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CHANGING LANES ON THE INSIDE TRACK

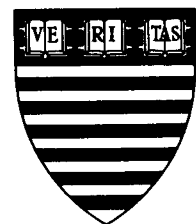
The Career Shuttle Between Journalism, Politics and Government

By James McEnteer

Discussion Paper D-8
May 1991

The Joan Shorenstein Barone Center

PRESS · POLITICS



· PUBLIC POLICY ·

Harvard University
John F. Kennedy School of Government

Introduction

Anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and most other social scientists are engaged, broadly speaking, in the process of trying to understand and to explain some social phenomenon. In doing so, however, they face a dilemma that has dominated much of the literature of the philosophy and methodology of the social sciences. This dilemma, which we might call the dilemma of distance, is that of the continuing tension between the advantages and disadvantages of inside information.

One of the traditions in the social sciences is the *verstehen* tradition, associated with Max Weber, Wilhelm Dilthey, Heinrich Rickert, and Peter Winch, among others, pursuant to which the task of the investigator is to attempt to see a social practice as it is seen by participants in that practice. Thus it is not sufficient as an explanation to describe the outward manifestations of someone else's actions, for according to this tradition we can explain and understand only if we know the motives and beliefs underlying those actions. Only by seeing the point of view of those whose practices we wish to explain can we offer what Weber referred to as "interpretive understanding."

This method, however, is not without its difficulties. The more the investigator attempts to gain this insider understanding, the more the investigator is likely to become internally and externally associated with the objects of the investigation, possibly jeopardizing the presumably advantageous distance that makes investigation desirable in the first place. As Juergen Habermas has noted, for example, insider understanding may require participation, or belonging, but the attitude of belonging may be sufficiently normative that the investigator is no longer just describing, but justifying as well.

Moreover, it may be a mistake to assume that there is anything more "real" about insider understanding. To be an insider is to have a perspective, and to see the world in one among a number of possible ways. Just as outsiders may undervalue the explanatory importance of an institution as seen by insiders, so too may those insiders overvalue the explanatory importance of their own likely justificatory perspective. Especially when an institution is located within a larger domain, insider knowledge potentially ignores the function that the institution serves within society. Just as there is more to the institution of baseball than what we can learn from players alone, so too are we limited in our understanding of the institution of law in society if we talk to and listen only to lawyers, and much the same applies by trying to glean a total understanding of government by talking only to public officials, or a total understanding of the role of the press by talking only to journalists. The perspective of the insider is just that—a perspective—perhaps ideally considered along with outside perspectives as well if we want to approach a deeper understanding.

Despite the frequency with which the problem is discussed, social scientists have obtained no easy solution to the dilemma. They recognize both the advantages and disadvantages of insider information and insider explanations, and much of the history of the philosophy of the social sciences is a continuing attempt at reconciliation of these competing goals.

As explainers of the world, and more particularly often as explainers of government, journalists face virtually the identical dilemma. On the one hand explanation is impoverished insofar as it is not sufficiently based on insider information and the point of view of the insider. But to get that point of view may require the journalist to become such an insider herself or himself that competing goals of detachment and objectivity may be sacrificed. Can insider information and the insider perspective be obtained in such a way that the journalist does not become part of the very enterprise whose evaluation and criticism is almost definitional of the job? If the journalist stands outside looking in, some understanding will be lost, but if the journalist is inside with those whose activities are under scrutiny, is there a risk that explanation will turn into justification, and criticism will become apology?

This unavoidable tension within journalism and all of the other explanatory professions has recently been the subject of frequent and occasionally heated discussion among journalists, particularly in the context of journalists who have been or become governmental officials, and conversely in the context of governmental officials who become journalists. This blurring of functions is the subject of the following study by James McEnteer, author of a forthcoming book on iconoclastic journalists in Texas, conducted in 1990 while he was a Fellow at the Joan Shorenstein Barone Center on the Press,

Politics and Public Policy. McEnteer illuminates our understanding of the problem by providing a useful series of case studies, an engaging collection of comments by those who have been at the center of these controversies about dual roles, an insightful analysis of the issues, and an articulate argument for recognizing the advantages of what some have seen only as a conflict of interest. His study will be of great assistance not only to journalists and policymakers themselves, but also to those who study journalism and policymaking, and to those who in other parts of the social sciences confront the problems I described above.

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CHANGING LANES ON THE INSIDE TRACK
The Career Shuttle Between Journalism, Politics and Government

At a National Press Club dinner in November, 1988, *Washington Post* columnist David Broder sounded an alarm about what he called the "Androgynous Political Insiders." Broder thinks this "new hybrid creature" that he sees proliferating in Washington is "blurring the lines between journalism on one side, and politics and government on the other."

"We all know them," said Broder. "The journalists who go into government and become State Department or White House officials, and then come back as editors or columnists...One day, he or she is a public official or political operative; the next, a journalist or television commentator. Then they slip into the phone booth and emerge in their original guise."

Broder sees the increasing traffic between the two professions as dangerous. The public may become confused by these sudden role changes. They could grow to resent the power of journalists they did not elect and cannot vote out of office. Such attitudes exist already, but the "revolving door" could aggravate them. It would also exacerbate the "insidious inhibition of intimacy" for journalists, who already live on the same social and financial level as the individuals they cover. Broder believes that if the lines between the professions blur, journalists might lose not only their distinct identities, but also the special privileges granted them under the Constitution.[1]

Recently Jules Witcover seconded Broder's worry about "revolving-door journalists." Witcover, a veteran Washington correspondent for the *Baltimore Evening Sun,* thinks political activists turned journalists are like "foxes in the chicken coop." As individuals shuttle between the professions, Witcover believes the "character issue" which has haunted recent candidates for political office might well be turned against political reporters and analysts. He points out that "in journalism as in politics, public perceptions count."[2]

Broder and Witcover object to the "androgynous political insiders" on professional grounds. As career journalists, both men have been careful to cultivate a discrete distance from all politicians and to maintain a non-partisan balance in their writing. They distrust anyone practicing journalism whose bias, or appearance of bias, might compromise their own hard-won credibility as independent political analysts.

