



**UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE NATIONAL AGENDA 2020
WE ARE THE PEOPLE**

Mary Louise Kelly

“The Room Where it Happened”

HOSTED BY

University of Delaware –
Center for Political Communication

PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Lindsay Hoffman

Director of National Agenda and Associate Director
of the Center for Political Communication,
University of Delaware.

Mary Louise Kelly

Co-host of *All Things Considered*, award-winning evening newsmagazine on NPR. In January a post-interview dispute between Kelly and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made headlines. Kelly’s questions to Pompeo about the Trump Administration Ukraine policy made him angry and he challenged Kelly to locate Ukraine on an unmarked map. She did. She’s held other recent interviews with world leaders and US actors turned activists. Kelly served as national security correspondent for *NPR News* reporting on the CIA, NSA and terrorism, wars, and rising nuclear power. She also has written for the *New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *POLITICO*, *Newsweek* and others. She has written two novels: *Anonymous Sources* and *The Bullet*.

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[Musical interlude to 0:05:50.0]

DR. HOFFMAN: Good evening. Welcome to the tenth annual National Agenda Speaker Series. This year's theme calls attention to the power of us, the people, the citizens of the United States. We've already held two National Agenda without borders events each drawing nearly 500 viewers from nearly 20 states and four countries. Tonight, we're continuing the conversation with a veteran journalist who has witnessed numerous White House administrations and also has expertise in national security issues. As always, National Agenda is about demonstrating civil dialogue and engaging with the community. Even though we're virtual we will be asking audience members to submit questions. So just type your question into Chat, select the Chat at the bottom of the screen, and it may be selected during our Q and A at the end of this talk. Tonight, Mary Louise Kelly is co-host of *All Things Considered*, NPR's award-winning evening news magazine. Her recent interviews range from Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, to Jane Fonda and Matt Damon. Kelly also served as a national security correspondent reporting on the CIA and the NSA, and other spy agencies, as well as terrorism, wars and rising nuclear powers. Her assignments have included North Korea, Russia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and beyond. And all this with Harvard degrees in government, French language, and literature as well as a master's degree in European studies at Cambridge. I'm so excited, excited to speak with her. Welcome Mary Louise.

MS. KELLY: Thank you. It is my pleasure. Thank you so much for that nice introduction, Lindsay, and thank you to the University of Delaware, um, for hosting me. This is great and my only regret is that I have not been to your



campus and was so looking forward to it. So, you have to have me back.

[Chuckle.]

DR. HOFFMAN: Definitely. We will. Ah, whenever you; one of your colleagues, Domenico Montanaro is a UD alum so it's only telling that you should press him that you should come back.

MS. KELLY: Yes.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um,

MS. KELLY: [Indiscernible] –

DR. HOFFMAN: – so –

MS. KELLY: – [indiscernible] –

DR. HOFFMAN: – so thanks everybody for joining us virtually. Um, welcome to the more than 600 folks, ah, who have registered for this call. Um, and, from Delaware to California to Texas. Our viewers comprise UD alumni, faculty, staff, retirees and students, as well, as well as many not affiliated with, ah, UD. So, thanks to all of you. Thank you for joining us tonight and this season for very important conversations. So, Mary Louise, let's start with Pompeo [chuckle] –

MS. KELLY: [Chuckle]

DR. HOFFMAN: – Secretary of State Pompeo. You interviewed the Secretary of State in January. Um, it feels like a long time ago, ah, but it was less than a year ago, ah, before we all went down on lockdown. Remind us why this interview was important and what happened. Tell us about as the theme for this, ah, ah, talk is, the room where it happened. The thank you hat tip to Hamilton. Um, what happened in the room?

MS. KELLY: Yeah. Um, thank you, ah, for just tackling that head-on.

I did indeed interview Mike Pompeo in late January which does feel about 17,000



news cycles ago. Um, it, the room where it happened was the 7th floor of the State Department, um, which is the top floor. I had been in there before, ah, for, with different Secretaries of State for, for interviews and they hold receptions up there. You know, if you're the king of wherever, the Prime Minister of wherever they hold a big luncheon for you. That has never happened for me, but I've been lucky enough to attend on the sidelines and, and wander around up there. Um, the Secretary of State has actually a very small actual office, like where their desk is. But it opens on to a lovely living room and then there's a suite of private conference rooms and the staff is sitting around there. And then there are more formal reception rooms. And we, we arranged this interview. I had been asking for it for a while. Ah, I think he agreed to talk to me because I was in Iran in early January and Mike Pompeo is keen to talk about U.S. policy on Iran, ah, and figured I would be interested in, in discussing that. As I was. Um, so we set it up and I roll in with my crew which for an interview like that is a producer who's recording and making sure it sounds okay; ah, an editor who's listening for editorial things and, um, do we have our facts right, do I need to follow-up on something, did anybody misstate something; ah, somebody who's going to write about it for the website; our diplomatic correspondent Michelle Kellerman who has the closest relationship with the State Department was there. Um, I think that might have been it. I think we were a team of five that day. And, we sat down in one of the, ah, reception rooms with, you know, portraits of past Secretaries of State around the walls. And I had met Pompeo before and spoken to him and, ah, so we sat down. I had been told ten minutes and that's it. Um, and sometimes you can push that a little bit, but you never know so you need to get right to the point. And, um, I asked about Iran. We spent the first seven or



eight minutes of the interview on Iran talking about U.S. policy and you, and I mean, again, this is 17,000 news cycles ago but remember we, we came close to going to war with Iran in January. Um, the Swiss [indiscernible] and the story that was still, you know, leading the world, um, at that point. And, ah, we went around on that and it was somewhat tense because I was pushing him on how is the U.S. going to stop Iran from getting a nuclear weapon. Like, what's the plan? What's the endgame here? Um, but I had also gone in knowing, gone in knowing I have to ask about Ukraine, ah, because we were in the middle of a summit impeachment trial about Ukraine and he's the Secretary of State and he was on the famous July 25th phone call where, that led, that put the whole impeachment process in motion. Um, and he had never really been asked about that. He had not be subpoenaed to appear in any of the impeachment testimony and he had done a lot of interviews but had with fairly friendly media or media he thought would be friendly to him and he'd not really been pressed on it. So with the remaining time we had I tried, ah, and ah, if you listen to that it's a very terse exchange where he does not want to talk about Ukraine. It is very clear he doesn't want to talk about Ukraine. Um, and we push him and go back and forth and we, ah, one of his aides ended up ending the interview slightly before the ten-minute mark. Um, he stood up, not another word, no thank you, no pleasantries, glared at me, left the room. Um, aides sweep behind him and the doors close. And, um, okay, you know? We knew he had made news and so we're packing up to go file for *Morning Edition* which was on air, which was a morning interview on a Friday in January and, um the double doors to his private office sweep open again and the same aide who had cut the interview short stepped out looked at me and said come with me. Um, just you, no producer, no



editor, nobody else. Just you and no recorder. Leave your mic here. And, ah, so we went back to his private living room and he screamed and swore at me for about ten minutes. And, challenged me to find Ukraine on a map um, a blank map with no, ah, countries marked, no writing, no borders, no nothing. Um, said people will hear about this. Asked if I thought Americans actually cared about Ukraine. Used the F word in that sentence and, and many others. And I thanked him, and I left and went and filed for *Morning Edition* and then later for *All Things Considered*. Um, that would have made news. I think it made significantly more news, ah, that he dropped a statement the next morning on State Department letterhead calling me by name a liar and saying I had, ah, lied to him twice and, ah, suggesting that I had actually pointed to Bangladesh instead of Ukraine on a map um, which I, I will just note for the record that I have two degrees in Europe, I've reported from Russia several times, and they're on different continents. Um, it is an experience to, you know, wake up on a Saturday morning and um, have your inbox a statement ah, on State Department letterhead from the Secretary of State of the United States calling you a liar and thinking okay, um, where do we go from here? Um, and, my reaction was the, the best response would be to show up and do the work again on Monday morning to try to put an excellent show on the air and let the, let the interview stand for itself. Um, NPR's CEO did an interview and, and NPR put statements defending the reporting and saying we will not be intimidated. Um, and that to me was critical because we did go back and forth over whether to report the coda to the interview. We had never gone off the record. Um, the reason that I was at the State Department that morning was to interview Mike Pompeo. And, ah, he chose to continue the conversation. I didn't want it to be about me. I didn't want it to be something where it looked



like I, I was trying to make him look bad. Um, and that was part of my calculation in terms of how do we discuss what happened in his private living room. Um, but ultimately I thought it spoke to the, the character and the actions of um, of the top diplomat of the United States of America and spoke to the way that this administration interacts with the media. And I felt then, as I have many times, I wasn't there, you know, I was there as me, obviously. I was there representing NPR, obviously. But I was there representing the free press and the right to question the officials who, who are governing this country.

