

## Informed & Engaged Ep. 17 - English

[00:01:38] Hello, everyone, thank you for joining us for the 17th episode of Informed and Engaged. I'm Jennifer Preston, the vice president of journalism at the Knight Foundation. And we are thrilled today to bring you this conversation in partnership with Aspen Digital. When we plan this event last week, we had no idea what the state of the election would be today, and indeed, we still don't know.

[00:02:06] Hi, everybody. Thanks, Jennifer. I'm Vivian Schiller. I am the executive director of Aspen Digital, which is a program of the Aspen Institute. We're so thrilled to be doing this program together with the Knight Foundation. And I'm so happy in this experiment in moderation with my friend Jennifer Pessina. So regardless, when the counting stops and a winner is declared, there's one thing that we do know for sure and that there has never been an election like this, a raging pandemic leading to record Maylin and early voting and a nation as divided as we've seen in generations. So the question for us right now is how at this moment in time are our vital information ecosystems responding? We are lucky to have a stellar panel of experts in news media, the platforms and their impact on American democracy. Before we get going, just a little bit of housekeeping. So the plan is Jennifer and I are going to spend the next 20 minutes or so chatting with our panelists, but then we are going to get to your questions at any time. Starting right now. You can drop your questions in to the Q&A. If you're watching us on Zoome, just drop it in there. We will get to them later. If you feel comfortable doing so, please add your name and your affiliation. It's just a great context. So again, it's the Q&A at the bottom and we will get to your questions in just a little bit.

[00:03:39] Jennifer, back to you. So let's introduce our guests. Saidy Warren is the executive director of the Shorenstein Center on Media Policy and Politics at Harvard's Kennedy School, and he previously served as mayor of Newton, Massachusetts. So can bring a very important perspective on the importance of informed communities from Wisconsin. We're happy and delighted to have Charlie Sykes, who was a long time host of a conservative talk show in Wisconsin. He is now the fine founder and editor in chief of the website The Bulwark. And we are pleased, so pleased that Charlie was a member of the Knight Commission, Untrust, Media and democracy. Also joining us today is Joanne Lipman. Joanne Lipman also served as a member of the Knight Commission on Trusts, Media and Democracy, a project with the Aspen Institute. And Joanne is a journalist and an author, a former chief editor of USA Today, Conde Nast, and The Wall Street Journal's Weekend Journal. We're also delighted to have Kate Clonic, who is an assistant professor of law at St. John's University in New York and a renowned expert on Internet platforms and their content in their context, moderation, content, moderation, policies, which is so important now as so many people as all of us are battling the spread of misinformation and disinformation.

[00:05:18] OK, so welcome, everybody, to kick off. We're going to ask each of our panelists to just broadly talk to us through the lens of their own experience and their own expertise. What is going right and what is going wrong at this moment of time with regard to our information ecosystems. And we're going to start with Joanne. Joanne, what is going right and what is going wrong?

[00:05:42] Thank you, Vivien. Thank you, Jennifer. Yeah, I'm going to talk specifically about the news media. We're going to focus on that. First of all, let's talk about what they got right. Which is and this is a big one, preaching patience. This is something we've all been accustomed to getting the answers on election night or shortly thereafter. The media

