

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH TED DANSON, ACTOR AND BOARD MEMBER,
OCEANA
MODERATOR: SYLVIA SMITH, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB PRESIDENT

HOLEMAN LOUNGE, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB, WASHINGTON, D.C.
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MS. SMITH: My name is Sylvia Smith. I'm the Washington editor of The
Fort Wayne Journal Gazette and President of the National Press Club.
I'd like to welcome Club members and their guests today, as well as
those of you who are watching on C-SPAN.

We're looking forward to today's speech, and afterward, I'll ask as
many questions from the audience as time permits.

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to stand
briefly when their names are called. From your right, Bradley Hague,
National Geographic Television, Richard Strauss, President of Strauss
Radio Strategies, Marilyn Thompson, a reporter for The New York Times
and a guest of the speaker, Joseph Hebert, environmental and energy
reporter for The Associated Press and a guest of the speaker, Diane
Feins, National Press Club member and Director of Communications for
North America for OCEANA, Matt Wall, the energy and transportation
correspondent for The New York Times and guest of the speaker, Angela
Greiling-Keane of Bloomberg News and chairwoman of the National Press
Club's Speakers Committee, skipping over our speaker, Melissa
Charbonneau of the Speakers Committee and with CBN News and White House
correspondent, Juliet Eilperin, national environmental reporter for The
Washington Post and guest of the speaker, Ken Milgram affiliate
relations manager for AP Broadcasts, Andrew Schneider, associate editor
of Kiplinger Washington Editors and Bill McLune of Bloomberg News.
(Applause.)

MS. SMITH: -- a recovering alcoholic who owns a Boston bar called
"Cheers." Actor Ted Danson won two Emmys for playing the lovable
bartender in the smash television series. He's gone on to tackle
countless other roles in TV and film, including the comedy series,
"Becker," the recently released film, "Mad Money," and cable drama,
"Damages," for which he received a Golden Globe nomination for his
portrayal of business tycoon Arthur Frobisher. But it is damage to the
world's oceans and his role as environmental advocate that bring our
speaker to the podium today.

Ted Danson is a spokesman and board member for OCEANA, the largest
international watchdog organization dedicated to protecting the world's
oceans and marine life.

He helped found the group's predecessor, the American Oceans Campaign
and for more than two decades, has addressed continuing threats to
oceans caused by pollution, destructive fishing practices and, now,
global warming.

Before becoming a Hollywood heavyweight as Sam Malone in "Cheers,"
Danson landed early roles in daytime soaps in New York. Compared to

Cary Grant, Danson was the original McFeeney in an ad campaign as the Erasmus man. He was even his own trivia category on the game show, "Jeopardy," and here's another piece of trivia. One of his hobbies is tap dancing.

He is married to acclaim actress Mary Steenburgen and together they worked on the television series, "Inc," it was set appropriately for a Press Club audience at a newspaper.

The couple made headlines during the Clinton administration when ties to the president led to a White House invitation and a stay in the Lincoln Bedroom. This year, the Hollywood couple has been spotted on the campaign trail stumping for Hillary Clinton. Today though, our guest will talk about a different campaign - the fight to protect the world's oceans and habitats.

Please help me give a warm National Press Club welcome to Ted Danson. (Applause.)

MR. DANSON: Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you. That was a very sweet introduction, a trip down memory lane. How sad.

Thank you so much for the invitation. This is very impressive for a guy from Hollywood to be surrounded by tradition and thank you very much, Juliet, for the invitation to begin with. Really appreciate it and for all of the guests of OCEANA here today. Thank you so much.

I was once at an American Oceans Campaign dinner - environmental jokes are tough to come by and we were honoring Sylvia Earle, who is like one of the most famous ocean advocates in the world and I was looking for the environmental joke and so we had fish for dinner like we did today, which was brilliant by the way and I said, my new motto really is why save them if you can't eat them? Sylvia did not like and would not speak to me for months.

But anyway, great fish today. Thank you. It came from Alaska, too, which makes it really, really good and appropriate to eat.

Thank you for letting me come talk to you about the problems that we face. I'd like to, first, acknowledge and I promise this won't be a commercial for OCEANA, but I want to acknowledge the staffs of the American Oceans Campaign and OCEANA and to the dedicated men and women who work so hard to protect and preserve our oceans and who were willing to teach me as much as I could absorb.

Thank you so much.

I've been working on ocean issues for 20 years, actually, 53 if you count this really bad dream I had when I was seven. This is a true story. I had this high fever and I woke up screaming and running in my parents' room and they said what's wrong, what's wrong? I had this nightmare. What was it? Well, and this is for verbatim, I was sitting on the beach as a seven-year-old and God's voice said, Ted, you have one hour to enter the oceans into this bucket and then gave me a spoon with holes in it. True story. That was my nightmare. So it's basically a typical Messiah complex kind of thing, I admit, but you would have to say that I have been concerned about oceans from a very early age.