Besides the professional argument, there is an ideological one. Critics on the left and the right see the increase in the number of individuals who play roles both in journalism and politics, or government, as an ominous trend. Both liberals and conservatives have found evidence for their concern.

Conservative critics have long charged the media with liberal bias. The Media Research Center in Alexandria, Virginia, publishes a monthly "MediaWatch" newsletter with a regular "Revolving Door" feature, listing "the latest moves between politics and Big Media outlets." By March 1990, the Center had discovered 172 "Liberals/Democrats" who had made the move one way or the other, as opposed to only 53 "Conservatives/Republicans."

An example of the leftist argument is "The News Shapers," a study by University of Minnesota Professor Lawrence Soley. Looking at the nightly network newscasts from January 1987 through June 1, 1989, Soley found that the experts who appeared on camera were dominated by a small group of "ex-government officials (mostly from Republican administrations), and 'scholars' from conservative Washington, D.C. think tanks..."[3] Though experts may not be journalists, reporters who constantly interview familiar figures with predictable viewpoints are practicing a kind of ventriloquism.

Both the professional journalists and the ideologues are most concerned with the bias of the individuals delivering the news, especially on television. Journalists who evolve into politics or government do not pose a problem for critics, but those who subsequently revolve back to journalism are a worry, along with political activists or government officials who take up televised reporting, analysis or "expertise." The problem is one of "spin" or "bias," and whether or not past political affiliations of reporters or commentators should be made explicit, and if so, how extensively, and for what period following their affiliations.

My purpose here is to evaluate the phenomenon of the revolving door between journalism and politics or government. What are the

implications for the functions of journalism and government? Are the concerns of the journalism professionals justified? What about ideological problems? To widen our view of the matter, this study looks beyond the Beltway which circumscribes Washington, and sometimes Washington thinking, at a variety of city halls, state legislatures, and governor's mansions around the United States.

The results of this inquiry reveal that the volume of traffic between journalism and government, or politics, is heavy throughout the country. The dilemmas facing such career changers, and the clear pattern which describes the journey from journalism into politics and back, raise several issues that the professionals and ideologues may not have considered.

Changing careers is an educational experience. Reporters who spend a season or more in public life and then return to journalism acquire a more profound understanding of both professions.

...reporters who get their education about politics from the inside are better equipped ...to deliver realistic descriptions of the political process to the rest of us.

These revolvers can articulate precisely where politics and journalism meet, and where they diverge. The evidence in this study, gathered from around the country, suggests that reporters who get their education about politics from the inside are better equipped than those who have not had that inside experience to deliver realistic descriptions of the political process to the rest of us. But before we turn to this evidence, and the issues it raises, it is useful to take a brief historical look at the revolving door phenomenon.

The Office of Journalism

American journalists have been active in politics and government since before the Constitution existed. When Benjamin Franklin began publishing the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1729, he helped support his fledgling enterprise with a contract to print the currency for the colony of Pennsylvania. In 1736 Franklin was appointed clerk of the Pennsylvania Assembly, and the next year, postmaster in Philadelphia. He continued in official positions of increasing authority throughout his long life, using his *Gazette* as a sounding board for many of his political and civic ideas. Franklin practiced journalism and propaganda while serving as a diplomat for extended periods in England and France, before and during the American Revolutionary War.[4]

In the early decades of the 1800s, the American press and political parties grew up together as co-dependents. Newspapers served as official organs for the political organizations which provided their financial support. Despite the advent of the penny press in the 1830s, as late as 1860 only five percent of American newspapers claimed independence from partisan politics.[5]

Horace Greeley's career exemplified the intimate relationship between politics and journalism in the nineteenth century. To support *The New Yorker*, a weekly paper he started in 1834, Greeley edited a series of Whig party organs in Albany and New York, including *The Jeffersonian, New York Whig* and *Log Cabin*. Though Greeley began the *New York Tribune* as a journal free from "servile partisanship," his reporting was often as partisan as any editorial.

Greeley was rewarded for his party loyalty with an appointment to an unexpired term in the U.S. Congress in 1848. In 1860 Greeley was instrumental in forming the Republican Party, along with an editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, Joseph Medill. Both journalists strongly supported Abraham Lincoln, for whom Greeley attempted to perform diplomatic missions during the Civil War. In 1872 Greeley became the presidential candidate of the Democratic and Liberal Republican parties, against Ulysses Grant, who was running for re-election. Greeley lost. But Joseph Medill won his race for Mayor of Chicago that same year. After serving one term, Medill returned to the *Chicago Tribune*.[6] Many other influential figures of the era, such as, James G. Blaine, John Hay, William W. Holden, and Schulyer Colfax, combined successful careers in politics or government and journalism.

By 1890 fully one-fourth of the American press had declared its political independence. By then the wire services—the Associated Press and United Press International—were providing factual reports of events to papers of various political stripes around the country. Combined with the sensationalist yellow journalism of Hearst, Pulitzer and others, the wire services and the independent press created a popular appetite for information which forced even political party organs to decrease their editorial content in favor

of more news.[7]

The journalistic practice of objectivity developed in the early decades of the twentieth century. Among those who attempted to define and propose standards and limits for the emergent professionalism of news reporting, none was more influential than Walter Lippmann. Though journalism had begun to separate its function from political partisanship, Lippmann's own career combined journalism and commentary with a lifelong activism in politics and government.

After graduating from Harvard in 1910, Lippmann worked briefly for a Boston weekly, then apprenticed for one year as a researcher for the muckraking reporter, Lincoln Steffens. Lippmann also wrote editorials for socialist magazines. In 1912 he became an aide to George Lunn, the socialist mayor of Schenectady, New York. One of the founding editors of the *New Republic* in 1914, Lippmann spent the summer of that year writing a position paper on labor for Theodore Roosevelt, who hoped to run again for the presidency.

