Nobody threw Gore out of office because they thought he lied about the Internet. They thought he was a robot. That's what they didn't like about Gore.

HENDRIE: Yeah.

CAREY: "I lied about the Internet."

MURPHY: Yeah, exactly. [laughter] So as long as – as long as they think the President is somebody they like, somebody they trust and somebody who is a leader and can make a decision, and is on their side, for most of them—

PROOPS: Then how does Bush fit any of those things? [laughter] [applause] It's clear, he couldn't make a decision without Dick Cheney's hand up his ass. [laughter] [applause] [voices overlap] You know, this whole "father to us all" thing—

MURPHY: I'm telling you, the problem you guys have, just to be a political consultant for you on there for a minute, is that kills in about four zip codes. But the other 300 are, like, behind it.

PROOPS: Well, honey, I play all over the world, and it kills everywhere. [laughter] I just—

HENDRIE: One of the problems with – the real problems we've got, especially living in Los Angeles or Hollywood, where Greg and I live – I don't know where the rest of you guys—

CAREY: I live in Hollywood.

COLBERT: I live in America, Phil! [laughter]

HENDRIE: The view of the – the view of—

COLBERT: The U.S. of A. I love it, and I suggest you live there, too. [laughter]

HENDRIE: You know, I can tell this—

COLBERT: [stands as if to leave] Fuck this! [laughter]

HENDRIE: Good. Yeah, get John out here. This is – this attitude is not out there in the country. It's not. It's not.

COLBERT: It's out there for—

HENDRIE: It's not.

COLBERT: It's out there for half plus 500,000. [laughter] [applause] [cheers]

HENDRIE: That's the one—

PROOPS: This whole idea that everyone loves Bush—

HENDRIE: Those hanging chads.

PROOPS: Get over the half thing.

COLBERT: I'll take more than half, how about that?

CAREY: Nobody – what's the last president that got elected with over 50% of the popular votes? Who was it?

MURPHY: Ron Reagan, '84.

COLBERT: Warren G. Harding. [laughter]

CAREY: Over half, but that was only the people that bothered to go out and vote.

HENDRIE: Right. This is not an attitude that's reflected in America. That's why they got fooled with Howard Dean. That's why they thought this guy was really something,

and he turned out to be – nobody cared, nobody wanted to listen to this guy. He wasn't going to be anybody's president.

John Kerry won't get elected president for a couple of reasons. One, people are going to look at this guy—

COLBERT: Yeah, exactly. [laughter]

HENDRIE: They're going to look at this guy—

COLBERT: Instruct me, Phil. [laughter]

HENDRIE: They're going to look at this guy.

COLBERT: Write this down, get it down! Write it down. The truth is coming down from the mountain! I see the—[inaudible under cheers]—coming off your head. Go ahead.

HENDRIE: John Kerry will not get elected President because they're going to whip this—

COLBERT: Do it in character!

HENDRIE: --they're going to whip this out in probably September, that John Kerry stood before the Senate and called his fellow soldiers "rapists and murderers" back in 1971. Guy's not going to make it. Nobody is going to—

CAREY: Oh, come on.

HENDRIE: At this time in the history of this country, nobody is going to vote for that guy.

PROOPS: You may be right.

CAREY: Can I just point out something?

HENDRIE: And he pistol-whipped the hell—

CAREY: No matter what your opinion is, he just defined you for everybody in the room. [laughter] [applause]

BROWN: Phil, let me give you a chance to—

HENDRIE: In other words, the guy who does the voices.

BROWN: --redefine. Redefine. Because one thing we haven't talked about is this success and popularity of conservative talk radio versus the Left, who hasn't had much success there. And there is a liberal radio network that's launching—

HENDRIE: It's absurd.

BROWN: Well, what – how is that going to work? What advice would you give them?

HENDRIE: First of all, this idea of liberal-versus-conservative talk shows is the most horrific thing that's happened to radio. I don't know how this started. Well, Limbaugh started it by being a conservative. So then there was this reaction. A liberal radio network—[Proops laughs]—the stupidest thing I've heard in my life, you know?