has been, I think, quite good about saying we're not going to know the results on election night. This is not a flaw in the system. This is a feature of the system and that the counting will go on. So I think that's been good. There's a couple of other pluses. I think that the media has been very good about not calling races prematurely. I give a hat tip, especially to Fox, which has been under a lot of pressure from the president. I also think has done a pretty good job in general of calling out or. Correct. Trump's inaccurate boasts about winning his complaints about fraud, now, overall, social media gets low marks, I'm sure we'll hear much more about that. But I do want to give some props to Twitter. I actually think Twitter has done a good job of identifying and labeling false claims and slowing the spread of some of the misinformation. Unfortunately, I have to say that the list of what the media has gotten wrong is a little bit longer. I'll just go through it quickly. I do think the biggest issue here, frankly, is a complete and total lack of understanding of the Trump voter. The media focuses again and again on the politics of fear and anger, on the misogyny, on the racism. But all of that is unfortunately is true. But what we're missing here is understanding how Trump supporters actually experience their own movement, which is very different. They are experiencing this as a positive, as celebratory, not a negative. Right. They're seeing themselves. We're patriots, we're proud, we're cohesive. We have team spirit. We have these great parades and car caravans. And we've got a lot of. So they're seeing it as a positive. And on a related note, there's also a real misunderstanding in the media of the Latino vote, which we have seen, which tends to be portrayed as something that's uniform and monolithic, when in fact it is anything but. And then very quickly, I'll just tick off a few of the others. We've been and you, Vivian, have been in the forefront of this continuum. So we need to understand that the media projects winners. It does not declare winners. There is still confusion on that front and I still see it in even the AP still says it declares results. I've seen this in The New York Times, Slate, USA Today, other major publications where they're just getting it wrong in the description. Another point, polls obviously misleading. I'm sure that will come up in our conversation today. But I want to just reference beyond the polls being wrong, the related point here, which I think is really important, is that the other part of this is the polls play into this really, I think, harmful horse race journalism. We've seen this for four years. It's just endless particular cable conversation that is looking at this horse race. That's really not helpful. It doesn't shed light and it overstates because they're feeding on all this poll information. So we're overstating the significance of the poll while not providing useful information. And on a related note to that is journalism edited by Twitter. Twitter has become a giant slack channel for all journalists. And so it's almost as if everybody's in this bubble together and talking to each other and amplifying each other and often about points and issues that really have no bearing or relevance for the larger audience who they are supposed to be serving. And finally, I'll just end with the misinformation issue, which I again will be discussing. We still haven't figured out how to effectively combat misinformation and at the same time to also not fall into this trap of allowing ourselves to be painted as the enemy of the people and allowing ourselves to adopt that mindset, which I think is quite dangerous if the media starts to take on the role of opposition, the opposition, and to internalize that, I think that's a that's a very, very hard position to take back then to try to regain the trust of our audiences.

[00:10:28] Well, Joanne, every point that you made, there could be the subject. Each one could be the subject of a full day conference. There's so much to unpack there and so much to follow up there. And particularly I'm just making this note for myself. Interesting. Talk more about polling on the one hand. Yes. Horse race politics is a problem. On the other hand, understanding the voter, which obviously did not happen very well. This cycle is so important to understanding the country. Charlie returned to you now. What went right? What went wrong from where you're sitting?

[00:10:59] Well, I'm going to take a little bit going right and going well, a little bit wider lens than just the video, the election here. I remember three or four years ago after the election saying that everything that's happening with misinformation, disinformation is going to get worse. I had no idea it would actually have gone much worse than I thought. We're undergoing a stress test right now on all of these issues, both the coronavirus, the pandemic and the election. And I got to say that I'm not optimistic about it. Yes. All I agree with everything that Joanne said about the way the media handled it and everything, but the flood of misinformation and disinformation has increased exponentially. And we are no closer to coming up with any sort of a solution for this. I remember right about right after the election, Garry Kasparov, who is the former world chess champion, Russian dissident. I had this great tweet. He said, The point of modern propaganda is not only to misinform or push an agenda, it is to exhaust your critical thinking, to annihilate truth. And he was channeling Hannah Arendt, talking about also the same phenomenon, and I think we just kind of lived through that over the last few years and we're in the midst of it right now. I mean, this is the stresses, wars, pandemics and elections are terrible times for truth or being able to figure out what is true. And I guess the problem is, is that if you open up Twitter or you open up social media or you open up YouTube, you are going to get a you will get a flood of information. And much of it has no relationship to reality whatsoever. And in terms of the attacking your critical thinking skill, the phrase that I've heard the most often over throughout this campaign is I don't know who to believe. What do we trust? The failure of the polls is just going to make that much better in terms of the pandemic, which experts do you pay attention to? What rumors, what stories do? And this is a life or death issue. I mean, it's one thing to have a lot of disinformation and misinformation in the political campaign, but we have seen that the tribalization of the response to the pandemic and fed by an absolute flood of misinformation. So, you know, there's a big difference between wanting to get information that is true and accurate. And one on the one hand, and then wanting to get fame, get information, wanting to believe information that you see because it is convenient for you. And then there are people who, frankly, don't care whether it's true or not, as long as it helps your tribe or your team. And this is what disturbs me the most. There's so much out there. People don't know what to believe, who to believe. The attack on expertise the attack on mainstream journalism to Joanne's point about the danger of becoming opposition. I don't know what the answer to this is. I mean, we have talked about this and thought about this for years now. And frankly, I'm more confused about this than I was when we began it, because if you have people who chronically lie, lie and who thrive in a world of disinformation and that's become normalized, how are journalists supposed to respond to that? So we have this weird moment that we're living in where I think it's to the best of times and worst of times we have had the best journalism of my lifetime over the last several years. You read some of the stuff that's being done in The Washington Post, in The New York Times and even The Wall Street Journal. These are this is amazing period for journalism. And yet we're also living in a time when there's forty five percent of Americans that won't believe anything that they read or hear from those sources and live in a completely different universe, being part of the problem of understanding how other voters, what they're thinking about, what they care about is they're living in a complete alternative reality, completely different narratives. And we don't know how to go down all those rabbit holes and fix it. I mean, it's not just Fox News. It's not just a few websites. It is an entire ecosystem out there, an alternative ecosystem that that is growing exponentially. And I mean, the best filter that we could have is not something on Twitter that warns you something might not be true. It's people who want to get accurate information. And I think all of that is broken down. So I wish I could be more optimistic. I think the challenge for the media and for rebuilding trust is getting greater all the time. And I hope I hope that I hope that I am the darkest person here. I hope