I still have the occasional nightmare, but there has been some movement. The president last year protected a large area of ocean off the Hawaiian Islands. The federal government set aside three-quarters of a million square miles of ocean from bottom trawling. The World Trade Organization is considering language that will limit fishing subsidies. Things are moving, but unfortunately, we will know in our lifetimes whether we have moved fast enough.

It didn't really get interested in ocean work until about 1987; it was about the fifth year of "Cheers." My family moved into a neighborhood in Santa Monica and there was a local fight to keep Occidental

Petroleum from drilling, slant drilling into Santa Monica Bay right along the Will Rogers State Beach. It was run by a man named Robert Zelnick, who was an environmental lawyer. I wrote a check and we became great friends. We came up with a way to actually beat them by putting - making an initiative on the ballot in Los Angeles and we actually won and we so enjoyed each other's company that we wanted to keep working together and we liked ocean issues. So with a great deal of naivete, we said, let's do something about it and we started American Oceans Campaign and it was throwing bricks at the Bush administration in very pep rally kind of thinking, but the more we got involved it became so clear how complicated the issues were and that throwing bricks really didn't help anything.

We had a great staff, very small. We had about ten people here in Washington and in Santa Monica and then my friend, Robert Zelnick, took off to do something else after about, I guess, it was about 12, 13 years and I started looking for an exit plan. I was so embarrassed to keep asking my friends for money and they actually - I had friends who said you never call me except when you want money, which is humbling and humiliating because it was true and so I kept looking for a way out of this, I thought there must be way some out and along came OCEANA, which was a brand new international ocean advocacy group that was put together by a group of foundations and it had like \$10 million to go with and the staff was going to be absorbed. Everyone would be happy and taken care of and I was out of there.

And then they did this really cheap trick of naming an ocean award after me and I am so embarrassed that it worked, you know, typical actor. But also it was so clear that this was an amazing organization and really positioned to do great work, great ocean work.

So I'm thrilled to be on the board of directors of OCEANA.

I should mention that Barbara Boxer, then-Congresswoman and George Miller were very influential in my life starting doing ocean advocacy work and they were very generous with their time.

So. All right. Here we are. What are scientists telling us what's happening with the oceans? Science. Since the late 1980s, the fish catch around the world has been declining. More boats go out bringing back less fish. The technology is such now that you can literally, you know, catch that fish over there. So better technology. More boats going out and, yet, the fish catch for the first time in history since the mid-late 1980s is declining.

Since 1950, when I was a kid, all the big fish that were out there, the big game fish, the marlin, the cod, the tuna, according to Ransom Myers who did a study, 90 percent of those fish are gone. This side of the room is still here; all the rest of you are gone if we're big fish. Huge impact. Twenty nine percent of fisheries around the world have collapsed and that means that it's below the ten percent historical level if you look over history and this is the level, it's down ten percent.

It's not like Canadian cod; it's not a guarantee that they will ever come back, too. Some do come back, some don't. If you take it down below a certain percent like Canadian cod, it will never be back.

Seventy-five percent according to UNFAO, the world's fisheries are either fully fished or over-fished. So they are on the brink.

According to Boris Woren, another scientist in the journal, Science, says and other groups of scientists say that by this century if we continue this trend of fishing practices, all of the world's fisheries, all of the world's fisheries will collapse. We will not be eating this dinner.

Every month, new sea life, sharks, turtles, blue fin tuna, become endangered and are on the brink of collapse. Seafood contamination - always great to bring up after you've had your salmon, seafood contamination - we have so much mercury now that the FDA is telling us no swordfish; if you're a woman or a young child, no swordfish. Period. And maybe one sandwich of albacore tuna a week, the equivalent of one sandwich a week. That's the stuff you give to your kids because you want them to be healthy, tuna fish.

The New York Times study and also independently an OCEANA study, just recently came out saying that a lot of our favorite sushi restaurants and our fish stores, our supermarkets, actually have levels of mercury in it that make it unsafe. One out of four women in New York, this was a study done last summer, one out of four women have reportable levels of mercury. One half of all Asian women have reportable levels.

Also, we're pumping so much carbon dioxide into our oceans from the atmosphere that we are actually changing the pH balance of the water. We're making it too acidic and that means all your carbon shells that are made out of carbon calcium breakdown. Your corals breakdown and a lot of that by the way comes from shipping fleets, worldwide shipping fleets. They actually pump out the equivalent of - if they were a country, I think, it's like the eighth country in the world as far as levels of pumping it out, of all the cars in the United States, whatever that pumps out every year is what the shipping fleets pump out.

So it's a big source of global warming.

So, essentially, all science is saying that we are on the brink of an irreversible collapse and we have been trending this way for the last 20 years.

Okay. Why do we care? One billion people around the world, mostly poor depend on fish protein for their protein. Two hundred million people depend on fishing as a way of supporting their families. The EPA says one out of six women of pregnant bearing years; one out of six of you have too much mercury in your system to safely give birth to a child without the possibility of severe neurological damage. The carbon dioxide, the mercury slopes down into the water, it's water soluble, little fish swim around, take it into their gills, bigger fish eat those little fish and we're eating the bigger fish and by then they have so much mercury that it is very unsafe. It's a real public health hazard.