DR. HOFFMAN: And so, like, is this a unique experience interviewing the Secretary of State –

MS. KELLY: Oh, yes, I hope so.

DR. HOFFMAN: – or any other [indiscernible] –

MS. KELLY: [Indiscernible] political official –

DR. HOFFMAN: You had this experience before?

MS. KELLY: I have not been submitted to any map tests, um, by anyone else. Um, I have interviewed multiple senior members of, of this administration and others. I've never lived through something quite like that.

DR. HOFFMAN: How does this treatment compare to how political officials in other countries talk to their media?

MS. KELLY: I mean, I can't speak for how they speak to their media, I can say that I have interviewed the Foreign Secretaries of other countries, ah, in their countries and in the United States and I have never had an experience like this. Um, I, I can't speak for Mike Pompeo and I wish him well. I really have no, you know, this is not personal in any way. I look forward to interviewing him again at some point. Um, and I, ah, and I look forward to interviewing his, you know,



successors and, and all the rest of it. There's, there's no, this is water under the bridge. Um, but what it speaks to is in an administration where from the very top the message is that the media is the enemy of the people, that alternative facts are okay, um that we live in an era of fake news. Um, there are consequences to that in terms of what is, what becomes acceptable behavior or what people think will be acceptable behavior. And it felt to me important to draw attention to that. Um, there are consequences. I mean, I, I don't, I'm, I'm fine. People have, you know, [chuckle] people have sworn at me before and will again. That's, that's fine. Um, or not fine but whatever. Um, but it has occurred to me, you know, reporting from some of the places I have reported from during the Trump administration from Russia, from North Korea, from Iran as a reporter whose job is to go in and ask officials there uncomfortable questions. And ask and really try to find out what do people who live in other place, parts of the world, what do they think of their life, what do they think of their government? That's my job is to go and bring that back to all of you. And you take risks when you do that. Um, journalists get detained, journalists get arrested. It was a huge calculation when we decided should we get on a plane to Tehran in January, ah, after the U.S. had just killed Soleimani. Um, I have always had in the back of my mind I take responsibility for my work. Um, I take responsibility for my own security and that of my team. But it's really nice to know that I have a U.S. passport and that the U.S. State Department and our government would back me up. And it has crossed my mind more than once on reporting trips in recent years to wonder would they? [Laughter.] Um, would it be the same as, as I would have taken for granted in the past. Um –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Indiscernible] –



MS. KELLY: – I think the answer is yes. But um, but there are consequences to the, the dynamic, ah, that is at play right now between this administration and, ah, and reporters who are doing their jobs.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, can you help us understand, for those of us who aren't journalists or understand, um, the relationship between journalists and the press, and the President, how do reporters and sources usually navigate whether things are on or off the record or on background? Can you explain these terms and why some sources choose to go off the record?

MS. KELLY: Yeah, it's, it's a great question and I covered before I became an anchor I covered the intelligence beat and national security for many years, um, where this is constantly in play because, uh, you're inevitably trying to get sources as close to the information, as close to the action as you can get. Um, and often the people who know the most are those who have the most to risk by talking to you. Um, you know, when you cover the CIA beat or the National Security Agency as I did for years those people all get polygraphed regularly and one of the questions that they get asked is have you had any unauthorized contact with the press and any contact with the press is going to be unauthorized if you're working in the clandestine service or the Central Intelligence Agency. Um, so you're navigating, you know, the risk to these people of losing their jobs, their pensions, and um, and how do you fact check something that one person gives you? There are all kinds of calculations that go into that. I, I because of that and, and for other reasons, um, in an interview where it's remotely going to be an issue. Most of the interviews I do are, you know, I'm talking to somebody in normal times they would be in the studio. Right now, they're very clearly being recorded. They know it. I always say at the start of an interview okay, we're



going to start recording, here we go. Um, you know. You; it's very clear that you're on the record. When it's, when it's somewhat less clear, um, or when somebody's saying I can tell you this but you know off the record I always define it. Um, and you know, the way I practice journalism is off the record means I cannot use or report what you've told me. I can't do it. Um, I will try to work people from there to being, again as I practice it, to being on deep background which means I can say NPR has learned this, that, and the other. I'm not identifying anyone by name or by position. Ideally you want to move somebody from there to being just, you know, on background so you can identify them and then you're negotiating how. I always am negotiating to try to give as much information as I can to help my listeners and readers and audience gauge does this person actually know what they're talking about, are they in a position to know this information that they're sharing. So, it's a constant negotiation of, um, how you're going to ID somebody and how you use it. And I will say I have covered national security and foreign policy for [sigh] – I'm, I'm dating myself – two plus decades. Let's leave it there. So, let's leave it there. Um, and I have never violated these rules. Um, you wouldn't last very long on the intelligence beat if you did. Um, in a case like this, we were not on tape and it, and it gave me pause. It was one of the things I considered in deciding whether to report the coda to the interview. Um, however, you're on the record until you explicitly agree that you're off the record and in a case like that where I wasn't just hanging out in his office or bumped into him at the neighborhood Starbucks, I had come to the State Department to interview him. Um, they cut the interview short [chuckle] and then summoned me to continue talking. And so, in my mind we're, we're on the record unless I agree that we're not. Um, and that was part of the



calculation that we made to, to, ah, to describe that part of the interview. We also before we did called the State Department back, explained to them we're going to report on that portion of the interview; do you want to comment or clarify in any way we will include that. Um, the comment came in the form the next day on the State Department letterhead from Pompeo. Um, but yeah, that, that is a, a lesson that I would imprint early and often because people hear different things, you know? Even journalists use the term on background or off the record in different ways. So, I always just say this is what I mean by it, this is what I'm going to do with the information, this is how I'm going to ID you or not as we are agreeing to do. And, just to very quickly say, you know, to your point of why do you use anonymous sources? It goes back to, there, if you're trying to cover what the CIA is doing and you only report what the press officer is willing to tell you in a printed statement on the record you're not going to get very far. Um, and you have to agree in those cases, I would argue, to grant anonymity to protect people, to be able to speak more freely about what their employer, in this case the U.S. Government, is doing on behalf of the American people. And you weigh is what they're telling me valuable enough that I should report it even though I can't tell you who the name of the person is? What is the risk to the person who's telling me that? Like, are they the only person who could possibly know even if I agree not to name them or are they going to get fired anyway because nobody else had access to that memo or that meeting? Um, and the last thing I would say is, you know, we've done explainers on air about this, about the use of anonymous sources, why we use them and there's a, a common misperception that, that I don't know who they are. You know, that people are leaving me hot tips on the phone and I'm just racing to broadcast across



America. Um, and if anything I go even beyond, you know, the vetting and verifying and fact checking and reporting that I would do with you, Lindsay, where I can name you, um, when I'm dealing with anonymous sources because I'm asking our audience, look, trust me. I can't tell you who this person is and therefore it's my reputation on the line. I am telling, you know, I am asking you to trust that I vetted this person, that they are who they say they are, that they're in a position to know what they're saying to me. Um, you know, and so, you know, it's, ah, I've never, never reported something from an anonymous source who I didn't know who they were [chuckle] and had a relationship with them.

DR. HOFFMAN: That's very interesting. Well let's move on. People just don't trust the media right now. Um, at a time when Americans are relying heavily on the news for information about the pandemic, the election, and all this that is 2020. Um, Gallop reports that the public remains largely distrustful of the mass media. Sixty percent of Americans say they have not very much trust or none at all. How has the rhetoric from the Trump administration played a role in this or is it just part of a continued decline in trust in media that we've seen over the past few decades?

MS. KELLY: The Trump administration rhetoric I think does play a role. If the president of the United States is telling you from, from, you know, all the authority that that role carries, ah, don't trust the press, it's fake news, they're the enemy, um, there are going to be people who, who believe it. Um, I think the media is not blameless here by any stretch. Um, there's a lot of partisan reporting and um, retweeting of things you haven't read. I just noticed this week, I don't know if anybody else has noticed, um, somebody tweeted out one of my NPR interviews and had an interesting comment about it and I went to retweet it



and Twitter made me stop, put up a flag and said don't you want to read the article first before you retweet it?