So it's not going to work. They don't have broadcasters. Doing a three-hour radio show – Al Franken is a brilliant guy. I think he's funnier than hell. But he's going to find doing three hours every bloody day, there's more to it. So it's – they've got to get away from this idea of conservative-versus-liberal talk show hosts. They have to start to just—

MURPHY: But, you know, as a precedent, say, try. One, there's the First Amendment. It might work. Two, spend all your money on it. [laughter] Sell the hybrid cars, put it all into the radio network. Take your best shot. [laughter]

PROOPS: It is a trifle absurd to start a liberal radio network at this late date. Not that radio is, of course, the most all-encompassing media. I was thinking a liberal pony express might be a little more effective. [laughter] Or maybe a liberal carrier pigeon that can go from house to house and disseminate the good news. [laughter]

Going back to the initial – the initial premise of this debate is, “Who's Funnier, the Right or the Left?” – the fact that Rush Limbaugh is considered “humorous” by conservatives absolutely defines that the Left is always funnier the whole time. [laughter] If your idea of a joke is to call women “feminazis,” and to rail about Hillary Clinton way after the sell-by date, then that's not that fucking funny, quite frankly. [laughter/voices overlap]

And going back to Garry's point, a satirist has to have a point of view. Otherwise, they are a bland late-night talk show host who plays all sides against the middle. If you don't have a point of view, then what are you talking about?

COOPER: I mean, don't you need a certain amount of anger to drive talk radio?

HENDRIE: Sure. Yeah.

COOPER: And liberals – liberals who heretofore had sort of an NPR-conversational tone, now have, you know, books like *Scumbag: The Lies of Laura Bush*. [laughter] Liberals have discovered their ids. [laughter] So why doesn't this make it a good moment for them to—

PROOPS: That's what frightens me. Howard Dean yelled, and now, you know, the Volvo has turned. [laughter] [applause] We're coming back, baby.

MURPHY: Since when are they bored with the *New York Times*?

PROOPS: Because the *New York Times*—

MURPHY: And the *Washington Post* and the *Boston Globe* and CBS? I mean, it's—

PROOPS: The *New York Times* is like reading the *Weekly Reader*. [laughter]

MURPHY: It's not like the liberals are unrepresented in the media.

HENDRIE: They've completely missed the point of how radio works. Radio is just – you know, it is an entertainment medium.

PROOPS: Run by rich, white guys.

HENDRIE: And to say that Rush Limbaugh is a conservative, so therefore we have to have liberals is – he is an entertaining guy. Whether you want to call him a humorist, a satirist, whatever, he's entertaining—[Proops laughs]—and the guy – like what's funnier than the caller abortion, which I thought was pretty good. He also, you know, made fun of the homeless. He also – he did it at a time when nobody was doing it, and it made it really different. And I'd like him to bring it back, frankly.

BROWN: Well, why – let me get back to a point you were making – why do both sides – CBS, *New York Times* – why do both sides always feel like the mainstream media is misrepresenting them?

MURPHY: Because they do.

CAREY: Because they do.

MURPHY: But, no, I'll actually temper it. I find generally the media makes a lot of mistakes. Incompetence, stupidity, PAC journalism, cheap applause, you know, all the

usual kind of problems. I don't think it's as much of a bias ideologically as people in the Right often think. I think most people who work in the liberal media are pretty – working media – are pretty liberal, but I don't think they wake up everyday with a partisan bias. I think more they just don't get, like, the fly-over states.

CAREY: I think—

MURPHY: I mean, you could do the million-dollar prize: walk into the *New York Times* newsroom and find a pro-lifer. You know, 40-some, depending on how you want to debate the polling percent of America are pro-life. I guarantee they're pretty hard to find in the media elite. So I think it's more of a cultural disconnect than a big partisan liberal bias. But the farther you get out of—

PROOPS: Could we call them “anti-choicer” instead?

MURPHY: No. The farther you get out on the cranky side of either Left or Right – I mean, if Kucinich was here, he'd rant and rave about how his gasoline pill, geodesic dome plan have been totally covered up by the media, and if only people would hear it, he'd win! Nader would go on for hours about this stuff. So would Pat Buchanan.

So I think the more you are on the cranky side of the horseshoe, the angrier you get about the media. But fundamentally, I think the problem is much more PAC journalism and incompetence.

CAREY: I agree.

BROWN: John?

PODESTA: Well, you know, I think that – I wanted to come back to the radio thing because I think that most of conservative talk radio is characterized by people who are angry and who – I think they're not funny. And they don't pretend to be funny and they don't really try to be funny.