that nobody has more pessimistic. I hope that there's more optimism and there are more constructive ideas here. But I'll tell you, I started the morning by getting a call from my daughter in France and she was saying, I'm getting all of these emails and these texts from my French friends about voter fraud in the state of Wisconsin and what is going on there. And I had to tell her, this is it's B.S. It is misinformation. It is disinformation. That is first of all, it's based on misunderstandings, false reporting. It is being amplified by a number of media outlets. That shouldn't be. But when you're sitting here and there are people all around the world that are going, what's true? What's going on? It feels like there is this it is a pandemic of B.S. and I'll say B.S. rather than anything else. I'm sorry, that was a longer answer.

[00:16:30] But it was it's so important in this issue of trust and the notion that there that these two alternative universes, one of them based on evidence based facts and the other not so much, is really, really important. Say I'm going to turn to you. But I also just want to remind anybody that's watching if you're part of our zoom to click on the Q&A and add your questions, which are going to be getting to and a little bit, please add your name and your affiliation if you're comfortable doing so. Let's again turn to you, and I'm sure you have other in your observations about these issues of trusts and these clashing sort of communities of reality.

[00:17:13] Well, thanks for having me. That's a heck of a way to hand off the baton, Charlie. Unfortunately, I'm going to build off of Charlie and Joanne's observations. I have two specific observations, but I look at this through the lens of a former local elected official and mayor as someone who's worked at the White House Clinton administration center to the U.S. Senate. If we do not have a healthy ecosystem of information, we can't govern. We can't actually make decisions on behalf of the constituents that that those elected officials represent. And so we are in real danger, not just them as far as public safety and people being misled around ballots where we're really in danger of being able to function as a governing democracy at every level, at every level. So two observations. I want to start with a positive one, which was the Hunter Biden story. As we recall, The New York Post ran with a story around Hunter, Biden and the Biden family. And traditionally, a lot of major news outlets would feel obligated to do something on that because, you know, a major publication published. They talk about the vice president and his son. Well, that didn't happen. Major news outlets decided that they were not going to run with the story. They didn't have the appropriate documentation to report on it, so they didn't do it. I thought that this was a major positive decision. I'm actually hopeful that that that trend continues. And so I did want to point that out. The second one piece I wanted to point out, which goes back to the platforms, is content moderation. There's a fantastic article by a woman named Emily Dreyfus who works at the Shorenstein Center with the Technology and Social Change Project, who published an opinion piece in The New York Times today. And I encourage you all to take a read. She goes through misinformation, disinformation, campaign against the Biden family, going back a year, very deliberate on various platforms, including Twitter. I think it's posted in the chat now. She did an excellent job and sort of segmenting how that information was spread. I agree with Joanne. Yes, Twitter did make an attempt to push back on that and stop the spread. That was a plus. However, I do think the other piece took responsibility for all the platforms is two to one uniformly really put strong content moderation in place because it's dangerous if we don't. I mean, both Charlie and Joanne describe many different situations where, you know, this information is put out. That means people's lives. There have been reports of, for example, disinformation targeting the black community, misleading information about medical information and black community. So this is life and death, also public safety. The second piece is I think they have a responsibility to be transparent about how they are doing



content moderation. Why do I think this is important? And we think this is important. If people don't understand how they're doing it, you can then actually promote additional conspiracy theories about why they're doing it, how they're doing it. Are they biased? Are they running an anti Trump campaign? So I think that that is the second piece that I think will be vitally important moving forward.