So this is not about saving fish from the goodness of our hearts or taking care of our oceans because we want to be thought of as environmental. This is economic. It is moral. And it is public health. Okay. The good news. This is one of those environmental problems that we actually can fix. The oceans are very resilient. During World War II, the North Atlantic - they couldn't fish because of the U-boats. Those fish populations just became hugely abundant as a result of not fishing in an area for five years. They are resilient.

So what do we do? First, we can solve these problems because they are mostly national problems. Few fish like swordfish and tuna, you have to have some sort of international laws governing them because they're out in the deep ocean, but most of our sea life is along the continental shelf, which means it's under national waters. So you can approach this - you don't have to have a new international mandate or a new international body to attack a lot of these problems.

Second, we know what to do in most cases. It's clear that we have to put a stop to destructive fishing practices. Ocean habitat, all the little nooks and crannies, the coral reefs where the little fish get to

be safe from the big fish and grow into big fish that we eat. When we do bottom trawling now, we destroy those habitats, the nurseries where our little fish grow up and the gears are now so sophisticated, they used to have to when they were trawling, lift them up over rocks and nooks and crannies because they would tear up the nets. Not anymore. And they literally - we have amazing footage, sad footage of these beautiful little nooks, crannies, corals, turning into a gravel pit basically. Very destructive. You destroy the habitat. You destroy the nursery.

By catch. When you're after fish A, you catch all these other fish in your nets, but you don't want them. So dead or dying, off goes 30 percent back into the water. Thirty percent of the world's catch dead or dying back in the water. Four pounds of by catch for one pound of shrimp in the shrimp nets.

So when you accumulate all of these fishing practices, you really will put a dent into the fish populations of the world. You really will collapse the world's fisheries. So what you need to do is you need to put observers on ships, which is being done. You need to do so that they can count exactly what's going on with science to see what the by catch is and then you need to cap it. You need to put a limit, so you're saying, all right, Mr. Shrimp Fisherman, do you want - you have to count the other four pounds of by catch along with your one pound of shrimp and if you go above your limits, too bad, you know. You have to cap it somehow. So you can't just throw it dead or dying overboard and not count it. And then you can control it by learning, you know, the different habits of fish populations if turtles are going by this day, you don't do it there, you go do it over there. There are ways to control the amount of by catch.

Third, policymakers should curtail the \$20 billion subsidies that each year go to support the worldwide fishing industry. It's about an \$80 billion a year industry, all the fish that are landed come to about \$80 billion, \$20 billion of that goes to bad, meaning, not science, not for making the boats safer, but for bad subsidies that increase the amount of catch.

We basically have two times the amount of boats out there in the world, fishing, than we need to for sustainable fishery.

The New York Times had an amazing article, The Empty Seas series that they just published, because one of the things that you subsidize a fleet and we can go from the European Union all the way down to the west coast of Africa and we can wipe out their fisheries.

So it has a moral, you know, question to it as well.

So the World Trade Organization should adopt the very strong language that's under consideration by negotiations in the Doha Round and we have great support, actually, in Congress for this and the U.S. Trade Representative whom we met with yesterday is very supportive of this. So there's a good chance it will happen and you really need it to happen because it takes about eight years for these trade agreements to come around again, with a new president and a new European parliament and yadda yadda yadda, it becomes like another eight years that you could address this situation and by then if we believe what science says that by mid-century, we could be in a real problem and then we can't wait, you know, we really need this to be part of the trade agreement, the reduction in subsidies because it's one of the fastest ways to deal with over fishing.

Fourth, you enforce the laws that already exist, for example, sea turtles are part of the endangered species, they're threatened by extinction and yet we still issue permits allowing fishing operations

to catch thousands of these animals and there are ways around it. Turtles - when they panic and they're in a net, go up for air like we would, but fish don't. So you put escape hatches in your nets. There are ways around this. We just need to enforce it and start being smart. And finally, you limit the amount of pollution that ends up in the oceans and in our bodies because of the fish we eat. You reduce the amount of mercury that comes out of coal-burning plants and out of chlorine plants. You use mercury in a lot of these chlorine plants to make the chlorine molecule. You don't have to. There is a system in place and a lot of plants do use this system that doesn't make the use of mercury, but there's still four plants that lose a huge amount of mercury every year.

You get the FDA, you get grocery stores to post the FDA warnings telling us which fish are safe for us to eat at the place of purchase. So you educate the consumer.

A lot of things you can do. Reduce the amount of carbon emissions coming from arranged shipping, I think, California is already working on this and by reducing the speed when they're in our waters. You have to slow down, which, like cars, reduces the amount of emissions. So there are things to do and the oceans are in great peril, but they are fixable. I'm incredibly optimistic and, at the same time, I'm very scared because if we believe science, then we are in for a very bumpy ride if we don't start taking care of the oceans.

