

January 2002

Discussion Following the Remarks of Ms. Askari and Dr. Waddell

Discussion

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/cuslj>

 Part of the [Transnational Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Discussion, *Discussion Following the Remarks of Ms. Askari and Dr. Waddell*, 28 Can.-U.S. L.J. 195 (2002)
Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/cuslj/vol28/iss/30>

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Journals at Case Western Reserve University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Canada-United States Law Journal by an authorized administrator of Case Western Reserve University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

DISCUSSION FOLLOWING THE REMARKS OF MS. ASKARI AND DR. WADDELL

COMMENT, MR. JANSON: We will have a question-and-response time. There were a couple of points that Chris made that on which perhaps you, Emilia, could comment. You said something about conflicts and needing to understand of all the vested interests that people have when they are coming forward, and, as a reporter, you get bombarded with all of these things. Perhaps you could say a word on how you have approached information sources; when you are looking at a story, what sort of things do you do?

ANSWER, MS. ASKARI: Okay. Sure. The delete button is my friend. I come in to work in the morning and I delete messages but, of course, I do pay attention from where the information is coming. I have been covering environmental issues for over a decade – a decade in Michigan and for several years in California before that covering water issues – and over that time, I have tried hard to become more and more informed about all of these issues. I have developed sources and I have developed knowledge about who I trust and who I do not, just the way sources develop a feel for who they are going to talk to and with whom they are not going to talk. That is how I approach the information flow that is washing over me every day, and it could easily be overwhelming if I did not tune out a great deal of it.

When I am working on any given story I try also to find new people to talk to, not just the ones that I have always talked to in the past, and I do turn to the Web a lot.

I mentioned to you while at dinner that I helped found this organization called the Society of Environmental Journalists. Its mission is to increase the quality and accuracy of environmental journalism. It is an international organization, though most of the members are from the United States and Canada. It is a group of over a thousand members now.¹

What you say about training is absolutely true. We have annual conferences of three days or so where we have dozens of seminars on different topics pertaining to the environment. We bring in experts and other journalists who have covered the issues to try and mentor others, because within our newsrooms, there is usually no one else who will talk to us about these issues and we all have to pay our own way. The majority of us end up paying our own way.

¹ See *Contacting SEJ*, at <http://www.sej.org/contact/index.htm> (last visited June 12, 2002).

COMMENT, DR. WADDELL: You are paying your own way. That is the key. Your employer places so little value on that.

COMMENT, MS. ASKARI: Exactly. You may or may not be aware that there is this group of leaders of journalism organizations called the Council of Presidents; they are the presidents of many different professional organizations who meet regularly. Just a week or two ago, they released a study about training issues where they had surveyed people in the media and found that a fair number of journalists even win fellowships to go get some training but their bosses will not let them take the time off to go, even though there is no cost except their own salary.² It is a very big problem. I think you really hit on something there.

COMMENT, MR. JANSON: Our time is beginning to run short, actually. We are open for questions from the floor. Please indicate your interest and then state who you are, because, apparently, we are keeping track of you.

QUESTION, MR. URAM: I would like to thank you all for coming and sharing your insights. This was the one forum that I thought was going to be the most enlightening. Unfortunately, I have heard everything that I have heard before. There is nothing new. We are not running into anything new. Just a couple of quick comments.

Even when you are looking back in history at even the earliest stories when it was David versus Goliath, it was David that was covered. When you are looking at conflict, it is always the little guy that is going to get the coverage. On energy I am seeing more and more business reporters covering this. It is not environmental, not health, it is business, so it is the dollars and cents kind of thing coming into the picture now and the environment and health are being neglected in that realm. I do not know to whom to get after. Do we get after the editorial boards? The editors themselves? Because going to the reporters and pitching is not getting to the source of the problem. As Emilia pointed out, she has to go to the kids' page in order to get some global warming stuff into the paper and into print.