[00:21:03] Thank you, City, and that is a perfect segue into our conversation with Kate, because Kate is one of the nation's top experts on the Internet platforms and content moderation. How do you think the platforms performed during this election, during this momentous time now?

[00:21:26] Yes, so I will to counter Charlie's doom and gloom. I will take the the the slightly sunnier position that I was impressed as someone who has followed these companies for the last six years inside and out, who is very, very familiar with not only the rules that they use to moderate content, but how that policy changes from internal and external pressure and really the processes that are put in place to make sure that those rules are enforced. So let's just kind of start out with the fact that, like Donald Trump, for all intents and purposes, basically broadcast his plans like some type of like villain in a movie declaring ahead of time everything he was going to be doing, like two to kind of to screw with the election results, kind of following it. And because of that, you had Twitter and Facebook in particular. And we'll get to what happened with Google and YouTube in a second. But you had Twitter and Facebook in particular, do some pretty robust, very tailored, very rapid response, moderation. As soon as the president tweeted certain types of things, which were first sort words were foretold by the president himself before the election had even begun. So they actually did a pretty great job. And they did this in a way that was really interesting. It was not just about removing harmful material. They also did certain things like put up labels in search areas or high traffic areas that reminded voters in the same way the media was doing that like results would not be coming in soon, that people were that ballots were still being counted, that that they shouldn't be trusting everything that they were seeing. And so in addition to that, you're seeing a development in and instead he kind of said we need really robust content moderation. And that's been a struggle for years. But it's probably the strongest with these three companies of anyone in the world. And the difference that happened here is you're really seeing finally at long last and I say finally, because it really means people have been calling for this for the last 15 years, a development of shades of gray and how people are doing content. Moderation does not just removal. And it is not just keeping things up. It is adding content to problematic content so that people can find the right answer. We can have a healthy, healthy democracy in the sense that people can go and search out and have the tools to know into question what it is that they're reading. And then they're also doing something that is not just taking things down, not just removing something from the conversation, because sometimes bad content has to be seen in order to have a healthy conversation about it. But they're putting interstitials into place, interstitials being like fuzzed out content that basically allow you to selectively decide that you're going to click through and read something. But maybe with the knowledge that it contains violent material, that it contains false news, that it contains something like hate speech. This is these are all really great developments. And we saw them all on display on Election Day and the day after that is not as true with what YouTube decided to do.

[00:24:38] So YouTube really just had like like a small link at the bottom of all of the election results saying like the election results are not final. Click here for more info.

[00:24:50] And like, had people click on that button and then go out, that took them to an outside of YouTube search that was on Google, like in another like a completely different window. It's a very different thing to give people a like a frankly, slightly, but needed paternalistic understanding of why content is not exactly true, what they should be questioning specifically, and to do that work for people in the same way that journalism has done it for centuries and give people just another type of firehose of information like you do what like YouTube did, which was basically like here is that here is like here's a Google search on election twenty twenty. That's not going to necessarily help anyone decide whether or not the president's tweets or the president or any of the president's aides on TV are saying the right thing. So all of this being said, making sure I got everything that I thought I thought that basically this was a really strong showing from the platforms. Of course, there is going to be disinformation that is that is flowing. I think that what's going to happen is now we've had this very high profile event that they prepared for pretty incredibly, that we're not going to have like then we're like, this is not sustainable for the platforms in the long term, this type of like quality of information that probably have people following specific accounts that are high profile and likely to tweet certain things and they just can't do this at scale.

[00:26:20] But I think that, like, it gives us a sense of like the best possible thoughtful scenario in. Small test setting of what it is the platforms are capable of and what works and what doesn't so that we can start developing best practices going forward.

[00:26:36] And I just so in this very narrow sense, I think that what happened on Tuesday and Wednesday was was pretty was pretty good for four platform policies.

[00:26:47] I want to just pull on that thread of the last part you were saying about what this says, about how content moderation will work going forward. Now, granted, we're still in this very difficult situation. There's always some questions coming in about misinformation, disinformation on the platforms right now, granted, but.

