

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH JIM CANTORE

SUBJECT: JIM CANTORE WILL DISCUSS 25 YEARS OF COVERING THE WEATHER

MODERATOR: MARK HAMRICK, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

LOCATION: NATIONAL PRESS CLUB BALLROOM, WASHINGTON, D.C.

TIME: 12:30 P.M. EDT

DATE: WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2011

(C) COPYRIGHT 2008, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB, 529 14<sup>TH</sup> STREET, WASHINGTON, DC - 20045, USA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. ANY REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION IS EXPRESSLY PROHIBITED.

UNAUTHORIZED REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION CONSTITUTES A MISAPPROPRIATION UNDER APPLICABLE UNFAIR COMPETITION LAW, AND THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB RESERVES THE RIGHT TO PURSUE ALL REMEDIES AVAILABLE TO IT IN RESPECT TO SUCH MISAPPROPRIATION.

FOR INFORMATION ON BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB, PLEASE CALL 202-662-7505.

**MARK HAMRICK:** (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. I'm Mark Hamrick, I'm a broadcast and online journalist with the Associated Press. And I'm the 104<sup>th</sup> president of the National Press Club. We are the world's leading professional organization for journalists, committed to our profession's future through our programming, events such as this, as well as working to foster a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, we'd invite you all to take a look at our website at [www.press.org](http://www.press.org). And to donate to programs offered to the public through our National Press Club Journalism Institute, you can find information on the website there as well.

So we'd like to thank our speaker for appearing here today, as well as all of you for attending. Our head table includes guests of the speaker as well as working journalists who are Club members. And this is, let's say, the warning that I have to give for events during any election season, or when we have political events-- I think less so for our guest speaker today. But what we say is that, we have members of the public in the audience. And so, if you hear applause, we do note that it's not all working journalists, so it's not always evidence of a lack of journalistic objectivity.

I'd also like to welcome our C-SPAN and Public Radio audiences. Our luncheons are featured on our member-produced weekly Podcast from the National Press Club, available for free download on iTunes. You can also follow the action on Twitter using the hashtag NPCLunch. After our guest speech concludes, we'll have Q&A and I'll ask as many questions as time permits.

Now it is time to introduce our head table guests. And please note, again in this political season, that a journalist's presence at the head table does not imply or signify an endorsement of the speaker. I would ask each of you on the head table to please stand up briefly as your name is announced.

From your right, we begin with Ken Molestina. He's a new member of the National Press Club, and he's on the air. You'll recognize him here in Washington, a reporter for WUSA Channel 9. Good to have you here Ken. Leslie Sage is senior editor, physical sciences, for *Nature*. He's also our Membership Committee Chair. Thank you for your work on that this past year, Leslie. Amy Morris is executive editor and anchor of the Federal Drive on Federal News Radio, a member of our Speakers Committee. Don Larrabee, I'm so happy that Don could join us on the head table today. He's a former President of the National Press Club from 1973, and our winner of the Cosgrove Award this year, and a great friend of all of us who are members of the Press Club. Don, thank you very much.

[applause]

And applause is actually welcome for that. Thank you.

[applause]

Dressed in his Christmas season finery. [laughter] Sophia Yan is a reporter for Bloomberg News. Welcome, Sophia. David Blumenthal is a senior director for corporate communications for The Weather Channel and, he told me today, a former intern for C-SPAN. So apparently, that program works out just okay. David, thank you for being here.

We will skip over the podium for a moment. Angela Greiling-Keane is a reporter for Bloomberg News. And she has filled in as our Chair of the Speakers Committee to a role that she had filled for several years in the past. And Angela is also our newly elected Vice-President for 2012. So congratulations Angela.

We'll skip over our guest speaker for the moment. Jennifer Shonberger is a writer for Kiplinger's Personal Finance and organizer of today's luncheon. She's done a phenomenal job on the Speakers Committee this year, including with this even. Thank you very much, Jennifer. Shirley Powell is Executive Vice-President for Corporate Communications at The Weather Channel and a guest of the speaker. Thank you Shirley.

Jack Williams, he's another luminary from the Press Club here. He is a founding editor of the USA Today Weather Page. Remember when that came on the scene, and it was all the rage, and may still be, when that was such exciting information to be gathering? So he was the man ahead of the curve on that. And he's also a science writer, specializing in weather climate in polar regions, and also Chair of our Books and Brunch Committee at the Club. So he wears many hats. Thank you for that, Jack.

Mark Heller is the Washington correspondent for the *Watertown Daily Times*. And, last but not least, Bill Greenwood is the retired White House correspondent for ABC News. And he's a former Vice-President of the Club, from 1975. Bill, welcome. And please give them a warm round of applause.

[applause]

If you see our guest speaker today on a beach, sometime between June and November, he's probably not there on vacation. And chances are, a big storm is not too far behind. Whether it's battling the high winds from a hurricane, or withstanding countless feet of snow, this on-camera meteorologist for The Weather Channel has built a reputation, reporting on the biggest storms, making him one of the most recognizable such reporters on television.

His broadcast appearances reach over 100 million homes. At last count, our guest had nearly 86,000 followers on Twitter. I think they were working with content from the cookies here today, weather-related cookies. And he has 25,000 or more "Likes" on Facebook. Everywhere he goes, we're told women ask for autographs, men want to buy him beers. And we're told restaurants send him free pizza. [laughter]

His main producer for seven years says of our guest, "He is Mr. Hurricane." Says The Weather Channel CEO Mike Kelly, "Viewers find him endearing because of his obvious concern for their safety and his intense passion for what he does." He's always in the thick of it, showing the story behind the weather. Few cover the weather with the same passion, intensity and purpose as today's speaker. Cloaked in a trademark baseball cap, t-shirt and windbreaker, he travels constantly to cover storms around the nation, often during shifts of up to 18 hours a day. And I can imagine he's had a few that lasted more than that.

Although he loves chasing storms, weather as a passion competes, we're told, with baseball. As a teen, he aspired to be a baseball star like New York Yankees great Reggie Jackson. Still, if you had to guess his eventual career, it would have not been hard to forecast.

As a youngster, he would ask his mother to leave the barn light on when snow was in the forecast so he could watch the first snowflakes coat the family's Vermont farm. And other kids would ask him whether the weather would cause a cancelation of school the following day.