DR. HOFFMAN: I saw that. Yeah.

MS. KELLY: And I thought, okay but it's my interview. Like, I know exactly what it was. I don't – but it made me go through click through to the, you know, I had to prove that I had gone through and at least tried to listen to it or read the transcript before it would let me retweet it. I had not seen that before and I thought, that's great. That's great because, you know, we, we are all guilty of, ah, ah, in the crazy 24/7 hyper-fast news environment that we live in repeating something. Ah, you know, it, whether that is in the form of retweeting an article that you haven't read and fact checked every word of to worse, um, you know, we're all guilty of it. And the media, ah, definitely plays a role in this. I, I, find it simultaneously super depressing and understandable [chuckle] that Americans, um, have less trust in the media than they once did. It's, you know, the, the media, we, we are citizens, we are Americans and our work mirrors what is going on in our society and we're at a super divisive and distrustful, poisonous-feeling moment, um, and so, yeah, people are going to feel that, you know, reflected in the way that they consume media. I know, you know, there's no, there is no easy answer to this. We're never going to go back if there ever was some glory days of, you know, the six p.m. news where a super authoritative white male anchor who looked like your great granddad is going to come on and tell you the facts, like, and everybody is going to tune in and watch it and agree these are the facts. Um, I don't think it ever existed and we're certainly not going back to anything resembling that. Um, I will say one thing we have tried to do and that I am trying to do, um, you know, at every opportunity is just that it's not enough to say hey,



you know, we're the mainstream media, trust us. Um, be more transparent about why we're doing what we're doing, how we're doing what we're doing, you know, pulling back the curtain a little bit on the agonizing internal debates that we have in our newsroom everyday over how to cover things, how to try to be fair, how to try to get you the truth. Um, you know, the, the discussion that I just referenced about anonymous sources is one of those because I got, I had quoted anonymous sources in an old story I had done um, and got all this, you know, voice mail saying I don't, I don't trust these fake anonymous sources. It came up in the Pompeo interview where he said, I asked him something and he said well I don't know what your, you know, unnamed sources are telling you and I pushed back and said it's not an unnamed source. It's your senior advisor. [Chuckle] A current diplomat of four decades and here's his name and he just testified this under oath, quote. Um, not an unnamed source. Ah, you can't push back like that in every, in every occasion but the media needs to be prepared to do so when we can and needs to explain when we can't why we're using anonymous sources. Um, we are trying to do this more at NPR, just explaining. You know, we have these big agonizing internal debates about what language we use and the, the memos go out about what is acceptable to say on air or not. But how would our listeners know that. How do they know why we're choosing to call, you know, use a certain verb or not, or use a certain name for something or not, or refer to a group by this name versus the other, or you know. A recent one was about, um, to do with the Gretchen Witmer, governor of Michigan, you know, alleged plot to kidnap her. Um, crazy. Um, ah, is, is the appropriate term for the people who were planning that militia? That's a really loaded term these days. Why did we use it or not use it? We have these discussions; the guidance

circulates. But trying to be more explicit about explaining to people. So we did an interview on *All Things Considered* about here's the term, here's the background, here's why we used or didn't use it in this, in this occasion versus another occasion and doing more of that I hope, um, just reminds people, okay they are actually being thoughtful. I might not agree with the way that they phrase this or their decision to cover this and not this. Um, but here's why they did it. Because, you know, we don't get it right every time, but we are trying to be intentional. We're trying to get it right every time.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, given, you know, all the confusion around who to trust, who to go to, on a more personal level, ah, my student Julie wants to know what's your best advice for evaluating a credible news source or detecting media bias? What are some concrete examples of how you discern good news, good journalism?

MS. KELLY: So, the question to me of how I know who to trust as I'm trying to consume news?

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

MS. KELLY: You know, the track record of the, if, if they got it right. I mean, I always go, you know, you look through and if, there's often a sensational headline, I need to say, and then you read and you're on paragraph one, two, three, four, five, six and it's and you're like where where's the evidence that supports that headline? And sometimes you get there eventually, sometimes not. Um –

DR. HOFFMAN: So, you're looking for the evidence that supports the headline?

MS. KELLY: Yeah. Yeah.



DR. HOFFMAN: You know, looking for a track record?

MS. KELLY: I'm looking for a track record. If it's a, a particular organization or a particular journalist, um, have they been right on this before; do they seem to be well sourced, um; are they actually in the place that they're reporting from, you know; do they seem to have access to people who are there. It's hard in the pandemic. Ah, most of us are, you know, grounded, literally. Um, but, ah, trying to look at just, yeah, what, what is the evidence they cite. What are the quotes that they're citing? Um, have they made an effort to gather as many, you know, competing points of view on this as possible? And again, that speaks to something that we touched on in an earlier afternoon session, Lindsay, about, you know, it's not about presenting the two sides of every story. Um, for almost story there are more than two sides. And one side might be right [chuckle], the other is just not. Um, so, that's something I think about a lot. Um, you can be accurate without being entirely truthful [chuckle] as a reporter if that makes sense. I mean, a, a basic example, you could be assigned as I have been, um, to cover a Trump press conference. You could cover it verbatim, get every quote right, cover it completely and thoroughly and put it out there. Um, would you have served up the truth to your listeners and audience? Um, and I say this not in a partisan way but, um, given the track record of this president and his willingness to, to put things out there that are demonstrably untrue I would say you probably haven't as a journalist done your job. So that's what we're trying to figure out. What is the job now? How do you get the truth out there? Um, it's, it's a challenge and I, I mean, I can only say that one of the things that gives me comfort, um, as a journalist is that this has been a challenge for journalists since the beginning of [chuckle] since the beginning of journalism is, is



that, you know, none of us are, ah, neutral. Nobody is striving for that. But how do you, how do you get as close as you can to the truth without injecting yourself into it and making it biased and giving an opinion and all the rest of it. So we are, it's, um, it is not easy, but we are trying.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, what are your thoughts on, I, I mean I, I teach the history of media in politics and, you know, the early part of our democracy was extremely partisan press. It was openly partisan press –

MS. KELLY: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: Is it better to, you know, it was just in the early 20th century that we started to see, ah, journalists becoming more professionalized and saying, you know, we're objective, we have these, um, you know, norms of objectivity and fairness, and ah, is there a, a best model? Like is one better than the other? Like, should journalists just say hey, I'm, [chuckle], I'm partisan on this side and here's what I think?

MS. KELLY: [Indiscernible] –

DR. HOFFMAN: Or, I mean, is there room for a middle ground to ask a difficult question?

MS. KELLY: I think there is. You know, you raise a point that we have debated at my dinner table regularly. My husband is born and raised in Scotland and the press there, um, is more partisan or you could say more transparent. It depends on how you're coming at this. Um, but, you know, the, the newspapers there, not just the editorial pages, but the reporting staffs tend to be a little more open about what their political ah, ah, agenda, bias views are that they're bringing to the table and to their reporting. And my husband argues that that is totally the way to go and that Americans are deluded in thinking there's anything



resembling a, a mainstream, unbiased press. Um, to which I guess that I, I disagree. [Chuckle]. Um, you know, we're humans, we're all flawed. We're all biased. We all have opinions, of course. Um, I see huge value in the, in the traditional mainstream media, ah, that this country has fostered and that, and that continues to thrive and that I would argue if anything in recent years has been not defeated but reinvigorated. Um, I just think there's plenty of people out there telling you what to think [chuckle]. Um, I don't think anybody cares what, what I tell you to think. That's not my job. Um, my job is, is to be curious, to ask the questions that occur to me as I try to make sense of some of the bizarre times that we are living through, um, and to bring you every night what I managed to find out, like what I know and how I know it. I was in, you know, this has been, it's, it's harder to do than it sounds. I was having flashbacks listening to a podcast just yesterday about the last disputed election in the United States which of course was Bush versus Gore in 2000 –

DR. HOFFMAN: Oh, on The Daily?

