

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON ADDRESS BY SAM WATERSTON

SUBJECT:

THE UNITY '08 MOVEMENT TO ELECT THE FIRST-EVER BIPARTISAN
PRESIDENTIAL TICKET

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MR. ZREMSKI: Good afternoon. Good afternoon and welcome to the
National Press Club. My name is Jerry Zremski and I'm Washington
Bureau Chief for The Buffalo News and president of the Press Club.
I'd like to welcome club members and their guests as well as those of
you watching today on CSPAN. We're looking forward to today's speech
and afterwards I'll ask as many questions as time permits. Please
hold your applause during the speech so that we have as much time for
questions as possible. For our broadcast audience, I'd like to
explain that if you hear applause it may be from the guests and
members of the general public who attend our luncheons and not from
the working press.

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to
stand briefly when their names are called. From your right, Kate
Hunter of Congressional Quarterly, the chair of our young members
committee here at the Press Club; Ralph Melzick (ph) executive
producer of NBC radio programs; Alicia Munde of the Seattle Times;
Ivan Roman of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists; Jerry
Rafshoon, former White House communications director and cofounder of
Unity '08 and guest of the speaker; Ken Melgrin (ph) of AP Broadcast;
the Honorable Angus King, former governor of Maine and cofounder of
Unity '08 and guest of the speaker.

Skipping over the podium, Angela Greiling Keane of Bloomberg News -- the chair of the National Press Club speakers committee. Skipping over our speaker for a moment -- (laughter) -- we'll get to you -- Debra Silimeo, senior vice president of Hager Sharp and the speakers committee member who organized today's event; Doug Bailey, cofounder of Unity '08 and a guest of the speaker; Eleanor Clift of Newsweek; Marilou Donahue of Artistically Speaking; and Martin Tolchin of The Politico.

(Applause.)

In the American political system, the people are represented by two separate yet equally important groups. (Laughter.) The Republicans, who generally oppose the Democrats, and the Democrats, who generally oppose the Republicans. A new group of idealists is trying to force them to work together. Today, we will hear their story. And we'll hear it from the star of the television show that opens each week with words suspiciously similar to what I just said.

Sam Waterston has become a household name thanks to his portrayal of New York Assistant DA Jack McCoy in "Law and Order", the longest running prime time drama on American television. More often than not in his long career, Waterston has chosen roles like that of McCoy -- the sober, competent and dedicated professional trying to do the right thing in morally ambiguous circumstances. On television and in the movies, he plays people who think. In "The Matthew Shepard Story," he plays the father of the young man who was slain because he was gay. In "The Killing Fields," he played an American confronting the Cambodian genocide under dictator Pol Pot. And again and again over the years, he has portrayed Abraham Lincoln.

Waterston immersed himself in studying the complexity of our greatest president, trying to get inside the man who led our country through its greatest challenge. So when the founders of a new political movement wanted a spokesperson that was the very image of sober competence, they chose Sam Waterston. The movement began when Doug Bailey joined with Jerry Rafshoon and Hamilton Jordan -- Republican and Democrat -- Democratic political consultants with decades of experience to start planning a book about how partisanship had rendered American politics dysfunctional.

Indeed, few people say that they have faith in the system. In one poll, 85 percent said they think the system is too polarized to fix our problems. As the story is told, the dinner conversation turned to why just write a book? Why not try to do something about it? So disillusion led to action, and Unity '08 was born. The people behind TV's transformation of politics are now hoping the Internet will be transformative as well in a positive way. They plan to hold an online convention and nominate a bipartisan presidential ticket. Here to tell us how it's all going to work, please join me in welcoming Sam Waterston to the National Press Club. (Applause.)

MR. WATERSTON: Thank you. I mean, if we wanted to really save time, I could just say he stole my speech. (Laughter.) But I've written this so I'm going to say it. Hello, I'm Sam Waterston and I'm not running for president. (Laughter.) I'm speaking to you today in

answer to an invitation that's about 10 years old. Are you surprised to see me after all this time? I'm kind of surprised myself. This isn't my line of work and I wasn't going to come at all unless I had something to talk about that would merit disturbing the quiet enjoyment of your lunch, and now I do. Its name is Unity '08.

So let's get down to business. Gridlock and partisanship, lobbying, corruption and money influence, paralysis and extremism -- the familiar words for our political landscape of such longstanding that at the sound our minds go into a kind of protective crouch. We're not going to talk about that again, are we? Surely that has to have been fixed by now. Tell me the words don't apply anymore. Maybe nothing can be done. But the words don't go away and the landscape doesn't improve by itself.