On the fairness and objectivity issue, what I am seeing is that some people who really have some good insight into the issues are actually leaning over the wrong direction; they are actually glossing over what they do know to cover what they do not know. These are people that have good insight in environmental issues and rather than covering those environmental issues as deeply as they know them, they are covering those issues from the other side of the perspective and making sure that side of the perspective is looked at. More of the economic stuff is brought into the picture from the business page, rather than the environmental and health issues that these reporters

² See Beverly Kees, *Newsroom Training: Where's the Investment?*, at <http://www.poynter.org/centerpiece/newsroomtraining.htm> (April 9, 2002).

know as part of their own inner feelings on this issue. So, it is becoming problematic to try to get this all going.

What I wanted to question you all on is, as media acts and as the story gets covered without the creativity instead of just pitch, pitch, pitch, do you have any insights as to where to go and who we are supposed to be talking to in order to try and get this information covered? I am frustrated and I can tell by your presentation that you sound frustrated. For those of us that are not really working with the media on a day-to-day basis, do you have any suggestions?

QUESTION, MR. JANSON: Chris, would you like to give a comment?

ANSWER, DR. WADDELL: I think it is difficult to do, but I think it has to start. It is interesting watching what has been going on in Canada in the last week or two on the whole climate-change issue and the movement that seems to be taking place by the Federal Cabinet by being perhaps not that keen on ratifying Kyoto, and the minister kind of dancing all over the place. It is interesting to see the way this has been covered. Unfortunately, the way it *is* covered is that it does not really get beyond much of Alberta, who thinks it is bad, and the federal government, who thinks that maybe it should ratify Kyoto.

On the other side of it, let me throw a challenge out to you: If anyone feels like it, they could write me, before we are through tonight, a one-minute, forty-five second television script outlining Bob Page's presentation earlier today. You can try to figure out how to shrink something like that into a minute forty-five television piece, or even into what in Canadian newspapers used to be a 20-inch story (which is now a 12-inch story and is getting shorter and shorter, and newspapers do not want to devote the space to any of those kinds of issues now). This is the reality that tends to force much of this discussion into either more specialist publications or into other sorts of issues.

I think the only thing that you can do is to keep up pressuring the reporters who are dealing with it (if there are specialist reporters) and call the editors and/or publishers and tell them that we want to see more explanation of these sorts of issues.

QUESTION, MR. JANSON: Do you have a comment, Emilia?

MS. ASKARI: Yes. Obviously, you have to contact those people who cover these issues; the reporters are advocates for the story and for the topic within the newsroom. People who chose to cover environment issues within journalism are generally people who are not seeking great monetary rewards and they are doing it for mainly for altruistic reasons. Within that group, people who cover environment issues are even crazier because it is not the ticket to the front page, nor is it the ticket to a great career in journalism, either. You have to be especially interested in those topics.

So, I would appreciate it if you did not put increased pressure on journalist by asking, why are you not getting those stories in print? It is not their fault. I think that, yes, trying to approach the editors and getting members of organizations like yours and your constituents to let them know that you are interested in stories on the environment and energy; that would be the most helpful. I request some creative thinking on your part on how to do that.

COMMENT, MR. JANSON: We have a couple of questions in the back, and then we will move the microphone down.

QUESTION, MR. UJCZO: I am a member of the Institute here. I would disagree with the first intention that the energy policy is not an interesting story. It was on the front page of the paper today, the Senate voting against drilling in ANWR.³ The topic across this country is: We are dumping a buck fifty in our SUVs rather than two bucks or ninety-nine cents, so I think there is a push towards sound energy policy.

My question has to do with this: I grew up in Youngstown. I grew up reading the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, the *Youngstown Vindicator*, the *Detroit Free Press* and the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. Words like "environment," "energy" or "NAFTA" were the kinds of "four-letter words" for which my mom put soap in my mouth, because they meant daddy was going to lose his job at GM or at the steel mill.