In 1917 Lippmann quit *The New Republic* to serve as special assistant to Secretary of War Newton D. Baker. In the final stages of the First World War, Lippmann helped draft Wilson's Fourteen Points, then wrote propaganda in Europe. During his long career as a commentator for various periodicals, which endured into the 1970s, Lippmann also served often as ex-officio advisor to presidents and candidates for high office. His unique status rendered his world travels a kind of roving ambassadorship, sometimes in a significant diplomatic role.[8]

But Lippmann's own political/journalistic androgyny belied the twentieth century trend toward professionalization of news gathering and reporting, the founding of journalism schools, and a rising concern for ethics. The developing ideals of journalistic practice coincided with the spread and sophistication of broadcast technology. Television, which quantumly increased the reach and power of journalists, hastened the final separation of journalism from its other traditional functions, including political activism and also teaching.

Television...hastened the final separation of journalism from its other traditional functions, including political activism and also teaching.

Franklin, Greeley and Lippmann, each in his century, exercised the teaching function of journalism in the sense of moral instruction. Franklin wrote advice for living in *Poor Richard's Almanack* and in a didactic *Autobiography* meant less as a factual record than a moral example. Many of Greeley's editorials read like secular sermons, whether against the institution of slavery or in favor of socialist communes. Lippmann's moral philosophy, less homiletic than Franklin's, less absolute than Greeley's, was just as instructive in terms of values.

In our television age, the once spacious office of journalism has been subdivided by the sort of partitions which do not quite reach the ceiling. At the entrance to the office, only news reporting is visible. To reach political activism or teaching from "pure" reporting, one must pass through doorways in the partitions. The university, or think tank, has become another portal through which journalists may now move. The revolving door is a new issue only because the partitions themselves, the subdivisions of journalistic function, are relatively recent. The issue enflames emotions partly because of the high stakes—of money and power—which television represents.

Irony, Conflict, Confusion and Blur

To comprehend the problems and patterns of contemporary career changers between journalism and government, or politics, this study looked at individuals in the states of Arkansas, California, Maine, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Texas, Vermont and Washington. The sample was opportunistic, not random. But numerous examples in every section of the country indicate a widespread movement between the two careers. Washington provides a dramatic, if not typical, illustration.

Charles Royer, political commentator for KING-TV in Seattle, subsequently served as Mayor of Seattle for three terms. He is now Director of the Institute of Politics at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Royer was succeeded as mayor by Norm Rice, a former radio broadcaster. The state legislator representing Seattle since 1984 is Jesse Wineberry, ex-television reporter for KSTW. Three of the state's nine Representatives in the U.S. House—Rod Chandler, John Miller and Al Swift—are also former television journalists.

Often it is the flashpoints of identity di-

lemma, both for the career changers and their colleagues, which best illuminate the fundamental differences in roles and functions between journalistic observers and political actors. These difficulties vary in character and severity, but we can classify them by degree as problems of irony, conflict, confusion and blur.

Charles Royer found himself the center of an unpleasant, very public, irony shortly after his election to City Hall. Starting in 1970, Royer had become known in Seattle for his nightly sixty to ninety-second political commentaries on KING-TV. In 1976 Royer's half-hour documentary, "The Bucks Stop Here," exposed the improper use of special-interest money in the state legislature. The program had political results and won two national journalism awards. Royer also did a series about how television covers politics.

When he won the Seattle election in 1977, Royer discovered that the flow of information into the mayor's office was more than he had known or suspected. He decided to share some of this data with his former press colleagues in a series of off-the-record background sessions. But TV crews wanted to bring their cameras into the meetings, against the mayor's wishes. Royer showed up on television and the front pages of the Seattle papers, pushing the TV cameras out, trying to close the door on them. Royer remembers the headline with the photo: "TV Commentator turned Mayor shuts out TV."[8]

A different sort of irony arose from the career choices of a young ex-legislator in Maine named John Diamond. By his senior year at the University of Maine, Diamond was spending two days a week in Augusta, the capital, to cover the legislature for the university's National Public Radio station. After graduation in 1977, he wrote briefly for a newspaper in Lewiston, but soon quit to help a friend run a legislative campaign. In 1980, aged 25, John Diamond ran for the Maine House of Representatives and won.

His rise to leadership was rapid: Assistant Majority Leader in his second term, then Majority Leader in his third term, before his thirtieth birthday. With cohorts and critics alike predicting a governorship or other high office for the young political star, Diamond suddenly announced, in 1988, that he was quitting politics to teach and practice journalism. Within months of leaving office, Diamond became the host of a television public affairs program for the Maine Public Broadcasting Network called "Inside Augusta."

His first program broke a story Diamond had heard about during his tenure in office, concerning a former colleague in his own party who seemed caught in a possible conflict of interest. Diamond's colleague had accepted $10,000 from a lobby that appeared frequently before a committee he chaired. As a legislator, Diamond saw the situation as improper but said nothing publicly. As a television journalist, Diamond exposed the arrangement in his first program. He even got the ex-colleague in question to speak on camera.

More overtly ironic was another program Diamond did, in his first season on PBS, about how Maine politicians manipulate the media. Diamond attributes at least some of his own rapid rise in politics to a thorough knowledge of the media, natural in a former radio and newspaper reporter. His program, "Not Necessarily The News," showed how the Governor of Maine and others exploit media habits and standards for political advantage. As his principal sources for this thorough, sophisticated analysis, Diamond interviewed reporters who had recently been covering Diamond's own political career and abetting his own successful media use.

Changing roles between journalism and government or politics can cause conflicts in the minds of some individuals who are making that change. A poignant historical example is that of

Confusion is an occupational hazard for those who move from journalism into government...

Edward R. Murrow. The most respected radio journalist of his time, or since, Murrow led the development of the television documentary for CBS in the early 1950s. But Murrow's prestige gave his controversial programs extra bite and made his network bosses nervous. Afraid of alienating viewers and especially corporate sponsors, CBS executives cancelled Murrow's various series, until Murrow himself decided to leave broadcasting.

