



BLOOMBERG, THE ICEBREAKER
Sunday, June 24, 2007

Every Sunday CUIP's political director Jacqueline Salit and strategist and philosopher Fred Newman watch the political talk shows and discuss them. Here are excerpts from their dialogue on Sunday, June 24, 2007 after watching "The Chris Matthews Show," "Face the Nation," "Meet the Press" and "The McLaughlin Group."

Salit: There's a lot of Bloomberg fever out there.

Newman: I don't know if it's fever, but there's a lot of Bloomberg out there.

Salit: Well put. What do you think about the dialogue about nonpartisan politics, about Bloomberg becoming an independent and being a spokesperson for that kind of approach in politics and in government?

Newman: It's about time. Because of Bloomberg and his money and what he's done in New York City, maybe some people will be motivated to find out what they're really talking about. The analysts know virtually nothing about this. Even Sam Waterston, the actor, who represented Unity08 on "Face the Nation" isn't informed about what's been taking place, including the recent history of independent politics that catalyzed the Unity08 process. That's unfortunate, because I think this is a moment when the public can hear some new things. Obviously, the best spokesperson on national television this week, the person who knows something both about Bloomberg and this whole phenomenon, was you. And there was a huge difference between your statement, which was a knowledgeable statement, from someone who's been in the trenches, and knows what's going down, and what everyone else was saying. There is an independent movement that a lot of people have been participating in. And, it's been fought against tooth and nail by the major parties. Yet, they haven't destroyed it. It's still there. Bloomberg is an obvious spokesperson for that movement, both by nature and by fact. Everybody forgot to mention that he ran and won as a Republican/Independent. Nobody wants to talk about that. But, maybe we'll begin to see a more serious investigation of what this is all about. So, I like it. I like Bloomberg. I think he's serving well as an icebreaker that might lead people to be more discerning about what's under the ice.

Salit: It's important to look under the ice. It's not just that 70% of the American people feel the country is on the wrong track. It's that they have been doing something about it. That's the independent movement.

Newman: Michael Bloomberg didn't get elected in a vacuum. He didn't get elected simply because of his money. He didn't get elected because Rudy Giuliani supported him. He got elected because he was smart enough – or his campaign people were

smart enough – to seek the line of the Independence Party, and therefore transform his own image, to become an independent, which is now the “new movement on the block.” That got him elected mayor the first go-round. He did such a nice job that the second time around he got elected on his own record. But you don’t get a chance to get elected on your record until you get elected.

Salit: Until you have a record.

Newman: Until you have a record, right. I teach philosophy. I’ve taught it for 40 years. And, I teach it well enough to get people interested in buying another philosophy book – so they become interested in learning what it really is. And I’m perfectly happy to play that kind of role. That’s an important role. And Bloomberg is playing that role for independent politics.

Salit: Exactly.

Newman: And I think we, the New York City Independence Party, as part of the independent movement, can take credit for that. And you in particular made that hook up better than anybody else in the country. You spent the last six years saying to Bloomberg, ‘You’re an independent, you’re an independent,’ and to the public, ‘He’s an independent, he’s really independent.’ He ran as an independent, he won as an independent. He got elected as an independent. What he did last week was to simply sign a form which says “I’m an independent.”

Salit: I was interviewed by some reporters this week and I appeared on “Washington Journal” on CSPAN. But there’s not a reporter who I talked to who knew that Bloomberg had run and won as an independent. No one knew that. To the extent they’d thought about it, they thought Giuliani got him elected.

Newman: I think that’s a myth. Who were Giuliani’s supporters supposed to vote for? The liberal Democrat Mark Green? No, the issue is what added value there was for Bloomberg. That was the independents.

Salit: There was barely any substantive political dialogue on the shows this morning that went beyond the headlines and the ‘Oh my god, can a third party candidate win? A third party candidate has never won in America.’ By the way, everybody forgets about Abraham Lincoln.

Newman: Well, he wasn’t exactly a third party candidate. He was sort of a new second party candidate, which is close to being a third party candidate. He was a 2.5 party candidate.

Salit: Okay. I’ll grant you that. There was a little bit of a debate on “Face the Nation” between Sam Waterston and John Harris from Politico.com. Boiled down to its simplest

terms, the debate was that Waterston, on behalf of Unity08, said that the thing that the American people are concerned about and that they want to address, is the process.

Newman: Although he said virtually nothing about the process. Just for the record.

Salit: True. John Harris from Politico.com said 'It's not about the process, it's about the issues, and the fundamental issue that it's about is the war.' So that's set up as a dichotomy. But obviously, there's no separation between the two.

Newman: What else is there to say. You can't separate process from policy. You can't separate process from anything. Process is the vehicle by which policies get shaped. And if they get shaped by virtue of two major parties engaging in endless uncooperative debates which are more about power and money and the lobbyists than about sound policy, then you're going to have a profound alienation between the parties and the people of this country. It's important to understand that the American people have been actively engaged in creating something which responds to that. And now some in the Washington crowd are in turn responding to them, which is good. Bloomberg has been firm on the need for a new politic, there's no question about it. He's the Mayor of New York City. And he's the "Poster Guy" for independent politics. But the challenge now is to look more deeply at all of this. The real question for the media, in my opinion, is whether they are going to cover the American people.

