

**Statement to CBS 2 News, CBS News, and the American Media at Large  
from the American Friends Service Committee – Pacific Southwest Region,  
Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace, and Media Democracy Legal  
Project**

Los Angeles  
March 15, 2006

FILED/ACCEPTED

OCT 19 2006

Federal Communications Commission  
Office of the Secretary

Journalism has always had at its core the idea that it exists, in the words of an 1861 Chicago Times editorial, "to print the news and raise hell." Some have looked at it as an avenue to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable, but it has always been the art of speaking truth to power.

Legendary journalists like Edward R. Murrow, John Howard Griffin, Upton Sinclair, and current carriers of the flame like Greg Palast, Robert Fisk, and Seymour Hersh are being outnumbered by the adherents of another old tradition—the stenographers of state-run media who work for the powers that be instead of calling them to account.

We are outside the gates of Columbia Square today—the Hollywood home of the CBS network affiliate CBS 2 News, and its sister station, KCAL-9—because we are deeply concerned at the state of journalism in the establishment media today. At a time when we are embroiled in a war halfway across the globe, as our communities feel the strain of slashed services for human needs such as health and education, and as our democracy falls under the shadow of centralized, unchecked executive power amid evidence that such power has been used to propagate acts alien to our Constitution and to the idea of a free society—namely torture and warrantless surveillance—we regretfully state that the media establishment in this country has failed in its role of defending the truth.

As the Fourth Estate, the press is an essential part of our democracy. The lifeblood of a republic is an informed citizenry, yet we have seen the press in this country devolve into what is often at best an entertainment commodity, or at worst an uncritical minute-taker and, at times, booster for the official statements of the administration. This situation as it pertains to broadcasters is especially troubling, not only because the fact that most Americans get their news through these types of outlets, but that the airwaves belong to the public, and broadcasters are required to serve the public interest as a condition of their licenses. The major media outlets in this country have largely been consolidated into the hands of a few large corporations, and the profit motive has largely outweighed considerations of journalistic excellence.

At CBS 2 News, we have seen an emphasis on police pursuits and other reporting on local crimes and accidents rather than on issues that affect the community as a whole. National and international news, if mentioned, is fleeting. Although 85 people died in sectarian violence in Iraq yesterday, March 14, 2005, the Eleven O'Clock News last night had not a single story on the war. Rather, the first nine stories were entirely about crimes and accidents, one of which took place three months ago without any real new developments. One story of national significance that was reported in that half hour was a court ruling in which Google would have to turn over user records to the government.

No. of Copies rec'd  
List ABOVE

041

However, this news item lasted only seconds and leaned toward the category of "He said / She said" journalism, with a statement of the government's position alongside the reported fact that the judge had "concerns" over privacy.

Despite one CBS 2 News assignment editor's belief, as stated in his blog on your website, that "our viewers are recognizing that they can turn to CBS2 / KCAL9 for quality news that's actually \*meaningful\* to them and their families," the stories which he says he is thinking of—"from pursuits to fires to weather"—lend little confidence in his initial statement. We are dismayed that CBS 2 News is so focused on police pursuits that you give them a special category on the menu of your website's homepage. We are certainly not asking you to ignore significant crimes and disasters in your local reporting, but we expect you to cover local issues rather than just events of the "When it bleeds, it leads" category. In light of the significant impact that the war is having on our communities, with both economic and human tolls, we expect you to give probing coverage to the war in Iraq and its effects here at home.

CBS network news and the rest of the media establishment must also live up to the high ideals of journalism. Our message is simple—Uncover the Cover-up:

1. Verify—not just report—official statements of the administration and military on the war, including its initial justification and related issues such as torture and spying.
2. Show the war and provide more accurate and in-depth coverage of the casualties—military and civilian—and other costs of war.
3. Report on the local impact of the war—how money for community needs is going to the war budget.

The current state of affairs does not have to be this way. Indeed, it cannot be this way if we are to survive as a free society. Acts of courage throughout the history of the press—by reporters, editors, news directors, publishers, and even network chairs—have made journalism into a great tradition worthy of respect.