Is that not the problem, that the press treats the environment and business or success as mutually exclusive, rather than, as we heard today from Janine Ferretti, who said that, in Mexico, when there was increased investment and more productivity, they were able to raise they are environmental standards. Is that not a problem that there is not an environment section *and* a business section?

When LTV closes, it is on the front page.⁴ Why are not those reporters who are offering those stories also schooled in the environmental issues? Why are they mutually exclusive? I think that is a fundamental question. That is why the people who were marching at Quebec City, at the Summit of Americas, cannot relate trading and increased investment to environmental protection. So why does the media treat them as mutually exclusive? Moreover, do you think the media perpetuates that view among the American and Canadian public?

QUESTION, MR. JANSON: Who wants to go first here?

ANSWER, DR. WADDELL: They are treated as being mutually exclusive and that is part of the problem, because reporters are only looking

³ See Tom Diemer, *Senate Blocks Oil Drilling in Alaskan Arctic Refuge*, PLAIN DEALER (Cleveland), Apr. 19, 2002, at A1.

⁴ E.g., Jennifer Scott Simperman & Peter Krouse, *Shutdown Order Looms for LTV*, PLAIN DEALER (Cleveland), Dec. 6, 2001, at A1.

at some parts of the issue, because that's the easiest way to address it. I guess they do that because it is simple and not complicated to deal energy as a business story and to not get into the environmental components of every energy story and every decision.

It is also simplistic to say, yes, that is right, under some energy circumstances, some people lose their jobs, or that some people will obtain jobs. As we move away from doing things the way we did them before – lots of people make computers now that were not doing things before – other people who were previously working in other fields will do something different.

The ANWR story is an interesting one, as it was on the first page of the paper today. When was the last time someone wrote about it prior to the vote in Senate?

COMMENT, AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: It was a subject of a debate on national television. Al Gore and George Bush debated the issue.⁵

COMMENT, DR. WADDELL: That might have been the last time it was on the front page of the paper. There is not consistent coverage of some of these issues, I think, for some of the reasons I talked about, and without the consistent coverage, you do not get the linkages being made by the reporters and by the public who are reading those stories.

COMMENT, MS. ASKARI: I agree with everything you said, that energy is an important story, and that it should be covered in a more holistic fashion; it would be great if people had more training on it. I am just saying that, from within the newsroom, it is hard to get the time or the space to do that kind of quality of reporting and you have to fight to get every little piece of that story in print.

QUESTION, MR. JANSON: We have another question?

MR. GAINES: I have a question and an observation; they may be somewhat unrelated, but I think in some way they connect. Let me start with the observation: on the one hand, it seems like we have this proliferation of media. I do not ordinarily go to a bookstore or something, but I do notice that when you go to an airport or something, you look, and there are 3,000 magazines, all of them targeted at these small, niche markets. I do not know how any of them stay in business, because I cannot imagine there are *that* many people interested in all of these thousands of different topics. When they cover issues, they probably give them very superficial treatment.

I happened to read last week in an airport newsstand some journal called *Blue*, which, I guess, is some kind of travel and adventure magazine. They had a blurb on ANWR because it was coming up. It was mostly a photo spread with a few choice quotes from prominent people and a few graphs. In

⁵ See *Special Report with Brit Hume* (FOX News television broadcast, Oct. 11, 2000) (transcript available at 2000 WL 6326438).

a way, I think they did a reasonable job with the issue, but it was very, very superficial, and I guess that is where some people are getting their information. So, in terms of the structure of the media, I would be interested in your observations about this proliferation of niche reporting versus general-interest broadcast reporting.

The other question is about coverage of scientific issues and the conflict orientation, which both of you discussed. People in the climate trade business as scientists have remarked that this conflict orientation really distorts people's understanding of the issue because what you miss is where the consensus is. If 99 percent of the scientists believe that climate change is a real problem and you have just this one percent minority that are naysayers and say, "forget it, it is not happening," the way it gets presented in a newspaper or television story is 50/50; therefore, people end up with a distorted view of what is going on. Is there a way to get away from the conflict orientation and toward what is really going on in the scientific community on these issues, which is so often science-driven?