Thank you. Thank you very, very much. Thank you for letting me talk to people who can change the national will. I'm not telling you what to write, but when you do write about this, it's so hard when you talk fish, I can see peoples' eyes - please don't talk fish. It is a very geeky, strange thing to talk about and yet, think of a world where you don't have any fish literally to eat, maybe a few little critters out there, but basically, you know, on a big industrial level, no more fish. Think what it does to the economy, think what it does to the 200 million that make their livelihood out of it and just the moral, ethical thing of we should not do what we did to the buffalo, to our fish. There is a morality, an immorality to that.

So I really do thank you and I appreciate the opportunity to talk to writers and people and inform the public and policymakers about what's going on even if it makes you doze a little bit.

Thank you. I'd love to entertain any questions. That was the body of my knowledge. (Applause.)

MS. SMITH: One of the questions is: Is fish and other seafood farming an answer?

MR. DANSON: That was planted by some of my people. No. No. I'm kidding. Maybe in some cases, but most fish that are farmed are carnivorous, so that creates a problem because to make one pound of farm salmon, you have to catch and grind up three pounds of wild fish, make little pellets and then feed it.

So, clearly, that doesn't make any sense. If you live in Santiago, Chile and you go to the market and you're poor, your fish that used to be like this that you're buying are now getting to be like this because all the fish are being ground up to make those farm salmon nice and plump to sell in Europe and to us.

So, you know, we're not experiencing a problem. The poor people are and it's coming our way, you know, we can still afford to pay for farm salmon. Poor folks when they go to the market are noticing smaller and smaller fish.

MS. SMITH: What specific laws or policies, which you propose in the short term?

MR. DANSON: Mike? All right. All right. Hey, the biggest opportunity we have right now is the World Trade Organization's subsidies. That will have the biggest impact on this problem that we're talking about. So that means you have to have, wow, you have to talk to the international crowd. You have to get countries that aren't that excited about reducing fishing subsidies like the European Union, like Japan, like many other countries and you somehow have to educate the people there, but basically making sure here, for us, making sure that Congress is excited about the possibility of reducing fish subsidies in this new Doha Round.

So everybody is on our side on this issue. They need support and encouragement, but that would have the, you know, the biggest and fastest impact. I'm sure I'll think of something else in a minute.

MS. SMITH: I could move on to the actor questions if you like.

MR. DANSON: Yes. Anything that you want.

MS. SMITH: Have you met with representatives of the governments that oppose the fishing subsidies or support the fishing subsidies? And how credible are their arguments?

MR. DANSON: Well, you know, there's an argument about the Third World - so you have the West African nations. You have the small island nations grouped in with China, so they're saying, wait a minute, you know, this doesn't make sense.

I think that is one of the biggest stumbling blocks. A lot of people have fished out there, their national waters and so they almost have to go to international waters to get their fish. I'm rambling now. I think the Third World issue is a big deal. What else? Whisper something. Come on. Let's educate people.

Mike, our chief scientist is here from OCEANA. Yell it out. Come on. It's all right.

MR. : When we were in New Zealand we talked to a lot of different countries, and there are always good political reasons for governments to keep their supporters happy.

So fishermen are powerful constituents in many countries, and so there's a lot of political pressure for subsidies.

Fortunately, in the U.S., we don't actually have very many subsidies at all. So our fisherman are supportive of leveling the playing field worldwide.

MR. DANSON: Yeah, which is a good argument on our side. You want to level the playing field, because we play, basically, by the rules here. See? I can answer anything. (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: (Great ?).

Is there a need to abandon some species in order to ensure a greater number? And how could this be handled to reduce harm?

MR. DANSON: (Laughs.) Not a prayer! (Laughter.) Is there reason to abandon certain species? I don't know. That sounds like a leading question. I wish whoever asked that will come and tell us why. And maybe it is a good idea. I don't know how to answer that. Sorry.

But hey, I won't have my voice from the audience, but please -- I will make sure that Oceana -- do we know who wrote that? Because we have so many bright people at Oceana, they will get back. Is that fair to do?

MS. SMITH: That's --

MR. DANSON: Great.

MS. SMITH: Who pays for the proposed regulations, the cost of monitoring and enforcement? Would the cost be passed on to consumers? Would that be prohibitive?

MR. DANSON: See, clearly, we should have moved to the career questions. (Laughter.) (Would it then ?)? I don't know. Mike? Holler that out. Do we know?

MR. HIRSHFIELD: (Off mike) -- I've been told that I have to -- if I am directed, to go to the --

MR. DANSON: Good. Let's do this. Come on, this is not show-off time for Ted; this is get work done and hear about oceans. So thank you for coming up here.

MR. HIRSHFIELD: It is -- there's basically two ways to do it, but --

MR. DANSON: No, you have to come all the way, buddy. (Laughter.)