Today, in particular, we look to the courageous stand of Edward R. Murrow, the CBS newscaster who risked his career to expose McCarthyism for its true self, a destructive force that imperiled our democracy. Murrow broke through the conventional news frame of his day, which had accepted McCarthyism as a means of protecting America from its enemies, and bucked the sentiments of those whose eyes were more on CBS's revenues than on any desire to rock the boat.

We call on every journalist and executive inside the walls of Columbia Square, and throughout the American press, to heed the example of Edward R. Murrow. Your work affects lives. It affects our communities. It affects our democracy. We came here today to mourn the death of a news tradition, but it does not have to be this way if you will stop burying the truth.

## **Report on Meeting of AFSC/ICUJP Representatives with KCBS2-TV/KCAL9-TV News Editor and Managing Editor July 13, 2006**

Representatives from the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace (ICUJP) met with the editors of the two local CBS affiliates in Los Angeles on Thursday, July 13. The meeting took place as part of a campaign to Challenge the Media over coverage of the war in Iraq and related issues such as spying and torture. In March, 2006, as part of a Day of National Media Action, the two organizations had held a protest outside the studios of KCBS2 and KCAL9 in Hollywood (with similar protests taking place in New York and Chicago). The two CBS-owned stations both operate out of studios at Columbia Square, also sharing news staff and equipment.

KCBS2/KCAL9 News Director Nancy Bauer Gonzales and Managing Editor Paul Skolnick had agreed to a 30-minute meeting limited to two representatives from the organizations involved in the protest. Those representatives were ICUJP Steering Committee Member Stephen Rohde (attorney and Past President of the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California) and AFSC Middle East Peace Education Program Associate Benjamin Parke.

At the start of the meeting, the station editors were presented with a list of stories—with running times—that appeared on the stations' newscasts for two consecutive days, picked at random out of the previous couple of months of monitoring. (The days selected—Sunday, May 21 and Monday, May 22—happened to fall within the May sweeps, an intensely competitive period for broadcasters when Nielsen Ratings are collected to determine a station's value for advertisers. This fact was pointed out by the Ms. Bauer Gonzales, the News Director, who said that such lists of stories could be arranged in many ways to make various points.)

A story relating to the war did occasionally appear in the newscasts that had been picked: the 5:00 News on KCBS on May 21 spent 25 seconds reporting that 18 people had been killed in bombings in Baghdad. However, the story appeared eighth in the reporting line-up, while the lead story comprised two minutes about a bear sighting in a Ventura County neighborhood.

Mr. Skolnick, the Managing Editor, had advised the Challenge the Media project in a previous conversation to "look at The Nine," referring to the 9:00 News on KCAL9. He said that back in the days when KCAL9 was an independent, with no network to rely on for a national newscast, the station had ambitiously decided that its local newscast would prominently feature national and international coverage. This tradition had been maintained after the station came under CBS ownership.

Indeed, "The Nine" featured a minute-and-a-half story on Iraq on May 21. It said that 17 (rather than the earlier KCBS report of 18) people had been killed in bombings that day,

that the Iraqi Cabinet needed to fill its security posts, and that Prime Minister Al-Maliki vowed to "fight the terrorists." Of course, there was little time for context or a range of viewpoints. Neither of the other two newscasts that were monitored for that day, the 6:00 News and 11:00 News on KCBS, mentioned Iraq at all.

The station editors were also presented with a list of headlines from Democracy Now from the same time period as the CBS newscasts which had been selected for analysis. Stories reported by the national radio program from that time included: "U.S.-Air Strike Kills 76 in Afghanistan; Up to 30 Civilians Killed," "CIA Pick Gen. Hayden Refuses to Rule Out Use of 'Waterboarding,'" and "Alberto Gonzales: Gov't May Arrest & Prosecute Journalists." No one watching the KCBS or KCAL newscasts on May 21 or 22 would have had a clue that these events had occurred.

What kind of things *would* they have learned about? The bear sighting story appeared on every newscast monitored on May 21. The 9:00 News on KCAL9 carried an additional report about a Seattle bear that had been tasered. The next day, on May 22, the video from the sighting in the Ventura County neighborhood reappeared on KCBS during its 5:00 and 6:00 newscasts—the repetition presumably justified because someone had reported seeing another bear off a mountain road in the county that day.