MS. KELLY: I was listening to The Daily. It was a great podcast. Hat's off to them. Um, just reliving quite hope epically bonkers that, ah, that the whole, you know, the election and, and the, you know, 30 whatever days that followed were. Um, and it's something I found myself explaining now that I work with many producers and editors who were, you know, toddlers at best in 2000, um, and have no direct memory of it. And I remember being like the most rookie JV anchor of all time at the BBC in London that night and it was my big shot because for once they were happy to have an American accent on the air, ah, covering the U.S. elections. And so, I was anchoring out of London and, um, doing, you know, the, the, watching and just trying to figure out – they would



open my mic at the top of every hour and I'm giving the big headline on what's happening and, and I'm sitting there, [laughter] sweat rolling down my neck with, as the clock is clicking to the top of the hour thinking I have no idea what, what is happening or what to say. And you can, you know, you're sitting in the control room on one side of the soundproof glass and stay calm where you are, and you can see other chaos –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MS. KELLY: – as editors are screaming and throwing things and phones are ringing off the hook on the other side and you think, oh my God, like, nobody knows what's happening or quite how to say that. And it's going to be me in five seconds, four, three... What do you say? And, ah, and hour after hour we did some version of I, I have absolutely not a clue [chuckle] [indiscernible] tonight.

Um, you know –

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, [indiscernible] –

MS. KELLY: – wellll how you know it.

DR. HOFFMAN: If we can let's, let's time travel back to 2000. So, the news media thought they had a winner in the VP Al Gore. Then they rescinded saying Florida was too close to call. This is for all those Millennials and Gen-Zers out there. Just a summary. After 2:00 a.m. the next morning the networks finally called Florida for Bush. This began a chaotic recount, ah, that led to protests and claims of voter fraud and finally a judicial halt to the recount declaring Bush the winner. Do you see any similarities between that year and 2020? Could a similar story play out over the next days or weeks? We've got election day coming up, ah, next Tuesday. Um, or has early voting and technology made this somehow easier to vote, count these votes? Do we, are we going to see a 2020



scenario like, or I'm sorry, 2000 scenario again in 2020?

MS. KELLY: Ah, my God, I certainly hope not but I, I, I think all predictions are off at this point. Um, early voting means we now, we now are already where are we it's Wednesday, ah, we've got six days to go and already we're past the 50 percent mark of the number of Americans who cast a ballot is 2016. This is, I don't see anyway that it's just not record turnout. Um, counting them is another story. Ah, you know, we've got as, as, you know, as we've been talking reports rolling in from the Supreme Court where they are ruling on what's going to happen in Pennsylvania and how late your ballot can come in and still be counted. Um, and I don't see any way that this doesn't go to litigation. I, I honestly wish I could say otherwise. Um, the thing that makes it a little bit worse than 2000; in 2000 it was heavily litigated, the stakes could not higher. This is, you're talking about the president of the United States, um, and they roll in the big lawyers and it goes to the Supreme Court. Um, and by the way, you know, the, the detail you just left out in that recounting is that Governor of Florida, the state in question, is the brother of, you know, the Republican candidate for president.

DR. HOFFMAN: Right [chuckle].

MS. KELLY: Suspect. I mean, it was so crazy. Um, but, and maybe I'm naïve, but, but there was a sense that this, you know, they were going to fight this tooth and nail all the way up and appeal it and it went to the Supreme Court but that once the Court ruled that both parties would respect the decision whichever way it fell. And that is what happened. The Court ruled and the next day Al Gore conceded. What worries me a little bit more now if I'm being honest, is that whenever we get a result that is certified by states and the, the litigation



has played itself out to whatever point it reaches, I don't know that you have a scenario where both candidates accept that wholeheartedly and graciously and I don't know that even if that bridge is crossed you have a scenario where half the country isn't outraged and protesting and not accepting the results of the, of the election. Um, that's where we are and that is scary. Um, you know, that said, it gives me heart that, ah, so many people are voting, ah, that so many people are voting early, that there have not been significant problems. We've seen lines that have been way too long,. You should not have to spend your entire day in line to vote in Georgia or other places where that's happened. Um, I sincerely hope that all of the early voting means that's not where we are come Monday and Tuesday, um, with people trying to vote and giving up after they've sat in line for eight hours. That would be a travesty. Um, but, you know, there, there are fears so far of voter intimidation at the polls has not come to, you know, from, from extremist groups. That has not come to pass yet. Ah, mail in voting appears to have, you know, reached people and the ballots have flooded back in so far. We are now for the record past the point where in almost every state you should be voting by mail. If you were planning to vote by mail, you know, check with your local and state authorities, but generally speaking change your plan [chuckle]. Go vote in person. I know it's an inconvenience. I know were all worried about Covid safety. Vote in person or find a way to get your mail ballot either to an official drop box or to hand in directly to your local election officials. We're, we're too late to, to be sure that the U.S. Postal Service is going to get it there. Um, so there are, there are a lot of questions. Um, you know, –

DR. HOFFMAN: Well –

MS. KELLY: – [indiscernible] is working. The courts are working. The



system so far is working so far, and I'm reaching for wood to knock. There, you know, I'm about to interview the head of U.S. Counterintelligence on Friday, who is the one who put out the big statement over the summer about Russia and China and Iran. We'll get an update what foreign threats look like. But so far there are no reports, no validated reports of widespread voter fraud. So, you know, what we can do is be informed, vote, um, have a big cup of herbal tea or a big shot of brandy, whatever [chuckle] –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MS. KELLY: – works for you. Try to get some good sleep this weekend because I don't know what we're up for next week.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, on that note. Let's now fast forward. Let's look in the crystal ball: it's November 4th, 2020. Um, I read an article today in the New York Times, more people are buying guns – Americans bought 15.1 million guns in the seven months this year from March through September. That's a 91 percent leap from the same period in 2019. Why do you think this is and are, are we looking for potential violence on election day no matter what the result or post-election day?

MS. KELLY: Hum. Um, it's a, it's a chilling question and I won't pretend to be an expert on it and one of the glories of my job is that I, I don't partic (sp?) – predict the future. Um, you know, it's outside, I'm barely managing to keep up just trying to track what's, what's unfolding as we speak and what unfolded an hour ago. So, I wont venture a prediction on that, I mean, you know, everybody listening will have access to the same reports I do which is the international election monitors who come to the U.S. to monitor our vote as we do theirs, um, are worried about this election and the possibility of violence. Um, you know,

there are fears about intimidation at the polls and protests that, you know, I just was tracking something of ten protests scheduled for D.C. between now and election day. And those are the, the big ones that have officially registered with the National Park Service. It's, it's going to be wild, you know, these, these next few days. Um, you know, it, it, again, it's not my job to, to predict. I, I cling myself to the reassurance that thus far democracy has held [chuckle], media is, is operating. We are fact checking as fast as we can check. Um, we're, you know, trying to put correct facts out there. We're trying to, you know, it's, it's not our job to urge action or lack thereof but, but to provide context to information so that people can decide. Um, you know, make up their own minds about, about um, how they think these next days may unfold. And thus far you know our, our democracy is holding and um I, I don't know, I look back to my, my grandparents and great grandparents who lived through threats that must have seemed, you know, worse than this. Ah, as I was despairing the other day to my husband and saying my God its all so horrible. And he looked at me and said you're saying that while eating really good takeout sushi and drinking a lovely bottle of wine –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MS. KELLY: – in our nice, heated house. So, you know, there are no bombs falling. It could be worse. And I thought, you're right. It could be worse. It could be worse. Knock on wood.

DR. HOFFMAN: All right. What would you have said to yourself a year ago if you had said, what could be worse; we could have bombs falling on us [chuckle]?

MS. KELLY: I tweeted recently, ah, on just the – I can't even remember what it was – but it felt like the craziest news day in a while which is saying something, and I tweeted, you know, remember, remember how calm the



beginning of 2020 felt when all we were dealing with was a presidential impeachment trial and nearly going to war with Iran? And it does kind of feel like that. Like the quaint good old days before pandemic and um, you know, before the election hit fully in its stride and ah, and the economy went off the rails and everything else that we are dealing with.

DR. HOFFMAN: Absolutely and I, I can say talking with my students and you talked with them today they are uniquely primed, primed into what's happening in politics today. I always joke that, um, where I have been joking since the pandemic, that I used to tell my students why politics matters to them, and [chuckle] I don't really have to explain that anymore –

MS. KELLY: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – because they see it. They see how it matters to them. It's inhibiting their freedom. It's inhibiting all sort of things.

