

## ISOJ 2021: Day 5, Keynote Session

### Marty Baron, former executive editor, The Washington Post

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**Chair:** [Kathleen McElroy](#), *director of the School of Journalism and Media, UT Austin*

- [Marty Baron](#), *former executive editor, The Washington Post*

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**Rosental Alves** Hello, good morning, the world. Good morning, America. Good morning, more than 130 countries where we have people registered for ISOJ. I can't believe it is already the last day of the coolest journalism conference in the galaxy and vicinity, like I used to say. But yet here we are, the last day. We have so enjoyed the company of our ISOJ-ers from around the United States, and around the world, and the great presenters. This has already been an ISOJ not like any other. We celebrate the interests of all those 7,300 people who registered for this conference. Thank you, Google News Initiative and Knight Foundation for sponsoring this amazing conference, and a big shout out also to Univision Noticias for sponsoring the Spanish-simultaneous interpretation of ISOJ for the eighth year in a row.

If you want to listen in Spanish, you have to use the little globe on the bottom of the Zoom screen. And of course, we have two feeds for YouTube, one in Spanish and the other in English, the original English. So please continue to follow along with the conversation with the hashtag #ISOJ2021 on Twitter and listen along to our Spotify playlist full of Austin originals. We cannot bring you to Austin, but at least we will give you a little flavor of Austin with some recipes of Tex-Mex food and with this cool playlist.

So now let's get into our fantastic keynote session with Marty Baron, the retired executive editor of The Washington Post, and one of the most celebrated, if it's not the most celebrated, newspaper editor in the United States in the last decade or so. I'm going to invite my colleague and the esteemed director of the School of Journalism and Media at the University of Texas at Austin, Kathleen McElroy, to be the chair of this session. And you can hold your questions until the end because we are going to be accepting those questions in the chat, and Kathleen will pass them on to Marty. So let's go to the keynote session. Thank you.

**Kathleen McElroy** Thank you so much, Rosental, for that introduction, and I am happy to welcome one of the coolest, calmest editors I've ever worked for, Marty Baron. And that cool demeanor that you've seen from him and fictionalized is absolutely true, so he is a cool cat. So you stole my word, Rosental.

So in this introduction, Rosental talked about 130 countries. People from 130 countries are registered to attend this International Symposium of Online Journalism. When you began your career in 1976, if I do the math, that's about 45 years ago, what was international journalism? I mean, there certainly wasn't an online journalism at that point.

**Marty Baron** No there wasn't, but of course a lot of newspapers actually had foreign correspondents, probably more newspapers than had foreign correspondents than have them today. I started my career at the Miami Herald, and the Herald had a number of correspondents, of course, in Latin America. And you even had a correspondent in Jerusalem, and I think one in Europe as well at the time. I'm not entirely sure. The LA Times had an entire network of correspondents around the world, the Baltimore Sun did,

Chicago Tribune. So in a way, that was a period where there was actually more international journalism on the part of US organizations in some areas than there is today. And I don't know about the state of foreign newspapers that had a presence here in the United States. But from the standpoint of American journalism, there was a greater presence, there was a more extensive network of foreign correspondents than there is today.

**Kathleen McElroy** You know, from the standpoint of being a news consumer, I remember if you wanted a German paper, or a French paper, or even a British paper in New York, you had to go to this little bookstore in Times Square to get papers. I feel like as a news consumer now, the world has opened up to me.

**Marty Baron** Well, I think that's right. Certainly for anyone who wants to get news, you can certainly find sources around the world. And fortunately for many Americans who don't speak the languages of those countries, many of those are translated. Not all, and I think we have to keep in mind that we're not necessarily getting a full window on what's happening around the world if we are incapable of actually reading what's being published elsewhere. But certainly we have far more access today than we ever had before, and I think what we're also seeing is a level of cooperation among news organizations around the world that we never had before. And we see that with a number of nonprofits that have organized, for example, investigative enterprises, and just refer to the Panama Papers and things that have followed since then. And so that's encouraging because we can amplify our reporting by working with other news organizations around the world.

**Kathleen McElroy** And you shared a Pulitzer with the US Guardian, so.

**Marty Baron** Well, we both received Pulitzers, but we did not work with The Guardian.

**Kathleen McElroy** Well, I'm sorry.

**Marty Baron** We both received Pulitzers at the same time, but it wasn't a shared Pulitzer. It was a Pulitzer for each of us.

**Kathleen McElroy** That's right. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to mischaracterize that. You were talking about how Miami used to have foreign bureaus, and Baltimore. It seems like the shrinking of American journalism has sort of taken place in what used to be those powerhouse regional papers. How has that affected places like the Washington Post and The New York Times? That loss of that intermediate level? Not loss. I shouldn't say that. They're not completely gone, but.