Some stories of substance did make it into the newscasts: Mayor Nagin reelected in New Orleans, theft of personal data from the Department of Veterans Affairs, immigration rallies in downtown Los Angeles. But other kinds of stories were more typical: sheep rescued in Santa Maria, a new bra that massages, and a mystery skin disease.

The latter story was broadcast on the 11:00 News on KCBS in two parts over the two days analyzed by the Challenge the Media project. It concerned something called Morgellons disease—an ailment whose existence is not recognized by the medical community at large—in which people report the sensation of bugs crawling under or on their skin, which may break out into rashes, or develop lesions accompanied by strange fibers. The premise of the report was that the medical community may not have yet given the disease its due, as well as the fact that the majority of reported cases are in Southern California (a total of 3,500 people claim to have the disease). A local family that claimed to suffer from the malady was interviewed in their home, and the lesions displayed on camera. A "soundtrack" of music ran throughout each night's segment—3:40 minutes long on May 21, and 5:45 minutes on May 22. Toward the end of the second night's segment, a statement from the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services was reported: "No credible medical or public health association has verified the existence or diagnosis of 'Morgellons Disease.'"

While potentially new, unrecognized diseases should certainly not be outside the province of journalism, why would CBS devote such a large amount of their news program to a story based largely on anecdotal claims while eliciting viewer emotion with music? Why not report on events that are obviously affecting the lives of people in this country and in the world?

"We do not pretend to cover national news and international news," said News Director Nancy Bauer Gonzales. (This despite a willingness to cover a roller coaster that had derailed in Minnesota, injuring six; a Baton Rouge church shooting that had left five dead; or a New Zealand amputee who was trying to sell his leg on the Internet—all stories which appeared on the newscasts analyzed by the Challenge the Media project.)

It was pointed out to the editors that stories about the war were often very easy to localize. Instead of running that story on the amputee in New Zealand trying to sell his leg on the Internet, why not do a story on amputee soldiers returning from Iraq?

The editors were presented with a fact sheet that outlined LA's share of the money spent on the Iraq War. The City of Los Angeles' share of war costs was \$3.4 billion. For Los Angeles County, the war represented a budget impact of \$10.1 billion. The fact sheet also had figures on what that money could have paid for in the region. 1.8 million children in the City of Los Angeles could have received health insurance for a year based on the city's share of the total cost of the war. On an ongoing basis, that means that without the war, about 600,000 children a year could be insured in Los Angeles. With a total population in the city of nearly 4 million, that's likely to be enough to cover every child in a family living below the poverty level. Other figures reflected how many children could have attended Head Start, how many public housing units could have been built, how many public university scholarships could have been awarded, and how many public school teachers could have been hired.

(You can download this fact sheet at <http://www.afsc-pswro.org/mepep/ctm/localcostofwar.pdf>. PDF, 58.3 KB)

The News Director's response to the fact sheet was that there are relatively few children living in Los Angeles. She maintained this position even after being told that more than a quarter of Los Angeles is comprised of children. (According to US Census Bureau, 26.6% of the City of Los Angeles, and 27.5% of the County are persons under 18 years of age. Nationally, 25.7% of the population is under 18.) The editors said that budget issues might make it into their newscasts in cases of malfeasance—if money allocated for one thing went fraudulently to something or someone else. The case of Halliburton was pointed out to them.

On a more general level, News Director Bauer Gonzales offered her view on why some stories make it on the air and others don't. What's news to one person, she said, is not what another person considers to be news, and yet another person may have an entirely different idea of what constitutes news. She was asked if there might be any objective way to say that reporting about an amputee soldier returning from Iraq was more important than reporting about an amputee in New Zealand trying to sell his leg on the Internet. Her answer was "no."

The editors gave some of the reasons why certain stories make it into the newscasts while others don't. One critical factor is good video. Another is immediacy. They also look for a story with which viewers will feel some sort of compelling connection. For national

and international news, that often means localizing a story to the communities in which the viewers live. Ms. Bauer Gonzales noted that on the morning of our meeting, with things heating up in the Middle East, she had told her staff, "I think we need to cover Lebanon." Subsequently, the news staff had been looking for people from the region who lived in LA, though without success.