And, if you have any doubt whether he is just as passionate about weather, check out YouTube and search for "Jim Cantore," along with the words, "Thunder snow." After encouragement from his father to pursue his tremendous interest in the weather, our guest studied meteorology at Linden State College in Vermont. In 1986 he landed a job at The Weather Channel, where he has enjoyed a great career.

This summer he celebrated 25 years of tracking storms for that enterprise. Best known for his live field coverage of major storms, our guest host has a series on the channel called “Cantore Stories.” And for that, he travels to some of the most extreme climates in the world to talk with locals about the weather that they have personally experienced.

And now, he also appears as a frequent guest on NBC’s Nightly News with Brian Williams, as well as The Today Show and MSNBC. He is a member of the National Weather Association and the American Meteorological Society. He holds the AMF Television Seal of Approval and Award for Weather Forecasting Excellence in Broadcast.

Please give our guest, Jim Cantore, a warm National Press Club welcome.

[applause]

All right. So now you know my life history. I’ll just put that page away. Thank you very much for having me here today. I mean, it’s really a tremendous honor. I mean, I really didn’t know much about this, to be quite honest with you, when I got asked to do it. But just walking into the-- First of all, seeing, you know, the Press Club on the outside of the building, then walking into the building and seeing the kind of people that have got a chance to speak up here before me, I was like, “Wow. This is a pretty big deal.” So I really appreciate that.

It’s been 25 years. I was very fortunate to get a job at The Weather Channel right out of college. And, you know, the biggest change in 25 years is the fact that, when I started, I had a full head of hair. [laughter] And, as you can see, each follicle has been taken out with each weather event that I’ve covered. And there's been plenty of those.

I’m going to start off by talking about 2011, because out of all of my 25 years, I had never seen any year in weather like we just had. We are talking about-- If you just take the four seasons, where you have tornadoes, you have snowstorms, and you have hurricanes, every possible ingredient that comes together to make a big event came together each one of those seasons.

And so we had, you know, over 3,000 weather records broken in 2011. And these aren't just little record highs and little record lows. For example, Philadelphia typically gets about 40 inches of rain annually. They have had 65 inches. So, you know, these are very dramatic records and very extreme records. And that’s got to kind of raise your alert. And I don’t care how long we’ve been on this Earth, that’s just a huge deal.

Twelve billion dollar disasters, maybe \$14-- they haven't finished the tally on Tropical Storm Lee or the Snow-tober, which many of you got a chance to actually shovel before you got a chance to use your rake this year, which is just amazing. Texas, some of these areas under three feet down in water, three feet down.

And our major snowfall that we had in the Northern Rockies also alerted folks down the river, in the Missouri River Valley, to flood once the summer came along, and all that melted. So two major rivers in flood, where they had to open up spillways just to relieve the kind of pressure here. So just everywhere you look, extremes. Not only because of the different seasons, but also extremes that built on extremes. In other words, if we didn't have the heavy snow in the Rockies, we probably wouldn't have had the Missouri River flood.

The biggest changes that I've seen, certainly in 25 years, have to go back to just weather dissemination. I mean, how we can get weather-- it's not just-- When I started, it was the morning news. There was sometimes a noon show. And there was 6 and 11. But then comes The Weather Channel in 1982, where you can get it any time you want. And then, a few years after that, Local on the 8s. You can get it every eight minutes. And now, if it takes you eight seconds to get your weather, you're slow on your phone, right? So that's how quick things have certainly changed. A seven-day forecast is probably as good as a five-day was about 20 years ago. Five days is probably as good as a three-day.

And one thing that we see now is extreme weather events very well forecasted by computer models out seven days. And when you're thinking about preparing a city or a whole coastline, that's huge. That's huge. When I started at TWC in '86, we were in 26 million homes. Now we're in over 100 million. And our cell phone app and our Internet have just tremendous reach in popularity. And it's been great to be able to be alongside that brand. And the good news about weather is, it has no political agenda. Believe it or not, weather forecast, there's no side, no side to choose. We just want to do what we do to get people out of harm's way. And that's the core of our business and the core of our brand.

You know, social media, I think, has been one of the biggest things, certainly in the last few years, to come along. I know, when I was covering Irene on the Battery in New York City, when I saw-- in between live shots I'd come back in and just look at my desk. And I was starting to see the Vermont flood story unfold. You know, being a Vermonter, and watching the bridge at Quechee almost under water, and knowing how high the Ottauquechee River must have gotten for that to look like that, I was just-- that was just mindboggling to me.

And, you know, in the meantime, we knew New York wasn't going to get it as bad. This wasn't going to be a Cat. 2. But any time you bring a tropical system into the mid latitudes, you have a potential for disaster. And so, what we wound up with on, I think, four rivers up there, were 500-year floods, which is just a disaster. And, for the State of Vermont, you know, where they count on a foliage season for the major part of their economy, that was just awful.

But, you know what? They got a lot of those roads back. And, even though it wasn't one of the prettiest falls, it's always nice to be up there in the fall season. They've still got a long way to go, but they're going to do it.

If you go back and look at the time I started covering hurricanes, which was 1992, I've covered about 75 tropical depressions, storms and hurricanes. And Andrew was my first one, the second landfall of Andrew. I got a chance to go to Baton Rouge. And so, this storm never got to Cat. 5 strength again, thank God for Louisiana. But it stalled over the bayou. And we had completed our coverage that night.

So I went up and tried to get a little bit of sleep, because we had to get up the next morning and cover this thing. And about four a.m., you know, the old units that they used for air conditioners, my air conditioner unit blew in. It blew right in. And I'm looking out the window-- Obviously, I was startled out of bed. I'm like, "What the heck's going on here?" And I'm seeing transformers blowing all over the place.

And I can't tell you the energy that that just gave me. So I woke up all my producers. I'm like, "We got to go live! We got to go live! This thing is coming in!" And we proceeded to get on the air about five a.m. that morning, which is the earliest I think we've ever gone on the air live for The Weather Channel, at that time. Now it's regular. You know, we can do it any time, especially during a big storm.

I don't know how many of you remember John Hope. Do you remember John, if you're an old Weather Channel watcher? Yeah. John was my mentor. He was like everybody's grandfather. And he knew the tropics. And, you know, when he talked about the tropics, he had such compassion in his voice. And it was genuine. And I said, "Man, I'm going to emulate that guy. That's the guy I want to be."