**Marty Baron** Well, look, I mean, I think it's a loss for the American public, frankly. It's more important than the loss for a news organization like The Washington Post. I think it was really helpful for the Miami Herald to have a bunch of foreign correspondents in Latin America. It was helpful for people in Boston to have foreign correspondents of the Boston Globe, which they had about half a dozen when I got there, but unfortunately, we couldn't afford to sustain that any longer. But also from the standpoint of news organizations like The Washington Post and I think The New York Times, those regional publications tended to be the source and sort of supplied foreign correspondents essentially to the bigger newspapers. So when The Post and The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal were looking for reporters who had experience overseas, they tended to look at a lot of those regional papers and their foreign correspondents. Now, that's generally not available to us, and so we look to people internally who simply have an interest and a facility for foreign

correspondence. We look to people who've been freelancers around the world. Sometimes we look to people who have worked for news organizations elsewhere in the world as well.

**Kathleen McElroy** Yeah. So, you know, given that, let's say I have a 21-year-old student who wants to be the next Marty Baron. Would that student's career be decidedly different from yours?

**Marty Baron** Oh, yeah, I think absolutely there's a good chance that it will be. You know, I mean, in my time there was a basic track if you wanted to be in metropolitan reporting, sort of working for a large metropolitan newspaper. You started at a small newspaper or started in a small bureau for a regional newspaper. And then you work your way up, and that's how it worked. I started in the town of Stuart, Florida, in 1976, working for the Miami Herald. The town had 12-thousand people, and the county had 50-thousand people. We had two of us working at the bureau. We had to produce a page six days a week, take our own photographs, and that's classically how people started their careers.

Now I think there are many more avenues that are open to people, and a lot of those avenues that existed for me are not available. So a place like the Miami Herald doesn't have those bureaus anymore, and it employs far fewer people. And that's true of regional papers and local papers all around the country. But we do have a sort of the development of a lot of online operations that didn't exist before. So Politico, and Axios, and nonprofit operations and things like that. And so, you know, those present opportunities for Chalkbeat, and in the area of education, for example, a bunch of them like that. And so those present opportunities for people that didn't exist before and allows people, let's say, if you're interested in covering politics in Washington, that you can actually get to Washington probably more quickly today, or politics here, than you would previously.

**Kathleen McElroy** So when you were in Stuart, Florida, all those many years ago, did you see yourself having the career you ended up with?

**Marty Baron** No, I mean, I had no idea. I mean, I was just happy to be employed, frankly. I mean, it was coming out of a recession in the United States in 1976. I felt lucky that I had a job, and I anticipated being a reporter for a long period of time. I didn't know exactly what direction I would be going in, but I didn't really have a longer-term vision for where I might end up. I certainly aspired at one point to be, you know, an editor of a paper. I'd been editor of my high school paper. I'd been editor of my college paper. And so, you know, I had liked that role, but I had no idea whether that was in store for me or not.

**Kathleen McElroy** You know, this is you're talking about editing, and it seems like that's one area that even at the larger publications, the pure copy editor position seems less robust than it was back in the day.

**Marty Baron** Well, that's true. You know, a lot of newspapers have eliminated their copy desks or sharply scaling back. We have not done that. We have not done that at The Washington Post. I very much believe in the copy desks, and the role of the copy desk, and the importance for having additional reads on stories. To look at those stories not only for the use of the English language, but more importantly, looking at issues of logic, tone, fairness, things of that sort, and sort of a higher level of editing. And it is the last line of defense for us. And I think there needs to be a last line of defense, and they save us from both error and embarrassment. And so I very much believe in it, and I would be very concerned if it did not exist. And I'm proud that at The Washington Post, while I was there, we were able to maintain a copy desk, and a good, a really good one.

**Kathleen McElroy** Oh, yes. It's a fabulous desk. I want to go back to talking about your career a little bit. You've worked at nearly all the top newspapers in the U.S. And in fact, the editor of your forthcoming book said you had an "unparalleled career." I think he meant it in a positive way though.

**Marty Baron** Yes, it could be interpreted in multiple ways.

**Kathleen McElroy** But you were at L.A., Miami, New York Times, Boston, Washington Post. There are people who started off at those publications, who were at those publications when you were there, and they're still there. Yet you've moved on to all these other places. I mean, what has it meant to come to these newsrooms and almost be an outsider going into them, not having that insider cultural knowledge?

**Marty Baron** Yeah, look, I mean, many of the people have stayed at these other news organizations. That's great. I mean, they love where they live. They love the paper they work for. They've done well at those news organizations. I think that's a good option for people who wish to do that. For me, my opportunities were in moving and moving elsewhere, and I was willing to do so.

