

CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING**BOARD OF DIRECTORS Dinner / Remarks: Judy Woodruff****Monday, December 9, 2019**

Thank you, Bruce, and to the members of the Board for the invitation.

I'm delighted to be here - you picked a really quiet time for news – there's not much going on:

Impeachment hearings today in the House Judiciary Committee – on the same day the Inspector General of the Department of Justice releases the long-awaited report on the origins of the Russia probe – and next week's Democratic presidential candidate debate in Bruce's hometown, L.A. When you first reached out last summer, you knew we'd be right in the thick of it, didn't you?

Seriously, it's a treat to be here with so many champions of public broadcasting. To you, Bruce; to Pat Harrison, whom I've known going back many years, through your work at the State Department and even before then, promoting opportunities for women.

Your great team at CPB, several of whom I've gotten to know, Michael Levy, the remarkable Kathy Merritt whom I met through PRI. I'm going to leave someone out.

From PBS, Perry Simon and Michi Ebrahim, who work so closely with us at the NewsHour.

From APTS, my long-time friend Pat Butler, we go back to your days working on Capitol Hill for the iconic Senator Howard Baker.

Our friends at NPR, including my former colleague at CNN, Edith Chapin.

And of course, our leader at WETA, Sharon Rockefeller, truly a ROCK supporting public media and the NewsHour going back many years. In fact, this past week celebrating her 30th anniversary as President and CEO, an occasion we all celebrated, to have the great good fortune to have her leadership and commitment over all this time. Thank you, Sharon!

And finally, my NewsHour family, represented by our Executive Producer Sara Just, who juggles more every day than you can possibly imagine as she guides our program, our growing staff and our coverage on many different platforms.

As well as the tireless Mike Rancilio, Senior Vice President and General Manager, and I'm happy to say, Leah Clapman, Managing Editor for Education, who oversees the brilliant Student Reporting Labs, which she herself conceived over a decade ago.

They're the tip of the iceberg, they represent a remarkable team of people without whom I couldn't do my job, without whom the NewsHour wouldn't get on the air every day – a smart, creative, hard-working group of journalists whom I am so proud to call my colleagues.

And we're all pretty busy these days.

Bruce asked me to give you a thumbnail sense of what we're focusing on right now – and how we're covering it – so I'm going to do that, say a few words about the Archives of Public Broadcasting, and then take any questions you have.

First, impeachment: it has come up on us very quickly. As recently as mid-September, we thought we'd heard the end of impeachment – it had faded with the Mueller Report. Speaker Nancy Pelosi was widely quoted as saying "He's just not worth it," when asked whether Congress was planning to move against the President. But when information surfaced about a phone call with the President of Ukraine, about an alleged decision at the White House to put a hold on foreign aid, if Ukraine didn't investigate Joe and Hunter Biden, and when normally non-political civil servants, in the intelligence community, at the State Department and even at the White House, raised red flags, everything changed.

Since then, the NewsHour along with the rest of the Washington news media have followed events very closely, as we've moved from closed-door interviews to public hearings by the House Intelligence Committee – which PBS asked us to anchor and carry live over the course of 6 days – something we were eager to do - followed by three days of public hearings run by House Judiciary, up through today – as we wait to see what happens next.

With our correspondent on Capitol Hill, Lisa DesJardins, our White House Correspondent Yamiche Alcindor, Foreign Affairs Correspondent Nick Schifrin – and a remarkable team of producers and researchers and editors - none of whom require sleep – we've monitored all these breaking events, here, in Ukraine and anywhere the story has taken us. We've followed action on the Hill, at the White House, in the Courts, in the federal agencies and in foreign capitals.

We've interviewed key players, Democrats and Republicans, trying to understand not only the facts of the story, the role politics is playing -- but also the historical context – something I know my friend Mark Updegrave from the LBJ Foundation appreciates: what the founding fathers intended when they put impeachment into the Constitution. And how does what is going on now compare with the Clinton impeachment, the Nixon impeachment process, even the impeachment of President Andrew Johnson in 1868. We take our role seriously, to inform and in this instance, educate the American people about the sobering responsibility that Congress has undertaken that could result in the removal of a President from office.

Of course, we don't expect that to happen, because of the political divisions in the House and the Senate. As things stand today, we think it's likely a majority of the House of Representatives will vote to impeach, but the Republican-controlled Senate will fall well short of the two-thirds vote required to convict. But in the meantime, we'll witness a historic debate in the House, likely next week, before they vote; and another historic event, probably in January, a trial in the Senate presided over by the Chief Justice John Roberts.