The CBS stations conduct market research to see what kind of stories people look to see on the local news. In the 80's, according to Ms. Bauer Gonzales, it was health. In the 90's, it was crime. Since the late 90's, it's been what's called "Breaking News." Of course, they would not share this proprietary market research with us, but said they would let us know if any public surveys reside in the stations' public files.

When asked why they didn't have more voices that reflected alternatives to the official views that are reported, the editors said that they knew very few people with the desired credentials, whether it be academic stature, or experience and/or direct knowledge of a particular topic.

The ICUJP representative, Mr. Rohde, proposed that the stations make use of organizations like the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) which, for instance, could have helped find local residents for the story on Lebanon. The editors said they would welcome information on contacts for use as sources and alternative voices for stories. The stations were, in fact, on the mailing list of CAIR (among other organizations), but Mr. Skolnick said that the press releases they receive tend to reflect statements coming from a national board, and lacked the kind of localization that would play well on their newscasts.

The News Director also said that she makes it a point to hire different kinds of people. The staff "bring diversity to the table" so that one person might have something to say about the way in which a story is being covered (or not covered) that others may have overlooked.

To bring in more alternative views, the editors said that they would consider Mr. Rohde's suggestion to implement a Point-Counterpoint type of segment—two people with differing views on a topic discussed for about five minutes. Ms. Bauer Gonzales said (gratifyingly) that she would be wary of featuring such a segment if it were similar to the screaming heads featured on certain cable programs. Mr. Rohde pointed out that her newscasts would have a lot of power in setting standards of decorum.

The editors "look at the totality" of what's been covered in their newscasts each day—they have a saying: "It's all in the mix." And while they pointed to "The Nine" as the place to look for national and international news, they wouldn't say that it makes up for everything on the two channels. They must be happy, they said, with each station's newscasts for any particular day, each channel considered separately.

On KCBS2, they also pointed out that there is less national and international news on their local newscasts which air in proximity to the network's CBS Evening News at 6:30

PM weekdays. The morning local newscasts, meanwhile, tend to feature more national and international news because of the news cycle, with the day's newspapers having appeared.

What demographic section of the population do the editors of KCBS2/KCAL9 think they serve? After all, Los Angeles County is composed of people who are 2/3 people of color, and, being overwhelmingly Democratic-voting, are certainly not in lock-step with administration policies. The editors' answer was that they consider the demographic segment that they serve to be everybody two years-old and over. They said that they are aware that people over 55 are the ones who tend to be watching, and also that their audience is composed of more women than men. They also said that they know that viewers aged 25-54 are interested in news specials (like the mystery skin disease story). But the editors maintained that they attempt to serve everybody two and over. They said that this principle doesn't apply, however, during the Nielsen sweeps.

There are two types of stories, according to the editors: a regular story and a "sweeps story." Sweeps stories are put together and promoted with CBS audiences in mind, and aimed at the viewers of CBS programming leading up to the newscast. Now, rewind to that story on the mystery skin disease—the editors acknowledged that the two-part story was indeed the kind of story that would play well with viewers of the hit CBS program CSI, which aired on the evening of the second part of the special report.

News Director Bauer Gonzales said that earlier in her career, she had worked at a station that did air stories more akin to the ones on Democracy Now. Ratings plummeted, she said, and the staff was fired. She said that while she realized that the CBS affiliates operate under license from the FCC, money was also a factor to be reckoned with. The editors also noted that "The Nine," their flagship of national and international news, is now in a ratings valley among the newscasts of their stations.

Some positive things came out of the meeting: an invitation to supply the stations with lists of contacts as well as story ideas, a description of the kinds of stories and angles that the editors are looking for, and a stated willingness to consider airing a Point-Counterpoint segment. On Sunday, July 16, KCAL9 aired a report on an interfaith gathering at the Islamic Center of Southern California. Mr. Rohde had given the editors the tip about the event, and perhaps that's what led to the coverage. The editors also agreed to another meeting with AFSC and ICUJP representatives after Labor Day.