Unity '08's goal is nothing less than to resurrect our lost political values and rescue tomorrow from today's neglect, to restore honest cooperation for the common good, and get to agreement on the ominous backlog of crucial issues from education and healthcare to immigration, security and the war in Iraq that looms over our future. You can't say Unity '08 is thinking small.

A smart old Sicilian said, "Give me a place to stand and I will move the world." Unity '08's entire focus is on the election of a bipartisan presidential ticket in 2008, using new tools on the Internet to do the old-fashioned work of renewal. Its common sense assumptions are that if you give moderates a place to rally and the chance to vote for action at the center, the days of divisive politics will be numbered. Do it inexpensively, relying on small contributions alone and K Street corruption and money influence will begin to fade. Change this one thing and all things to do with Washington politics will change with it.

The idea is simple. The execution can't be. It will take lots and lots of people. Getting the word out is crucial. Joining the effort is vital, whether you're a journalist, or just listening out of curiosity about what an actor might have to say, or both -- please pitch in. You can find out more about who we are, from the youngest student idealist among us to the wisest old owl, at our website, Unity08.com. My first mission is to get you to remember that address -- Unity08.com. The plan is good, simple and timely. The goals are commonsensical and badly needed, so naturally I want to make the most of this chance to stir your interest and the interest of the people who by joining will make Unity '08 succeed.

I have 20 minutes. (Laughter.) But there will be question time afterwards and fortunately Doug Bailey and Jerry Rafshoon who started all this are here to answer the questions I can't. With them is Angus King, another founder who served two terms as an independent governor of Maine from 1994 to 2003, and can tell you about the practicalities of an independent executive making bipartisanship work, which is what Unity '08 is all about. I'm not much to look at beside them but I did get the original invitation and I have good lungs. If at any time in the course of things you think you hear the note of someone running for president himself don't be misled -- you're thinking of the other "Law and Order" actor. (Laughter.) And I harbor no resentment over the fact that Fred Thompson, after I was already involved, decided to

inject himself into the 2008 race. (Laughter.) If I'm free to dabble in politics I guess he can too.

I need to talk a little about myself here, which for an actor is a high and noble sacrifice. (Laughter.) But I'm prepared to make it because the cause is good. What's a nice guy like me doing in a place like this? (Laughter.) What gets a person with a long -- lifelong interest in history but mostly a spectator's interest in politics, on the long end of middle age who enjoys nearly every day and phase of a career that pays me for doing what I love to do, with children and grandchildren, the envy of Lake Wobegon, and married to the love of his life -- what would lead a person like that to get into the middle of a mud fight? I have a confession to make. I'm a moderate.

In these times where extreme political positions get so much respect, so much airtime, so many headlines and so much representation here, one is almost ashamed to admit it. You're looking at a bird rarely seen in Washington, even in springtime.

I'm part of the vast crowd that's the moderate American center, underrepresented on the national political scene and little heard from. My real business -- show business -- is the business of passion and conflict. I very well know where passion and conflict usually lead. That may be why I'm a moderate in politics. Unity '08 is the first political movement I've come across that speaks to me and for me, just at a time when moderation and consensus are sorely needed in the worsening world of the politics of division. Professor Morris Fiorina of Stanford described centrists as ambivalent, moderate and pragmatic. Add skeptical and that about describes me. There are a lot of us but to a degree it's our own fault that we are not heard. Our hands are full with our own lives. We've wanted to believe that politics would take care of itself -- that the good old two-party system would see us through. We wanted to think ourselves better off with a government that has a hard time getting anything done. In the face of that ominous backlog of issues with real time limits attached to them, the whole long and familiar list, gridlock as a virtue looks like a very thin reed to cling to.

Moderates don't have a great reputation for leaping into the fray. That's why they called us the silent majority. But my father was both moderate and skeptical, and it didn't stop him from volunteering in World War II when he was already in his 30s and had three children and would never have been drafted. And it didn't stop him from joining in the Freedom Rides in the 60s at a time when that was regarded as riskier and more dubious than we now like to remember. He was a member of the greatest generation, but if moderates have made their weight felt in the past, then surely we can again when the times call for it. The times are calling, and Unity '08 is the way.