MR. HIRSHFIELD: There are basically two ways to do it. One is to have the costs of management paid for as part of government agencies, so the taxpayers would pay for it, or you could have the industry pay for it, in which case consumers would pay for the cost. And it's -- like every other cost of regulation, a lot of the environmental harm is being done for free, and we're not paying for it. And one of the things that we're seeing in the oceans, we're seeing in climate change, is some of those bills are coming due. And so we'll have to pay it, one way or another.

MR. DANSON: Great.

Bobby Kennedy Jr. has this great phrase: Show me a polluter and I will show you a subsidy. You know, and I think that speaks to really what you say, too: that we are subsidizing really bad fishing practices. We're already paying people to do the wrong thing. It wouldn't be so bad to pay people to do the right thing.

MS. SMITH: Well, you led right into this question.

MR. DANSON: Is it about my career? (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: (Chuckles.) (Inaudible.)

MR. DANSON: Ah --

MS. SMITH: What do you think of free-market solution to pollutions and overfishing, such as buying or selling portions of rivers?

MR. DANSON: Never heard of that. But you know what? Free market -- free market's probably not a bad thing, but there is no free market. I mean, most -- every problem we have comes from subsidizing, I think. You know? So I don't know how to answer that.

Mike, where'd you go? Mike? Mike? (Laughter.) That's a tough one, isn't it?

MR. HIRSHFIELD: I'm not sure I even understand it.

MR. DANSON: What do you think of free-market solutions to pollution and overfishing? I mean, free market was an excuse for not regulating the coal -- (audio break) -- especially if you're getting subsidies at the same time.

So I'm saying no.

MS. SMITH: Okay. All right.

MR. DANSON: I'm saying no. (Scattered laughter.)

MS. SMITH: Final answer. (Chuckles.)

MR. DANSON: Oh, you see me sweating a little bit, don't you? Come on!

MS. SMITH: (Laughs.) No.

MR. DANSON: We got Mike behind us. We can do this.

MS. SMITH: Is it technologically possible to reduce the by-catch on commercial fishing ships?

MR. DANSON: Yeah. I mean, you can do things like know where certain populations of fish are coming, and turtles and things like that, so you can go: All right, we don't go there that day.

You can also put -- you can change your nets so that they have escape hatches, you know, for things like turtles, and other fish, others. So yeah, you can, by controlling the -- where you fish and when, and to be more educated about the movement of that population. It's the vast

indiscriminate fishnets that go anywhere and keep fishing forever that are creating most of the -- are creating the problem. So yeah, you can do that.

Do you agree?

MR. HIRSHFIELD: Absolutely.

MR. DANSON: Ha! (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: If the fish subsidies were eliminated, how would those 200 million people you talked about get their protein?

MR. DANSON: A lot of those -- the subsidies go to the big, huge factory ships. You go -- we went to -- (starts to say Portugal) -- no, where did we go? We went to the Basque country, and we talked to fishermen there. No, we -- we also went to Santiago, Chile, and talked to the artisanal fishermen. They know how to fish in a sustainable way. Those 200 (sic) people are mostly people who -- The New York Times article also -- you know, in the West African nations, people are going farther and farther out in their little wooden boats, trying to find fish populations that haven't been wiped out by the big European factory ships.

So the 200 million represent people who go out -- most of them go out in little boats and know how to fish in a sustainable way and have for many, many, many generations. So cutting subsidies would help by far those 200 million people.

MS. SMITH: What's the main mistake the press makes in covering -- coverage of ocean issues?

MR. DANSON: Oh, I'm going to bite the hand that just fed me?

(Laughter.)

It's tough. You know, I -- one little tidbit: I think it's something like -- or it used to be, so it can't be that much different -- one-half of 1 percent of all monies going to environmental causes in this country goes to marine issues. So that kind of, you know, First Amendment -- follow the speech, follow the money -- but you know, I guess it's really tough to get people to focus on this great big beautiful, gorgeous ocean. We're eating fish. Where's the problem, you know.

So I think it's really hard to get people's attention. So I think finding hooks, like The New York Times did with the article about the European Union coming down and fishing out the west coast of Africa or the fact that mercury is literally -- if you're going to have a kid, you don't want the risk of neurological damage, and it's very, very scientifically real.

So I think you should find hooks -- the press finds hooks to get people's attention, because it is hard to get people's attention. But if not, this is genuinely -- and I think there could be an excitement to it. There's -- you genuinely can risk it all by not doing anything, or you can fix it. You can actually save it. So that's kind of an exciting challenge.

But I think people need to be aware that it's very, very real. It's not, as I have been accused of by Rush Limbaugh, that --

MS. SMITH: (Chuckles.)

MR. DANSON: -- of overstatement -- you know, it's not environmental hyperbole. The science is there to say we are trending towards a very serious collapse of all of our fisheries if we don't change our ways. So I think finding hooks to get people's attention would be a great thing. So I don't think you've made any mistakes. I just think you could focus on that.

MS. SMITH: Yes. Why don't you -- if you would say that again -- no mistakes (in the ?) press -- (chuckles) --

MR. DANSON: You've got it, (I guess ?).