And the interesting thing about this new radio network is that their whole line-up is going to attempt to be funny. And I think one of the reasons for that is because conservatives kind of hate the culture, and they're mad about it, and they can't really joke about it.

I mean, I think if you think Jerry Falwell—

HENDRIE: They hate the culture?

PODESTA: Well, Jerry Falwell—

HENDRIE: Jesus, I mean, how do you get away with making a comment like that and nobody says – when I say something, it’s “you’re full of shit.” No, really, conservatives hate the culture?

PODESTA: [overlapping] Jerry Falwell and, you know, Pat Robertson don’t go on television – Jerry Falwell – well, yeah, they hate the dominant culture. [audience chimes in]

HENDRIE: Well, you know, all right, liberals hate the culture.

PODESTA: Maybe, but they’re not funny.

HENDRIE: I mean what kind of a ridiculous—

PODESTA: They can’t laugh about it. You don’t see Jerry Falwell telling jokes, or Pat Robertson, et cetera.

HENDRIE: They’re not funny?

PODESTA: I don’t think – you know, they find no humor—

HENDRIE: I know Dennis Miller is funny. He’s sometimes conservative. [Proops laughs] I guess he’s, like, you know – I must be funny to Greg—

PROOPS: You are funny.

CAREY: Pat Robertson – Pat Robertson will just come out and just – anything that’s fun, he doesn’t like it.

PODESTA: He doesn’t like it.

CAREY: You know, if a movie is fun—

HENDRIE: I agree. I agree.

COOPER: I mean, conservative libertarians like the culture.

HENDRIE: But you know if you’re going to talk about the extreme Left—

COOPER: Conservative libertarians like the culture. They don’t have any problem with hip-hop or cursing or sex. Right?

MURPHY: Well, you've got to be careful lumping our whole weird little—[voices overlap]—is a gas bag.

HENDRIE: He's an idiot. I mean, and the far Left probably don't – is Ralph Nader a funny guy?

PROOPS: Oh, my God.

HENDRIE: I mean, he's a real – that guy's a real – he's a real cut-up, isn't he? He's just a riot.

PODESTA: Mister Comedy.

HENDRIE: So I mean to say that, you know, that conservatives hate the culture is like – Ann Coulter walked into my studio one day because she's a fan of mine. [audience reacts] Anyway, she said—

PROOPS: What an illuminating moment that must have been. [laughter]

HENDRIE: I slept with her. [laughter]

PROOPS: Who hasn't? [laughter]

HENDRIE: Everybody except Greg. [laughter]

PROOPS: I didn't have the money. [laughter] [applause]

HENDRIE: A couple grand an hour. [laughter] She said something equally stupid. She said that liberals hated America. And I said, "What the hell is that about?" "Well, they do." Ann's not going to say anything and back off on it. Nothing. "Liberals hate their country." It's ridiculous to say that.

And I said, "I'm a liberal. I truly believe that I am." [laughter] Because I don't share your foreign policy views doesn't mean that I'm not, you know, not a liberal. So I said, "That's an absurd thing to say."

"Well, they do. They hate their country. Liberals hate America. Not only that, they've been trying to destroy America for sixty years." That's the kind of thing that has made talk radio exciting, because it is so polarizing and loud and screechy. It's also unfunny. It's also not creative.

And if that's the kind of crap that the liberal radio network is going to engage in, they're going to be playing the same game that conservative radio does and it's going to – it's done.

TRUDEAU: Then they'll get huge ratings. [laughter]

HENDRIE: No, no! Conservative – you know, there's only one guy that gets ratings and that's Limbaugh. All those other guys die, man.

CAREY: Including you—[laughter]

HENDRIE: You know what?

CAREY: I was just thinking of John. I'm sorry. [laughter] You said the only one who gets ratings—

COLBERT: Only the truth is funny, though, Drew. [laughter] [applause]

HENDRIE: Well, I don't know how I got – I'm not perceived as a conservative talk show host. I'm perceived as a—

PROOPS: And you are—

HENDRIE: --I think, a humorist.

MURPHY: I'm going to ride to his defense. When I first showed up in L.A., a liberal comedian who is a genius, Harry Shearer, grabbed me and said, "You want to hear the smartest guy on radio, tune into a guy named Phil Hendrie."

HENDRIE: He's a liberal.

MURPHY: "Radio genius."