Salit: Other than the way NY1 does or Fox News does, namely by covering every murder or car crash or someone who jumped off a roof. You mean covering what the American people have been doing positively. That's a tough one. I don't know if even Mike Bloomberg can accomplish that.

Newman: We'll see.

Salit: Chris Matthews' lead topic was "Hillary Clinton's relationship to the Left." Earlier in the campaign, the Left came at Hillary very hard; 'You've got to apologize for your previous support on the war.' Meanwhile, Obama gets into the race. He's been against the war from the beginning. John Edwards apologizes for his vote. There's a whole lot of pressure on her from the Left and from the "Netroots," the Moveon.org part of the Democratic Party base. So, here it is, the end of June and Matthews says "Let's take a look at this. She's ridden out the storm and she's neutralized the pressure from the Left, she's made that a non-issue for her."

Newman: I don't know that the Left is permanently shut down. The Left goes on summer vacation, since a lot of it is based on college kids leaving, so don't over-interpret the summer. But, I don't think the issue is what Hillary has done vis a vis her relationship to the Left. The issue is what Obama and Edwards haven't done relative to their relationship to the Left and to the independents.

Salit: What do you mean?

Newman: At some point, those two have to take on Hillary Clinton, not just for her position on the war, not just around the foolish issue of whether she does or doesn't apologize, but on what she really stands for. She's a Clintonian Democrat, therefore an ultra-conciliatory Democrat, like her husband Bill Clinton, whose eight years of triangulation created George Bush. They have to take on that issue and say to the American people, The last thing we need in this country is eight more years of Clintonism, because God knows what will follow from that. The Right Wing movement in this country is not going away. There has to be a new politic that is beyond Clintonesque triangulation. Hillary Clinton is the wrong candidate for the Democrats. She's the wrong candidate for the presidency.

Salit: You're saying that's what Obama and Edwards have to say.

Newman: If those two together, in whatever arrangement they make, take that on, then we'll see a shift in the dynamics in the Democratic primary. If they don't, Hillary's going to ride home free and clear.

Salit: So, Obama and Edwards need to take on Clintonism, which is to say, the actual record of the 1990s.

Newman: And what it produced.

Salit: And what it produced. Okay. Meaning George Bush and the rise of the neo-cons.

Newman: Meaning giving business interests a free pass, which has put the markets in an unprecedented growth position. There are now more millionaires created every day than there are workers getting jobs in factories. Obama and Edwards have got to take that on, if they're for real.

Salit: My guess is that Edwards and Obama would say We are doing that. Edwards says 'I'm raising the issue of poverty. That's my issue.'

Newman: The issue is Clintonism. It's not "poverty" in isolation from the making of public policy. The issue is the attempts of various political leaders in recent years to deal with poverty. And both Clinton and Bush have failed at that. Clinton and Clintonism is the issue. Is there going to be a new way? When Obama speaks of a new way, is he going to say that the new way has to take us beyond Clinton and what the Clintons have stood for? Because "the Clinton way" has not worked domestically around the issue of poverty, nor has it worked internationally. That's the tough issue. Will they talk about that?

Salit: It's a Democratic primary. So, it should be an opportunity for candidates to speak about what the Democratic Party's been doing all this time.

Newman: In a way Bush did what Bush said he would do.

Salit: Yes.

Newman: The issue is what the Democratic Party hasn't done. A very important engine in that failure to act, in my opinion, has been the Democratic Leadership Council and Clintonism. Is that going to be talked about?

Salit: And the dialogue about the war?

Newman: They're trying to hide behind the anti-war movement. They're trying to say 'Well we'll all come together now. We're all anti-war.' But that's not the issue. The issue is what the Democratic Party hasn't done.

Salit: We were looking at Rolling Stone magazine today, an interview with Al Gore, where he talked about the movement against global warming and the destruction of the environment and building a movement to impact without running for president. But Gore described what's gone wrong and the changes that need to be made only from the vantage point of analyzing what the Bush Administration has been doing for the last six years. Gore doesn't raise the issue of what the Democratic Party's been doing, and the Democratic Party's complicity in that failed environmental policy.

Newman: Gore's not taking on Clinton either. People are afraid to take on Clinton. And in part they're afraid to take on Clinton, because they expect, with some good reason, that Hillary might be on her way to the White House.

Salit: Yes.

Newman: I'm as concerned about that as I am about whether she does or doesn't apologize. Clintonism is the wrong road and the road has bad consequences.

Salit: You remarked earlier 'the Right Wing isn't going away.'

Newman: It's always been there. It will always be there.

Salit: Would you say the Right Wing attempted a full blown revolution in American politics and they came up short?

Newman: No, I think they had a full blown revolution. But, then the neo-cons tried to come up with a tactic to make their success permanent and international, namely their intervention into Iraq. But the international vacuum that made that possible was created by Bill Clinton and the Democrats' inability to resolve the Palestinian conflict. So Bush says, 'Democracy, democracy, democracy. We're going to democratize the Middle East. But now he's forced to say, 'Hey we got a problem on our hands, they voted for the wrong people.'

Salit: That's a dangerous situation.

Newman: That's the opening that Bloomberg sees.

Salit: That the Republicans are in disarray and the Democrats haven't engaged their own responsibility for the current crisis.

Newman: Yes. The fact that Bloomberg was elected by independents and has a connection to that movement gives him a different view of what's needed.

Salit: Thanks.