MS. SMITH: (Laughs.)

MR. DANSON: I did have to mention Rush, didn't (I ??) (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: What will Oceana do to attain an enforceable global treaty against overfishing if the Doha Round of the world trade talks fails?

MR. DANSON: Don't know. You go back to the drawing board. But you probably go after the European Union. You know, you have all of the -- all -- you have the campaign in place. We know how to do it. So then you take on the European Union. And they cause a great deal of the problems with overfishing. So you would have to go piecemeal. This is a great opportunity to do it all at once.

MS. SMITH: Do you exempt U.S. fishing companies from your broad criticism? You said that the problems come from subsidies. Does the U.S. do it right?

MR. DANSON: Mostly.

I think, you know, I think the North Atlantic fisheries and the North Pacific fishing councils really get it. They're made up of fishermen. They're made up of those people that would normally fight you if you're just an environmental twit trying to take away their livelihood. They are on our side and they get it.

There are some places in the United States that are not quite getting it, but I don't think fishing subsidies is a huge problem in this country. We don't do it that much.

I sound really smart. (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: Who should address curbing ship emissions -- an environmental body, the U.S., California, shipping companies?

MR. DANSON: Okay. Who should address curbing --

Well, in California, we're going after it as a state. I guess you want -- I don't know.

Mike, what do you think?

MR. HIRSHFIELD: Well, ultimately, it's equivalent to the WTO. The International Maritime Organization is the U.N. body that regulates shipping. We've actually petitioned the Environmental Protection Agency to regulate shipping emissions of ships that come in U.S. waters. We believe that U.S. law already gives the EPA the authority to do that. And just as the Supreme Court has confirmed that they have the authority to regulate automobiles, we believe they ought to regulate shipping. If the U.S. did it, the European Union, in this particular case, seems to be quite serious about taking on shipping. If those two blocs take it on, we think there's a good chance that the rest of the world will follow.

MR. DANSON: Thank you.

MS. SMITH: Is your campaign hurt by all the other issues that consume time, energy and money, particularly the war in Iraq and the economy?

MR. DANSON: I would have to say, I would have to guess, yes.

You know, I think global warming rightfully so, you know, has taken up a great deal of attention, and rightfully so. But at the same time, you need to take care of business. So if you take care of global warming and you turn around and there are no fish, you'd be very sad. So I think you have to do it all.

But, yes, I think, all of the above. I think the economy and, yeah, Iraq, everything.

MS. SMITH: Does Oceana plan to participate in the Ocean Expo 2012 in South Korea?

MR. DANSON: I don't know. I don't know. We might. I don't know.

(Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: Somebody wants to know.

MR. DANSON: That's good. If we were invited. (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: There was a recent report about a dead zone created in the Gulf of Mexico from phosphorus nitrogen, which is -- nitrogen's a major ingredient in agricultural fertilizer.

Would you go so far as to say U.S. agriculture should not use fertilizers?

MR. DANSON: I wouldn't. Mike might. No, but is a huge problem, and, you know, how close the agriculture is to rivers and streams is a huge problem. If you get too close, all of your fertilizer does leach. The truth is, we are all like 50 miles from the ocean. We all are -- I can't remember the wonderful catchphrase, but everything we do in life basically ends up in the coastal zone. You know, your fertilizer, what you put down your sink, everything. Our toxic kind of lifestyle does get in the water system, farming included. So, yeah, if there was some way that we would be less toxic with our pesticides and everything, obviously that would be better for all of us in many, many, many ways. But I don't have a real --

MS. SMITH: Would you ban them?

MR. DANSON: Would I ban them? If I were king?

MS. SMITH: Sure.

MR. DANSON: Yeah. I'd probably have to make sure there was some sort of alternative, you know, so that we didn't lose all those potatoes.

(Laughter.) You know, I don't know. If I were king, yes, damn it, they're out.

MS. SMITH: They're out.

The Law of the Sea Treaty would establish, as you know, procedures for ocean treatment, such as seabed mining and fishing regulations. Has Oceana lobbied senators for ratification of the Law of the Sea Treaty?

MR. DANSON: Yes. Yeah. It's a --

MS. SMITH: Oh. Not --

MR. DANSON: No, no, no, I know. It's a little strange. It's a -- I'm talking a little out of -- over my head, but basically, I think a few of the senators and congressmen on the -- congresswomen and senators on the right think that this was a Reagan mandate never, ever, ever to sign, you know, the Law of the Seas. And there actually -- my understanding as of yesterday was there was just one part of the treaty that they did not like, that they refused. So they went no to the whole thing.

Then negotiations took place over different presidencies, and that one thing that they objected to, that Reagan objected to, was fixed. So now a lot of Republicans are all in favor of this. But the far, die-hard Reagan Republicans still say, no, no, this is like a line in the sand. We must defend Reagan in this.

So it's a little bit bizarre because it doesn't quite make sense to me anymore or to a lot of Republicans or to President Bush. So yeah, I think first Mr. Reid has to bring it up on the floor for a vote. And then I think he would probably get a lot of people to be encouraged on the Republican side to actually change their mind.