I did come in as an outsider in many of the places, particularly in Boston, at The New York Times, too. I think sometimes at The New York Times, when you arrive there, it's as if you've never worked anywhere else before, and that people don't necessarily recognize your achievements at other news organizations. And, you know, at the Post, I mean, I knew maybe two dozen people at the Post because it was such a destination for journalists. But I was certainly new to the organization, and had not grown up in Washington, had not been a creature of Washington. In Boston, I was, more than anywhere else, I was an outsider. I really didn't know anybody in town except one couple. The husband, I had worked with previously at the L.A. Times years earlier. And I didn't know anybody in the newsroom. And, you know, that's a challenge for anybody who's coming in as an editor because you have to establish yourself with the staff. You have to establish yourself in the community. You have to establish yourself with the people on the business side who are not familiar with you as well. I think it's a challenge, but it's also an opportunity. It's an opportunity to look at things with fresh eyes and to see things that perhaps other people didn't see simply because they were so immersed in that community. And maybe they took some things for granted, or felt that, you know, that some certain stories were unachievable when in fact, they turned out to be achievable.

**Kathleen McElroy** I'm thinking of the work you did in Boston there specifically. So that's a great way to look at it, because you do worry about things. And I think that's an issue for smaller publications, too, sometimes. Can you fight the power of a town, a community? So we're talking about newsrooms and workplace culture. Could you talk about the decision to make a managing editor position for diversity, equity and inclusion, and which I'm proud to say is held by a UT graduate, Krissah Thompson, the inaugural position. Talk about the process of why you decided it was time for that?

**Marty Baron** Well, of course, we wouldn't have given it to anybody but a UT graduate. In any event, look, I mean, after the killing of George Floyd, there was a reckoning in this country over race. There was a reckoning in our own newsroom and a reckoning for myself. And so there was a strong sentiment, totally understandable, that we had not done enough with regard to diversity and inclusion and equity in our own newsroom, that we needed to make far more rapid progress on diversifying staff, but in particular diversifying

the leadership of the newsroom. And also related to that, and importantly, that we needed to make sure that we were covering the stories that would reflect the concerns and aspirations of individuals who were in marginalized communities, and communities that had been historically underserved by journalistic institutions, including our own.

So there was this reckoning. And so we felt that many people on the staff made clear they felt we had conversations about this before, not only within our own news organization, but within journalism generally, and that it was time for concrete steps. And we agreed that it was time for concrete steps and not just to have a bunch of conversations. And so we moved very quickly to take those concrete steps. We set aside twelve positions, ten of them were new, two were redeployed, as I recall, and for coverage of race, ethnicity and identity. And that included a managing editor for diversity and inclusion who would have primary responsibility for recruiting a more diverse staff, retaining the staff we had, making sure that people have the advancement opportunities that that they needed, and also, very importantly, that we were engaged in the kind of coverage that we should have. And Krissah also is involved in reviewing many of those stories, all those stories essentially, that touch on issues of race, ethnicity and identity.

**Kathleen McElroy** You know, given that there was this reckoning on many levels and COVID exposed so much inequity, obviously, from the time you started, do you see papers now, or media in general, being more anti-racist? I'm not getting into the objectivity debate or anything like that, but do you think there is this kind of sense that there needs to be more than just reporting? Which there always should have been more than that, I guess.

**Marty Baron** Well, maybe you can explain to me what do you mean by "more anti-racist"?

**Kathleen McElroy** Oh, yeah. So I was just hearing you talk and it made me think about it. For instance, a lot of our students want to make sure that the journalism that we do is not only good journalism, but it's journalism that does good. You know, and it's not just saying, here's what's out here in the world. You know, we give you this. But can a news media be anti-racist and still maintain all the integrity of journalism? And this is just totally philosophical.

**Marty Baron** it's hard for me to address in the abstract, but I think that we as journalists, our obligation, our mission, is to give people the information that they need and deserve to know in order to be engaged citizens. And we have to reflect what's happening in all communities, and reflect it honestly and honorably and accurately. And that we need to hold power to account to ensure that certain values are upheld. One of those values happens to be tolerance. Another one happens to be equity. And I think that we need to go about our job with a level of empathy as well, meaning that we actually listen to people and hear what they're saying and take that into it account in our reporting, take that very much into account in our reporting. And so I think, look, I mean, I think if anybody who looks at the history of journalism, we'll see that there have been any number of failures. But there also have been many great successes that we cannot forget, that journalism has done a lot of good and has made a big difference in this country. I think it's not an exaggeration to say that journalism sustained democracy in this country and has shined a light on areas where society needed to pay greater attention, including the issues of equity.

**Kathleen McElroy** Which makes me think of the motto that you came up with. So on a completely lighter note. So you're executive editor. You're dealing with presidents. You're dealing with wars. You're dealing with all this stuff. How do you also work in the little things that people might take little daily pleasures from? I'm thinking of, like I love reading Carolyn

Hax in The Washington Post, and I love the fact that The Post has comics, which are actually in color online. I love that. Are those things that you you still have to be cognizant of and even proactive?