But enough about me. Here is how Unity '08 will work. By signing up at Unity08.com -- and please do right away -- Americans can, without leaving their own party or compromising their independence in any way -- without leaving their own party or compromising their independence in any way, first, become a delegate to the first ever online convention. Next, devise the questions that will be put to the presidential candidates, then judge their answers

and shape the new American agenda. And then, in a vote in an online convention -- nominate a bipartisan ticket for the presidency and vice-presidency in 2008 and that will appear on the ballot in all 50 states. Unity '08 is in this race to win. Any voter in the country who goes to unity08.com and takes the few simple steps to become a delegate can be an important part of the vital process of nominating the next president or vice-president of the United States.

All this means change, and change is unnerving, especially for moderates -- (laughter) -- who are a little bit progressive but also a little bit conservative. So, is a change like Unity '08 really necessary? Do we have to do this? Obviously I think so, and experts of different stripes seem to agree. For example, on the issues side, Tom Freidman argues that we need a third party just to resolve the interconnected challenges of energy independence and global change. Alan Greenspan says a third party is essential to deal with the predictable explosion of deficits from Baby Boom entitlements. We know without being told that our schools are ailing, and with them our hopes for our children. Health coverage is unacceptable, inefficient, expensive and it's been on the table my whole life. Immigration, made worse by partisanship and inaction, eats away at the core idea of American community. Am I wrong, or does practically everyone in Washington know that all these things are true?

Lincoln famously said, "If we could first know where we are and whither we are tending, we could then better judge what to do and how to do it." Where are we now? How different is now from the past? Again, among the experts, it seems to me there's a great deal of agreement that there is a great that is new. Television campaigning and TV campaign advertising is now indispensable and expensive. This didn't use to be. There are more and more early primaries. This didn't use to be. The money primary may be the most important one of all. This didn't use to be. The last presidential campaign cost \$2.2 billion. This one will dwarf it, and this didn't use to be. Single-issue movements turn out the base and bring in the money. Candidates depend on them and cater to them. Forty years ago, it wasn't so. Computerized redistricting and lobbyist dollars make for safe districts. It hasn't always been so. News and entertainment conflate, particularly on TV but in every medium. This, too, is new, and this is a partial list.

So it pays to be skeptical. Political scientists have their own uncertainties even about the observations on which they base their strongest assertions. But still, isn't it common sense to be wary of our representatives' reliance on activist bases and the extreme views that go with them? Isn't it common sense to be alarmed that the media play up the political dogfights because they're more entertaining and lucrative than cooperative deliberation? Isn't it prudent to take precautions against the influence of lobbyist money and bundled money on politics? Did you read Monday's Washington Post? The number of new lobbyists have doubled since the mid-term elections -- since the mid-term elections. To me, the two most alarming developments over my adult lifetime have been dishonest communication about crucial

questions, often as much by omission as by active misrepresentation and the growing sense that in these crucial issues -- health, education, energy, climate, immigration and so on, time is not on our

side. No two ways about it, things are bent out of shape.

Isn't it broadly understood that the political class -- though rich and dedicated, intelligent, patriotic servants -- is unable to repair itself now when it very urgently needs to? Isn't it largely taken for granted that the result is gridlock and paralysis on issues that won't wait, where inaction already has a high human cost with a lot worse to come? The people I've spoken to get all that, and there's research to back up their common sense. Unity '08 believes that the politics of division is at the heart of our troubles. The founders -- and I don't mean the founders of Unity '08 -- I mean the founders feared faction more than foreign invasion, executive power or popular demagoguery. They feared that factions, conspiring to control the people by setting them against each other, might undo all their good work. With no way to definitely prevent it, they had to accept that future generations were fools enough to throw away their freedoms in infighting, that there wasn't anything they, in the late 18th century, could do to stop us at the beginning of the 21st. Nowadays it's not unheard of for a politician to claim that there is no democracy without partisanship. To the founders, it was the very devil. I think the founders had it right.

Abraham Lincoln, who -- as you figured out by now, I rely on for just about everything -- was my source for this. The political class -- Republicans and Democrats -- was alarmed enough itself to invite me to read what he had to say about division at a bipartisan retreat in 1999. "There is a view that democracies can't deal with long-term problems, that they can't come to agreement until the house is about to fall on the politicians' heads. I don't accept that. But in this situation, the house was falling on their heads and they knew it." And what has happened, in your estimation? Have things improved since the '90s? So, if this is where we are, then the question is what to do and how to do it.

Unity '08 proposes to begin by removing the excuse for contention, to elect a bipartisan executive branch, a president for all the people -- not of any one party and not in word alone. If removing the excuse for contention doesn't reduce contention itself, what will? In the middle of a cultural war zone, can it be done? Professor Fiorina began, "American divide evenly in elections or sit them out entirely because we instinctively seek the center while the parties and candidates hand out on the extremes. A polarized political class makes the citizenry appear polarized. But it is largely that, an appearance."