MS. SMITH: Would the treaty -- in what ways would the Law of the Sea Treaty advance the issues that you care about? And have you done any lobbying of Senator Reid to in fact bring this to a vote?

MR. DANSON: I have not lobbied Senator Reid. Do you have an answer?

MR. HIRSHFIELD: Yeah. Very briefly, Oceana has, in fact, lobbied Senator Reid and other leaders in Congress on this issue. The irony about the Law of the Sea is that it's recognized as customary law by the United States already.

So we are, in fact, legally -- we consider ourselves legally bound by its terms. What makes it timely to get it -- to get the United States to finally accede to it is that one little-known part of the Law of the Sea says in addition to those 200 miles that you get off of your coastline, you get to look at the entire continental shelf off of your coastline. And with things like the Arctic melting and new areas potentially being available, a lot of countries are starting to have negotiations about this post-200-mile discussion. And the U.S. really needs to sign on to the to the Law of the Sea to participate in those discussions.

MS. SMITH: How do the positions of Clinton, Obama and McCain compare on ocean environmental issues?

MR. DANSON: How do -- I don't know that. I would guess that they're very similar. A lot of their policy is very similar. I don't know how to answer that, sorry.

MS. SMITH: Okay.

MR. DANSON: You'd think I would.

MS. SMITH: You would.

MR. DANSON: Yes.

MS. SMITH: What's it like to stay in the Lincoln Bedroom? And do you think you'll be invited again next year?

MR. DANSON: (Laughs, laughter.) You know, it's the mugs from Camp David that I really want, the little coffee mugs. (Laughter.) We're breaking them, and I missed them. (Laughs.)

It's incredibly impressive. It is a rare honor and treat. You can see the original Star-Spangled Banner, you know, on the wall, the little -- the music -- I mean, it's astounding. The actual sleeping is like sleeping in a gymnasium and it's not that much fun, because it's like "Dear God!" (Laughter.) It's so huge, but a real honor, and yes, yes, I would like that very much next year.

MS. SMITH: Why are Hollywood figures qualified to be leaders of social movements?

MR. DANSON: Just because. (Laughter.) You know, we're not. We're not. I'm -- as you can see, I've been tutored and taught by incredibly bright men and women on this subject and I have a real limit to my knowledge. I know this much and no more.

And so this is -- here, we're doing exactly why it's okay for celebrities to be involved. You put the microphone in front of me because I'm a celebrity. And Mike Hirshfield, who's the chief scientist at Oceana gets to stand next to me and tell you what's really really going on. So as long as you're aware that what you are is kind of like a red flag for the media to draw a little attention, I think it's okay. Other than that, you know, gosh, why would anyone listen to Sam Malone? I don't know. (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: (Laughs.) Well, I have a question for Sam, based on hearings yesterday. (Laughs.) Did Sam use steroids? (Laughter.)

MR. DANSON: No, I think alcohol was his drug of choice. (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: (Laughs.) One reporter quotes you as saying Bill Clinton was like your wife's big brother, that the first time Clinton met you he embraced -- this is a quote -- "He embraced me up and down. It was very intimidating. There I was, about to ask Mary to marry me, and he was giving me the once-over." What kind of first husband would Bill Clinton make if Senator Clinton becomes president?

MR. DANSON: That was actually "braced," just so you don't start some wild thing that --

MS. SMITH: Oh, he didn't hug you.

MR. DANSON: He does -- he's a great hugger. He does hug me.

He braced me that time, meaning, who are you to, you know, to be asking the hand of my dear friend Mary?

Yeah, it's strange, very strange. But Mary's from Little Rock, Arkansas, has been around one president and two potential presidents. Wes Clark, actually, his mother was a bank teller with Mary's mother, so they're best friends, Wes Clark.

So I drive around, and the car phone rings, and it's the White House. And I'm from Arizona. I'm like, I can't believe it quite.

I think he would make, I think he will continue doing what he's doing, which is incredible work in Africa, the global initiative. I mean, the man is the busiest human being on the planet, doing public service. So I can't imagine him giving any of that up. I imagine he'll keep doing what he's doing.

I'm sorry, I'm, you know, they're best friends. He gave Mary away at our wedding, so I'm, you know, madly in love with the Clintons.

MS. SMITH: What, if anything, did you learn about journalism or journalists from the TV series "Ink"?

MR. DANSON: That it's very easy to get cancelled. (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: I think you're talking about our industry right now.

As a TV star on one of the most popular sitcoms in TV history, what do you think is the funniest comedy on television today?

MR. DANSON: Well, you know, I'll answer that specifically, but it's very strange. Comedy's going through change, thanks to my friend Larry David. You know, "Curb Your Enthusiasm" really kind of changed half-hour format forever.

But I'm watching my, so, "Curb Your Enthusiasm" is really funny. "The Office" is really funny. I love watching that.