[00:27:06] Is this I mean, is this the dam breaking, you say it's going to be hard to maintain this level of vigilance at scale, but is it do you think we will see? Do we do you think we will see Twitter?

[00:27:22] Maybe YouTube will get with the program, Facebook keeping up this level of scrutiny or do you see it slipping back? Are you optimistic or pessimistic about where we go?

[00:27:33] I well, I think that it's going to really it's kind of really depend. The US election was kind of the event that, like the world, unfortunately for the world, the whole world was waiting for. I feel bad for everyone else who got dragged through our election. But there's a I think that this is so they put a lot of effort into this. And this was kind of a very, very big moment. But I would love it if this level of scrutiny happened, wherever there were national elections all over the world, and that this was kind of a best practices and level of effort went into that type of thing as a start. Right. As a very, very bad start. Unfortunately, like many events are not are not are much more organic than like the election where you can plan in advance for what advance? For what's going to happen. Or, you know, you can put a entire set of plays into place of this happens there. And we're going to take this down or keep this up. I just think that, like, at the very least, if we keep this type of scrutiny up for elections that are taking place wherever they might be, that would be a wonderful start. And then going forward from there, start really understanding what it is that people want from platforms, be it like this type of kind of heavy handed, heavy handed guidance on

fake news and everything else that I think that they do, people do. And or and how to dial that in for more organic events that appear in terms of how the how Facebook or Twitter or YouTube decides to deploy mechanisms for content moderation in reaction to them.

[00:29:14] Thank you. Could it could I ask a question here, because I have really mixed feelings about this and you don't see his point about the handling of the Biden story is really fascinating because that really was a big moment.

[00:29:25] I'm glad you did it. But I guess and I have very mixed feelings about this. So I wanted to get a sense from Kate about this robust response. Twitter decided it was just going to block The New York Post. It was just going to block the whole story. And that raised the whole question of censorship. So a lot of the debate that focused afterwards was not just on, is Biden a bad guy or not? It's like, OK, are the platforms now being Big Brother? And so there was a lot of blowback that was that the right decision? I have mixed feelings on that.

[00:30:03] In my opinion, as an expert, I know I don't think it was the right. I don't think it was the right move. It's I mean, I don't think they did reverse the decision. So I just for. Right, right. People I that I was just going to say that went to settings point into your point, rather like I think that this is the entire problem with something that like I think that where and I say this over and over again, but like we are in a normal setting period of trying to understand what it is that we want from these platforms and what we want them to be. How we even I mean, I've been doing this for six years. I probably heard four dozen analogies of platforms are public utilities. Platforms are not. Platforms are like media companies. Platforms are, you know, like mols platforms are, you know, so it's just like there are all of these analogies. We don't understand what the area. And so what's so great about something going right is that's a very strong signal in this election. It's like, OK, that was actually like a decent job. Like maybe we could recreate that. And that gives the platforms and ourselves kind of like, well, this is what they're capable of and this is what we can expect from that and we can hold them to this. I thought The New York Post was a terrible decision because I think that it did this thing of stepping into the shoes of like other journalists and journalism and fact checking the journalists. And they could have, again, put interstitials on it, done any type of other thing. But like removing the post or blocking the post or spreading seemed incredibly problematic to me for a lot of reasons.

[00:31:39] Well, because I do the I'm sorry to keep talking here, but I, I also think to going to Joanne's point earlier, the decision by other major traditional media not to follow it, not to do the Hillary's email thing, the fact that everybody else looked at that and go we're not going to be an echo chamber. That was, I think, even more important than what happened on on Twitter. So the bigger the Twitter controversy, but the fact that the Times, the Post, other newspapers did not follow up, The Wall Street Journal basically debunked it. But I mean, it really is I think that's going to be one of the case studies and no big push for disinformation that didn't work as a model. So it's not just the platforms, but it's also the media decided to be responsible.

[00:32:27] I thought it was the media's job there to do that, by the way, not the platform, right? That's my question.

[00:32:33] And at the same time, there is concern. For example, Mother Jones pointed out, they reported that their stories, that their reporting was being lowered in search in response to the reported pressure from conservatives who felt that they were being censored. So so this whole question about content, moderation, censorship, free

expression was not adequately addressed in this election and certainly does need to be addressed if we're going to have informed communities.