And I'd say about 1988 or so-- actually '87, he comes, he grabs me after one of my tropical updates, which we do at 50 past the hour. And he goes, "Cantore, your tropical updates are terrible." [laughter] You know, first of all, when you love somebody like I loved John, that was brutal. You might as well get kicked in the head by a mule. I mean, that was brutal.

He goes, "You're terrible. You don't know Granada from Grand Cayman. I mean, you need to learn the tropics. You need to get an idea of what these tropical storms do and then learn the tropics." And, sure enough, that was all I needed to hear. So I made it an objective to learn the tropics.

And then, back in 1992, this little storm came, Andrew. This little storm named Andrew developed east of Miami. And I thought, Okay. I'm watching this thing. All the models are taking it west. And back then, there were three-day forecasts going out. And I said, "All right, I'm going to-- If this thing keeps going, it's going to come in somewhere between North Carolina and South Florida." So I just thought, "Why not share that information with everybody-- potentially?"

So now I'm going out five days, which was unheard of back then. Now we have five-day forecasts. But, here is the kicker. I get off the air after saying that. And I walked outside. And the gentleman who calls up the radar-- we used to have to call up our radars back then. They weren't computer-generated. He goes, "Hey Jim, the director of the

Hurricane Center is on the phone, Bob Sheets.” I’m like, “Yeah, right.” And I just kept on walking. And he goes, “No, no, seriously. He’s on the phone. He wants to talk to you.”

And I’m like, “Mr. Sheets, this is Jim Cantore.” He goes, “You know, Jim, did you just extend out the three-day forecast for Andrew?” I said, “Yeah. If it keeps going in the direction it’s heading, it’s going to come in somewhere between the Outer Banks and South Florida.” He goes, “Well don’t ever do that again. I just had every emergency manager from Cape Hatteras to South Florida call me.” [laughter] “Sorry sir. I will not do that again.”

But, after I hung up the phone, I said, “I think I learned a little something about the tropics.” [laughter] And I learned that, you know, you got to go with your gut sometimes. And sometimes it’s wrong. But, in retrospect, the storm moved faster. And we all know the rest of the story.

Katrina was definitely the worst storm that I ever went in. We got some bad information about a place to set up and how high they were above sea level. We lost four vehicles. I ate Mini Wheats with cream cheese on them for two days, slept in a car, you know, all the fun stuff, for being out in the field. But, of course, that didn’t matter. It was the hardship, seeing people’s-- just lives torn from them, just like that. The whole Mississippi Gulf Coast changed overnight. That was the hard part.

And it’s really weird. Once you spend about 10-14 days out in a storm, you become such a part of it, it’s hard to leave. It was really hard to leave Katrina. I felt like I was kind of leaving my wing man so to speak. But, you know, the best thing to do was get back to my family, recoup, and then go down and do some follow-up stories later on.

Anyway, one thing that Katrina did bring into light was, in my opinion, the new age of volunteerism. I had so many emails and letters saying, you know, “Jim, what do we do? We don’t just want to give money. We want to make sure that we can go down there and take our own hands and help these people get back on their feet.” And to me, it was just easier to write a check in the days before. But now, people just started showing up. And people started rebuilding the Mississippi coast.

And, after talking to several of the mayors down there, they will swear by the fact that Mississippi would not be where it is today if it wasn’t for volunteers. So now the efforts, which Craig Fugate has done so well with his helping coordinate that with the Red Cross-- And, you know, you can’t just show up there. I mean, you know, church organizations and everything, now, are coordinated. So they really have done a nice job in getting people that want to volunteer with their own hands and their own means in. But I think Katrina really was the first time that I had seen that new age of volunteerism come into play.

Tornadoes. Growing up in New England, I didn’t see a lot of those, as you can imagine, even though they’ve happened before. And they’ve certainly been very

memorable. They didn't happen in my lifetime. So I saw my first one when I was out chasing in Harper County, Kansas. There it is, out in a corner wheat field, on its own, big stovepipe tornado comes down, not bothering anyone. As a matter of fact, you couldn't even hear anything. It was probably two-three miles away at the most. And there is this huge tornado. And you couldn't hear a thing.

But, as we know, tornadoes don't always drop down in cornfields or wheat fields. They drop down on people's homes. If you look at the \$12 billion dollar disasters that we have on the table right now, six of them are from tornado and severe weather episodes from this year, which is really impressive. That's a testament to how incredibly strong and multi-day events these were.

552 people out of the 1,000 people that lost their lives this year in weather were because of tornadoes. These are tornado deaths. Third worst in American history. So you sit back, and you're like, "Holy cow. What did we do wrong?" And then you look at the warnings. 99 percent of the people that died were within a tornado warning. It's not like they're not listening. And it's not like they don't know what's going on. Because a lot of these events, especially Alabama, was advertised days before it happened. So this is a testament to how incredibly strong these tornadoes were. I mean, you literally had to be underground.

Plus, I think people's understanding of a tornado-- this wasn't just a little stovepipe tornado, or a little rope tornado. These were so big that all people-- I remember so many people saying, "Well, it was just really dark. And then, all of a sudden, everything went haywire. It was just really dark." But that was the tornado. I mean, this is literally the whole thunderstorm dropping down to the ground.

What do we do about it? Well, I think, you know, there's been a lot of talk lately, especially when Norman started yesterday with a projected called Weather Ready Nation, to how do we change these warnings? Should they be more tornado emergencies? Do we need to tail back a little bit on the tornado warnings, especially in situations that aren't like Joplin and aren't like-- I mean, you know, where do you go with that? And so, that's something we're going to have to do. We have to improve our warning system, I think, a little bit better.

But again, the takeaway is, the forecasters did a great job. 99 percent all had warnings on them. But the testament to those storms, and how severe they were, is the takeaway. When you look at tornadoes as a whole, there is usually a very small percentage of the average of 1,300 a year tornadoes that are in that scale in the EF-3, EF-4, EF-5, which are the strongest part of the scale. These are winds over 250 miles an hour when you get up toward EF-5. And wow. We just had way too many of those. On average, you have one every other year. I think we've had five or six this year, just to kind of give you an idea of what we're talking about.