It doesn't get any more serious or sobering in the work we do, and we plan to continue to give it our very best effort, because we owe that to the American people.

In the meantime, there is other news to cover, here in the United States and around the world. The economy, the courts, health care, education, the criminal justice system, science, the arts, conflicts and politics overseas. At a time when so much of the news media has cut back on international news coverage, we feel a special obligation to report on places and people who are part of the human family but who are so often overlooked unless their country falls into a war or is the site of a natural disaster. We believe we have to keep our eyes wide open to see all of this, because the world HAS shrunk and what our neighbor does increasingly affects us, just as what we do, affects them.

And by the way, we are painfully aware of how much the American news media has cut back on coverage of LOCAL news, which is why we so value our partners at PBS stations around the country, at public radio outlets around the country, because they are increasingly our eyes and ears as we try to understand the full picture of what is going on in America, what is happening in communities, in big cities and rural areas, that affect us all.

Meanwhile, there IS this other story we're covering – the upcoming 2020 presidential election! We are thrilled that the NewsHour was selected by the Democratic National Committee to conduct one of about a dozen primary debates this cycle, in partnership with Politico. It'll be held in LA on the campus of Loyola Marymount University – unusual for the state of California to get one of these debates but since they moved their primary up to early March, they're being taken more seriously than usual. I'm excited to be moderating, along with 2 of my NewsHour colleagues, national correspondent Amna Nawaz and White House correspondent Yamiche Alcindor, along with journalist Tim Alberta, who writes for Politico. A lot of work has gone into the planning for what will be a 3-hour production, counting pre-and post-shows, with a live audience – live on PBS, simulcast on CNN and livestreamed across several platforms, with a global audience in the millions. But I'm not nervous.

Of course, we might not have chosen to hold this debate a week from Thursday, December 19th, in a perfect world, because that may well be the day or the night, the House of Representatives holds its fateful vote on impeachment.

That's why we've already discussed how it's possible, we may have to have a "split screen" – one side the impeachment debate and vote, the other side the Democratic candidate debate.

But if that's what happens, we'll be prepared. In a way, it's a fitting development in this remarkable presidential campaign – which at one point or another – thanks to the strong desire to deny Pres Trump a second term - has seen as many as 29 major candidates running for the Democratic nomination, (and we've interviewed almost all of them on the NewsHour) - but after 14 dropped out at different moments, the number is now down to only 15. If you think this has kept the NewsHour's political team jumping, you're right! Talk about no sleep. They've done exhaustive research on every candidate's positions, record, statements, speeches, and in the case of Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders, and now Michael Bloomberg, that's going back a long time.

Even our research notebooks on the candidates qualified for the debate next week, according to rules set by the DNC, has shrunk and then grown fatter again, as Kamala Harris dropped out, and Tom Steyer qualified to participate. Six candidates have qualified as of today, we expect there could be a couple more.

Then, as soon as 2020 begins, we'll swing into action to cover the primaries and caucuses, starting with Iowa on February 3rd, followed quickly by New Hampshire eight days later, then South Carolina, then Nevada – and on March 3rd – 14 states across the country will vote in a lollapalooza day of voting called "Super Tuesday." We'll see how many candidates are left in the race at that point. I wish I could tell you tonight who's going to win the nomination, or even which candidates it'll be down to by April and May, but the truth is, I have little idea, and neither does anyone else. That's what makes this race both so fascinating and so frustrating to cover. Either way, we at the NewsHour are committed to cover every primary, the delegate count, both the Democratic National Convention in Milwaukee in July and the Republican convention in Charlotte in August.

By the way, there are a few Republicans challenging President Trump for their party's nomination, but since the RNC is cancelling primaries and not holding debates, we don't think he'll have a serious challenger. Whatever happens, we'll cover it; this President has been unprecedented in so many ways, and we expect his re-election campaign to be no different. He has kept us on our toes since before he was elected in 2016, a news machine like no one else in American political life. Someone who makes news from the moment he wakes, till late at night when he puts down his iPad or smartphone and stops tweeting. New policies have been unveiled and others rolled back, top officials have been hired and fired, international leaders have been caught up in controversy with him; there has been a steady stream of communication - much of it on Twitter, with and about government officials, anyone in the news.