MR. JANSON: You may answer but not as long as the question.

MS. ASKARI: Okay. I would just quickly say that I am very happy that, as a reporter, that I had a victory on that front, with the climate change story. Obviously, for children, you try to convey the message in very, very simple terms. I did not put in any "on-the-other-hand" thing, and I went through the editing process. I came back and the editors said, "What about the other side?" We had a back-and-forth e-mail dialogue about it, and I wound up convincing them by throwing lots of Web site addresses at them, saying, here is the National Academy of Sciences website, and so on. We had no mention of opposition in my latest children's story, which was a big victory. Everybody who covers that kind of issue is aware of that and tries to do the same kind of thing.

ANSWER, DR. WADDELL: I think there is another real problem in all of this and I do not know how to deal with it. I covered the Free Trade negotiations between Canada and the U.S. from 1985 to 1988. The 1988 election in Canada was all about that. It was a very big event in Canada. We did polls at the *Globe & Mail*, in cooperation with the CBC through that period. In the last three months before the election, we did more environmental damage to the forests of this country by writing stories about free trade, and yet all the answers from every poll said that the general public did not know anything about it. What we concluded, which I think is right, was when people said they did not know anything about it, what they really wanted the media to do is tell them what the right answer is. I wonder if that is the issue with many of the environmental stories. Since the media cannot or will not do that, the stories do not end up telling people what the right answer is, people stop reading them. When they do not read them, the editors then say that nobody reads this and you have a real problem. It is a

very difficult issue, because on many of those issues people want to know what the right answer is; in a lot of cases, there is no right answer, or we will not know that answer for a long time.

COMMENT, MR. JANSON: Interesting point.

QUESTION, MR. POTTER: Two things have been confirmed tonight: first of all, that we in this area who know something have a duty to help journalists to understand what is going on and to make sure that they are equipped to do a very difficult job. I think we have a duty as well to recognize those difficulties that journalists face. I think Ms. Askari and Mr. Waddell have done a good job at setting out those difficulties and the obstacles.

I would like to know a bit more about what practitioners – lawyers, engineers, or the bureaucrats – what more they could actually do. Does it help, for example, for people to be sending in op-ed pieces to try to render, in some in of vernacular, the speeches that they deliver here and there to the *cognoscenti*? Does it help to offer themselves up to give speeches? What can be done? I think we understand the obstacles. We understand the problems and we know that journalists do a heroic job to try to get this stuff across, but what is it that we can actually do?

ANSWER, MS. ASKARI: I have two quick ideas. I think your thought about putting your opinions into op-ed pieces is excellent. We need more variety of voices, credible voices, on these issues. Too often we get columns from regular newspaper columnists who are not as educated on the topics or who have a very political point of view. It would be terrific to have more people like you to send in op-ed pieces, but they should be very short. If you send one that is too long, it will not get in.

Secondly, it would be lovely to have more personal contact with experts such as the people in this room. If you are passing through Detroit, give me a ring and see if you could stop by to have coffee or something. That is more helpful to me than sending me a lot of news releases.

ANSWER, DR. WADDELL: I would add to that by saying, if reporters phone you up, do not be afraid to talk to them.

COMMENT, MS. ASKARI: Right away.

ANSWER, DR. WADDELL: For your own protection, it always makes good sense to establish what the ground rules are on which you talk before when you start. Are you talking about something, on the record, that you will later be quoted, or will you be talking about background information? Take the time to clarify what the rules are and then take a couple of minutes to explain the issue to the reporter; and, second of all, if you can suggest to them one or two things they might want to read that might give them more information, that would be helpful, too. You cannot guarantee that every reporter is going to read it. If you talk to five people, two or three will, and eventually they will know a little bit more and you can judge that by the next

time they phone you up. If their questions are a little different or a little less naive, perhaps maybe they have actually done their homework.