One of Murrow's final projects for CBS was the 1960 documentary, "Harvest of Shame." The program showed the terrible living and working conditions of migrant farm laborers in Florida. Murrow's closing comments appealed for action to remedy the situation. In 1961 Murrow accepted President Kennedy's appointment to head the United States Information Agency. One of his first acts as director was to

try to stop the British Broadcasting Corporation from showing "Harvest of Shame." His attempt failed, but word of it leaked to the press, embarrassing the novice bureaucrat.[10] Murrow, the government propaganda chief, had tried to censor Murrow, the muckraking journalist.

Madeleine Kunin, Governor of Vermont, came into conflict with her own journalistic role after her first, unsuccessful run for governor in 1982. Trained as a journalist at Columbia University, Kunin worked as a reporter for the *Burlington Free Press,* then as writer and producer for Burlington's WCAX-TV. In the late 1960s and early 70s, she taught at Trinity College and became involved with environmental and women's issues.

Kunin served in the state legislature from 1973 until 1978, when she was elected Lieutenant Governor. She was re-elected in 1980. In 1982, Kunin ran for Governor against the Republican incumbent, Richard Snelling. Snelling defeated Kunin in November. In December, still holding Vermont's second-highest office, Kunin began hosting a public affairs interview show, "Talk of Vermont," each weekday on WJOY radio in Burlington.

On January 14, 1983, Kunin's radio guest was Governor Richard Snelling. Instead of an interview, the encounter turned into a debate, an extension of the long, recently-ended, political campaign. When Kunin asked the re-elected governor, "What are your plans?" Snelling replied, "Wouldn't you like to know?"[11] Kunin's conflicting roles as politician and interviewer clearly confused Richard Snelling. (In 1984 Kunin was elected Governor of Vermont. In 1990, after three terms in office, she announced she would not seek a fourth.)

Confusion is an occupational hazard for those who move from journalism into government, or vice versa, especially if a given person crosses the dividing line more than once. Not just the individuals themselves are confused about their roles or functions. Colleagues of career changers, as well as news consumers seeking information from or about them, may also suffer doubts concerning the professional identities of these individuals.

Colleagues of career changers, as well as news consumers seeking information...may also suffer doubts concerning the professional identities of these individuals.

Michal Regunberg's recent situation was rife with potential confusion. An experienced print and broadcast journalist, Regunberg was press secretary for Massachusetts gubernatorial candidate John Silber. A liberal Jewish woman, Regunberg worked for a man who publicly antagonized many liberals, Jews, and women. In January, 1990, Silber made headlines for his critical remarks about welfare and immigrants in Massachusetts. Before she quit to work for Silber, Regunberg served as spokeswoman for the state Public Welfare Department. Regunberg thought she could have a positive effect on Silber, educating him about some issues. She quit a previous staff position, as an aide to Senator John Kerry. Regunberg liked Kerry's liberalism, but not her unimportant job.

Regunberg viewed her press secretary job as almost identical to journalism. "You still need to know as much of the real story as possible, *then* decide what to say. It's the same job as journalism really, just a different selection of facts. Instead of one [fact] from Column A and two from Column B, you take three from Column A, etcetera." Journalists do select information to write news stories, but few would agree with Regunberg's equation of their job with that of a publicist. Regunberg's description of her recent work appears disingenuous, if not deluded.

Readers of the *Philadelphia Daily News* may have suffered a different sort of confusion in 1987, the last time John Baer changed jobs. In 1972 Baer began his reporting career at the *Harrisburg Patriot.* In 1977 he started full-time public affairs broadcasting with WITF, the Harrisburg PBS station. For a *Philadelphia Magazine* candidate profile in 1978, Baer interviewed William Scranton, who was running for Lieutenant Governor on a Republican ticket headed by Richard Thornburgh.

The Republicans won. Covering state politics, John Baer developed good working relations with Lt. Governor Scranton. When the Republicans were re-elected in 1982, Scranton asked Baer to join his office as press aide, to prepare for the 1986 campaign. State law prevented Governor Thornburgh from seeking a third term. Scranton was the heir apparent. It was "understood" that after re-election in 1990, Scranton, who had already attracted national notice, would begin to position himself for national office. Despite his qualms about leaving journalism,

Baer signed on with Scranton.

But Scranton's apparently unlimited future slipped from his grasp in the 1986 gubernatorial race. Democratic challenger Robert Casey ran a well-financed, hard-hitting campaign. On the Friday night before the Tuesday election, the Casey camp televised a devastating commercial which became known as the "guru" ad, showing the long-haired Bill Scranton of the 60s.

As sitar music played and the bearded face of the Maharishi Mahesh appeared, an announcer reminded viewers that Scranton had practiced transcendental meditation and said he wanted to bring TM into state government. Though the information was not new, the last-minute 60s flashback estranged many of the older Republican voters Scranton needed. Robert Casey, who had failed three times before, became Governor of Pennsylvania.

Bill Scranton left Pennsylvania and politics. John Baer had already decided, midway through the "meat grinder" of the campaign that, win or lose, he wanted out of politics and back into journalism. Baer found a job as Harrisburg correspondent on the *Philadelphia Daily News.* The *Daily News* position was available because the previous legislative reporter, Robert Grotevant, had accepted a job as press secretary with Governor-elect Robert Casey. *Philadelphia Daily News* readers saw the door between journalism and politics revolve rapidly before them, as the lieutenant governor's ex-press secretary took over political reporting from the press aide for the incoming governor of the opposing party.[12]

The roles of journalist and political or governmental actor become blurred when there is no way to distinguish any difference between them.

> *If a person is both journalist and politician, then he or she is neither one of those, but rather a third, hybrid species of the sort David Broder calls "androgynous insider."*

Blur means that functional confusion, in the minds of the individual career changers and their colleagues, has become complete. If a person is both journalist and politician, then he or she is neither one of those, but rather a third, hybrid species of the sort David Broder calls "androgynous insider."