[00:33:17] So just moving forward and Joanne, let's start with you.

[00:33:23] What does the news media, what do journalists after they all take a well-deserved vacation this election, what might they do to help rebuild trust and accurate information? Because we all know one of the best ways to battle misinformation and disinformation is to deliver accurate, trusted news and information.

[00:33:50] Yeah, I do think, actually, Jennifer, there is as we were just discussing, I think there is a positive lesson to be learned from this election, which is for the mainstream media to stop giving oxygen to the nonsense, to stop allowing Trump and in some sense, Fox News to set the news agenda and spend all of their time battling against misinformation coming from Trump or that they see coming from Fox News or others in that in that world. And we've seen that it works. We saw it with the Hunter Biden story. I thought that was a model of how journalists can handle this, which is to say they didn't jump on this story, but they reported was sort of like, why are you seeing this? Why are you hearing this? Here's the back story. And there is, by the way, there is we this is why you're hearing it. This is tracks that direction, misinformation, etc.. And then the other thing is that in terms of the platforms we've seen, I think that the Twitter experiment with the election, I think has gone quite well. And it shows not only what you can do, but also that you are able to do it. We've heard from the platforms over the years that there's too much of a flood. We can't do this. It's impossible. And we're seeing that this is in the realm of the possible. So I do think the news media, though, the first most important thing is don't give oxygen to the nonsense. Stick to actually understanding, setting the news agenda, which is what their role has been, is to say what is going on in the world and not kind of getting batted back and forth. And I think that would help considerably. I also do think, though, we do have to be very mindful. There is a there's a little bit of a mostly a generational war with a lot of newsrooms now between sort of the old school people who came up with we want to be unbiased. We want to make sure that we what has been now attacked as both side tourism. And I think very often fair journalism is being attacked as both side tourism. In other words, when you're going after just the facts, very often you have in particularly among younger journalists saying, but wait a second, this is lies, this is blasphemy. This is horrible. And we have to call it out for what it is. And I do think that that can lead us astray. So I do think we have to be very careful about how we position stories, the amount of oxygen we give stories, what we choose to focus on and in old fashioned print, which amazingly still has a lot of currency out there, we got to be very careful about where we placed stories and how we prioritize stories to signal what our news judgment is. And I guess it all comes down to, by the way, just news judgment, good old fashioned news judgment as opposed to allowing others to set the news agenda for you and Charlie.

[00:36:57] It's one of the founders of the bulwark and your commitment to delivering accurate reporting that's not driven by a partisan agenda. What roadmap do you give to journalists to help journalists move forward?

[00:37:14] Well, first of all, we are very much an opinion journal. We have a very public part of point of view. We try not to be tribalistic about it. But, you know, the piece of advice that I always give to people, which is not original, it is not new. It's as old as journalism is. Please people get it right. There is nothing that does more to erode truth than sloppy journalism and mistakes because those mistakes are instantly weaponized. You know, particularly when you have this environment we live through where you have out of the



White House referring to journalists as enemies of the people. And it's all fake news. Any mistake, any error, which is human, is multiplied. It's exponentially more damaging. So this is again, I would think that this is obvious, but I think in the fact that we have these micro news cycles now, I don't even know if we have news cycles anymore, Joanne. I mean, we did say it's like every five minutes it's the the beast of the Internet. And you have all of these people who are competing for the eyeballs and the clicks. But there's so much bad stuff out there that makes it very, very easy to discredit journalism. So I wish there was some way that we could do a better job in saying, look, here are actual fact based, credible media outlets pay attention to them. But the part of the problem is, is that everything gets flattened out. Everything just sort of shows up on on your screen. And I really want Kate. To be right about this and I want me to be wrong about this, I really, really do, and I think that she probably is. I guess my my concern is that some of the things that they've done do strike me as the finger in the dam and the dam is about to to to break here. But I think that if I had one advice to more traditional media, it's to really markets that you are a different kind of media, be as transparent as possible. Why we do what we do, what our standards are, what fact checking looks like, and saying that if you're trying to figure out who do you listen to, who do you believe? Well, this is what we do, and this is why we think you should believe us. But but please, people get it right.