Unity '08 has confirmed this with its own polling. We remain close to one another in our views. It's the politicians who are oceans apart. Here is a situation crying out for moderates to do something to end the false division, for ambivalent people to demand that the complexities of an issue not become an excuse for inaction,

for pragmatists to start looking for a place to stand to get some leverage on the problem and for skeptics to act. So what's holding us back? We appear to be frozen in the belief that we have no other choice than between a Republican and a Democrat, who get to stand for election only by playing to the extremes of their parties and who inevitably compromise themselves because of the cost of running. But

we have other options, and if we come across a good one -- a carefully conceived one, a constructive and tempered one, we would be foolish not to grab it.

As the great man said, "We must disentrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country." Unity '08 is an opportunity not to be passed up, arising at a moment when new technology makes it possible and winning the White House has not been so open to competition since 1928. Unity '08 has figured out how to move our enormous, complex and unwieldy national politics, get it back on track without harm to what is good about things as they are, including the two-party system itself when it's working properly. It's a good idea and it can win. With anything like the numbers who share its views, Unity '08 will win in a landslide.

Let me invite you to try a liberating thought experiment. Next time you read the paper or watch the news or listen to a politician of either party state that the choice is between his way or their way, between his heaven and their hell, imagine the presence of a third voice saying, "We have asked the people what they want. And with that ever before us, we want to work with both of you on reaching a consensus to fulfill their urgent needs." I think you'll find it refreshes the air. You may feel the weight on the top of your head lift a little and some of your passion for politics as the best means to solve problems peacefully coming back.

It could be that the regular two-party system will yet renew itself by itself.

But just in case the past is prologue, isn't it common sense to have a Unity '08's ticket there as an alternative, indebted only to the country as a whole, arriving without strings attached, having lived on small-dollar contributions and worked with less money overall, dedicated from the outset to cooperation and action? Unity '08 only intends to be around for one election and to turn a repaired and redirected government back over to the old parties, after demonstrating that things can be different. It's an opportunity not to be missed.

Imagine -- how am I doing for time? -- imagine what the election of a Unity executive could mean. It could attract a bipartisan Cabinet and inspire the very best people from all walks of life to come to Washington to save it from itself. Together with the vice president of the opposite party, the president could summon the congressional leadership of both parties and both houses to the White House, shut the doors and get serious about finding answers they can all agree on. A president without debts to pay could clean up K Street and the lobbying corruption that paralyzes Washington.

A Unity president could take the bully pulpit back from Larry Birkhead, Don Imus and Ann Coulter -- (laughter) -- and tell the public and the media what we need to know to make right decisions about the future. A Unity executive branch could present a united face to a dangerous world. In short, a Unity president could lead for change. With so many big issues before us, with so many gigantic waves coming up behind us, doesn't it make sense to take out a little insurance?

America's first third-party president was Abraham Lincoln. Like those first Republicans, if we'd rally around Unity '08 and make it succeed, we can make possible now what they made possible then: a new birth of freedom and the rescue of the Union. Please join us at Unity08.com to get the job done.

This is page 16. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. ZREMSKI: Thank you very much.

We have lots and lots of questions starting with this: The past presidential elections have done nothing but further alienate voters, especially young voters. What makes Unity '08 so different in its outreach to young voters and to people who have been disengaged from the political system?

MR. WATERSON: I guess in "Law and Order-ese" I would just say, "ask then answered." What makes it different is -- you know, it's hard to be brief about it. It puts policy questions and the issues themselves and the consensus of the public ahead of the personalities that are going to lead the party. And this is more like things were in Abraham Lincoln's time than they are now. And there isn't any -- there's nothing in the Constitution that says we couldn't do it again.

MR. ZREMSKI: You mentioned several factors that seemed to motivate this acrimonious partisanship. What do you think the biggest factor would be?

MR. WATERSON: I don't know. Do any of you know wiseguys know -- (laughter). I don't know which one is the -- I don't know.

MR. : (Off mike.)

MR. WATERSTON: Well, money, but single-issue stuff too. I mean, there's a lot of factors. I tried to list them.

MR. : (Off mike.)

MR. ZREMSKI: Should the media take any blame for fanning the partisan flames?

MR. WATERSON: Oh, I do think so, definitely. I said it. I think that -- I mean, you know, "You fight and we'll write about it" is the journalists' creed, isn't it? But it's not that anybody wants you to stop doing that. It's fun. But there's a terrific imbalance, I think. And I think that it's the imbalance that's new.