**Marty Baron** Yes, as a matter of fact, I mean, I think that's something that we've paid a lot of attention to at the Post is how do we spread our wings? How do we become more a part of people's lives and recognize that people's lives involve a lot more than politics and government? I mean, clearly, politics and government is at the center of what The Washington Post does, and it's incredibly important. And it's an area of intense interest for a huge segment of the population, but people's lives are much broader than that, thankfully. And so we want to make sure that we're part of that. I mean, we've expanded, for example, our recipes, our food offerings, with something called Voraciously, which has done quite well. We hired for a position, just before I left, for a position to archive Carolyn Hax's columns because I want to look back. We wanted to do that for a very long time. I think it is important that we started, you know, a section of the post on E-games and video gaming and all of that. And we need to recognize that people's lives are a lot broader than just coverage of whoever happens to be in the administration and happens to be in the White House.

**Kathleen McElroy** And that is a way, you know, to build loyal reader engagement. I mean, you know, I'm also a big fan of Spelling Bee in The New York Times, and I know all kinds of people addicted.

**Marty Baron** Sure. Well, The New York Times has put a big emphasis on games of that sort, sort of brain games, I guess. And they've also obviously invested heavily in their food app, and they've invested in their crossword puzzle. And those were good moves on their part. That's something that we at the Post have given a lot of thought to, and we'll see how that evolves.

**Kathleen McElroy** By the way, if you're a fan of biscuits, Voraciously did an incredible biscuit slideshow that I printed out, just because it was so cool.

**Marty Baron** I cook, but I never bake.

**Kathleen McElroy** That's funny. I don't bake either, but I do watch the "Great British Baking Show" or "The Bake Off."

And actually, until you decided to write this book, you had time for the first time in 40-something years?

**Marty Baron** Well, I had time. Now, I don't anymore, working on this book. But yeah, I at least have more freedom of movement and just sort of greater liberty in my personal life and more time to do what I want when I want to. The book will consume a fair amount of time, of course, but I have greater flexibility.

**Kathleen McElroy** I'm waiting for that moment myself. So we actually have some questions already from people who are watching. And one, and I don't know where this person is from, asks what are the characteristics that you think make for a good foreign correspondent?

**Marty Baron** Well, I think it's obviously many of the characteristics that make for a good journalist, and that is somebody who is just curious, who is intellectually curious, who can

observe what's happening and understand the bigger implications of it. Somebody who obviously is willing to dive into subjects with which they're not necessarily immediately familiar and being in a constant learning mode and a good listener. And someone who is intrepid, obviously, who's going to be working really hard at it and who will also recognize who their audience is. So, you know, for our foreign correspondents, they're pretty much writing for a U.S. audience, certainly an English-speaking audience. And so, you know, it's important that our foreign correspondents write not just for the audience of the country that they're covering, but that they write for the audience that is going to be reading their work and sort of provide the kind of context and interpretation that allows people who have not been following these stories to really understand what's going on and what they mean and what the bigger meaning is. And also to just humanize these things. I mean, I think most individuals can identify with other human beings, and so to the extent that you can tell these stories through human beings, that's always the lives of ordinary human beings, that's really helpful.

**Kathleen McElroy** You know, even when I started in the 80s or 90s, I can't remember probably the 80s, the foreign correspondents were in Belgium and in France and in England. And there's still some of that now, but can you talk about the shift of really trying to put correspondents in the spots that are relevant to today?

**Marty Baron** Well, it seems like everything's relevant these days. News of consequence to us in the United States and consequence to the wider world can happen anywhere at any time. At the Post, we've tried to expand our coverage in certain conflict zones because we've been a country at war for a long period of time. And there are also important conflicts that don't directly involve the United States that have significant international consequences. But we've also expanded our staff in Latin America. We've expanded our staff in Asia. And I would expect that over time the Post will continue to do that. And we've expanded in Africa as well, I should mention. So it's important for the Post and other news organizations to recognize that we can't just be Eurocentric. It's really important to recognize that we're part of a much bigger world than that.

**Kathleen McElroy** We have a question actually about Latin America. And I know you're fluent in Spanish and were in Miami, but it says here that in many Latin American countries, the credibility of the media has lost much ground. How are public policies promoted to safeguard the quality of journalism? I guess this is in Latin American media. Is it important that there are legal frameworks that do not have these regulations only to the laws of the market?

**Marty Baron** Not sure I fully understand the question,

**Kathleen McElroy** Let me try to rephrase this. I guess the question is, are there public policies that could safeguard the quality of journalism, in Latin American countries?

**Marty Baron** Well, you know, I mean, I think there are public policies that could be helpful. One is that the governments could be more open. You know, depending on which country you're talking about, you have different degrees of problems between the press and the government. And in some places, there's just tremendous repression of the press, and in other places there is more indirect obstruction of the press. And I think that it's always helpful for the governments to be more open about what they're actually doing. I think that shining a light on government is the obligation of the press, and government can help in that regard. You know what the government can do with regard to disinformation and misinformation? I think we have to be really careful that we not have the government be

deciding what's true and false. Because under certain governments, they'll simply decide what's true is what serves their interests, and what's false is what is in conflict with their own individual political interests. And so I think we have to be super careful about that.