During his tenure in the Maine legislature, John Diamond achieved a blurred identity among many news professionals in the state. Diamond used his own journalism skills to get good coverage for himself and for issues he cared about. Republican opponents, and even some Democratic colleagues, complained about the special treatment Diamond appeared to be getting from the Maine press. But Diamond knew how to make himself available to reporters, and how to describe issues in simple, pithy terms.

In this fashion Diamond became a dependable source of quotes and information for many reporters. But he became more than that. "Because I had been in the media, news directors would call and say, 'We have a new reporter coming down [to Augusta], would you teach him or her the ropes?'"[13] Charmed by the articulate, available, happy to be useful, journalist turned legislator, Maine editors and news directors blurred John Diamond's function in their minds and compromised their own professional responsibilities.

For some political reporters in Arkansas, Charlotte Schexnayder has become a symbol of blur. Editor and publisher of the *Dumas Clarion* since 1954, Schexnayder has kept her smalltown weekly alive partly by increasing its circulation ten-fold. Schexnayder's work has won various awards. Named Woman of Achievement in 1970 by The National Federation of Press Women, she was the first woman to serve as director of the National Newspaper Association. Recognizing Schexnayder's civic abilities, Governor Pryor named her to the state Pardons and Parole Board in 1974, the first woman in Arkansas to serve in that post.

In 1984 Charlotte Schexnayder achieved another first. She won a seat in the Arkansas legislature but kept her editorial job. When a local reporter suggested that a journalist serving in public office might constitute a conflict of interest, Schexnayder replied, "You have to be careful not to let those conflicts crop up. You can't consider your business first. The public good has to be considered above anybody's private enterprise."[14]

Since her initial election to office, Schexnayder has been re-elected twice, running unopposed. In 1985, when a legislator introduced a bill to fine newspapers that published unsigned letters to the editor, Schexnayder led the opposition, reading the First Amendment in

its entirety to the Arkansas House of Representatives. As part of her strong support for Freedom of Information legislation, Schexnayder helped lead a 1987 battle to open all commercial tax records. In 1988 she worked with Governor William Clinton to pass a lobbyist disclosure law and a code of ethics for legislators, which would have increased financial disclosure by public officials. These efforts were unsuccessful.

Also in 1988, Charlotte Schexnayder's professional identity became blurred for Arkansas journalists in a debate about press access to legislative chambers. Like the fight over unsignd letters to editors, the media access battle began with a personal insult, which triggered legislative retribution. A Little Rock newspaper columnist called a deceased former senator "worthless." The Senate reacted by voting to restrict reporters to the press gallery, barring them from the chamber floor. During a House debate on the issue, Schexnayder spoke in favor of a compromise.

Reaction from journalists was swift and shrill. "Schexnayder sells out to good ol' boys," read the headline on one column. Another commentator, John Starr, wrote that journalists "knew they were going to get steamrollered" but refused "to beg" for "the 'privilege'" of covering the House. Starr was furious with Schexnayder for defending the press without consulting reporters, though he did not deny that her compromise was better than none at all. Schexnayder's "deadly sin" was "trying to serve two masters—journalism and politics," according to Starr, who warned that "anyone who runs with the wolves very long becomes a member of the pack."[15] In John Starr's ordered world of wolves and watchdogs, Charlotte Schexnayder was a new, disquieting breed.

Patterns of Change

Clear patterns exist among the widely varied circumstances in which news professionals move into politics or government and then return to journalism. These common elements include the motivation of the career changers, the reactions of their political and journalistic colleagues, the transitional role and identity dilemmas, and a radically revised understanding of both journalism and government for those who cross their borders.

"Most reporters would make rotten politicians or public officials," in David Broder's view. But reporters who cover politics or government, at any level, eventually become familiar with the issues, routines and traditions of their beats. Journalists often speculate about the next move of the policymaker they are covering. Some reporters may think that they could do a better job. Then come the moments of stress or indecision when an official turns to a reporter and asks, "Well, what would you do?" Sometimes the question is difficult not to answer.[16]

JoAnn Fitzpatrick writes editorials for the *Quincy* (Massachusetts) *Patriot-Ledger*. After working for wire services in Boston, Washington and Germany, Fitzpatrick served both in state and in federal government. She accepted a job with the Massachusetts Welfare Commissioner because she thought it was "unfair to be criticizing government from the outside" and wondered, as many reporters do, what the inside was like.

Some journalists are propelled into politics by their civic concerns. As Madeleine Kunin put it, both careers "try to deal with a larger agenda." John Baer insists he felt "no preconception that now is my time for public service," when he joined the Scranton campaign. Baer did not see Scranton as a "savior," but did think he might attract bright people to government, "so there was some idealism involved." Charles Royer "fell in love with Seattle" and wanted "the power" to make a positive difference there.

Royer also thought he had exhausted his "journalism cycle." He was tired of the professional "cynicism." He felt the "news doctors," with their bottom-line values, were hurting TV news, urging shorter stories and more upbeat material. John Diamond left journalism for politics "disillusioned" at how "promotional" the press was, as opposed to being critical.

> *...common elements include the motivation of the career changers, the reactions of their political and journalistic colleagues, the transitional role and identity dilemmas, and a radically revised understanding of both journalism and government for those who cross their borders.*

Disappointed at not being able to cover the state house, Diamond felt uncomfortable in his local beat assignment. Michal Regunberg first began political work when she was fired from her job as

editorial director of radio news by the station's new owners. John Baer had also reached a career impasse, which helped push him into politics.

With varying degrees of commitment to public service, journalists are motivated to enter government or politics because of job frustrations. They believe their careers have stalled. Or they run out of patience with the role of professional observer. This latter view was succinctly expressed by former Texas Commissioner of Agriculture Jim Hightower, who had previously been editor of the *Texas Observer*. Explaining his resignation from the liberal weekly in order to run for office, Hightower said, "It is not such a far jump from the editor's chair to the political stump." Watchdog journalism was important, "But there comes a time when writing about the bastards isn't enough..."[17]

The reaction of journalism colleagues to reporters who enter government or politics is overwhelmingly negative. When Charles Royer announced that he was quitting television to run for mayor, some of his colleagues felt betrayed that he would leave "us" to join "them." Royer thought some treated him unfairly to avoid charges of cronyism. Others quit associating with him altogether. The editor of the *Seattle Weekly*, a former KING-TV employee, carried on what Royer saw as "a mayor-bashing vendetta" for all of Royer's twelve years in office. Madeleine Kunin acknowledged that "You leave old friends behind" by changing careers. She saw her own press relations as "average," not overly antagonistic, but "not a garden party."