There used to be people that ran newspapers -- I guess maybe the last one in New York was The New York Herald Tribune where somebody with a point of view lost piles of money in order to advance the point of view, in order to make the argument -- not in order to stir up popular stuff, but to actually make the case for a position on the issue. And I don't think there's much of that left anymore anywhere -- is there?

MR. ZREMSKI: I ask the questions. You answer the questions.
(Laughter.)

Next up: How will Unity '08 be funded?

MR. WATERSON: Unity '08 will be funded by small-dollar contributions.

MR. ZREMSKI: Do you have any goals in mind for how much money you need to really pull this off?

MR. WATERSON: I think I'd rather have Doug add that --

DOUG BAILEY (Unity '08 co-founder): (Off mike.)

MR. ZREMSKI: Could I -- for our C-SPAN audience, if you're going to answer, I think you should probably come up to the mike.

MR. BAILEY: The overall budget of Unity '08 is somewhere between \$10 and \$12 million from now -- or from when it started -- through the convention in 2008. That doesn't include a campaign for the presidential candidate. That's the candidate's responsibility. But our needs cover about \$10 to \$12 million and that will be raised in small-dollar contributions via the web.

If we are successful in achieving 10 million delegates, do the math for yourself. It doesn't take 10 percent of those people giving \$100 each to produce more than 10 times what we need. So it's possible -- the Dean phenomenon of raising small dollars in large numbers was not some kind of a fluke. It can be done and we're going to do it.

MR. ZREMSKI: Do you see a potential for the unity movement to expand to congressional races at any point? Or is 2008 really going to be it?

MR. WATERSON: It's my belief that 2008 is really going to be it, and I think it's one of the beauties of the idea, because the two-party system, in a rough way, has served us very, very well for a long time. The idea is to get it back on track, not to replace it.

MR. ZREMSKI: Why start at the presidential level, where you will likely fail -- (laughter) -- rather than at the state, local and regional level?

MR. WATERSON: Well, for me -- I don't know what a more reasoned answer would be -- but for me I think it's that time's a wasting. That really, something serious needs to be done. And I didn't talk about climate change in the speech, but to me, you know, we've got to get busy with this in a hurry. And there has been precious little public education about the issue until last week. So -- and now we already have generals on both sides of the Atlantic planning for the social disruptions and natural disasters that are going to have to be coped with because what wasn't a problem last week is right around the corner this week. Well, we don't have time, do we, for politics to sort itself out.

And I'd just add one other thing, which is that the Constitution itself has plenty of checks and balances so that nobody's going to get the -- well, so that it's difficult to get the bit in your teeth and run away with the government. We don't need -- we don't need partisan infighting to keep us from flying off the handle. We need to get rid of it so that we can get the things done that need to get done.

MR. ZREMSKI: Why have other countries had success with more than two major parties but they never seem to have taken off here in the United States?

MR. WATERSTON: You're asking me? (Laughter.) My opinion is that this works well, that it's a big country and it has managed to be a really good way of adjudicating our differences and both parties have been very large tents, and only on rare occasions have they decided that they'd rather kill each other than cooperate.

MR. ZREMSKI: Would some sort of additional limits on campaign fundraising be necessary to level the playing field to make a third party a more serious contender?

MR. WATERSTON: These gentlemen say, and I believe them, that the efficiencies of the Internet will make it possible to make a highly credible campaign on the dollars that will be available if even 10 percent of the very large numbers of people that are necessary for this to work participate with money.

MR. ZREMSKI: Isn't political partisanship the result of human nature? And do you hope to change human nature? (Laughter.)

MR. WATERSTON: No, no. No, no. I think I listed "skeptic" among many of my self-descriptions. And I -- and I think that, you know, lots and lots of ideas have come from the wings of the party.

We're not talking about where the bright new ideas are going to come from. We're talking about the -- getting the work done.

MR. ZREMSKI: We all know what Ralph Nader did to Al Gore. Will Unity '08 dangerously split the vote?

MR. WATERSTON: I think that the -- there are a couple of differences. This is not a campaign about personalities. Personalities will come after the positions are determined, and the positions will be determined by the people. And because it is going to be a bipartisan ticket -- and that is its fundamental and unchangeable principle -- it's likely that it's going to draw people who have checked out, who will not draw votes from anybody because they're not voting now, and people of the center of the two parties who are fed up with the wings of their two parties. So we're going to be competing in the middle and not at the edge of anybody.

MR. ZREMSKI: Do you think a Democrat or a Republican who chose a member of the other party as a running mate could get nominated by their party?