You know, I got to approach climate, because that's been certainly something that's come up in the last 25 years. And it continues to come up. And here is where I'm at

with this. I got a chance to visit the Athabasca Glacier in Canada. Does everybody know where that is? Beautiful place up there in the Canadian Rockies. And just to see how far that glacier has retreated in the recent past was kind of a little bit eye-opening to me. I just said, "Okay, yeah, there's melting going on here."

And then, if you look at glaciers, there's only one in the whole world that's being added to. So it's warming. If you go back and look at statistics-- these are facts-- the sea level has risen seven inches since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And the forecast is, by the beginning of 2100, we will see the sea come up one to two feet. And, whether that's true or not, I'd be preparing for it. Even if it's half that. Because when the sea level rises, all the waves, all the storm surge, everything else that comes in on the water, is going to be on top of that. And that adds a whole new parameter to everybody who owns a beach home, or certainly lives on a barrier island. So that's something I would keep an eye on.

The last 30 years we've seen a half a degree rise in global temperature. And that is, now again, known data. And I know that's only 30 years, when you think about how long the earth has been around. But let's keep an eye on that trend. Let's keep an eye on that trend. Every year, there seems to be more record highs than record lows.

So, you know, my issue is, I think we are seeing a warming world. We're seeing ice melt. Whether we've had anything to do with it or not, I can't tell you. I'm a meteorologist. I focus on 10 days or less. I don't focus on 300,000 years or 30 days or 60 days. But I can tell you, it's just something that interests me, because it's going to affect all of us somewhere down the road.

But, at the end of the day, who can ever argue with cleaner air, cleaner water, and cleaner energy? I mean seriously? And the problem with all these conferences they're having, like the one they just had in Durbin in South Africa, is, you know, when you talk about changing your whole economy in your country, and you're asking people to cut corners or spend more money, not everybody wants to play. It's kind of like when the kids get together, and we're all trying to decide which game we want to play, and nobody can decide on it. And pretty soon, that hour of playtime is gone. And so, that's kind of what's happening. Everybody is just kind of kicking the can around and not really doing big things about it.

But it's not like people are not doing anything about it. But maybe we're just not doing it fast enough. It's certainly something we need to look at and pay attention to in the next 25 years. Because I think, after 25 years is over, we're going to know where we're heading with this. I think we're going to have a much better idea, as models get better, and things like that.

And speaking of modeling, I think that we're probably going to be able to-- You know, it's not inconceivable that we can't model out a whole hurricane season. That may not be in 25 years, but it may be in my lifetime, or even yours. So that would be really neat-- with accuracy, to be able to model out that far.

Forecasts are going to improve, I think, 10 to 15 days out. I think we're going to see a lot better forecasts. And when you're a planner, if you're an emergency manager, that's huge, huge to know what's coming up. Our warning systems, I think, are going to get better. I think that's one of the main agendas right now. And also, hurricane intensity, hurricane intensity. Track forecasts have gotten great. They've been great. They nailed New York on that track of Irene. What wasn't nailed was the intensity.

But, by time we figured out the intensity wasn't going to play out, there was no time to say, "Okay, well maybe we shouldn't have evacuated New York." You know what? You should have, because you're playing with one category and several hundred thousand people here. So you have to make that call early on. That storm was not hyped. That's exactly how it should have played out, exactly how it should have played out.

Mitigation's a big thing. We have to think about-- especially a city like New York, that doesn't really have a ton of flood gates. You know, this guy named Jeff Masters, he works for Weather Underground. I love this guy. Not only does he write about what's happening in current weather, but he also is a forward thinker. And, you know, he kind of wrote this great blog about different flood gates that would really help out, not only in a hurricane, but also a nor'easter if we were to ever have another one like we had back in December of '92, which flooded New York.

So things like that have to be thought about as we go forward in time. And that's going to be a big deal, I think for us 25 years down the road. And there's no reason-- there's no reason why we shouldn't build homes that have roofs that can withstand 100 miles an hour. Roofs shouldn't blow off with 70 mile an hour winds. Garage doors shouldn't cave in with 70 mile an hour winds. We have to have some protection for our people. And really, when you're talking about a 13 minute average lead time, which is the average tornado warning, which is pretty good, the structure that they go to that interior room has to hold.

You know, it's not going to be with every tornado. The EF-4s and the EF-5s, with the winds over 200 miles an hour, you know, you need to be underground. You need to be in a safe room. But if we can protect you from the small EF-3s, the EF-2s, the EF-1s, that's a good thing, because we're going to save a lot of lives. And we're not going to see another year like we just had with 552 dead.

I've been doing weather for 25 years, mainly because I like teaching people about it. I like talking about it on the air, explaining it. And I like saving lives. I think being on the beach, being on the coast, even though you guys think I'm getting the crap beat out of me, I mean I'm actually out there because people expect me to be out there. And I'm going to keep doing it, maybe for another 25. Who knows. But that's what I'm going to do. And it's been a great ride. And I've been around a lot of great people, especially at The Weather Channel, great meteorologists who have taught me a lot.

Your education in meteorology, by the way, does not stop at college, I promise. It goes on, and it goes on after that. So I hope you see some good things from The Weather Channel and myself as we go for the next 25. Thank you very much.

**MARK HAMRICK:** Thank you.

[applause]

**MARK HAMRICK:** Thank you, Jim. That was both informative and entertaining. And we have a lot of questions from our audience. As you can see, we have an inch-thick catalog here. And I think sort of the newsy part of the questioning that seemed to come in did involve climate change. And also, how you kind of-- let's say-- partition your own view of that relative to what your own expertise is as you described it.

So first of all, how relevant is the issue of climate change for your day-to-day duties? Does it change the business of forecasting on a short-term basis? Does it change the assumptions? How does it change the work that you do, aside from the experiences of the extreme weather that you just described?

**JIM CANTORE:** Well, again, I'm a meteorologist. We deal with 10 days or less. In some cases, getting a 24 hour forecast right can be difficult. But what I know is, if you look at today's dollars, and you go back to the 1980s, we averaged about one billion dollar disaster a year. In the 2000s we've averaged almost five. And, in the last two years, we've averaged 7.5 billion dollar disasters per year.

So we have seen more extremes. And we're going to continue to see more extremes. So what I know is, is the earth atmosphere system is really a very intricate one. You know, the sun heats things differently at the equator than it does the poles. So the earth tries its best to just keep it equilibrium and keep it status quo, unless it's interrupted. Then it tries to fiercely get back where it was.