MS. KELLY: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: So, um, tell –

MS. KELLY: Can I just say one thing on this just before we move on? Ah, just thinking about the long view. Um, I, I interviewed Bob Woodward recently because of his book that made all kind of news and we went through the whole, you know, what the president knew and when about the pandemic and why didn't you, Bob Woodward, tell us sooner what you knew because he said it to you?

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

MS. KELLY: We did all of that and then, and then we pivoted and talked about, you know, I just, you're sitting there and you're sitting there with Bob Woodward, a guy who has, ah, covered every White House since Nixon, um, who covered Watergate, um, and didn't just cover Watergate –



DR. HOFFMAN: Right, broke Watergate.

MS. KELLY: – broke Water – he was Watergate. Um, and documented the unraveling of a presidency and a, and a nation that felt so divided. Um, and where nobody knew who to, who to trust. Um, and talked about how that compares to, okay, you did that and now you're covering Washington now and, and what gives you hope, you know? How different does this moment feel in terms of just feeling worried for the future of our democracy? Um, and it's interesting and Bob Woodward is a reporter's reporter. He's not there to give you deep analysis on his deep feelings about any of this. He just wants to get the president to tell him something that he hasn't said to anybody else and put it out there and make some news. That's his deal. But, but he did say he has never in trying to cover administration has never encountered what he has for this most recent book which was interviewing the most senior national security advisors to a president and that they were persuaded that this president represented a threat to our democracy. Um, and that he felt leadership of America has failed. His view. Um, but the democracy has held. And I, I wouldn't presume to weigh in on some of that, but I will say, you know, it's, it's true and worth bearing in mind. Democracy has held. It will hold next week. We're going to be okay.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well that's, that's very hopeful. I'm sure my, my students really appreciate that, and the audience appreciates that, appreciates that too. So, um, we're going to head into, ah, the Q and A in a few minutes. Um, but I want to ask you, um, sort, sort of a more personal question. Ah, I know you're a runner. Um, I wanted to ask if this is something that helps you destress particularly in an election year that also happens to be taking place in a pandemic with widespread social unrest [chuckle] over race and racism.



And then to ask, what are some other ways you can recommend to our audience members? I know my students are stressed out. Um, they're overwhelmed by the news. What are some ways you can recommend to them to sort of destress or to, to wind down over the next week, which is going to be pretty, pretty wild [chuckle]?

MS. KELLY: Well, I actually would invite anybody who's figured this out please share your tips because I have not.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MS. KELLY: Um, you know, like, bring on the tips. You know, I, for me it's, you know, chug a bottle of tequila or go for a run. And the latter is probably the better choice. Um, it's, this is, you know, it's almost in a way to me, you know, the most comforting thing I can say is like I hear you and I'm right there with you [chuckle]. We are at, nobody is sleeping in my house. Nobody is sleeping in the newsroom. I, you know, I can, you know, see on the screen, behind the screen I'm talking to you on, emails pouring in – planning for special live round the clock coverage starting soon. And God knows when it ends. Ah –

DR. HOFFMAN: Right. We've already had some breaking news just since we talked earlier this afternoon [chuckle].

MS. KELLY: Um, everybody is stressed out and it's almost kind of helpful to just realize it's not just me. It's not just me. This is, you know, whatever your politics, however you hope next week or whenever we get the election results, however you hope it lands, um, to do this while we're all stuck at home and in the middle of pandemic and people are really sick. I mean, it's just a, it's a, its crisis upon crisis upon crisis upon crisis. Um, and it's hard. Um, for me running really helps,. It's the one positive change I have made I think to my routine in the

working from home era is I used to have a 45 minute commute every morning so I would leave my house, id drop my kids at school, I'd drop my husband at work and by the time I made it to the NPR parking garage it was a 45 minutes door to door. I don't do that anymore. I just walk downstairs. Um, and I used to just show up at my laptop, you know, 45 minutes earlier than usual. And then I thought, no, like I'm, I am reclaiming this time –

DR. HOFFMAN: Hum.

MS. KELLY: – and I [indiscernible] you know? I missed a couple of mornings but pretty much every, every morning since April I have gone either for a walk or a run, um, outside whenever the weather. Um, that's going to get harder as the weather gets worse. But I'm going to keep doing it and it has saved me mentally. And I don't listen to podcasts. I don't talk on the phone. And I also as an aside I wear hearing aids. I don't wear them when I run because I can't sweat and get them wet and so it's just quiet. And, um, sometimes I think through something productive. I'm trying to write something, and I was stuck, and I'll think, and the words will flow while I'm running. Sometimes it's just, I'm just thinking random thoughts, you know. What to cook for dinner? But it's my time and, um, and I do think more clearly when I'm running. You start to sweat, and the blood starts pumping and, um, I have found that super, super helpful. So, that ended maybe a bigger shot of tequila if nothing.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MS. KELLY: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: All right. Well, um, we're going to get some questions in the que here. I'm going to wrap up my last questions with you, ah, while we, our, our

team, our producer and our, um, amazing students who are going to act as, ah, audience surrogates are going to get their questions together. Um, if you still have questions you want to ask, um, Mary Louise Kelly, you can enter them into the Chat and they could be asked, um, this evening by one of our students. So, ah, I want to ask you before we jump to the Q and A, um, this question comes from my student Chelsea (sp?). She says how do you feel about, ah, people getting their news from Twitter? People don't always read the full articles. You mentioned earlier that you were sort of notified like did you read this article [indiscernible] –

MS. KELLY: [Indiscernible]

DR. HOFFMAN: – lots of details but, um, it's also younger people to get, to engage more with news in a way that's more familiar to them in sort of a chat sort of social media format. What do you recommend for our younger viewers tonight about how to consume news on social media?

MS. KELLY: Oh, good question. Um, I mean, Twitter is so fantastic, and I couldn't do my job without it and it is also the total bane of my existence, um, because it, talk about relentless, it, it never ends. I mean, you know, you can't possibly keep up with it. You look away for 30 seconds depending on how many people you follow and what the news day is, ah, you've missed, you know, 14 news cycles. Um, I, I, I will confess, I probably will not do this this weekend and I didn't do it last weekend, but I have for most of this year been on a strict Twitter ban over the weekend. I don't open it, I don't open any social media and, um, you do miss some stuff but the tradeoff is, it's amazing and terrifying how much time just opens up, um, and I figure people who really need to reach me can, they can call me or they can text me and I will answer my phone. But I am not on

Twitter on the weekend. So, if you, if you catch me tweeting over the weekend tweet back and yell at me to, to shut the app.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, you told us a funny story earlier about, um, something you missed, I think it was yesterday or the day before, because you had been in a long interview.

MS. KELLY: [Chuckle] it, it was, it was yesterday in the runup to All Things Considered and I was crashing to try to get an, an interview recorded and edited and I opened up Twitter again right before we went on air and, ah, I had to get one of my younger, hipper producers to answer the question which is why, why is everybody in my whole Twitter feed, um, sub-tweeting somebody about gathering all their friends and being so privileged to go to a tropical island just to get away and forget everything going on in real life. And my producer was like, yep, Kim Kardashian and I can ,I can send you the original tweet if you want or you can just ignore it. I'm like, I'm, I think I'm good. I'm good. That's all I needed [indiscernible] –

DR. HOFFMAN: It is funny how like you log off for a few minutes or a few hours or a few days and you log back on and you're like what is happening [chuckle].

MS. KELLY: Is this crazy running joke.

DR. HOFFMAN: So, like what, what can students do? What can young people do? Like, do they, should they follow certain sources on social media –

MS. KELLY: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: – that, even more reliable?

MS. KELLY: You should follow certain sources, um, you know, who you, who are posting things you're interested in and also, you know, that you might



not necessarily agree with –

DR. HOFFMAN: Um-hum.

MS. KELLY: – um, you know, make sure you follow. If you're a Democratic voter who leans liberal make sure you follow a few personalities on the conservative side of the spectrum. Um, you should know what they are thinking. Ah, and the same goes in reverse. If you lean conservative, if you lean Republican, you know, make sure you follow some MSNBC hosts and some more liberal commentators and some Obama alums and the rest. Know what they're thinking. They might cause you to think more deeply about, you know, challenging you why, why do I think this is true. Um, or they might force you to think through a more nuanced articulate argument for why you believe what you do. But, um, it's incredibly useful to kind of be aware of what just the spectrum of, you know, I'm not saying you have to follow complete whack jobs, ah, across the political spectrum but the, the reasonable political spectrum it's, its, it's good to follow, you know, a range of people. Um –

DR. HOFFMAN: The way I usually describe is I say diversify your portfolio; you know?