**Kathleen McElroy** Now, I would agree. Here's another question about American coverage of international news. It says here that it seems that American news media coverage on international news is always under the spell of two taken-for-granted ideologies, American exceptionalism and anticommunism. Mr. Baron, very formal, do you agree? And do you think it can change? But I guess the first question is, do you even agree that those have been the two ideologies of international coverage.

**Marty Baron** Anticommunism and American exceptionalism? Maybe they were at one time, but I don't think that's been the case for quite some time. I don't think that this notion of American exceptionalism is generally accepted among much of the press. I mean, any of the press that's actually been around the world and has traveled around the world knows that we're not as exceptional as perhaps we've imagined, and certainly even less so given what has transpired over the last four years. So with regard to communism, there really isn't much. I mean, I think if you go back to the Cold War, that was probably the case. But I don't think that there is like this worry about communism around the world in the same way that there was at one time in the United States, and I don't think that the American press is motivated by that at all.

**Kathleen McElroy** The relationships with China and Russia tend to be in flux.

**Marty Baron** I don't think that has to do with communism.

**Kathleen McElroy** No, not at all with communism.

**Marty Baron** That has to do with authoritarianism.

**Kathleen McElroy** So exactly. No, that's what I meant, so thank you for clarifying that. So here's a question. It says critics, and not just on the right, have said that mainstream news organizations like the Post have, despite all efforts, lost their objectivity while covering the paradigm-breaking Trump administration. So that's a statement. You can disagree with that. The main question is, what did you learn from the past four years?

**Marty Baron** Look, I mean, I think we did fulfill our mission in terms of telling what was actually happening in their government. That's our obligation, is to tell the public what is happening. I mean, much of what the public knows about the Trump administration was because of the work of The Washington Post, The New York Times, a number of other news organizations. Good investigative work that held the administration to account. It wasn't that he was breaking a paradigm. It's that in many instances he was breaking rules and norms of a democracy. That's not the paradigm. That was the problem. It was our obligation to show that if that was occurring, and in fact, it was. And so I don't believe that that is some offense that we committed in any way. I think that was actually a fulfillment of our obligation as journalists is to tell the public, tell citizens what's happening in their own government. They can decide what to do with that information, but it's our obligation to tell them what's happening.

**Kathleen McElroy** OK, here's a question that I'm going to ask you, but I don't know if you're going to answer it. But I will ask anyway. Can you talk about your relationship with Jeff Bezos and the influence in the digital transformation of The Washington Post?



**Marty Baron** My relationship with Jeff was good. It was on a professional basis. We had a professional relationship. He is the owner of The Washington Post. Obviously, it was important for me to have a good professional relationship with him. I was always pleased that he never interfered in our journalism, not once. Not in any stories about Amazon. Not in any stories about himself. Not in any story about anything, for that matter. Not in any story about the Trump administration, which put enormous pressure on him because of the reporting of The Washington Post, threatening to quadruple U.S. postal rates, interfering in the award of the JEDI contract for the Defense Department, a cloud-computing contract, and then publicly condemning him and The Washington Post. And so, you know, my relationship with him was terrific. I think that he helped transform The Washington Post. I don't think that we would have been the success we were without his involvement here. He provided investment. He provided strategy. He provided good ideas. He was able to look at the industry in a fresh way that was different from pretty much any other owner or publisher I'd ever dealt with. And throughout he's been supportive of our journalistic mission and has never interfered with it, and in fact, has supported it quite publicly.

**Kathleen McElroy** And it almost seems like it's a bit like, and I don't mean to downplay it, but the NFL. Now let's find other great billionaire owners to take a role in journalism.

**Marty Baron** First of all, there aren't enough billionaire owners who want to buy newspapers. You know, there's an old line, what do you call a billionaire who bought a media company? A millionaire. So, you know, first of all, there aren't enough of them. And those that exist are not necessarily interested in owning media outlets. And not all of them would be good owners just because you're a billionaire. And by the way, Bezos didn't treat us as a charity. I mean, it's not like he just threw money at us. He insisted that we be operating as a business, and we've been profitable for whatever it is, a half-dozen years or so. And so we were able to take our profits and reinvest them in the company, and that made all the difference. That made all the difference in the world. He obviously doesn't need the dividends, so that was extremely helpful. But it was very important that he shifted our strategy to make us a national publication, rather than one with a focus on our local market. And in a very disciplined way, he made investments in our staff that were in service of that strategy. It wasn't just a matter of throwing money at us, and we were always operated as a business and not as a charity. And frankly, I'm very glad for that, because if we had been operated as a charity and at some point he got tired of that charity, then we would be left with an unsustainable business. And that would be a really bad outcome. It's important, and I think he felt it was important, and it certainly was important, that we use this opportunity to create a sustainable business, one that could endure whether he's involved with it or not.