MR. WATERSTON: Well, that's a really interesting idea. And if Unity '08 generates the numbers to be effective and work on its own, it seems to me that something like that would be very tempting.

There has been -- there have been a number of coalition governments in this country. I'm not telling you -- all this stuff -- I'm announcing this like you don't know. You know all this stuff. But there have been lots and lots of coalition governments in this country, and some of them at moments of great crisis. Roosevelt, Truman, on and on.

MR. : Lincoln's vice president was a Democrat.

MR. WATERSTON: Well, I was going to say, but I didn't know whether it was fair to go back to him again. (Laughter.) Yep.

MR. ZREMSKI: How would a bipartisan White House be able to work with partisans whose parties lost the election? They will, after all, have to run against the Democratic and Republican tickets. Simply put, how do you govern?

MR. WATERSTON: Well, I mean, I don't know. People might have some sore elbows and toes and stuff, you know. But --

ANGUS KING (Former Maine governor): (Off mike.)

MR. WATERSTON: Yeah! (Laughter.) Oh, yes! Come and say how it works.

MR. KING: It's a lot of work, but it does work. For eight years I governed in Maine as an independent, and before I was elected, there were stories in the papers that said, "Can an independent govern?" Those stories disappeared.

The way it works is by working with individual members of both parties to develop coalitions on individual issues. One week's ally is the next week's opponent, but over time you develop a sense of trust, and it really is about the personality of the leader and the ability to work with people and find consensus.

The people who are running for the parties' nominations and who are the candidates and who are in Congress are good people. They're smart and able people, and they have a commitment to this country. But the dynamic of the parties is what pulls them together.

But the short answer is that it can work, and it takes a lot more effort than just saying, "Okay, all you guys in my party stand up and vote with me." But if you pursue a consensus-based set of policies, you will more often than not find some success and indeed consensus.

MR. WATERSTON: And I'd just add to that that on the national level it may be hard to imagine, but if you -- if you look state by state, if you look at the way the Democrats in California seem to be responding to Arnold Schwarzenegger now that he's decided not to call them "girly men" and stuff. (Laughter.) You know, it seems like a lot of people are saying, "You mean we're going to work together to get things done?"

MR. ZREMSKI: How would a Unity '08 candidate approach the issue of the Iraq war?

MR. WATERSTON: Well, by consulting with the members of Unity '08 and asking them what they want to ask the candidates who want to run on the Unity '08 ticket what they intend to do, and then to judge of their answers. And that will be the policy of Unity '08 on Iraq and on the climate and on education and you name it.

MR. ZREMSKI: This being Washington, we have a lot of questions about particular personalities.

MR. WATERSTON: Yeah.

MR. ZREMSKI: One person in the audience asks, "Would you be a candidate?"

MR. WATERSTON: No, no, no and no. And even if there were some little tiny shred of temptation there, which there is not a particle of, Unity '08 is much too good an idea to mess it up with a stupid idea like that. (Laughter.)

MR. ZREMSKI: You know as much about Abraham Lincoln as any American actor. Do you see any American politicians with the qualities that made Lincoln so special?

MR. WATERSTON: I don't know anybody like Abraham Lincoln. (Laughter, applause.)

MR. ZREMSKI: The Unity '08 website has asked for quote, unquote, "dream ticket submissions." What is your dream ticket?

MR. WATERSTON: I don't want to play. I think that -- I think that -- you know, I really think this idea is beautifully conceived. And I think one of its many beauties is the fact that the candidates are going to come where the choosing of candidates belongs -- not at the front, but after we know what we're for.

MR. ZREMSKI: From what you've seen on your website so far, are there names that are coming up again and again -- (laughter) -- as a potential candidate?

MR. WATERSON: Anybody else want to?

MR. BAILEY: We have asked everybody to come to the website and we're doing this again now. If you have a Dream Ticket -- a Dream Unity Ticket for 2008, to come and let us know what it is. You'll be interested to know that we've had about five thousand submissions of which probably 4,995 are different from every other submission.

Let me also say that Jerry, and I, and others have been briefing potential candidates who've requested, and their staffs who requested -- and those whom we think ought to know about the process -- all of those are confidential meetings. In fact, whether the meeting has been held or not, is confidential; and the subject matter is confidential. But let me say that there is almost uniform -- this is what's

interesting, just as there is in this room, I suspect -- there is in this city almost uniform agreement that there is a big, big problem. They are watching us to see our delegates signing up, they are watching us to see whether ballot access will be achieved, but there is significant interest because they know the problem is very, very big and immediate.