The mistrust cuts both ways for career changers. John Diamond found that "for a long time other legislators told me, we can't trust you because you're a former journalist. And then later journalists said, we can't trust you because you're a politician." Charlotte Shexnayder has experienced similar difficulties. Charles Royer's relations with city hall regulars were complicated by his appointment of former KING reporters to key posts. He hired two ex-colleagues, including his brother, as deputy mayors, and appointed a third to run the city's energy department.

All the career changers consulted for this study agreed that their journalism training was useful, if not crucial, to their political success. The abilities to write well, to speak clearly, and to absorb large amounts of information quickly are important to reporters and to government officials. As John Diamond has demonstrated in his political career and in his television reporting, officials familiar with press habits and needs can use or abuse that knowledge, even when reporters themselves are aware of the manipulation.

We have seen the role and identity dilemmas—of irony, conflict, confusion and blur — that confront journalists who move into public life. Problems are especially intense during the transition period, but may never be resolved. Charles Royer estimates that it took him one full term in office—four years—to shed all the vestiges of collegiality with reporters. In his second term he hired a press secretary and worked to orchestrate coverage of issues important to him as mayor. John Diamond may have been clear about his own role as state House Majority Leader, but many Maine reporters never were.

For individuals who "revolve" back into journalism, the entry into government or active politics provides a crucial education, unavailable in school, or even in the press gallery. John Diamond, who now teaches at the University of Maine at Orono, thinks "a lot of people are raised in a political vacuum" and have no literal understanding of the process. "The media frame politics in terms of conflicts and numbers, instead of issues," according to Diamond, "and without understanding the psychological pressures which force people to take certain positions."

Even longtime political correspondents agree that the reality they discover inside the political process or governmental bureaucracy is radically different from what they had believed it to be. The nature of that reality is not reassuring. "You have to live through this horror to realize how awful it really is," said JoAnn Fitzpatrick, describing life inside the U.S. Department of Education during the Carter Administration. "In the Federal Government you can't get anyone to make a *minor* decision in less than a month." Fitzpatrick later spent three years at the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health, finding it, by comparison, a place "where you can actually get things done."

"I went in cynical, but the process made me more cynical, because [Bill Scranton] was one of the better ones," said John Baer. Before working in government, Baer thought "public policy had at least some relationship to the public good," but learned that "all decisions are really based on the advantage offered to the elected officials." Despite the "nice benefits" and "perks" that came with his rapid rise in Maine politics, John Diamond disliked the "all-consuming" political life-style. He also expressed qualms similar to

Baer's. "I was bothered that political decisions were not based on right or wrong, but on what individual constituencies could get out of it." Fitzpatrick, Baer and Diamond have all returned to journalism.

Besides acquiring a political education, reporters who enter politics or government also learn a lot about journalism. Viewing their colleagues from the "other side" of the cameras, microphones and notebooks affords career changers valuable insights about news gathering and those who practice it. Some of those insights are painful. "It doesn't take long to get pretty cynical about the press," said Michal Regunberg. "There's a lot of laziness." Inside the state bureaucracy, JoAnn Fitzpatrick "saw that most journalists only skim the surface of most bureaus. They are more interested in political intrigues than in the nuts and bolts of political organization." That superficiality is in her view "an indictment" of journalism.

As mayor, Charles Royer quickly grew "impatient" with slovenly reporters who had not done their homework, had no history on issues, or lacked information. But he realized he had to quit trying to teach them their jobs. It was one such attempt to educate reporters that ended in Royer's public scuffle with TV cameras.

With varying degrees of commitment to public service, journalists are motivated to enter government or politics because of job frustrations.

As a press secretary, John Baer found that some of his ex-colleagues were "not always meticulous" about their work. Some reporters used only a single source for stories, misquoted sources, or simply went for quick, one-line quotes. Answering reporters' questions turned out to be "only about ten percent" of his job. Baer spent most of his time trying "to pre-empt the damage" on upcoming stories by helping to supply reporters with information they had not requested.

Reporters who work in politics or government and then come back to journalism return with a strong sense of purpose and a greater ability to distinguish the possible from the ideal. As a veteran of state bureaucracy, JoAnn Fitzpatrick can probe below the surface of bureaucratic policy statements to the real issues, an asset for an editorial writer. At meetings of her five-person editorial board, Fitzpatrick's experience in government allows her "to be a voice of realism." She has saved her paper from "embarrassing" itself with superficially sensible editorials which fail to grasp operative political truths.

John Baer believes his political experience "made me a better reporter. It forced me to get to know issues on a much firmer basis than any reporter has to. I am a better reporter and a better listener. Now I know there *is* often more to stories than just a one-line quote, so I'll listen to the explanation." Baer volunteered a conclusion with which other journalistic survivors of the passage into public life agree: "Anyone who wants to be a serious political journalist for their career ought to get inside the political process."

Richard Clurman, veteran *Time* editor, remembers when "working in government or politics on leave was thought to be an automatic conflict of interest that disqualified journalists from covering the subject when they returned to the news media. I thought so myself. Now, more sensibly, most news executives regard working the other side of the street as an invaluable enrichment...Some editors are...actually encouraging reporters and paying them...to work in the complex fields they cover, then return as much better informed journalists."[18]

Considering the evidence of this study, Baer's conclusion and Clurman's recommendation make good sense. Journalists who spend a season in politics or government will improve their understanding of the field they cover as well as the profession they practice.

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Implications of the Revolving Door

We return to our original questions. Do reporters entering into or returning from public life compromise journalistic independence and trust? Are reporters and commentators sufficiently identified in terms of their previous

political affiliations or official functions to alert readers and viewers to possible bias?