**Kathleen McElroy** I think that's a lesson that many non-profits are trying to balance. You know, the idea of sustainability. This was a related question. How do you think serious journalism like The Washington Post can survive a social media world full of misinformation, extreme opinions and sensationalism? How have you survived? Because you have survived.

**Marty Baron** Well, I do think that there's a large segment of the American population that is looking for credible information. And I think the more that social media is sort of flooded with misinformation and disinformation, the more that at least a certain segment of the population will be looking to support news organizations like ours and others as well. And so I think we survive by doing our job and doing it well, and not losing sight of what our

mission is. And that is to in a very determined way, get the facts, put them in proper context, and tell the public in an unflinching way and an honest way what we have learned.

**Kathleen McElroy** Here is someone who has a question about editorial boards, how they seem to be much bolder and more aggressive in the past, and they're less so. So I guess it's a question of do you think editorial departments at major newspapers are still effective at highlighting issues in the country? And again, I see this interesting difference between what The Post and The New York Times can do and what regional papers can do with the editorial boards.

**Marty Baron** Yeah, I mean, I don't think that's the case on the editorial page of The New York Times and The Washington Post. They are forthright in their opinions and have had very strong opinions, particularly about, well, a variety of issues. A lot of local newspapers seem to have scaled back their editorial boards and their editorials. They're concerned about offending people. And in some instances, they've actually eliminated editorials so as to send the signal that they don't have any opinions, so that they don't come under attack from their readership. I understand the motivation. I don't agree with the result. I do think it's important for local news organizations as well as national ones to provide thought leadership that's important in this country and not to withdraw out of timidity and fear.

**Kathleen McElroy** The next question is from someone who loves the great work done at the Spanish-language Post podcast, El Post, and says Washington Post also has opinion in Spanish. Can you tell us about other plans The Washington Post might have for Spanish-language journalism?

**Marty Baron** Well, we did launch those two things. I launched the podcast and the opinion staff launched the opinions in Spanish, and we've expanded the podcast from twice a week to four days a week. And it's doing well. It's growing. And the same, I believe, is true of the opinions in Spanish. I think the Post is likely to give those two initiatives time to play out before it makes additional investments. I do think there is likely to be increasing translations of stories and that the Post will be doing that more frequently. And I think it already is. But I'm not aware of any particular initiative as of today that would go beyond what the Post is currently doing. I mean, it's possible that over time, you know, that the podcast will be five days a week, but we very quickly expanded from two to four days a week. I think those are two important initiatives, and we'll have to see where it goes from there.

**Kathleen McElroy** Did you have a particular hand in that because of your interest in Spanish language?

**Marty Baron** I did. In the podcast, I did. And I was a little bit involved on the opinion side, but not very much. Those were two sort of parallel efforts. But I did feel that we did talk to a number of people, many of whom I already knew, to get their advice on how we might get into the Spanish-language market and what would be the best way to do it. And we concluded that a podcast would be a very good way. Podcasts are still in their nascent stage in Latin America. We thought it could be helpful to be in at the early stage, establish ourselves, and that we also had the right people who could be hosts for that podcast. And we do. And so one is in Colombia, and one is in Washington, and one is in Spain. And they have a terrific podcast, and it's been doing quite well. And yes, I was involved in selecting those people, and in talking through what we might do and in deciding that we were going to take the podcast approach.

**Kathleen McElroy** We have another question from Mexico. It says, "greetings from Mexico." What would be the current challenges in a newsroom and advice to face them? I'm not sure if it means any newsroom or a newsroom in particular in Mexico.

**Marty Baron** The challenges in a newsroom.

**Kathleen McElroy** Yes.

**Marty Baron** Well, there's so many different. We're in an environment that there's just so many. You know, I mean, obviously we're operating under greater speed. I think it's really important that we make sure that we're accurate and fair as we work at a greater speed. There are all sorts of new metrics that are being applied to newsrooms that we never experienced before. There are, you know, issues of social media use that clearly there needs to be standards or practices that everybody can agree upon. And that in itself is a challenge. I think there is a challenge, which we talked about earlier, of making sure that we cover all people in our communities and our country, make sure that everybody is fairly and accurately and honestly represented in our coverage. So there are just so many areas to think about. I'm not sure I know how to address each and every one.

**Kathleen McElroy** That's a whole other book.

Some more questions. And this is from Tom Rosenstiel. I'm sure you know him. If you had to pick one thing you did at the Post that made the most difference, or one message you sent to the staff, what would that be? And he admits maybe not a fair question, but try to pick one.