I've covered 7 presidents and there's been no one else like President Trump, for so many reasons. But one reason in particular has truly kept us on our toes, and that is his relentless criticism of the press: accusing most of the mainstream news media of reporting "fake news," or lies – and even, since shortly after he took office, calling us "enemies of the American people." Most of us have thick skins, we didn't go into journalism to win a popularity contest, but we are not about making up the news, about fabricating stories. And I am not an enemy of the American people, nor certainly are my colleagues at the NewsHour, nor the reporters I know who work in the so-called mainstream press. On the contrary, I love this country, I am so proud to be an American and I am so grateful to live in the United States of America where the founding fathers made freedom of the press one of the central tenets of the First Amendment to the Constitution.

There's been a lot said and written about President Trump's attacks on the mainstream press. My philosophy from the outset has been that our job is to cover him, to report on what he says and especially what he does; and when necessary, to correct the record, to separate fact from rumor, to stand up for the role of the free press in this country. But NOT to get into a personal back and forth with the President; to challenge him personally. Our job, in my view, and the job of the NewsHour, is to report, period, and as appropriate, to provide analysis and invite others on our air and through our presence digitally and in social media, to express opinion. In the end, it's up to our viewers and readers and followers online to make up their own minds. Not for us to tell them what to think. That makes us a little like dinosaurs in the current very opinionated news environment, but we believe many Americans want exactly that; they don't ALL want opinion, and we believe it's critical to stick to that mission.

It's entirely in the tradition of the NewsHour, as it was founded by Robert MacNeil and Jim Lehrer in 1975, on the heels of the Watergate hearings, and another presidential impeachment process that resulted in President Nixon leaving office, to cover the news straight, without fear or favor; to be a place dedicated to facts, to reporting, to telling the stories of the human condition, as it evolves, to shining a light on place and people that are making a difference in the world, to illuminating injustice and accomplishment around the planet, and beyond, to witness those places where people are tackling tough challenges in ways that benefits humanity. To learning from the mistakes of others.

I view journalism as a public calling, and to me, no place is fulfilling that role more urgently and more importantly today, than public media – public radio through NPR and PRI and other outlets – and public television, through the NewsHour, Frontline, Washington Week in Review, and more.

This is not to say our sisters and brothers in commercial media, in print and on the air, online and in every other imaginable way, aren't doing important work. They are. Thank goodness for

the New York Times, the Washington Post, for the Wall Street Journal, the Associated Press, for the commercial networks and cable channels dedicated to covering the news.

But what sets us apart from our friends in commercial radio and TV is that we are committed to covering the entire country, to covering issues that aren't the "hot" story of the day. We pledge every day to hold up a mirror to our communities, our states, our nation and the world, and to make sure they're not forgotten. The list I mentioned earlier: the economy and business, health care, education, science, the arts, religion, culture, race, and so much more. The mosaic of our lives, that's what we pledge to try to cover every day, every week, year in and year out.

It's what motivates me, what makes me so proud to work at the NewsHour with a team equally dedicated to doing the same thing, and to doing it in ways that reach as many people as possible, where they are, on their TV or their laptop, their smart phone or some other device. Because in the end, we don't have a strong democracy unless people are informed. It's as simple, and as challenging, as that.

Finally, a quick word about the American Archive of Public Broadcasting: I'm incredibly honored to serve as the current chair of the Archive's Executive Advisory Council, which works with the Archive and now, the Library of Congress and WGBH to preserve public media for present and future generations. It is YOUR chair Bruce Ramer, who deserves so much of the credit for coming up with the idea of the need for an entity to preserve the astonishing trove of material that public media have recorded since its founding.

From the earliest public radio programs going back to 1941, early sermons of Dr. Martin Luther King in the 1950's and '60's, MacNeil/Lehrer Reports starting in 1975, programming that originated decades ago from local TV and radio stations around the country, William F. Buckley's Firing Line, which launched in 1966, full interviews conducted for "Eyes on the Prize," Ken Burns' documentaries, American Experience, and on and on.

The primary objective is to preserve public media and assure discoverability and access, and work toward making the material as accessible as possible. There's an elaborate and painstaking process involved of locating the material and getting it into easily accessible form, which AAPB is focused on. What we've learned is that there is so much MORE to be saved than what's already been identified, and we are grateful for the continuing support of CPB to ensure that this critical portion of our national heritage does not disappear.

I will tell you one of the reasons I joined the Advisory Council was because my friend, the late legendary Cokie Roberts of NPR was one of those who talked to me about it and through her passion, got me interested.

It's historic, it's exciting and it wouldn't have happened without the support of CPB. Thank you for all you've done and for all you continue to do.

In closing, I would only note that the 20th century philosopher George Santayana famously said those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it. We may be seeing that in public life today.

But what the archives and PBS offer is corollary: the value of learning from our rich history.

Thank you.