HENDRIE: Anyway, the only thing I'm trying to say is I think that if they do the same thing the conservatives are doing, it's going to – it's going to die.

CAREY: Don't you think it's a mistake when people, like you say, "Oh, conservatives are Pat Robertson and then, you know, liberals are whatever the equal of Pat Robertson—

PODESTA: Nader.

CAREY: Yeah, it's just crazy, because, to me, you know, conservative – people that really vote and really call – are just like a shade over. And the people on the Left are a shade over. And there's a lot of common ground. And to say, like, oh, it's all Pat Robertson – and even to cater to people like Pat Robertson when you make your appointments, like putting John Ashcroft in, or something like that, is crazy.

BROWN: Well, those are the people who vote.

CAREY: Well, other people vote, too, but those are the people who make the noise during the primaries. And those are the people who vote during the primaries. And maybe those are the people that call in.

COOPER: Yeah.

CAREY: But the people that vote are people right in the middle, on one side or the other, that have other concerns besides the far concerns on each side. It's a mistake to cater to them.

MURPHY: Yeah, one of the problems we've got is the way the distribution system of politics works, primaries, few people show up to vote on either side. So the more ideological on each side can dominate, leaning Left with the Dems and some of our Robertson-ites on the Republican side. The truth is, Robertson is so interesting as kind of threatening clown. He's overwritten as somebody with a lot of influence. He doesn't really have it in the party. Not like he used to.

BROWN: We have a few minutes left – do you have a point, Greg?

PROOPS: Well, he was saying—

HENDRIE: Do you have a point, Greg?

PROOPS: Pat Robertson – the story about two weeks, or was it – well, whatever time period – never mind, it's a joke--[laughter]—Pat Robertson said God told him Bush was going to win the next election. And I have trouble believing that God takes Pat's calls on a regular basis. [laughter]

And I agree with what you said, Phil—

HENDRIE: What was that?

PROOPS: That Ann Coulter says things like liberals hate America, and it's those weird blanket statements, but it goes back to what you said about Kerry in the beginning. That's

why it's anybody but Bush at this point. We're willing to accept that Kerry is a flim-flam in order to just eject Bush out of office, because I'm so tired of hearing—

HENDRIE: But that's the problem with the Democrats—

PROOPS: I know, there needs to be principles.

HENDRIE: --it's an anti-Bush party. It's an anti-Bush party.

PROOPS: And that's what we've got, Pookie.

HENDRIE: What?

MURPHY: It's the new McCarthyism with the Left. The level of this thing—

PROOPS: A new McCarthyism?!

MURPHY: Yes, yes. The criticism of Bush is – look, I ran McCain's campaign—[voices overlap]

PODESTA: The dangers – the dangers of getting close to politics as opposed to humor.

MURPHY: Just the cheap shots and the rhetoric are, I think, unfortunate.

BROWN: Let's take some questions from the audience for a couple of minutes. I see a hand, but there are microphones somewhere.

QUESTION: I just wanted to ask you what the panel thinks of the impact of "Rock the Vote" will have on this election, if anything.

COLBERT: None. [laughter]

CAREY: It hasn't got any.

COLBERT: Youth voter turnout has gone down since "Rock the Vote" started.

CAREY: You know what "Rock the Vote" is good for? "Rock the Vote" is good if you're in college and you want to get laid, and you want to impress the girl about how smart you are politically, and you take her to a "Rock the Vote" thing...[laughter]

PROOPS: You should also take into account that this is a group of white guys with glasses who are rich, so...maybe our opinion doesn't the entire waterfront. [laughter]

MURPHY: No, it's a total scam.

QUESTION: [off-mic] What do you think about assault weapons? Are you for them, too? Assault weapons.

HENDRIE: "Salt" weapons? Salted weapons? [laughter] Errol Flynn put cocaine on his. [laughter] [voices overlap]

CAREY: I have an opinion on that. I own four guns. I own two rifles and two handguns.

HENDRIE: Let's hear it for Drew. [he claps]

CAREY: I brought the rifles because they were trying – the government decided to ban them. And I thought, wow, before the government bans something, I just want to buy it. [laughter]

MURPHY: I did the same thing.