How that's going to interrupt or make me deal with my everyday weather aspects are simply this. I know that, as I go forward, there's going to be more extreme weather events. That's what you can expect. It's not just here. Go back and look at Russia's heat wave. Go back and look at Europe's heat wave. Go look at the Pakistan floods, India floods, those kind of issues.

And being a guy who stands out in the rain all the time, it's raining harder out there. And that's really weird. It's not very scientific. But, when I'm out there in it, it just seems to be raining a lot harder. More water vapor means more rainfall.

**MARK HAMRICK:** So someone asked, is climate change or global warming, are they really the right terms? And they make the point, rising water, bigger snowstorms, and hurricanes, wouldn't climate disruption be a better term?

**JIM CANTORE:** It would be if we had a basis on which to go from. So that's why, when I went back and I said, if you look at the last 30 years, we've seen on average a half a degree rise in the global temperature. And so, should that trend continue, the climate change will definitely be climate disruption. So, no matter what you call it, it's just something I think everybody has to pay attention to. And we have to mitigate for it.

And like I said, guys, who can ever argue with cleaner air, cleaner energy, cleaner water? I mean seriously. The population is not going down, it's going up. And everybody's got to get along. And, you know, if you've ever been out in Napa Valley, or even in Death Valley, and you've seen a beautiful sunrise or sunset, I kind of like that. I kind of like seeing those. Those are special to me. If you've ever been up in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, after two feet of fresh snow, and you're making first tracks, I kind of like that. And I don't really want that to change. So maybe I'm being selfish.

**MARK HAMRICK:** Someone asked, along those specifics, is our nation growing then more vulnerable to hurricanes, since they get their energy from warm water? And if global warming is a reality in the longer term, then is the pickup we've seen in storm activity likely here to stay, in terms of your best guess?

**JIM CANTORE:** Yeah. According to the IPCC report, you know, (a) we're going to see more intense hurricanes. Not necessarily more of them, but you know what? All it takes is one, quite frankly. I think an Andrew or a Katrina is plenty for everybody. Imagine if we had two of those this year, in addition to what we had.

The real worry is the rise in sea level. I mean, if we go up another six inches, a foot, again, all the action that creates the damage-- storm surge, wave action, is on top of the main sea surface. So, you know, if you come up six inches, all that action is going to be six inches higher. And that may not mean a lot when you think about it. What's six inches? If your house is sitting in that zone, then it's going to mean a lot.

**MARK HAMRICK:** Maybe you can assess or describe to those of us who aren't looking at this kind of data on a day-to-day basis. What is the take on the meteorological community on this issue of climate change, to the extent that you could be a spokesman for them? Are they acknowledging global warming and climate change, by and large?

**JIM CANTORE:** Well, I mean, you know, I think there are clearly two sides to this. I mean, I think there are people that are saying, "Look. It's getting colder." Or, "It's getting warmer." Or, "It's not really changing that much." The earth has been around for a long time. We all know about the Ice Age, all right. And is this warming just a continuation of coming out of the Ice Age?

Maybe. You know, I can't be sure. But I think it's a little bit more than that. But what I know, as a meteorologist, and the guy who's been in this for 25 years, is the weather is definitely getting more extreme. And, you know, in this day and age, if you're going to lose 552 people because of tornadoes that are more severe than they've been in U.S. history, I just can't chalk that up to, "Oh, that was just kind of an odd year." I just

think there's more to it than that. So I hope that answers the question. That's not an easy question to answer.

**MARK HAMRICK:** Someone was asking, is there a risk that we're facing another dust bowl if the weather conditions persist in the southwest?

**JIM CANTORE:** More extremes. Like I said, some parts of Texas this year, three feet down, the water table. And it's hard to make up for that, just with one season of maybe even a little bit above-average rainfall. You know, that drought absolutely has the potential to expand. It does. You know, it could also go away. Or it's just something we haven't dealt with, we haven't dealt with a drought of that magnitude since the '30s.

And yes, it's happened. You can always say, "Well, it's happened before. It's going to happen again." That's true. That's true. But I think the kind of conditions that we see right now, at least for Texas and Oklahoma, at least through the winter, don't let me believe that the drought is going to end any time soon. So it's going to be another rough year, I think, going into the spring for these areas.

And it could expand.

**MARK HAMRICK:** I'll ask one more on this topic. Then we'll move on. But I did get a lot of questions on it, so I want to be fair to our audience. In a geological timeframe, i.e. millions of years, would you have a guess on how long this trend could last before it would no longer persist? Or is that just guesswork at this point?

**JIM CANTORE:** Well, and this is where, you know, the climate modelers come in. And, you know, like I said to you guys, I wouldn't be surprised some day to actually see a whole hurricane season modeled out, with some accuracy. Modeling out hundreds of years, you know, I don't know. I'm not a modeler. I wish I was. I mean, I wish I could see these.

But, as computers get better, as information and data get better, as we understand not only the size of the atmosphere in the horizontal but also in the vertical-- you have to understand, the whole thing works in the vertical-- There's so many different players out there, you just don't know who's going to come up and hit three for three every night. You know what I'm saying? You got nine members of the baseball-- You don't know who's going to be the big hitter, the big slugger that night.

And, you know, last winter it was La Niña. I mean, La Niña is still around. But he's only batting about 200 this year, 250, as opposed to pretty much carrying the team, if that makes sense. We had a negative, what we call North Atlantic Oscillation, which was combining with NAO. This was your best three-four tandem out there. And that was keeping us cold and snowy in the east. This year, the NAO got traded. And so, it's not around.

I'm trying to make this as simple as possible, without getting into meteorology. But that's a player that just didn't-- she's just having a bad year. A good year, as far as we're concerned, because we like the warm weather in the east, but a bad year in terms of snowfall.

**MARK HAMRICK:** I was just thinking, we haven't had so many baseball analogies since Rudy Giuliani was here before-- [simultaneous conversation]

**JIM CANTORE:** Good, good.

**MARK HAMRICK:** And he likes the Yankees. I don't know if you noticed that or not. But I was thinking about the fact-- we've actually talked about this with respect to terrorism, which seems like a completely different subject, and it is. But it has to do with trying to measure risk and our acceptance of that risk. And it just sort of occurs to me that there is an impatience among consumers of information to accept a certain level of risk and inherent inaccuracy, whether it's forecasting something as difficult to do as terrorism, as well as weather.