But, you know, I watch my kids, who are in their 20s. They're on the computer doing their work and then they slam over to YouTube. They find their funny, you know, on the Internet.

So it's very strange. Are we going to be doing little five-minute, and Will Ferrell has got this "Funny or Die" on the Internet, I think, on YouTube or someplace. So it's the -- we're moving towards three-or-four-minute bursts of funny, you know?

"Curb Your Enthusiasm," even though I hate giving my friend a plug. (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: How has the writers strike affected Hollywood's image with television audiences? Will people who've taken up playing dominoes in lieu of their nightly drama shows return to their couches?

MR. DANSON: If they really were playing dominoes, I say, stay there and play dominoes. If they were watching reality TV, I beg you come back, come back, please. (Laughter.)

It's just too much. You know, we probably run the risk of what baseball did during their strike. I think we probably will lose certain people, and that's too bad.

MS. SMITH: How much of your time do you devote to ocean advocacy, as opposed to your acting career?

MR. DANSON: Less than I did with American Oceans Campaign, because I was kind of the chief bottle-washer, along with my friend Robert Sulnick. But I don't know, I do about three or four board meetings a year. I narrate films, you know, a couple times a month, I'll do a press conference here or there.

What I love doing now and, I mean, clearly I'm a layperson to ocean advocacy around the staff. But I love being around, being able to brainstorm with the board of directors and staff, to me is so exciting. So as often as I can.

MS. SMITH: And what kind of things are you doing for the Clinton campaign? And is this the first time that you've been particularly active? And what observations do you have sort of from that perspective?

MR. DANSON: Oh, brother. C-SPAN, right? (Laughter.)

We went to Iowa, my wife and I. Mary, my wife Mary Steenburgen, is making -- she's worked non-stop during this strike. I don't know how that happened but, so we haven't been able to travel as much as we hoped to do. So we've been doing lots of interviews.

Mary has introduced her two or three times around the country. We went to San Francisco. We did something in Martha's Vineyard. So we'll do radio and TV interviews whenever we can, and we're probably going to go -- we're going to go to Texas and we're going to go to Ohio. We're going to go to Pennsylvania and work very hard.

What observations? I loved last night's dinner, by the way, celebrating women in your field. And I, you know, I have to be careful when I talk about this, because it sounds like, you know, sour grapes or something. But I take my hat off to Senator Clinton for being the first woman to be in this kind of situation, because there is a double standard, you know. And I don't think it will hurt her and it doesn't matter, but there is a double standard.

And I have three daughters, and I throw my shoe at the TV a lot kind of out of frustration, you know. Two guys go at it, and they're good old boys, you know, giving each other a good licking. And if she says something mean to a man, dear God, what a, you know, terrible person she is. So it's a very strange position to be in. Luckily, it doesn't seem to faze her that much. So that's my one observation.

MS. SMITH: Okay. Thank you. After singing and dancing in "Body Heat," have you had an opportunity to use those skills again, or will you in the future?

MR. DANSON: No. (Laughter.) All right. I don't work out at the gym anymore. It's all rehab now. It's all classified as rehab. (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: (Laughs.)

Well, we're almost out of time, but before asking the last question, I have a couple of things to tell you all. First, let me remind our members of upcoming speakers. On February 29th, the commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, Andrew von Eschenbach will be here. On March 17th, we have a twofer: Terrence Jones, president and CEO of Wolf Trap, Wolf Trap for the Performing Arts, will have a special guest with him, Marvin Hamlisch, and I understand there's a piano in the -- a possibility. And on March 21st, the president and CEO of the Mayo Clinic.

And then I would also like to do -- make a presentation to our speaker of -- this is a copy of a -- it's the Press Club's hundredth anniversary this year, and we've made a documentary, and we've cast a medallion in our honor. So I'd like to present you those.

MR. DANSON: Thank you. Thank you very much. I really appreciate that. Thank you.

MS. SMITH: And then my last question is, what was it like to work for a number of years with Fort Wayne native Shelley Long? Was she the prickly pear that people say she is?

MR. DANSON: Do you think I was born yesterday? (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: Well, it was a lead. (Laughs.)

MR. DANSON: Shelley Long put "Cheers" on the map. Shelley Long's character had not been seen on television before. She was absolutely brilliant and one of the best dance partners I've ever had. There's your lead, and it's the truth.

MS. SMITH: (There I go ?). (Chuckles.) Thank you. Thank you very much. It was a pleasure to have you. (Applause.)

MR. DANSON: Yeah --

MS. SMITH: Great sport.

I'd like to thank you all for coming today. I'd also like to thank the National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Jo Anne Booze and Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch. And also thanks to the NPC library for its research.

The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by the National Press Club Broadcast Operation Center. Press Club members can also access free transcripts of our luncheons at our website, www.press.org.

Nonmembers may purchase transcripts, audio and video transcripts by calling 1-888-343-1940. And for information about joining the National Press Club, call us at 202-662-7511. Thank you, and we're adjourned. (Strikes gavel.) (Applause.)

END.