[00:39:38] I love that, Charlie. Get it right. This is Bob Dylan said, if it's not right, it's wrong. So and just wanted to know, Charlie, that you and Joanne and other members of the Knight Commission on Trust, Media and Democracy insisted in your recommendations that radical transparency, radical transparency and accuracy are our key city. Looking ahead, what do you think the roadmap needs to be?

[00:40:11] Well, I'm going to talk broadly about a couple of items, and then I'm going to reference some work at the Shorenstein Center that we're doing around this very question of the health of the information ecosystem. Let me start with some of the work we're doing that we think are important. You know, this was touched upon by all of us in regard to the New York Post story in the Hunter Biden non-coverage, which was very, very good. A lot of times newsrooms and journalists are faced with some of these decisions that are not as high profile, that actually aren't as clear once you dig down a little bit. So one piece of this is really having the leadership in newsrooms understand how media manipulation works. There are a lot of actors out there that that try to use the media to amplify their message. So one of the things that we're really pleased about, and I know this was just announced that we're happy to get support from MIT, is to convene some of those leaders in newsrooms to really engage them around how media manipulation works, how to prevent it in their organizations. So we're pleased that the Technology and Social Change project, led by Joe Donovan is a is working on that. Second, if you're not in our convening like that, we have a resource online. The technology and social change team has put together a media manipulation casebook that they're building over time so that you can actually see the various cases, understand how media manipulated media was manipulated by various actors. And I think that'll be in the chat. So you can take a look at that on the positive side and moving away from the defense. But the offense side, a lot of times journalists, particularly in mid-sized newsrooms, not the large New York Times, Washington Post, really don't have the resources to analyze and report on really complex research around science, health, medicine. So one of the things that we have a resource that's available is journalist resource at the Shorenstein Center. We're in contact with thousands of public policymakers and newsrooms to provide that. We've done a lot of work around covid-19 and health. We've done a lot of work around racial issues in the country and digging in, understanding and anti-racism and systemic racism. And so that's another piece that I think is important to other broader dimensions I want to make. One is we really have to

work on this collapse of local news. This is a very, very, very serious problem in our country. As we all know, I don't have to go through all the data numbers. It's just it's been a collapse over the last decade and covid-19 is accelerating that. And the results are through studies. We've become more partisan as a country because we don't have local news. People are turning into national news at the local level because their local news is going away. We're now seeing that corruption is being reported on at the local level, transparency and government decisions that are being made and it goes on. But I do think that working on this question of local news and how people get it, not just focus on the newspapers, but good local news and how people get it. And then lastly, there's a real responsibility for that, I think, that are public policymakers and politicians that we haven't talked about. There's an opportunity at the local level, not necessarily at the national level, but at the local level for local elected leaders to sort of reinvent how they communicate in their in their communities. Right now, there's sort of a one way communication, primarily people putting out what's happening in the town, what's happening in the city. I think we need to get to a place for local elected officials where they have a better understanding about misinformation, disinformation, how to get ahead of stories that may not be true in their own community, that could jeopardize various projects, decisions that the communities have to make and maybe even jeopardize public safety. So I think that communities need to sort of reinvent how they think about communications at the local level and sort of understand the space that we're in moving forward.

[00:44:51] Thanks, Betty. I think there's a number of questions about local journalism and the importance of filling in those critical news deserts, but we're going to questions now. You can still answer your questions in the Q&A. Please list your name if you'll feel comfortable doing so. I'm going to pose the first question here from Mark Newton, who is a journalism and media teacher. Thank you, Mark. I'm going to direct this one to Joanne. We've been talking about this before. I ask the question, I'll say we've been mostly talking about the responsibility of the news media. Mark asks about the accountability of the audience. What level of media literacy should we expect from citizens? Should schools teach media literacy like other literacies that we have deemed essential to function in a society, a democratic republic? What role does journalism, media, big tech have in promoting media literacy and helping teach its audience the public?

[00:45:44] First of all, thank you, Mark, for that question. This is so important and this is something warms my heart and that of Jennifer and Charlie for sure, because this was one of our major recommendations from the Knight Commission was for media literacy. And we had a lot of discussions about this. And I think there was a real consensus that we need to start literacy in the schools and we need to start it at a very young age. I mean, the students are on the Internet.