And so, that gets to the question that someone wrote here and said-- and you sort of acknowledged this in your prepared remarks-- There was some controversy with Hurricane Irene, in the forecasting of when and where exactly that storm would land. And then, here is the kicker, which is sort of asking you all to be perfect, right. So, where it says, why can't weather predictions be more accurate, with all the advancements in technology? Do you get a lot of grief from viewers who are upset that you are not perfect?

**JIM CANTORE:** I have never gotten a thank you letter for nailing a forecast. [laughter] It's just [00:31:57]. And that's 25 years worth of data right there. So yeah, they only remember when you're wrong. Like I said before, track forecasts with hurricane have been extraordinary in the last two years. There's been great advancement with track forecasts. Intensity, not so much. There's a lot of different players going on with intensity forecasts. And they have not come up with a good way of measuring that yet.

So, you know, like I said, regarding New York, by the time the decision was made to evacuate the city, the storm was still forecast to be a Cat. 2 coming into New York City, which was, without question, the right thing to do. People would have drowned if they had not evacuated the city. As it was, there was still a four foot storm surge at the Battery in New York. Now granted, it wasn't nine feet. But it was four. And that's because the storm stayed weak and didn't reintensify.

But, you know, when you're playing with 24 to 48 hours, and trying to get 400,000 people out of the way, while shutting down mass transportation, you have to make some hard decisions. And imagine what would happen if it was a Cat. 2, and it came into New York, and you didn't evacuate everybody.

**MARK HAMRICK:** Having said that, I know here in the Washington area, as well as having lived elsewhere across the country, there does seem to be, on occasion, on the local level, a certain amount of panic that sets in, certainly in Washington, where some local media seem to believe that we're all incapable of surviving a five-inch snowstorm. So I'm wondering whether, as someone who is a great practitioner of journalism related to weather, what you see when you are in the local markets? Or you see some people doing a live shot that might be 10 feet away from you, what's the level of competency on the reporting about weather, where people are also trying to drive audience, by the way, right?

**JIM CANTORE:** Right.

**MARK HAMRICK:** There are more motives at play than just trying to be accurate. What have you experienced out there in the field-- maybe the good and the bad? And, what is the appropriate level of dramatizing the coming storm? I mean, how do you make that judgment? And obviously, you have accumulated 25 years of experience to figure out what is supposed to be right.

**JIM CANTORE:** I just want to ask you, how many note cards did they use for that question? [laughter] I'm sorry. No, I'm just kidding. Here is the deal.

**MARK HAMRICK:** Also, [simultaneous conversation]

**JIM CANTORE:** Here is the deal. Being at The Weather Channel for 25 years, no one has ever, ever asked me to hype the weather. It speaks for itself. And that, you know, came from my friend John Hope and many great meteorologists that work with me and worked before me.

So the weather, believe me, is its own-- you know, its own never-ending journey. It just keeps going. And you really don't have to hype it. Because, even in a situation where it doesn't pan out the way you want it to, there is, as a meteorologist, a lot of things you can explain and talk about, why it didn't work out that way. But, in a situation-- If you looked back last year at the Groundhog Day blizzard for Chicago, there was no doubt that snow, that intensity was coming north. How they handled that as a city, you know, really wasn't that great. You know, people just kind of went about their normal business. I mean, there needed to be a point where we needed to say, "Look, we need to get mass transportation off the road." Because once a bus went sideways on Lake Shore Drive, that's it. Nobody is going anywhere. Because you're still snowing at two inches an hour. And now the plows can't get out there. So people were trapped in their cars.

And so, it's the disaster within the disaster. And you have to avoid that. And that's going to take emergency managers and local officials trusting in us and not afraid of being wrong. You had a situation here where five inches came in about two hours, and that shut down. Who spent the night on the George Washington Parkway? Anybody? Yeah.

**MARK HAMRICK:** We were lucky here, yeah.

**JIM CANTORE:** Right. Unfortunately, they made a decision to let everybody out early, but it came early. But you could see it on the radar. There was no question. So maybe the thing to do is to just kind of keep everybody in place, especially with a short-lived, hard-hitting event. Let the road crews get out there and plow, and maybe cancel or shut down mass transportation for a while.

My point is, there's better planning that can go underway. Because the level of forecasting ability has gotten so much better, we can give you times. We can give you what's going to happen within the hour, what's going to happen within the two-hour period. And, you know what? It's not always going to be right. But, in a situation like that, I'd rather not have people on the roads than have people on the roads.

**MARK HAMRICK:** How would you assess disaster response in the U.S., both from the government and charitable levels, since you've been around to see, in some ways, you're a first responder, right? Because you're there before the disaster hits. What do you see out there? And we know it's a partnership between government and charity.

**JIM CANTORE:** Yeah. One of the biggest improvements that has come along, I think, in the last ten years, is the collaboration between emergency managers, local officials, meteorologists, FEMA. If 2011 happened in 2005, I don't even want to think about it. Craig Fugate is probably one of the best things to happen to FEMA. I mean he understands, after going through situations in Florida in 2004, with four hurricanes straight, how you have to preplan, and how you have to make sure people are taking the storm seriously.

And, you know, he's a big proponent of, instead of becoming the victim, becoming a part of the solution. In other words, do your part in not only preparing, but also in helping others. And I certainly think, within the last five years, ten years, we've gotten a lot better at collaborating efforts, maximized-- especially in a big disaster, you know, pre-positioning supplies for storms that come on in. You know, like I said, I don't think, if we had 2011 back in 2005, we wouldn't have done very well.

**MARK HAMRICK:** Who are some of the unsung heroes out there in terms of organizations that are helping once the disaster hits?

**JIM CANTORE:** Oh, I mean, you know, like FEMA and their pre-positioning of supplies. You've got the Red Cross and Salvation Army. They're all in collaboration with that. I mean, you know, they're on everything. It's kind of nice, when I go out, and I'm on the beach, and everybody else is evacuated. And the Red Cross will come out and tell us, you know, how many shelters they've opened and, you know, what they're doing, and what they'll be ready for once the storm passes. And it's kind of like your friend out there in the storm.