MS. KELLY: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: Make sure that you have a wide variety of voices coming in even if you don't agree with them, you understand what's happening on the other side –

MS. KELLY: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: –um, and that helps you to be more persuasive if you're trying to make an argument on your side. Um, but it also helps you maybe feel in-tuned to, you know, what are the issues that are really concerning to people



who don't agree with you?

MS. KELLY: Yes –

DR. HOFFMAN: Like –

MS. KELLY: Right.

DR. HOFFMAN: – you might feel fine that, um, those are ridiculous issues that you don't care about. But to see real people on the other side saying this is something I'm passionate about, this is something I care about helps you to see the humanity in them, you know?

MS. KELLY: Very much. And that's super, super important. You know, you may think you disagree with somebody and you might really disagree with somebody but its immensely fascinating to find out well they, you know, most of us are not insane or inherently evil so there's, there's a reason that even this person who I think I totally disagree with, why, why do they believe what they believe? When we try to understand that, even if I'm going to still disagree with them, let me understand what's animating them because it's, um, you know, it, it's somewhat comparable to foreign travel in a way. You arrive in a new country and you see things that are amazing and beautiful, but you also see things and think that's crazy, why do they do it that way, that's so weird. And if you take the time and ask people or live there for a while you realize there's almost always a reason. People aren't going out of their way to do things in a weird way. There's a reason, historical or a cultural or a geographic reason why they do things the way they do. Um, I remember learning that, you know, when we, moved to Italy with my husband and kids a few years ago, um, while I was writing one of my novels and we could not find coffee filters. We were like Americans trying to use coffee filters so they're hard to find because Italians are not into that, but they

didn't sell them with the coffee, and I couldn't figure out why. And the only place where you could buy them was in a tobacco store. And I'm like why? And I finally got talking to this old guy who was running his tabac (sp?) and he talked about during World War II when things were rationed tobacco was rationed and coffee was rationed and you used to buy your coffee at the tobacco store and so they, that's where the supplies that go with coffee were sold. And that's persisted. And I thought that's so fascinating and gave me this window into something I'd never would have known, and it makes total sense now that I think about. And they don't sell it in my grocery store because Italians can't be bothered with the stuff but that's the way it used to work. Um, there's always a reason. And that's kind of, you know, if you're, if you're trying to figure out what somebody with different political views from yours there's usually a reason. You might disagree, you might think they're wrong. You might wish they had more information but there's usually a reason and trying to understand that is, um, is critical to where we are now. I mean, what other –

DR. HOFFMAN: Yeah –

MS. KELLY: – path is there?

DR. HOFFMAN: – yeah, Absolutely. I think 2020 ah, I know my students are taking this message from, from what's happening right now because this is, you know, for a college junior or senior to experience this pandemic in isolation is really jarring, um, but I think it's really giving them a moment to think about humanity and what it is to be part of a group. Because we all so much want to be with other people right now. We all so much want to connect with other human beings. So, I am always the optimist. And I remain optimistic that we will come out of this hopefully being stronger and, um, being more respectful of each other.

It's difficult right now, I get it. But um, I'm hoping that through conversations like these that we're having Mary Louise, um, and conversations that I'm going to continue have this semester that all of our viewers are paying attention to, that it can help give people some hope. So, all right, with, without further ado I want to begin the, the audience Q and A. Um, so it's a little different this year as I've mentioned in, in our previous sessions. Ah, some folks on our end have been reading through all of your questions that have been submitted in the Chat and I've been watching these as well. There's still time to submit them so if you want to submit something to the Chat make sure you do so. For each question one of my students in my National Agenda class, ah, were, who Mary Louise talked to earlier, they were, are going to read the question for the audience member. So, let's start with Spencer. Ah, what's our first audience question, Spencer?

SPENCER: Ken Grant of Newark asks, today, Miles Taylor, former chief of staff at the Department of Homeland Security came out as the author of the book A Warning. Is this someone you have interviewed or no, and are, do you have any thoughts on this revelation?

MS. KELLY: Hum. Um, I saw that. Ah, news was breaking this afternoon while I was engaged in talking with ya'll, so I have not read deeply beyond the headlines. And so, I will not venture a, a deep comment beyond the headlines. Um, other than having been intensely curious who Anonymous would prove to be, um, I noticed that the, ah, the comment, ah, I think out of the White House, Kayleigh McEnany, the White House spokesperson has already, ah, as one would expect dismissed this and, um, I don't want to misquote her. I can't remember exactly what the quote was but basically suggested this was a person who was fired quickly and for cause and only served briefly. Um, and this person

was chief of staff, ah, to both as I recall, um, Trump's first and, first, ah, Homeland Security Secretary and then the acting, Chad Wolf who followed. So, um, it was, it was not a flash in the pan in this administration. You know, there, there is the, obviously the question of, you know, if he felt so strongly should you have spoken up publicly and put your name on it? I mean, he has, ah, he's done op-eds and, and been critical since leaving the administration. Um, but obviously it's, it's just coming out now that, that he is the Anonymous who published the New York Times op-ed and the book that followed. Um, it, you know, it, it's not for me to judge. I, I really don't think it's for me to judge, you know, his decision not to speak up publicly, not to quit and speak out. That's a, a question that I have put many, many members of this administration who have ah, left and then chosen to speak out immediately or written their memoir or who have chosen, um, to keep working, uh, and you, you're constantly wondering why, ah, within this administration or, um, who have chosen to leave and then not speak publicly until they do. Um, Jim Mattis being the prime example who held his tongue for a long time and then didn't after the incident at, in Lafayette Park in June. Um, yeah, I think, I think that's all I want to say about that. Thanks.

DR. HOFFMAN: All right. thank you. Our next question will come ah, from the audience, will come from my student Nick (sp?).

NICK: Hi. So, Jim Parks asks how are your day to day relations with colleagues from other media that have different leanings?

MS. KELLY: Ah, good. You know, my, my day job is not usually speaking to other journalists all the time. I'm trying to speak to sources ah, and, and real people, um, in Washington, around the country and around the world. Um, I had much more interaction in a way with journalists from other news organizations



when I was a beat reporter and so you're covering the same beat and competing in a, you know, a collegial way against people from, from different news organizations who are coming at the story with different deadlines and different agendas and different pressures from you. Um, you know, the, the ah, the National Security Press Corps is, is a great, ah, really interesting bunch considering unlike most of the Washington Press Corps. And if you cover the White House you, in normal times again, you, you go to the White House everyday and there's a briefing and you have booths, and you see each other every day.

DR. HOFFMAN: I'm, ah, can I interrupt – you say in normal times. What, what –

MS. KELLY: What I mean pre-pandemic. I mean there are still reporters going to the White House but it's harder right now on most, there are deeper security calculations in terms of who is going there and for how long and, um, and all of that. Pre-pandemic. You know, if you covered the White House and you had a hard pass you went. Um, I've covered the Pentagon and you have a hard pass and you can go anytime you want and wander the halls and if you're trying to, you know, get a general to return your phone calls and he doesn't you can figure out, you know, where his office is and bump into him and you know, introduce yourself and ask a few questions. Um, and, and when they, you know, when the Defense Secretary or the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs travel you can go on the plane with them and, you know, witness what they're doing and what deals they're cutting and what they're saying. Um, when you cover the National Security beat, like the, the intelligence beat, um, you can't just go wander around the CIA [chuckle] and bump into your colleagues. They, they don't hold press



conferences. They, ah, they, you know, they're not going to tell you where the CIA Director is traveling and were you to find out they're certainly not going to invite you on the plane. So, it, it's a, it's a weird, it's a weird beat from that point of view in terms of knowing the colleagues who you're competing against. Um, but, ah, an intimate bond in a way because,. Because you're all kind of equally in the dark and trying to figure it out as you go. Um, and, yeah, it, it's, it's a, a lovely mix of being very, very competitive, um, and trying to figure out, you know, you're always reading when they've got unnamed sources who is that person. Sometimes you can immediately guess exactly who it is off and on. Um, and, ah, yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: Yeah, the way, the way I describe it to my students when I'm teaching about media and politics is that there is this particularly in campaigns there's this sense of pack journalism where it's like you're, like you're saying, you're competing but you're also sharing information, um, to an extent that is ,that you feel you, you can still get ahead. Um, so I think that's an interesting question.