It is easy enough to agree that any individual who reports or analyzes news should be more clearly and more thoroughly identified than current practice dictates. Whether or not the knowledge that a given commentator once worked for a given legislator sets off a "conservative" or "liberal" alarm for a news consumer is another matter. Do most TV viewers make a distinction between the American Enterprise Institute and Brookings? But labelling is only a small part of the problem.

Editorials, opinion columns and news stories are clearly grouped and identified in newspapers. On television, it is much more difficult to distinguish among reporters, commentators and "experts," especially those who appear frequently. Programs such as *Washington Week In Review*, on which reporters debrief one another, have trained viewers to accept journalists as sources. Television bestows an equality upon the journalists and the officials they interview as they sit side by side in the frame. In fact, David Brinkley, Sam Donaldson and George Will are often far more familiar, and more voluble, than the public figures with whom they converse. In terms of defining relations between journalists and politicians, or government officials, television communicates blur.

Another more profound problem than that of labels is suggested by the "News Shapers" study, whether or not one accepts its leftist bias. That study showed that a small number of experts is called upon over and over again by television news programs to deliver judgements on a variety of topics. The widespread extent to which the border between journalism and public life is breached also affirms the narrowing spectrum of thought available to American news consumers. The revolving door restricts and recycles the flow of ideas and perpetuates the closed system of insider government.

Presidential scholar James David Barber has written: "Democracy is a great conversation, a community defined by the scope and substance of its discourse."[19] This study is one bit of evidence among many that the scope and substance of political discourse is narrowing dangerously. Modern journalists appear to be following the path of Walter Lippmann from populism to elitism. Lippmann's youthful socialist fervor, based on a faith in "the people," yielded to his later belief that only representative elites had enough knowledge to make decisions. Lippmann himself acted as counselor to those elites and explainer of their decisions.

Martin Linsky's *Impact: How the Press Affects Federal Policymaking* shows how journalists at elite news organizations may serve as the information loop for intra-governmental communication. In some cases, highly placed federal bureaucrats find out from *The Washington Post* or *The New York Times* about developments in their own departments.[20] But the tendency of the press to serve as a bulletin board for government, media, and special interests has helped to alienate many who are not directly involved in the political process and who may not be able to decipher the insider code in which the news is presented.

Randy Wilson, capitol reporter for the *Maine Times*, estimates that more than fifty percent of what is written or broadcast by Augusta political correspondents is purely for the consumption of those who work in the state house there. The powerful are informed, but the public is excluded. Left out, many individuals lose interest, becoming apathetic, even hostile, to the political process, and to those who chatter about it knowingly, incomprehensibly, on the news. The community of democracy shrinks further.

Political reporters, whose professional currency is inside information, may find it difficult to understand the alienation of outsiders who are trying to understand the news. Veteran television reporter Roger Mudd had a rare opportunity to experience a political campaign as an average viewer in 1980. Between network jobs at the time, Mudd watched the televised campaign as did millions of other citizens. But though he watched diligently and daily, Mudd found himself "unable to understand half of what I was hearing on the nightly news...There were so many pieces of shorthand built into the switch to Des Moines, the tightly edited clip, the voice left up in the air telling me that the guy had been cut short, that when the evening news was over, I felt unsatisfied and dissatisfied and not very proud, and not very well informed."[21]

The revolving door between journalism and politics or government is not as much a problem as it is a symptom of a larger problem: the unwitting collusion of the news media in the exclusion of increasing numbers of citizens from meaningful participation in the political processes that govern their country.

David Broder has apparently come to a similar conclusion. During a recent lecture, Broder remarked that "campaigns were becoming only

of interest to those of us concerned with the intricacies of political infighting, and there are not enough of those." Broder's proposed solution is to talk to the voters more. "Let their agenda become our agenda."[22]

The idea of journalists representing the needs of ordinary people has merit, though politicians could claim that was precisely the function they were elected to perform. But the agenda of voters who lack current, meaningful channels of information about their government may be deficient, irrelevant, or wrong. It is time for journalists to revive the educational function of their profession.

For the press to collect and publish insider gossip, or to inform one branch of government about another, is not enough to nourish a free society. Insider journalists need to break cover, to educate more of us about "real" reality, to enlarge the scope and substance of our democratic conversation. No better teachers exist for this task than reporters who have endured rites of passage in politics or government and come back through the revolving door.

In some cases, this education can take place within academic institutions, a bracing dose of actuality to counter the polite civic fictions of courses in government theory. After three terms as Mayor of Seattle, Charles Royer as Director of the Institute of Politics is in a position to pass along insights from his journalistic and political careers to students who aspire to leadership in local, state and federal government.

John Diamond teaches courses on media and state politics at the University of Maine at Orono. Diamond admits that some of his students feel cynical when they find out how and why the political process operates. He tries to move students beyond cynicism, to accept politics as an intense mircocosm of life itself—complete with psychological pressures, negotiations, shifting allegiances and deal making. Diamond believes risking student cynicism is better than perpetuating political illusions. Maine public television viewers also profit from Diamond's analytical programs about the legislature he knows so well.

Sophisticated political reporting is the best way for journalists with public affairs experience to educate large numbers of viewers and readers. John Baer's writing—and therefore the understanding of his readers—has acquired new depth and complexity since his baptism by fire in Pennyslvania politics. JoAnn Fitzpatrick can give readers of her editorials a sense of why government bureaucrats behave as they do, and how they might be induced to change. She has been there, in those meetings, behind those doors, feeling that heat. Baer and Fitpatrick write with an authority absent from the voices of observers, however senior those observers may be.

When we learn about the realities of politics from an authoritative source, we can begin to appreciate the political process in real terms. Understanding is the first step toward participation and ultimately, empowerment. Paradoxically, the very insider journalists whose political power exemplifies the closed system, may, by returning to share the knowledge of that system, open it up to the many who are currently excluded.