I think they're oftentimes the unsung hero.

**MARK HAMRICK:** Do you ever get grief from people who are out there when you guys are saying, "Don't come out unless you absolutely have to," and they're like, "Well, you're here."

**JIM CANTORE:** Yes, all the time. [laughter] Who gave it to me today when I walked in? Somebody nailed me today with it.

**MARK HAMRICK:** How does that conversation go usually?

**JIM CANTORE:** Here is what I say. You know, I can't argue with that. And there absolutely is risk involved in being out in the storm, especially when I'm doing night hurricanes. I mean, you know, a palm frond moving at 50 miles an hour is a very dangerous weapon. And I can't tell you that that's not going to happen, that something's not going to happen. But it's my job.

If you ask somebody who is in the military why do they do what they do, it's their job. They have a mission. I think I make a difference when I'm out there. People expect to see me out there and take them through the storm. And that's exactly what I do.

**MARK HAMRICK:** So our 1973 President, Mr. Larrabee, asked the question here about the Old Farmer's Almanac. It says it predicts a very cold winter for this area, and not heavy snow. How do you rate their job in having produced these kinds of forecasts for many, many years?

**JIM CANTORE:** Well, I used to get the Farmer's Almanac as a kid, because I wanted to see what the winter was going to be like. And then I became a scientist. So, I learned it wasn't that easy to just go on what's happened in the past. I mean, they basically use climatology, and just kind of average out the years and I guess a few other things.

But, you know, how cold has it been in the east this year? Yeah, it's not been that cold. So, like I said, that player, the NAO, has not showed up this year to play yet. He's holding out for more money. Either way, you know, we don't use the Farmer's Almanac at The Weather Channel. [laughter] But they do send us a copy, and we appreciate that. [laughter] Just in case, you know.

**MARK HAMRICK:** Yes. So a lot, obviously, has changed, in terms of technology since you started there. And one of the biggest changes we've seen across the industry is the appearance of social media. Obviously, The Weather Channel is playing a big role there. And we mentioned, in the intro, you're a very popular person on Twitter. How does that change the way you do your job, if at all? And there's also the question of user-generated content. Obviously, if someone sees Joplin before somebody else, that's a version of reporting. How does the social media piece change?

**JIM CANTORE:** If you look at cell phones and social media, and you combine them, it's almost hard to miss any weather disaster, any flood, any big hailstone, any snow storm. And, like I said, that's how-- social media is how I learned about what was going on in Vermont while I was at the Battery doing live shots and nauseam for the pending Irene.

And so, the kind of flooding that went on there, when we were clearly out of the woods, I mean I just couldn't believe what I was seeing on YouTube. It's changed the industry. You know, instead of waiting for information and confirmation, now you can see it. I don't think people have a lot of malice intent when they send those things out. I think they want to get people help as fast as they can. And I think that alerts people just how bad it was.

I mean, when I saw that, I actually texted Craig. I said, "Craig, we've got some big problems in Vermont," just because I know that, by living next to that-- you know, in Quechee Gorge, or near Quechee Gorge, when that Ottauquechee River is that high, I'm like, that's got to be up 25 feet. I've never seen that in my life. So, you know, that just gave me kind of a hint as to what kind of a disaster was going on out there.

And so, what that's going to result in is faster response times, and maybe an "Oh my gosh, you know, we don't have enough to cover this. This is going to be a much bigger deal than what we actually planned for," as was the case in Vermont with Irene.

**MARK HAMRICK:** How do you decide when to Tweet?

**JIM CANTORE:** Well, through that 20 hour day, it's become a 24 hour day now. That's the drawback, I'm just going to tell you this about Twitter, because it's almost like you feel responsible that you have to Tweet everything. Because people come on there, it's like, "Cantore, why aren't you talking about that tornado warning? And why aren't you talking about that severe thunderstorm warning?" Well, I'm having dinner with my kids. But that doesn't really matter.

You know, so that's the drawback, is people expect it from you. But for me, what's nice is I get up in the morning, and I'll look at the weather, and I'll see things. And, instead of waiting until seven o'clock at night, when I go on the air, to share them with you, I'm just going to share them with a Tweet. And so, that's really how it changes. I mean, you get an idea of what I'm thinking about and what I'm looking at long-term, both that day and what's going to be coming down the road.

**MARK HAMRICK:** How do you pack for a disaster?

**JIM CANTORE:** Oh. Well, we shot something on that actually. I have a whole closet that's dedicated to field clothes. So I got my winter stuff. And I got my summer stuff. And I have a backpack that I always carry with all the Weather Channel jackets and things like that. So, should my winter bag not show up, which has happened before, by the way, I'll have everything in my backpack. And it just fits perfectly in the overhead

too, by the way. If you want to know which one it is, I'll tell you later offline. I know what I'm going to deal with. And I have an idea of how long I'm going to be out there. And so, I try and pack appropriately.

**MARK HAMRICK:** So how do you handle the logistics? You mentioned eating cereal earlier. Obviously, if the power is out, you don't have access to a grocery store, how do you get prepared to be there for a while, and maybe a while before somebody shows up?

**JIM CANTORE:** Well, there's a lot of health bars out there these days, a lot of different choices. So you could have peanut butter. You could have double chocolate, graham cracker-- I mean, there's a lot. We've come a long way since the Cheese Whiz and the Frosted Mini Wheats. And we do stock up. That's a key part of the logistics, is when you get out there, before everything shuts down, make sure that you have supplies. Because you may be there for three or four days without any place that's open, or certainly as, where I am usually, no power for a few days.

**MARK HAMRICK:** Somebody asked, have you ever literally been blown over by the wind or a hurricane? How have you been most adversely affected by the weather?

**JIM CANTORE:** Let's see--strongest-- You know, Katrina was rough. First of all, I've never been in over 100 mile an hour wind. Not many people I know can stand in a 100 mile an hour wind and not be killed with something flying around. I would say the strongest one I've been in is anywhere between 65 and 85 miles an hour, where I'm nearly blown over. I mean, you have to kind of get this stance where you're bracing your legs. And what do I call it, the Cantore Lean? I don't know what I call it.