MS. KELLY: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: Um, let's continue with, ah, Rachel has a question from our audience.

DR. HOFFMAN: Are you there?

RACHEL: Kate (sp?) from Wilmington wants to know if you can explain how you fact check information.

MS. KELLY: All kinds of ways. Depends on the incident. Depends on the information. Um, you know, starts with the who, the who am I talking to? How do I know this is, person is who they say they are? I mean, sometimes it's



obvious you're interviewing, I don't know, Kamala Harris. I'm pretty clear she is indeed Kamala Harris.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Chuckle].

MS. KELLY: Um, [chuckle] in a position to speak with the authority of Kamala Harris. Um, but, you know, fact checking who the person is, how they would have access to information. I mean, again, I go back to covering the intelligence beat where you're often dealing with classified information, um, and you ask one person what happened and you can have a great source who is honestly trying to tell you, you know, their best understanding of events and they tell you about this top secret memo and, you know, they're not going to give it to you but you can get them to read paragraphs and like great source, impeccable source. But they only know what they know. They might not have been invited to the meeting an hour later at which all the guidance from the previous memo and meeting were rescinded and, you know, a decision was made to go in a totally different direction. You just never know what you don't know. Um, so the fact checking sounds super obvious but it's, it's the, just you're on the phone just constantly. Um –

DR. HOFFMAN: Lots of different people?

MS. KELLY: Lots, the more people you talk to because you pick up just this random crumb that you wake up, you know, at two in the morning and think hang on, what was that one thing he told me? And you're going back through your notes and thinking, huh, that doesn't square with this and then that's the first call you make the next morning. Um, and one of my colleagues at NPR, Tom Gjelten, who covered the Pentagon for many years and now covers our religion beat was famous for stairway edits, um, you know, as a journalist on daily



deadlines you're always, your reporting but then you have to write your story and get edited and file. And that's all got to happen before the deadline. Um, and some reporters who I'm eternally jealous of, you know, their story is done, they're relaxing sipping a margarita, you know, an hour before deadline never happens to me and Tom Gjelten sets the standard for, you know, being tormenting his editors because he's writing his script on his phone as he's, I call it a stairway edit, because in our building you had to walk from where the reporters were to the studios where we filed. So, you're on the stairs doing the edit literally two minutes before this is going to air nationwide. Um, it drove editors crazy, but it works because he's just never stops working the phone. He's always curious and has one more question that he wants to answer. And I, you know, learned from that. He's a couple of decades ahead of me in, in covering this stuff and I learned from that. If you think you understand everything about this story and you've nailed it, pick up the phone and make another call because I guarantee you, you haven't. [Chuckle]. Um, and ah, yeah, so, you know, and there's all kinds of obvious ways that you, that you fact check with, with databases, we have researchers, we have producers who are going back through original documents. If you hear me say a quote on air it has been double and triple checked and our wording is exactly right, that we get the title right, that we've checked the dates. Um, which is not to say I think it was sometime in the last month – I authoritatively told you this is All Things Considered from NPR News. It's Tuesday September 2nd and it aired, and I get a text that's like actually it's Wednesday. [Chuckle]

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MS. KELLY: Oh, I'm so sorry. People are confused enough as it is. I



can't believe I just did that. But yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: Oh, how funny.

MS. KELLY: It happens.

DR. HOFFMAN: So, I, I'd like to ask just because I, I listen to NPR and All Things Considered regularly. Um, there's, there's a real collegiality among, ah, you and Ari Shapiro, and um, all the other reporters that come on. Like, are you guys, this sounds kind of fan-girly but are you guys like friends? Do –

MS. KELLY: Yeah,

DR. HOFFMAN: – you guys like hang out? [Chuckle].

MS. KELLY: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MS. KELLY: We do. I, it's one of the worst things about this pandemic is never getting to see – it's an intimate relationship with your co-host because you are usually too busy even to say hello as the, just the freight train of the day. You're doing different interviews and, you know, running around. But then at like 3:45 everyday at 15 minutes before air you, you will, the building wide page will go out. If you're not sitting in Studio 31 pre-taping billboards I'm ready to go because we're going on air in 15 minutes and the, the director will have a complete meltdown if you're not in there. And for the next two hours and 15 minutes you are locked in a soundproofed sealed [chuckle] off room with one other person who does exactly the same job you do and knows exactly, you know, the pressures on you and who has, um, you know, you do this more than a few times and you have saved each other. It, you know, yesterday on air, ah, I had an interviewee who will not be named but who just would not stop talking and we have no wiggle room live on air. I can't let it go an extra 30 seconds. I



can't let it go an extra one. It's that tight. I've got to hit exactly. When you hear me say from NPR News it's to the second five times an hour. Um, super frustrating when you have somebody really interesting saying something fascinating, um, or just when they're babbling on and they just never pause for a breath and you're like we got to go. So, anyway –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MS. KELLY: Ari rescued me from an interview that was, um, that was never going to end otherwise and I am eternally grateful and it took all of about 14 minutes before I repaid the favor and saved him from something that was crashing. Um, so yeah, we are, we're friends. [Indiscernible] Ari's [indiscernible] okay, he's gotten two dogs during the pandemic and grown a really enviable herb garden, um, from which he's constantly sending me pictures of. You know, which I could share my beautiful tomatoes and basil.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, let's take another question from the audience. Ah, and this time, ah, we're going to have Melissa asking the question.

MELISSA: Hi. Pamela of Alexandria, Virginia wants to know did you ever feel you and your family were at risk of retaliation from the administration including a threat to your personal safety and the personal safety of your family after the interview of Pompeo?

MS. KELLY: Um, thank you for the question. No is the short answer. Um, no, I didn't. Um, I do, just as a matter of course ah, you know, I don't list my address in the phone book. I don't post pictures of my kids on social media because they're minors and they're also teenagers and would never forgive me at this point. Um –

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]



MS. KELLY: Also I just try to keep them out of it, um, because we do, ah, you know, aside from the Pompeo interview, you know, we get, we get a ton of mail, um, and email, voicemail, tweets. Um, some of it is lovely and nice and conducive to productive conversation and some of it is pretty awful, um, and directly threatening. Um, you know, I did receive not from anyone, you know, not, not retaliation from the administration but I did receive some pretty threatening directly personal threatening things after that interview. Um, and I worked with the head of NPR security on changing a few of my routines, um, and ah, public appearances, um, and then the pandemic hit and now I never have any public appearances. So, it's [chuckle] you know, off the table. Um, but no, you know, I, I, I, I'm sincerely, you know, do not worry about that. I have worried, had occasion to worry about it more in some of the foreign reporting I've done in, in warzones or just in, um, countries with regimes that, ah, have a track record of not always being wonderful with Western reporters determined to go around and ask nosey questions. And, um, there is, again without going into details of it there's extensive security training that goes into that. I do hostile environment training every three years. And that extends to everything from, you know, flying into the Middle East to going and covering political rallies here in the states unfortunately, to, um, you know, in June ah when I was, flew down to Atlanta to cover the protests there when briefly they turned violent and, um, you know, was issued body armor to go report from my home town. Um, full body armor and helmet and, um, and we took it because reporters were being targeted.

DR. HOFFMAN: All right. Ah, we'll take the next question from, ah, my student Mia (sp?).

MIA: Hi. Nicholas Simmons (sp?) asks would you say there have



been more instances during the current administration of sources in, in government refusing to speak to you on the record than during previous administrations? If so, why?