**Marty Baron** Sure. Yes. Well, I know, Tom. We worked together at the L.A. Times, way back when. I think I pushed for more accountability journalism, more enterprise, particularly more investigative enterprise. We significantly expanded our investigative staff. We doubled the size of it. We more than doubled the size of it. We've continued to add to it. We created a so-called rapid response investigative team, which had, I think, a significant impact. For example, it did a variety of work that was really important, including work on Project Veritas and related to the Roy Moore case and what have you. It has been involved in a lot of signature work. But also the longer-term investigative team. And then we've planted investigative reporters throughout the newsroom in each department. There's a whole set of them. Now in the sports department, I believe we have now two investigative reporter working in the sports department and an editor who is focused on enterprise. So that's something that I felt the Post needed to do. I think that's very much a part of its heritage, going back to Watergate. I think that is the identity of The Washington Post in the minds of the public, even among people who have never read it before. And so I think we made sure to sort of reinforce that spirit within the Post newsroom.

**Kathleen McElroy** And you certainly succeeded. So here is a question. These are all questions. I'm sorry. What's your idea on how to incorporate a sense of "on the field" into international journalism, while a lot of foreign correspondents posts are being cut off? Japanese media outlets are facing the same situation except for Washington and Beijing. So I guess it's a question of how can you cover international when there are fewer people out in these countries? How well can you cover them?

**Marty Baron** Well, particularly in China, yeah. I mean the Post was pushed out of China as a purported retaliation for what the US government under Trump did with individuals who had the title of being journalists here in the United States but the U.S. government

alleged were not actually journalists. So, you know, it's hard. I mean, I think it's really hard to cover a country without being there. It's hard enough while being there, given that it's an entire country and you're only one or two individuals in that country, maybe with a research staff as well. You know, I mean, I think our reporters have sources there. They certainly can read local media to the extent that that's helpful. Some of them still have researchers in those countries that can do some of the legwork. But it's exceptionally difficult. And, you know, it's far from the ideal, that's for sure.

**Kathleen McElroy** There's another question about the low pay for journalists. You know, what's your take on one of the major failures of the job market for journalism?

**Marty Baron** Well, it kind of depends where you are. You know, I would say at the Post, we don't suffer from low pay. It isn't low paid work at The New York Times, or at The Washington Post, or at many other places. In fact, it depends where you're working. If you're a reporter at CNN or you're on air at CNN or on NBC, you're a journalist, and you can be pretty highly compensated. And I know of many, many highly compensated journalists. But if you're at a local newspaper, then the pay is likely to be pretty low. I don't know what one can do about that. I mean, the reality is that these organizations' revenues have declined over the years and many of them are paying what they can afford. And then there are the outfits like some of these hedge funds that have bought news organizations that are just trying to squeeze the life out of them. I don't know that anybody can really do anything about it, frankly. I mean, obviously, you have unions at many of these organizations, but there's bound to be a limit because the limit is going to be imposed by the revenue that's available to pay people. And that's going to be the limit. As well as providing a profit margin, some sort of profit margin, that allows you to invest in things that you need to invest in that are separate and apart from wages, including technology that you need. And for most ownership, they'll want a return on their investment as well. And you know what can be done about it? Honestly, I don't know.

**Kathleen McElroy** What do you think of the rise of fellowships and almost apprenticeships in journalism? Again, it's not people who will be going to The Washington Post, per say, but, you know, there's Report for America and other operations like that as training grounds for journalists.

**Marty Baron** Sure. Well, I mean, I've been very supportive of Report for America with Steve Waldman and Charles Sennott. Charlie is a former colleague of mine at the Boston Globe. Steve, I've known for quite a while as well. I think that's great. They're growing, and I've been supportive of that. I happen to be on the board of the Knight Foundation, and I've been very supportive of that organization as well as other fellowships. I think it's really a great way to go. I think that it allows people to get the training that they need. It gives local news organizations some of the very talented staff that they need as well. And it seems to be working quite well, and I would hope to see that expanded. So I'm encouraged by that.

**Kathleen McElroy** Here's a question on how digital media impacts news coverage, especially international coverage? I'm not quite sure if the person means digital media companies or just the fact that we're in a 24/7 environment internationally.

**Marty Baron** I'm sorry, but what is the question?

**Kathleen McElroy** How do you see digital media impacting news coverage, especially international coverage?

**Marty Baron** I'm not sure that it has any particular impact on international coverage that's different from the way that it has an impact on coverage generally. Clearly, it's going to have to be 24 hours a day. There'll be immediacy. There'll be some level of aggregation, looking at what local news outlets are providing and aggregating that if they're reliable sources, and communicating that information to the public as quickly as possible. I'm not sure I have any great insight into any other differences?

**Kathleen McElroy** Well, here are some questions about business models. One is from a data analyst in Mexico City, Emiliano Fernandez says, "Marty, you said in an interview with The New Yorker, quote, 'We didn't give it away for free,' meaning information, 'and people didn't expect us to give it away for free.'" How have you and the analytical team approach making the content for subscribers, and what was your main goal with the paywall model?