COLBERT: I feel the same way about pornography. [laughter] [applause]

PROOPS: Right on, Stephen. [Carey and Colbert hug]

COLBERT: That's us. [laughter]

CAREY: And I think – I think "assault weapons" is a misnomer. And every weapon is an assault weapon. A rock is an assault weapon. But no, you don't need full-auto with an 80-round clip to go hunting. And you certainly don't need it for home defense either. And I've got no—

COLBERT: It's attitudes like that are why the white-tail deer is overrunning the East Coast. [laughter] [applause] You try to raise cabbages in New Jersey! [laughter] [applause]

CAREY: I also think that the NRA has been so vilified by the—[Proops laughs]—they are. But if people – if they – if people followed some NRA – I think the NRA would have no – well, they shouldn't have, if they do, they're crazy – I have no problem with gun locks. I think people that – if you have a kid in your home and you don't have your clip empty in a separate place from your gun, you know – you should know where it is, but you have to be really, really safe about these things.

And they're not toys. I never bring my guns out to my friends and go, "Hey, look at my guns." [laughter] It's locked up in a safe where nobody can get to it except me when I need to, if I need to. And if you're safe about it and have a brain, there's nothing wrong with having legal firearms.

PROOPS: He's not lying. I've begged and begged to see his guns, and he just won't show them to me. [laughter] Load 'em up, Drew, and let's go ridin'! [laughter]

QUESTION: For all your political fooling around, do you ever find yourself in grave danger? And if so, what do you plan to do about it?

COLBERT: Grave danger? When I'm interviewing some people on the road, I'm afraid they'll punch me. [laughter]

HENDRIE: I get death threats on a regular basis.

PROOPS: Do you really?

HENDRIE: Everybody does. They led to Greg's house—[laughter]—and what I do is I try to—

PROOPS: You've got to read the mash notes underneath.

HENDRIE: No, I look at the postmark. It always says Santa Clarita. [laughter] No—

COOPER: America is not going to get that.

HENDRIE: You know what? I walk to my car at night in a garage, by myself, and if a guy wants to kill me, he's going to do it. So I think anybody that sends you death threats is not serious.

COOPER: Pistol whip his ass.

HENDRIE: I'll kick his ass.

COLBERT: I think one thing that comedians – that protects them—

HENDRIE: Comics are in trouble, though.

COLBERT: --is that they just continue to be funny. If they're making jokes and trying to be entertaining and not – you know, I think one of the things that people on the Left got in trouble with when they were protesting the latest war in Iraq, was that they – at the

moment at which these entertainers should have used what they do best, which is entertain, they stopped and they said, “No, I want to make a political statement.” They were vilified and, you know, ostracized by the general public because of that.

And there’s nothing wrong with making a political statement, but you’ve got to do it with what you do best. You know, you’ve got to continue to be funny.

HENDRIE: Stay in your medium, yeah.

COLBERT: Yeah, you’ve got to go with what you know. You can’t just say, “It’s wrong! I have a right to say it’s wrong!” Yes, but who cares unless you make me laugh.

HENDRIE: Although I’m excited to read -- Sean Penn’s dispatches from Baghdad, I’m sure are most illuminating, you know.

COLBERT: The man’s son – the man’s daughter was killed. Lay off.

HENDRIE: Yeah.

MURPHY: The Streisand memo to the Democrats is a comic gem. Read that sometime.

BROWN: Okay—

QUESTION: I think the reason people like the news from “The Daily Show” is because the normal news is improv for the seriously uncreative. [Hendrie claps]

COLBERT: Was that a question? Was that a question? Campbell, moderate that! [laughter] Earn your money. [laughter] You’re not being paid, are you?

BROWN: No.

COLBERT: Then you’re doing a fine job. [laughter]

BROWN: Matt, you take that.

COOPER: Well, I think, you know, I mean, the mainstream media tries to be apolitical, and so I think – you know, 70 years ago, when you lived in any American city and you had eight newspapers, four of them decidedly to the Left, four of them to the Right, you know, you could pick and choose the media you wanted. And, you know, I think that was, in many ways, sort of a more fruitful era.

And, you know, I sort of hope the rise of Fox News sort of gives rise to, you know, liberal networks and the like. I don't know. I think one ought to be able to pick and choose their news.

QUESTION: I have a question sort of directly for Phil, but I hope it stimulates some conversation here, which is how do you reconcile being a liberal who supports Bush when he's speaking out about trying to create an amendment in the Constitution against gay marriage?

HENDRIE: I disagree with that. I disagree with the President.