MS. KELLY: Um, no. If anything, it's been a little bit the reverse. Um, the, I've had access to, you know, I have not interviewed this president. Um, I would love to. There's an open invitation to President Trump to come on NPR and take our questions. Um, I have interviewed, um, multiple members of his cabinet and senior officials and um, they take your calls. The interviews are professional and um, you know, you're never trying to go in to do a combative interview. That's not the point. But you do ask tough questions and if they don't get answered you keep asking them and sometimes that gets tense. Um, it, it's a fascinating thing covering this administration. You think about we live in an era of Twitter and YouTube, um, and a president who knows that and, and avails himself of that regularly. Why should he, why do, why do they take any of our interviews? I mean, it's actually, it's a genuine question. It's fascinating to me. Why do they feel the need to sit down with members of the press? Um, there's no constitutional obligation for the president or anybody who works for him to do so. Um, and yet they do. And, ah, it drives the national conversation. It's how we learn things, ah, as, as an American public that we wouldn't otherwise have known. Um, and its what gives me courage when doing these interviews, um, is knowing that it's, you know, it's actually a total joy and privilege to be able to ask those questions and hold people to account whether its this administration or any other. Um, I know, you, you ask somebody a question they dodge it. You ask again, they dodge it. You follow-up in a different way, things start getting tense. Um, and I always just feel, I feel all of you, like, like, this weight on my shoulders



and on my back kind of leaning me forward and, and I think , okay, they deserve an answer. Like, they don't, they don't deserve to hear you dodge that question. He doesn't or she doesn't, whoever I'm interviewing, they don't owe me and answer but they owe all of you an answer or they deserve to hear me ask it often enough and follow-up enough with specifics that in a respectful way it become s clear that this person really isn't going to answer it or doesn't have a, doesn't have a good answer. And that's what we come to do is to hold people to account. Um, and that's a good day when you have the opportunity to do that. And, um, and this administration has actually been remarkably ah, you know, they take interviews. I was at the White House, I guess for the last time it was the second week of March, the week that everything shut down, for an off the record thing but laying the groundwork in future. And in general, you know an interview like Pompeo that unfortunately got more contentious than I than I certainly would have cared for to have. If you hold your ground and you ask fair questions, you keep getting interviews. Um, people are smart. They hear what's happening and ah, and they want that platform. They want to reach the people that NPR reaches. Um, and, you know, just as a, as a, an aside, um, this administration has aggressively gone after leakers and journalists who publish information that came to them through leaks. Um, it has not stopped the flow. Um, and ah, when information is not able to get out there and facts are not being corrected from the White House lectern people find other ways to do it. And I find a whole lot of people will take the call.

DR. HOFFMAN: All right. Well, let's take another audience question and my student Ellinee (sp?) is going to ask this one.

ELLINEE: Hi. [Indiscernible] Thomas says that you call this: bizarre

times that we're living in. In your opinion do you believe this country will recover and go back to normal if the current president leaves office in January 2021 or will we ever recover if he stays in office another four years?

MS. KELLY: Hum. So, you know, again, I, I don't want to dodge your question having just given you a sermon on why it's important not to dodge questions. Ah, I will say I'm so happily not a political analyst or a crystal ball pundit. You know, I, I don't know. Um, and I, and I, um, you know, one of the questions in my mind is whatever the ultimate outcome of this election, you know, what led us as a country to this point isn't, isn't about one person, um, and there's no one person who can fix it or perpetuate it. It's, um, you know, looking at cause and effect, that's symptom and, and, and underlying condition. Um, and I think that this country will take a long [sigh], I think it's going to take a while. There's a lot of work to be done. Um, to, to, you know, I had some hope early in the pandemic that this would bring us together because I just, I was interviewing so many people who were hopeful, um, despite all the bleakness and who were coming together. And I wondered if this was a disruption of the level it would knock us off the kind of track of toxic political discourse that we'd been on. And again, I, I genuinely say this with now partisan or political agenda, just as an American who has found it really hard and dispiriting to watch the way our political conversation has unfolded, ah, in recent years. And, um, and sadly I don't, I don't think that my hopes were necessarily proved that we've seen amazing and heroic individuals rise, rise to the occasion and we continue to do that. Um, but I can't say that our country feels any worse partisan and toxic and divided than it did before. But again, I am also an optimist. I don't know what the choice is other than to each do our little part and it is, you know – after the



Pompeo interview I, I can't even tell you how many letters and notes I got from people identifying themselves, lifelong Republican, thank you for defending the Constitution, thank you for defending the First Amendment. Thank you for asking the questions that the press in a free and fair democracy need to ask. Um, and I say that not, you know, in a praise of anything I did but as an, you know, because I can assure you that the, the critical, you know, gripes that come in fair or unfair, you know, would take us all night to work through. Um, those come in all the time and that's fine. Um, but I see it as an example of, you know, as journalists I'm under no illusion that I or anybody else in my profession is saving the world or saving democracy every day. Of course, not. But we have the chance to try and that feels to me like such a blessing. Not everybody in every job can say that. Um, it is invigorating and it, it gives me courage every day to keep coming back and doing it. This idea that we can ask tough questions, we can hold people to account in the service of trying to figure out why something happened, what might happen going forward in the service of effecting change. Um, you can do one interview like that and it gives you faith and it should; this pillar of democracy is working. Are we perfect? Of course not. Have we gotten a million things wrong from, you know, miss, bad predictions over what would happen with the 2016 election? Absolutely. Should we be held accountable and do it better? Yes. Um, but do we have the, the chance to try to, to try to hold, you know, this line? Yes. And that feels, that feels good enough, it feels important every day.

DR. HOFFMAN: I think we've got a good ah follow-up question that, um, Melissa can ask. So, let's go to Melissa.

MELISSA: Hi. Um, this is from Caroline from New York, she's asking



do you think Pompeo would have treated you that way had you been a male reporter?

MS. KELLY: Hum. I have no idea having never been a male reporter.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter.]

MS. KELLY: Um, I will [chuckle] I will say that ah I, I heard from, um, more than one ah multiple reporters um, who have dealt with him and who described, um, almost verbatim conversations as the one that I had with him including comments that I had, that I have never to this day reported. Um, you know, in specific words and language that, and um, ah, views that were expressed that I have never reported and people, you know, other reporters who have covered him in his various roles have said they've had similar conversations. Um, so, and those, some of those were male reporters. So, I don't know. Um, I don't actually know that, you know, my gender has anything to do with it and, and I will say, you know, I, I've been asked this, as a, as a girl who's covered national security for years which remains a, a predominantly male cover that. Was it a disadvantage? Is it a disadvantage? Is it a disadvantage to report from, you know, some of the countries I've reported from in the Middle East and other parts of the Muslim world as a woman? And if anything, I have always felt like no. Um, no, particularly reporting overseas I have access to half the population that my male colleagues don't have. You know, you, you go in Tom Gjelten or any other male colleague I work with at NPR and they can't go talk to women in Iran or Pakistan or Iraq or Saudi Arabia or some of the other places, ah, that I've been lucky to report from. Ah, whereas I can talk to all the men. Um, so, yeah, I, I don't know but my, my, I, I have no reason to think that gender was a particular issue in that, in that episode.



DR. HOFFMAN: Well, we could go on forever. Um, this has been such an interesting year. You've had such an interesting year covering what's happening in the Trump Administration and the Secretary of State. Um, I do want to wrap this up and, and introduce, ah, what we're going to be doing next. So –

MS. KELLY: [Indiscernible]

DR. HOFFMAN: – it, it, at this point ask for a big round of applause for Mary Louise Kelly. We can't really do that, um, but –

MS. KELLY: I, I give it back. Thank you for great questions and for hosting. This was so much fun. Thank you.

DR. HOFFMAN: This was great. Thank you so much for being here. So, I just have a couple of announcements before we wrap up. Um, this is our last conversation before election day. Ah, we have two more that are going to be analyzing this election. Um, we are going to be looking at, ah, November 11th we're going to be talking to Julia Ioffe whose expertise in Russian politics interferes in U.S. elections will be a timely conversation. Ah, we likely may not know the results of the election at this point on November 11th. Um, she's been doing a lot of work on what's happening in Russia. And then I want to end by inviting all of our University of Delaware community, um, students, faculty, staff to our quadrennial election central event. Ah, usually this is held in person. We have a couple of thousand students coming out eating ice cream popcorn etcetera celebrating the first time that they have voted. It's going to be virtual this year but, ah, you can join us before the polls close. It's going to be from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Ah, hear about, hear from experts about polling, the electoral college, and what to expect as the returns come in. We'll also hear from a psychologist who studies mindfulness in the brain. She's going to give us a brief mindfulness



practice to help us destress a little bit as Mary Louise has suggested we need to do sometimes. Um, and we'll talk with students about maintaining good mental help during stressful times. It will be good prep as we head into what is likely to be a very long night/week/month [chuckle] potentially. So, join us November 6th, ah, ah, sorry, November 3rd starting at 6:00 p.m. You can go to cpc.udel.edu/electioncentral to learn more. So, thank you so much Mary Louise. It's been a pleasure hosting you. Ah, thank you so much for our audience for coming out from all over the country. Ah, goodnight and I look forward to seeing you after the, ah, before the election on November 3rd. [1:26:08]