**Marty Baron** Our view has been that it costs us money to do the kind of high-caliber journalism and that therefore people should pay for it, that it was fundamentally a mistake not to charge for it in the beginning. And as Jeff Bezos just said, it was all a big misunderstanding. And we need to explain that to people. And clearly, the advertising market simply doesn't pay the bills, and ever less so because ad rates tend to go down and because the volume of advertising is drying up, because so much of it is going to the tech platforms. So we need to earn revenue somewhere in order to pay people, and where we need to earn it is from subscribers. And we need to get people to recognize that news and information can no longer be free, that you have to pay for that in the same way that you pay for a bottle of water or you pay for a cup of coffee or anything else for that matter. I mean, there's no reason that we should be free and everything else everybody should pay for. And so we force people to pay for it, and we tell them that they can only read a certain number of stories for free. We have tightened our paywall considerably over the years, and that's had a big impact. The trade is that we provide information and news that people consider to be of high value and that they're willing to pay for and that they're willing to support the kind of work we do. And they think that the work that we do is important. And so they are willing to pay for us, and want to pay for us, and want to support what we do. The reality is there's no other option. Because if you want to pay for a reporting staff, staff of copy editors, a staff of editors of any type, photographers, videographers, graphics artists, animators, whatever, then you need income coming in. And so we need to depend on the subscriber to pay for it. And the reality is that even in the days when we charged for the print newspaper, when people were paying for the print newspaper, which they still do, the price never fully reflected the costs of the newsroom. It was a tiny fraction of it because we depended so heavily on advertising. But now customers are going to have to pay the freight.

**Kathleen McElroy** Two more business related questions. One from Cindy Royal, the fabulous pioneering professor at Texas State. She says what should journalism schools be doing to support careers in news products? Because she says, you know, the Post launched positions in product management. And an almost related question is, is it important that journalistic managers deal with business models today? Do you see risk? So one is about, you know, journalism schools teaching news products, and another one is that should managers in the newsroom be thinking about business models?

**Marty Baron** Right. Well, you know, we do have product managers at the Post, a certain type, and they tend to be on the business side. But we work very closely with them. And so it hasn't been my responsibility to train product managers or cultivate a core of product managers. On the other hand, there are some people in the newsroom who decide to

move in that direction, and they like that kind of work. And we always encouraged it if they wanted to move in that direction.

**Kathleen McElroy** She's actually asking about news products. I guess news product development. Is that still on the business side?

**Marty Baron** Well, it's a collaborative process. We have certain people in the newsroom who would take charge of that. They would be our representatives, and there would be people from technology. There would be people from marketing. There would be people from a variety of different departments, advertising as well, if it needed to be advertising supported, which it often does. And typically there would be somebody designated as the manager of that product to bring everybody together and make sure that we are sticking to the timetable that we need to stick to, and to make sure that everything gets done that needs to get done. That often would be somebody on the business side who would do that. So as far as editors being involved in the business side, particularly the top editor, it's inevitable that you will be. Somebody needs to be a bridge to the people on the business side. Somebody needs to talk to the advertising department. Somebody needs to talk to the marketing department. Somebody needs to deal with a publisher. Somebody needs to keep in mind that we, at least at a place like The Washington Post, we are a business, and that we are not going to have the resources we need to practice journalism unless we are successful as a business. And so somebody needs to be in a position where we're making sure that we do what's necessary for the success of our business, but that also we make sure that we protect the integrity of our journalism at the same time. And my view is that if we don't protect the integrity of our journalism, then we're not going to have a successful business either. So I think it's absolutely unavoidable. It's essential. And it's important that whoever is the top editor recognizes that, and accepts it, and does it well.

**Kathleen McElroy** Well. Marty, thank you so much. This has been insightful. You've answered a lot of questions patiently, and I can't wait to read your book, which is titled Collision of Power: Trump, Bezos and The Washington Post. So I guess you're now working on this bad boy?

**Marty Baron** I'm working it away. It'll be a while before it's finished up. I need time.

**Kathleen McElroy** Well in the meantime, thank you so much for your contributions to journalism.

**Marty Baron** Well, thank you, Kathleen. Great seeing you.

**Kathleen McElroy** And thank you, everyone, for watching this keynote and sharing your questions and your comments with us.

**Rosental Alves** Thank you so much. This was a great conversation. You know, Kathleen is right. Lots of insights, and I learned a lot, as I do every time I talk to Marty, and I have had this privilege for about 20 years. So it is great to see you, and I'm looking forward to reading your book. OK, thank you.

So, guys, we have to continue now with ISOJ, the last day of ISOJ. So if you want to continue this conversation, go to the wonder room. The link will be in the chat here. And we are getting ready. In about half an hour, we're going to start with our workshop, How to Work Toward a News Ecosystem That Cleanly Separates News From Opinion. I think this is a very important workshop that reflects the very interesting work that people from CUNY

and other universities have been doing. So I look forward to having this workshop in half an hour. So before that, you can go to the Wonder Room and continue the conversation. Thank you very much. See you soon. Bye.