MR. ZREMSKI: Is there any danger -- in this era of very sophisticated political machinery, any danger that one of the partisan campaigns might try to visit your website a little too often and kind of infuse itself into your process?

MR. WATERSON: There is a Rules Committee hard at work on these questions. And in addition to your participation as a delegate -- to your suggestions about how to fine-tune the questions that will be posed to candidates, there is this whole process of developing the system that will prevent this kind of thing from happening. And it's well underway, but everybody's input is welcome. So please don't think that you become a delegate and then you wait to decide which of the candidates that have come forward you're going to pick. There is a lot of opportunity for participation down the way and this is part of it.

MR. ZREMSKI: Is it a possibility that, through this process, you're going to end up with a nominee who also happens to be one of the major party nominees?

MR. WATERSON: Well, only if that nominee is willing to declare that he will take a member of the opposite party as his running mate -- or her running mate.

MR. ZREMSKI: Okay, we also have several questions about another Law and Order star here.

"Do you and Fred Thompson debate politics?"

MR. WATERSON: Fred Thompson is a good man, and I'm a curious person. And I ask him questions sometimes when I feel like he might be in the mood to answer. But he is a person who is perfectly capable of keeping his own counsel when he wants to. On the other hand, whenever he's answered me, he's always been very straight forward.

MR. ZREMSKI: "What is your opinion of whether Fred Thompson will run for president?"

MR. WATERSON: I'm glad you asked me that, because somebody asked me that on a show yesterday, and it got on the web and stuff. And the statement is: I think he is going to run for president, but Fred is the one who knows whether he is or not. (Laughter.)

MR. ZREMSKI: If Fred Thompson runs for president, will you support him? (Laughter.)

MR. WATERSON: May I remind you of the beauties of Unity '08? The things that a person stands for now are conditioned by the river that he's swimming in. And the river that all politicians are swimming in now has to do with appealing and controlling the extreme

wings of your parties to mobilize your base and blah-blah -- everything you know. So until somebody starts to say what they really think, in a different atmosphere, you don't know who you'd support.

MR. ZREMSKI: Someone here -- probably interested in starting a rumor -- asks: Any interest in running for Hillary Clinton's Senate seat if it opens up on 2008?

MR. WATERSON: I refer you to my answer to the question, "What's a nice guy doing in a place like this?" (Laughter.)

MR. ZREMSKI: Someone in the audience writes, Your agenda seems more likely to attract Democrats than Republicans. Aren't you afraid that you might drain off enough liberal Democrats to swing the election to a Republican?

MR. WATERSON: Nothing is sure in politics, but -- I don't know who asked that question, but would that be a question coming from a Democrat, I wonder -- because Republicans are worried about votes being stolen from Republicans, and Democrats are worried about votes being stolen from Democrats. And no doubt whatever happens, somebody will blame somebody for something. But the -- but the real thing is that what Unity '08 is proposing to do is to plant a flag in the center -- which has not been in competition, and that people like me have had, therefore, no place to rally around -- and to invite all those people who feel disenfranchised currently, to join in.

MR. ZREMSKI: What kind of a job has George W. Bush done as president?

MR. WATERSON: I don't want to talk about that. (Laughter.)

MR. ZREMSKI: (Off mike.) Oh, well -- is that okay? Sure?

MR. WATERSON: I want to keep the focus on Unity '08.

MR. ZREMSKI: Will your contributors' names be required to be made public?

MR. WATERSON: I think so. Isn't that automatic?

MR. BAILEY: Everybody over \$200, yes.

MR. WATERSON: Everybody over \$200.

MR. ZREMSKI: Now, Hollywood doesn't have a reputation for being a home to a lot of moderates. What kind of conversations have you had with other people in the entertainment world, about that, and do you see widespread support within the entertainment world?

MR. WATERSON: A) I live in Connecticut; B) I do speak from time to time with people from the -- from the world of show business. My impression is that Hollywood is having a hard time getting its mind around this. And part of it is fear -- Ralph Nader fear, and part of it is that maybe they don't know as much about what's going on in this city as you guys know. Because this is the place, of all the places where you talk about these things, that people go, "Oh, yeah -- I get

it. I see. Yup, that's right." And in Cal -- it's, it's kind of hard to believe that things could be as bad as they actually are, but everywhere you go -- no matter who you're sitting next to at dinner in this town -- everybody knows what this is about. That's my impression.

MR. ZREMSKI: Have you always been a political moderate or have your views evolved over the years?