Finally, one over-arching aspect of the meeting may be characterized as a double-edged sword. The editors were very honest and forthright about what they consider news to be. It was refreshing to be in a frank discussion with "establishment" representatives. But during the meeting the editors largely did not defend their newscasts' stories in terms of the quality of their journalism. In fact, it was made clear that the measure by which the editors determine whether to run a particular story does not grow out of any objective journalistic principles. Rather, in the vacuum created by a relativistic view of what constitutes news, that measure is determined strictly by ratings and, ultimately, money.

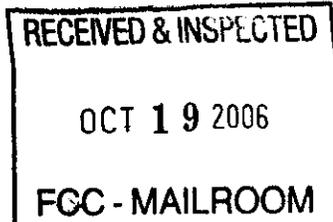
According to the National Priorities Project's May 7, 2006 report "Local Costs of the Iraq War," the budget impact for **Los Angeles County** from costs for the Iraq War is **\$10.1 Billion**. For the **City of Los Angeles**, it is **\$3.4 Billion**. These figures are based on a total Iraq War Cost of \$315.8 Billion through Fiscal Year 2006.

The NPP also maintains a quick calculator ([costofwar.com](http://costofwar.com)) for local communities to assess what domestic needs that money spent for the war could have paid for. The figures below, for Los Angeles County and City, represent domestic budgeting for one year out of the total money spent for the Iraq War. The initial figures have been divided by 3 (since the Iraq War has lasted more than 3 years) to give a rough idea of what could be achieved on an ongoing basis were it not for the cost of the Iraq War.

### What the Local Cost of the Iraq War Could Have Paid For in L.A.

| <b>The Possibilities</b>  | <b>Los Angeles County</b> | <b>Total ÷ 3</b> | <b>City of Los Angeles</b> | <b>Total ÷ 3</b> |
|---|---------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|------------------|
| Children who could have attended <b>Head Start</b>                | 1,232,983                 | 410,994          | 416,156                    | 138,719          |
| Children who could have received <b>health insurance</b>          | 5,574,264                 | 1,858,088        | 1,881,425                  | 627,142          |
| <b>Public school teachers</b> who could have been hired           | 161,326                   | 53,775           | 54,451                     | 18,150           |
| <b>Public university scholarships</b> which could have been given | 451,282                   | 150,427          | 152,316                    | 50,772           |
| <b>Public housing units</b> which could have been built           | 83,819                    | 27,940           | 28,290                     | 9,430            |

Data provided by the National Priorities Project (<http://nationalpriorities.org>), and current as of July 12, 2006.



Bonnie Glasgow  
3308 Dartmouth  
Dallas, TX 75205-3308

Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street, SW.  
Washington DC 20554.

RE: My comments on Media Ownership Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking - Docket 06-121

Dear FCC,

As an American citizen and taxpayer, I am outraged at former FCC Chairman Michael Powell's efforts to bury two separate studies that found media consolidation to be harmful to local news reporting. No decision should be made on ownership until a full and independent investigation of this cover-up is completed.

The FCC can't simply hide data from the public and push through new rules that unleash further consolidation of local news outlets. Localism and diversity are the cornerstones of a democratic media system; we cannot afford to compromise them in any way.

The FCC should allow no relaxation or elimination of the public interest limits on media ownership without first weighing all of the evidence and hearing out widespread public concern about the problems of consolidation.

Limits on media consolidation have been a bulwark against the concentration of economic power in the marketplace of ideas -- a critical part of balancing the public service mission of the media with their private profit motive. Our democracy requires the free flow of local information from a broad range of diverse voices.

Media consolidation has already led to declines in local and minority ownership as well as the homogenization of content in radio and television. Allowing further concentration of local media markets will only worsen the problems we already have.

The FCC should stand firm with the public against further concentration of media ownership in the hands of the few. A vote against media consolidation is a vote for democracy. I will join millions of Americans in closely following your actions regarding this vital matter. I hope and expect you will honor your responsibility to the American people by stopping any further media consolidation.

Most sincerely,

A large, handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bonnie Glasgow".

Bonnie Glasgow

No. of Copies rec'd \_\_\_\_\_  
List A B C D E \_\_\_\_\_