COMMENT, MR. JANSON: We have another question here, in the front.

QUESTION, MR. MICHAEL ROBINSON: My question is somewhat of the flip side of Simon's more constructive question, for which I praise him. I see a sort of a dismal prospect and I would like to throw this out to you, that the daily print media is finished because of things that you are telling us: the cost is too high, you have untrained reporters who get dumped into – what was this wonderful category wherein you do not have a specialty?

ANSWER, DR. WADDELL: General assignment.

COMMENT, MR. MICHAEL ROBINSON: General assignment. Your editors will not take the time or the expense to train people. This is no reflection on the integrity or quality of the reporters. I have a young daughter who is dead keen on being a reporter. She does not care if she ever gets paid. She just wants to tell the right story.

COMMENT, DR. WADDELL: There are many people in this business who want to hear that, I tell you.

QUESTION, MR. MICHAEL ROBINSON: I really want to emphasize, I am not adversely reflecting on the quality of reporters. The demand seems to be so huge that nobody can really do a good job.

Is the Economist the only kind of periodical that is really going to survive? I must confess, I read *The Economist*, cover to cover. I also take all three Toronto papers and try to flip through them. It is easy to drop the things you do not want to read. I read the two right-wings and the one left-wing paper we have. The one I read cover to cover is *The Economist* because I get these stories, in depth. I read the astronomy columns. I do not know a damn thing about astronomy, but they are wonderful because I know they have done their homework. Frankly, the daily print media does not convince me they are doing that any more and certainly not TV. What do you think about that?

ANSWER, DR. WADDELL: I think that is probably true. It is curious when you look at *The Economist*. I think *The Economist* may be one of the few publications around (but do not hold me to that completely) that has consistently, in the last few years, has decided to go "up market" every time rather than "down market," in terms of being more sophisticated or whatever.

On the other side, though, there are lots of people with lots of differing tastes. Newspapers will probably be around for a long time because advertisers will still think that they are a fairly effective way to get a message out.

Some of my comments at the very end were a little bit directed to whether we are moving to the direction we talked a little bit about at dinner, toward two extremes. On one level, we have globalized media (where, I noticed,

Mr. Robinson, you had the *Financial Times* with you, which is interesting. You read the *Financial Times*, very good.). People will read the top-end international papers, whether it is *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Financial Times*, *The New York Times*, or the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post* – whatever the papers might be. I have not mentioned any Canadian ones in there, maybe *The Globe & Mail*, I do not know. At the other extreme, you may see the emergence or development of much more community-based newspapers, distributed either on the Internet, or by e-mail.

Remember, you and I all have the ability to become newspaper publishers if we want. We could go home tonight and put out a newspaper and distribute it to our friends using our printer and our computer, and getting the software, which is not very expensive. So you may be seeing – you are right, I think – a middle-of-the-road kind of demand. I think there will continue to be demand at the top end and something at the local level. The problem is: how do you get across the complicated issues that we are talking about here if you are losing that big center section? I do not know the answer to that.

ANSWER, MS. ASKARI: I will say there is a sense in the newspaper industry that we are living through the end of the age of the dinosaurs. I take my son for a tour of the printing press plant where there are great big rolls of paper and I say, remember this, when you are an old man, it is not going to be around anymore.

It is also a very exciting business. I hope you do not discourage your daughter, Mr. Robinson, from going into journalism, because it is really a lot of fun. You are always learning. My brother is a doctor and he has to deal with people who have the same illness repeatedly, over and over again. Lawyers, you know, and journalists, are always talking to interesting people and continuously learning new things. People are making news; it is a very fun culture. In fact, it is so fun that I once had a editor who told me they ought to put a turnstile in the lobby and have people pay to come work there. I think there will always be a market for people who can gather information quickly and interpret it, even if it is not going to be printed on paper but published on the Web. I think we are flooded with information from so many different sources that an interpretation and analysis specialty could be very marketable.