MR. WATERSON: I didn't know -- it was like I didn't know. I've tried my whole -- you know, you -- these are the available choices, and this is what Morris Fiorina's thing says: These are the available choices. And so you try to say, "Well, I am really -- don't like that person, although I kind of feel squeezed." (Laughter.)

And I have to say that even though I know -- because I've read about politics and I know it's a rough game and I -- (laughs) -- and I know that I'm just a bug running around in the sun who just doesn't know that he's about to be squashed -- (laughter) -- this is an enormously liberating thing to me to be able to say what I think.

MR. ZREMSKI: Do you find yourself being kind of conservative on certain issues, more liberal on other issues? And if so, which issues are you on which side on? (Laughter.)

MR. WATERSTON: Oh, gee. (Laughter.) How much time do we have?

MR. ZREMSKI: Three minutes.

MR. WATERSTON: I think that's much too big a question to answer. And I don't -- I've never really ever tried to figure it out. I think it's too big.

MR. ZREMSKI: Do you think there's any likely issue profile that this ticket is likely to end up with? Is it likely to be, you know, strong on defense yet liberal on social issues?

MR. WATERSTON: I think it would probably be better to refer that question to a pollster because the only way you can really guess about how Unity '08 is going to shake out, how the delegates are actually going to vote when it comes time to vote -- the only way to guess is by polling, and I'm not enough of an expert to be able to say.

Care to weigh in?

MR. BAILEY: Let me say one word on that.

Any polling that we have done doesn't break down along conservative-liberal lines. What it says is that -- and when you see polls and hear them reported -- that 70 percent, 75 percent are very interested in this election, the next question in the poll ought to be, "Why are you so interested?" And what you will find is that they're interested because they're scared for their country. These are serious, serious issues that are not being dealt with in this city.

And so whether the candidate comes by way of a draft, which is

possible within Unity '08, or it comes by way of a politician stepping forward or it comes by way of a person from the business world stepping forward, I think what you're going to find is a candidate who is ready to deal with the public on the issues that they perceive as crucial to the future safety and well-being of the United States will be the nominee and be elected the next president.

MR. WATERSTON: I think -- you know, just to add to that, I think that the biggest issue is resolution, if I were to guess. When are you going to get to resolution about Social Security? When are you going to get to resolution about climate? When are you going to get to resolution about health coverage? Because as a private citizen, I don't know all the details.

I do know that there's a rough -- well, in health care you see a patient's rights -- a person sitting next to a person from the business community at a symposium or in a conversation on the news,

and one person says -- nods their head as the other person speaks. And then the other person nods their head as the other person speaks. And you realize there is a consensus to be found.

MR. ZREMSKI: Okay. We're almost out of time, but before I ask the last question, we have just a couple of other important matter to take care of.

First of all, if I could just remind our audience of our upcoming speakers: On May 1st, Paul Helmke, the president of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence will discuss "Gun Violence: What Are We Going to Do about It?" On May 4th, Bobby Rahal, the racing legend and owner of Rahal Letterman Racing will discuss "The Greening of Racing: Ethanol Powers the Indianapolis 500." And on May 22nd, John Robbins, the chairman of the Mortgage Bankers Association will be with us.

Next, we have some traditions here at the Press Club. One is the plaque that we give all our guests. (Applause.)

MR. WATERSTON: Thank you, thank you, thank you.

MR. ZREMSKI: And you can use this to toast victory on Election Day, if that so happens. (Laughter.)

MR. WATERSTON: This is why I came. (Laughter.) Thank you.

MR. ZREMSKI: Thank you.

MR. WATERSTON: Thank you.

MR. ZREMSKI: And our last question: What has been your favorite presidential race to watch as a political observer?

MR. WATERSTON: Jeepers. (Laughter.)

MR. (Off mike.)

MR. WATERSTON: Yeah! Well, I didn't get to watch the --

Douglass and Lincoln, but I didn't get to watch that one. (Laughter.) I don't know. They're all -- favorite, you mean in terms of, like, everything's going the way you want it to? I don't think I have a favorite. (Laughter.) But --

MR. ZREMSKI: In terms of excitement.

MR. WATERSTON: I think they're all terribly interesting because so much of my life depends on how they come out. So I don't think there is such a thing as a favorite.

MR. ZREMSKI: Great. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

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

The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by the National Press Club's Broadcast Operations Center. Press Club members also can access free transcripts of our luncheons at our website, www.press.org, and nonmembers can purchase transcripts, audio and video tapes by calling 1-888-343-1940. For further information on joining the Press Club, please contact us at 202-662-7511.

Thank you. We're adjourned.

(Applause.)

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