Endnotes

1. "We enjoy a privilege few others on this planet share. We make our living in private businesses, which perform a vital public function, under a unique constitutional protection...But if we are to defend that privilege, we damn well better make it clear we are not part of government, and not part of a Washington Insiders clique where politicians, publicists and journalists are easily interchangeable parts. Once we lose our distinctive identity, it will not be long before we lose our freedom," Broder said in a speech before the National Press Club November 19,1988. Broder has elaborated these and related ideas in *Behind the Front Page: A Candid Look at How the News is Made,* Touchstone, New York, 1987.

2. Jules Witcover, "Revolving Door Journalists," *Washington Journalism Review,* v. 12 #3, April, 1990, pp. 33-38.

3. Brent H. Baker (ed.), *MediaWatch,* v. 4 #3, March, 1990, p. 2. See also L. Brent Bozell, III and Brent H. Baker (eds.), *And That's The Way It Is(n't): A Reference Guide to Media Bias,* The Media Research Center, Alexandria, forthcoming.

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4. Ronald W. Clark, *Benjamin Franklin,* Random House, New York, 1983.

5. Michael E. McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928,* Oxford, New York, 1986, p. 114.

6. Richard Kluger, *The Paper: The Life and Death of the New York Herald Tribune,* Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1986. For information about Joseph Medill see Philip Kinsley, *The Chicago Tribune, Its First Hundred Years,* v. 1, Knopf, New York, 1943, v. 2 & 3, Chicago Tribune, Chicago, 1946.

7. McGerr, *Decline of Popular Politics,* pp. 120-130. See also Michael Schudson, *Discovering The News: A Social History of American Newspapers,* Basic Books, New York, 1978.

8. Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century,* Vintage, New York, 1981.

9. Interview with Charles Royer, January 30, 1990. I interviewed all the contemporary subjects for this article between January and May, 1990. Some journalists familiar with my subjects also spoke with me during this period. A complete list of interviews follows these notes.

10. A.M. Sperber, *Murrow: His Life and Times,* Freundlich, New York, 1986. See also Alexander Kendrick, *Prime Time: The Life of Edward R. Murrow,* Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1969; Joseph E. Persico, *Edward R. Murrow: An American Original,* McGraw-Hill, New York, 1988; and David Halberstam, *The Powers That Be,* Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1979.

11. Description of "Talk of Vermont" radio program, January 14, 1983, with quotes, from *Burlington Free Press,* January 15, 1983.

12. Interview with John Baer, March 26, 1990. See also John Baer, "The Next Second Banana: Scanning Scranton," *Philadelphia Magazine,* September, 1978, pp. 165-168 & 242-246; Baer, "Dirty Business," *Philadelphia,* January, 1987, pp. 81-84 & 188-196; and Kenn Marshall, "News-spokesman: Baer and Grotevant switch roles," The *Harrisburg Patriot,* February 25, 1987, p. B1.

13. Interview with John Diamond, March 2, 1990. See also Davis Rawson, "Diamond politician on rise," *Bangor Daily News,* January 5, 1983; N. Lawrence Willey, Jr., "Letter to the Editor," *Bangor Daily News,* January 12, 1983; John Hale, "Diamond opting out of politics to pursue journalism career," Bangor *Daily News,* January 23-24, 1988, p.1. Interviews with John Hale, February 28 and Paul Reynolds, March 1, 1990.

14. Charlotte Schexnayder in Pam Strickland, "Legislator anticipates bringing new ideas into the fold," *Arkansas Democrat,* July 22, 1984. My thanks to Charlotte Schexnayder, for her interview, and for the many news clippings and other materials with which she provided me, including Ted Wagnon, "Charlotte's Web," *Arkansas Business,* v. 4 #15, July 20-August 2, 1987, pp. 14-17. Thanks also to Meredith Oakley for clips and biographical data on Schexnayder.

15. Pam Strickland, "Lawmakers squash letter-to-editor bill," *Arkansas Democrat,* March 8, 1985, p. 7D; Pam Strickland and Joan Duffy, "Legislators delay ethics bill action," *Democrat,* January 28, 1988; "Session ends without ethics legislation," *Clay County Democrat,* February 10. 1988, p. 13; Meredith Oakley, "Schexnayder sells out to good ol' boys," *Arkansas Democrat,* July 14, 1988, p. 7B; John R. Starr, "Good old boys win again, thanks to Schexnayder," *Arkansas Democrat,* July 17, 1988; Starr, "Journalism, politics don't mix," *Democrat,* July 18, 1988; Carol Griffee, "Discipline comes before decorum," *Arkansas Gazette,* July 22, 1988, p. 17A.

16. Broder, *Behind The Front Page,* p.17. See also Mark Fishman, *Manufacturing The News,* University of Texas Press, Austin, 1980, for a discussion of the ways in which reporters identify with their beats and how they "repair the news" to conform to beat values and norms.

17. Jim Hightower, "Running for it," *Texas Observer,* July 27, 1979, p. 24.

18. Richard M. Clurman, *Beyond Malice: The Media's Years of Reckoning,* Transaction, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1988.

19. James David Barber, "And Now, Mr. Lincoln, You Have 15 Seconds," *The New York Times Book Review,* Oct 30, 1988, p. 36.

20. Martin Linsky, *Impact: How The Press Affects Federal Policymaking,* W.W. Norton, New York, 1986.

21. Roger Mudd, remarks at a conference at the Institute of Politics, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, January 29-31, 1982, quoted in Martin Linsky (ed.), *Television and the Presidential Elections,* D.C. Heath, Lexington, 1983, p. 52.

22. David Broder, "The Politics of the 1990s: A Question of Leadership," Ford Hall Forum, Faneuil Hall, Boston, April 12, 1990.

Interviews

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Rebecca Boren
Dale Davenport
John Diamond
JoAnn Fitzpatrick
John Hale
Madeleine Kunin
Martin Linsky
Brenda Moore
Ray Reece
Michal Regunberg
Paul B. Reynolds
Charles Royer
Charlotte Schexnayder
Randy Wilson
Jesse Wineberry