**MARK HAMRICK:** It's got to be a baseball--

**JIM CANTORE:** Yeah. And I mean, once you start seeing flying debris fly around, like was the case in Katrina, this big sheet of plywood, which was obviously, at one point, over somebody's window, that came-- the wind blew it off. But it was flying around in the air over me. I said, "You know what? I think it's time to move-- yeah, closer to the building. That's probably a good idea."

And really, Mother Nature dictates when you can go out on the air. Winds over 100 miles an hour, unless you've got a separate satellite dish that's in some corner, what we call flyaway, that's not a part of a truck that has to sit out in the parking lot-- or out of a parking lot, it's pretty hard to broadcast. It's pretty hard to get your signal out through that kind of rain.

**MARK HAMRICK:** Someone asked, how do you handle seeing the personal tragedy that goes along with covering disasters? And do you try to focus on the weather rather than the people? What kind of mental regime do you have when you're in an area such as Katrina? And I know one of your colleagues got very emotional in Joplin, just seeing what had happened there. It's a challenge, isn't it? How do you handle it?

**JIM CANTORE:** Well, I mean, it's not easy. I mean, Katrina was the worst. I'll never forget this little kid who came up to me. And he said-- and he was crying. He said, "Jim, I'm going to be okay. But I'm really worried about my dad. We lost everything, the house. And he used to work here at this building, which is now toppled." And, I mean, that just crushed me.

And you try and think of others when you're out there. I don't care how tired you are. I don't care what you've eaten or not eaten. You're out there to get the message out. We need help here. Mississippi, especially-- all the attention went to New Orleans because of the levies. And Mississippi was sitting there, as they say, as the forgotten coast. That's not to say don't pay attention to New Orleans, because they needed help too.

But you just try to stay on mission. You realize you have a crew that's counting on you. And you have people that are counting on you to get that message out. And it's not easy, because you go home. And sometimes the images don't come back to you for a couple of weeks. And, you know, Katrina was the worst, without a doubt.

And then I went to Tuscaloosa. And I thought, "Oh my gosh, this is the worst tornado damage I've ever seen in my life." And then I went to Joplin. And when you start seeing steel beams twisted around two times or three times like licorice, it just boggles the mind. But it all goes back to the personal stories. And we have had a horrible year, way too much heartache. So I'm really happy for this quiet fall and winter.

**MARK HAMRICK:** Eleven year old Megan over here in the corner asked, as we wrap up, what made you want to do meteorology? And who inspired you?

**JIM CANTORE:** Well, growing up in Vermont, it was the Blizzard of '78. That was my big party. I mean, we had a big snow year. We had 30 inches of snow with that blizzard. And, by the time they finished getting all the snow off the roads, it was like, when I was standing out by the road, it was like being in a tunnel. And, as a 12 year old kid, that was totally cool. I mean, I've got to be honest with you, that was really cool.

But here is the deal. I mean, when I'm sitting around thinking about what I'm going to do for the rest of my life, my dad, who was just kind of matter-of-fact-- in everything, he'll say, "Hey, what are you going to do for the rest of your life?" I said, "I don't know, dad. I'm going to be an electrician, or try and play some baseball or whatever." And he goes, "Why don't you go study the weather? You're kind of a freak when it snows." [laughter] "You leave the light on in the barn, and you stay up all night to wait for the first flakes." He goes, "When you have to wake up for the next 50 years of your life, every day, you better love what you do."

And he was a man of very few words, but those were some good ones.

**MARK HAMRICK:** That's great, Jim. If you don't mind, I want to have a couple of housekeeping matters to take care of here before we get to the last question. I'd like to remind our audience about some upcoming luncheon speakers. We have a new President of the Club taking office in January. And she'll have the opportunity to host Danica Patrick, the NASCAR driver will be here on February 21<sup>st</sup>. That's living another kind of extreme. [laughter]

Now we have a number of wonderful traditions here at the National Press Club as our way of thanking our guest speakers here. And we actually kind of broadened it out a little bit today, just because of the special nature of your job. So we'll begin with a different take on-- Typically we give you the National Press Club coffee mug. But we figured, when do you get to sit at a desk? So we wanted to present you with the National Press Club new travel mug. So there you go.

**JIM CANTORE:** Thank you sir.

**MARK HAMRICK:** So that's number one. That's number one. And then, because we know you have the trademark baseball cap, the National Press Club baseball cap. So there you go.

**JIM CANTORE:** Oh, beautiful. Thank you.

[applause]

**MARK HAMRICK:** There you go. So our last question is-- and this only really came to me because of all your baseball analogies and your passion for the sport. We know that some athletes like to dress a certain way before they go out on the field. Maybe they put their left sock on first, and their right sock on second. They have their lucky t-shirt, so to speak. So, do you have any-- dare we say-- superstitions, or any regimens that hey, you know, this is the big time. This is the big storm. Anything like that, that you go through, to just give you a little bit of added luck when you're sort of staring danger right in the face?

**JIM CANTORE:** Superstitions?

**MARK HAMRICK:** Yeah, anything like that.

**JIM CANTORE:** No. No. What I watched a long time ago, when people were out in the field, and they were out covering weather, I was like, "Why is that dude in a suit?" [laughter] So, I mean, I'm just like, look. I'm going to go out. My job is not to look like I just came out of an office, but to tell you about the weather. So, I mean, I'm always kind of-- I'm a hat guy. I'm a t-shirt guy at the end of the day. And I just thought, "You know, I'm just going to take that out there with me."

But I'm like, not everything that I'm on is going to be a disaster. So how do I differentiate that? So, if you don't see me in a black t-shirt, which is what I call my "Dr.

Doom t-shirt,” it’s usually not going to be that bad. [laughter] So the black t-shirt means I’m expecting the worst. A little side note for you.

**MARK HAMRICK:** That’s a little inside information.

**JIM CANTORE:** A little inside information.

**MARK HAMRICK:** How about a round of applause for our guest speaker today. Thank you.

[applause]

**MARK HAMRICK:** Thank you so much for coming today, Mr. Cantore. And I’d like to thank our National Press Club staff, including our National Press Club Journalism Institute, and our Broadcast Center for helping to organize today’s event, as well as our executive director, Bill McCarron, and Javila Ross.

Finally, here is a reminder about how you can find out more information about the National Press Club. Please visit our website at [www.press.org](http://www.press.org). Thank you. And we’re adjourned. [gavel]

END OF LUNCHEON