COMMENT, MR. JANSON: I think we have time for one more question. What are the rules here, Henry?

COMMENT, MR. KING: You can go on as long as you want. I think we are winding up. It is about a quarter past nine.

COMMENT, MR. JANSON: We will take one more question.

QUESTION, MR. ADLER: A quick comment and a question: I have attended Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) conventions a couple times and Ms. Askari mentioned some of the reasons that people become journalists is because they have the “fire in the belly,” and that they want to

inform the people and hold people accountable. One thing I noticed at those conferences, at least it appeared to me as an outsider, is that there seemed to be a divide between those that considered themselves in many respects – I am not trying to over exaggerate this – “traditional journalists” and those that considered themselves “environmentalists.” There is an interesting tension there. I think some of the criticism of environment reporting reflects expectations that environmental journalists should be either one or the other. If you are criticizing from one side, it is because you want them to be journalists and not environmentalists, and if you are criticizing from the other side, the reverse is true; that was just something I noticed at those conferences.

My question has to deal with the issue of journalists historically being intermediaries. If you look way back in the United States – this is still the way it is in many other countries, but not so much in the U.S. – newspapers as sources of information were very much known for their point of view, their perspective and their interests; people chose their paper because they wanted intermediaries that they trusted, and they tended to trust those that supported their political party or their religion. The United States, I think, went through a period where newspapers tried to get away from that. It seems now that one of things the Internet might be doing – and I would be interested in your thoughts on this – is that it is moving us back towards (I think trends in cable are doing the same thing) the place where we were when people chose their media not only because they want an answer, but because they also have very strong opinions about who they want their answer from. Or, there is an underlying ideological or other bias that they trust to give them that answer, so people are self-sorting in terms of deciding they want to, say, watch FOX News instead of CNN. Other people decide they want to use certain weblogs as a way of filtering what news stories are important rather than actually picking up the morning paper. I am wondering if the two of you think that is happening; and, will newspapers respond to that by moving away from trying to be objective and embracing the fact that different newspapers are going to adopt positions, or are they going to respond in some other way?

ANSWER, DR. WADDELL: I think the answer is two-fold. In the television business, I suspect, there has been to some extent more experimentation with ways to differentiate yourself in a field that is increasingly crowded with different channels. It has been successful, in part, I guess, by playing to sensationalism and a variety of other things.

In the Canadian newspaper business, it very successfully solved that problem by eliminating all except one newspaper in most communities in Canada, so that most communities no longer have a choice. I mean, you the buy a national paper, *The Globe & Mail* or the *National Post* (as long as it survives, which may not be very much longer), but if you are living in a lot

of cities in Canada, you really do not have much choice, but it may still be a tactic they try.

ANSWER, MS. ASKARI: Jonathan, I think that your observation is very perceptive. I think that it is gradually moving a little bit in that direction. You hear a lot talked about community journalism, or public journalism, as it is sometimes called, and the media outlets are trying hard to reflect back at the community as much as they can. The definition of what the community is, however, keeps on changing. So, I think, that over the long, run, yes, the U.S. media may come to look more like media in Europe, which is a lot more opinionated. I will still say that in the U.S. and Canada, with our very strong freedom-of-information laws, the newsgathering environment here is the envy of other journalists around the world. Despite all of our faults and the fact that we fall down quite a bit on the job, we still do much better and have much greater access to information than all the rest of the world except, perhaps, in Scandinavia.

COMMENT, MR. JANSON: I got the cut-off sign here. Let me ask you to join me in thanking Emilia and Chris. Thank you all for your attention.

COMMENT, MR. KING: Thank you very much. We will see you all at nine-o'clock tomorrow morning.