[00:46:11] They're getting a lot of information starting from the time they can read. So, yeah, I think there's a huge responsibility there. I would love to see some sort of curriculum programing and also funding for this. This is something that I do think that particularly the platforms could and should be a part of, at least in terms of the funding to allow us to work with people from very young age. That said, I do want to note that if you've taken any of these tests that occasionally The New York Times puts out there others, can you tell what's real and what's fake? Even experts have a hard time. It's the the the there are always the folks who are putting out false and misleading information are continually a step ahead. And I think that that's something that we have to work very hard on. And it's in addition to the news literacy, I do think there's also a role that we have to understand for who is the source of the information. And again, I think that the platforms can help us play a role in that in flagging. If you've got something that sounds like USA Today, there were a

whole bunch of USA Today while I was at USA Today and they weren't getting flagged. It would be like USA Today or USA Today and they weren't getting flagged and they were putting out all kinds of garbage. And so, you know, I think there's a role to play for education and a role to play for the platforms. And by the way, if I could just add on settees point earlier about local news, which is so important at Ginnette, where I was chief content officer, we had one hundred and ten local newspapers. And I've got to tell you, we had USA Today and local newspapers. And in those local newspapers, in addition to everything City mentioned, they also had a tremendous degree of trust and that would actually do a huge, huge help to media as a whole. People trusted their local newspapers in a way that they don't trust the national news of any sort.

[00:48:16] And I just put my pitch in, in addition to the literacy, learning civics education, because I think part of it, even though it runs tangential to the media discussion, there's just a lot of people that don't even understand what the role of these various offices they're talking about. They don't know what the Supreme Court actually does. They don't understand what a governor does versus a senator. So I think that also in our politics, in our information ecosystem, we need to really make sure people have a grasp of that.

[00:48:50] Absolutely. Thank you, City, and thank you, Joanne. This is a question from Mark Lente, and I'm going to post this to to to Charlie, who leads an opinion news site. So how might we lessen the confusion among readers, users, viewers about the difference between opinion and and reporting? I mean, we all know that the best opinion pieces are actually arguments are actually driven by but great reporting. And then with twenty four hours to fill this, Marklin notes, many of the networks offer talking heads to interpret the news rather than report the news. And how is that contributing to the polarization and to confusion about what's an opinion and what's not?

[00:49:46] What's reporting now that that is that is a real problem. And it used to be a very, very strict line. And I think newspapers still observe that line. But on cable to and by the way, I'm one of those talking heads. So just, you know, full disclosure. But on cable television, those lines are completely obliterated. And everybody has their basically rather than going to turning on one of the cable news channels to get information, you're going to your safe space. You're going to find out what your team is talking about. And there is no limit whatsoever. I also have mixed feelings about this because I like to have reporters have freedom of speech. And I think it's important to let people know where you're coming from. But that blurring where you have straight news reporters that have been on Twitter expressing their rather aggressive opinions, that that's that that that is a problem that that is added to all of this. It's made for a very robust debate. It's been very, very entertaining.

[00:50:44] But I think it has broken down that real distinction in the readers and publics mind that these people are just giving me news versus the talking heads that are giving me opinion.

[00:50:56] Charlie clarifying. You're a journalist as an MSNBC contributor, other political strategists, and I know you are not a political strategist. And I think that's what people mean when they talk about talking heads. Yeah.

[00:51:16] Unfortunately, we are out of time with so many questions left and a presidential election hanging in the balance. So I just want to say a big thank you to our panelists. I'm sure we will have more conversations about this going forward. A big thank you to everybody who is watching us, either on Zoome or YouTube or Twitter or Facebook. A big

thank you to that Knight Foundation and also to my friend Jennifer. Do you want to close this out, Jennifer?

[00:51:50] Sure. Thank you, everyone, for joining us. And thank you, everyone, for your patience as the votes get counted. Very special. Thank you to our guests. And this is just the start of a conversation that needs that needs all of you to participate in in the coming months and coming year. And thank you again for joining us. And Vivian, it was just wonderful for this special edition, special partnership with you as the new executive director of Aspen Digital. And for many, many, many discussions will be taking place in the future.

[00:52:38] Thank you. Thanks, everybody. Bye bye. Bye. Thanks, everyone. Thank you.

[00:52:50] Thanks, guys. You were great, whoever's left. Oh, they're all gone. Oh, well, that word completely and I think it worked and I assume we're not live.

[00:53:10] All right.