QUESTION: And he's got a funny forum for you guys to be speaking about.

HENDRIE: I agree with the President – I think that the gay amendment would be the first time in the history of our country we've passed an amendment to limit or keep a right away from—

QUESTION: Prohibition.

HENDRIE: Prohibition was – all of us, you know, sort of suffered under prohibition. [laughter] I say that figuratively. I wasn't around. But to say, “You people there, you don't get to do what the rest of us...” It's the first time in the history of our country we would ever do that. And that's a black day. [applause]

And I would – President Bush – and you know something, now I'll say something so you can hiss me again – I don't think he's anti – I don't think he's an evil – an evil enough man to actually do that. I just don't think -- it won't pass. To pass an amendment in this country—

CAREY: It's not going to pass.

HENDRIE: --it's incredibly hard to get an amendment to the Constitution. You have to have the states ratify all the stuff.

CAREY: The mistake he's making, pandering to the far Rights—

QUESTION: Yes.

CAREY: --and then he's—

HENDRIE: Right.

CAREY: --it's the thing where he's going to – politicians do it all the time, they say, “Hey, I'm for this thing” for the one day, to get the press conference, and then they drop it. And they don't campaign for it. But they're on the record.

TRUDEAU: Hasn't he, over the course of his career, advocated three or four or five different amendments? I mean—

CAREY: Flag burning.

TRUDEAU: Flag burning.

CAREY: Bad idea.

COLBERT: Like if there's something in the culture you don't like, what other option is there, Garry? [laughter]

CAREY: He's absolutely – it's not like you can go about your day, and everybody has the right to do what they want.

PROOPS: Bush is right about protecting the sanctity of marriage.

TRUDEAU: It's just a rhetorical way of saying, “I'm really serious about this, I'm willing to tear up the Constitution, that's how serious I am.”

CAREY: Well, no, they're not connected. He's not – I can't see – he's not going to campaign for that.

BROWN: Does anybody on the panel? Mike, do you support--?

MURPHY: I don't believe in federalizing family law.

HENDRIE: But, you know, that's the same argument they were giving at the time of Civil Rights: well, let's kind of leave it at the state level. That's dangerous, too. You can't leave those kinds of things to the states.

MURPHY: No, it shouldn't be an amendment.

HENDRIE: But, straight people have done such a great job with marriage. [laughter]

PROOPS: Yeah, they have. Kobe Bryant and Robert Blake and Britney Spears.

HENDRIE: Britney Spears.

PROOPS: Scott Peterson.

HENDRIE: Talk about gold standards. [laughter]

PODESTA: Don't you wish that marriage counseling program had been in place before the Britney Spears situation?

HENDRIE: So how come Kerry is against gay marriage? Oooh, that's got to hurt.

PROOPS: I know.

HENDRIE: How come—

PROOPS: He's weak. It's weak and vacillating.

QUESTION: Chicken shit.

BROWN: Let's take one more question. They're going to make us a leave the room.

PROOPS: They're going to make us leave the room?! [laughter] What kind of fascist state is this festival?! [laughter]

QUESTION: Watching a bunch of rich, middle-aged white guys have this discussion onstage may—

CAREY: We're in Aspen, so—

QUESTION: --may lend to my – actually not a question but a proposition, that sitting, watching, listening today, it's been a tremendous amount of fun. But I might suggest that we start a national conversation about initiating term limits for humorists and comedians. [laughter]

HENDRIE: I'm in favor of that. I'm still waiting for my TV show. So as soon as someone's term is up—

COLBERT: There is one.

CAREY: Yeah, it's called ratings. [laughter]

PROOPS: I think you'll find that Constitutional amendment going to pass.

CAREY: Elections are the term limit if they want their congressman out. You don't need stupid term limit laws. They have elections for that. They have ratings to get us out.

HENDRIE: You know, term limits—

QUESTION: Which is more powerful? Comedy or politics?

COLBERT: Politics.

MURPHY: Yeah, politics. Nuclear weapons are involved. [laughter]

COLBERT: Peter Cook – Peter Cook was once asked if he thought satire had an effect on the politics of the country, and he said, “Oh, absolutely. The greatest satire of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the Weimar Cabaret, and they really stopped Hitler.” [laughter] [applause]

BROWN: On that note, thank you all for coming. It was a great day. [applause] [cheers]

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