A Conversation with Chris Matthews

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Chris Matthews hosts *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, a nightly political debate program and anchors *The Chris Matthews Show*, a syndicated weekly news program.

Matthews has been a journalist, Washington bureau chief, Presidential speechwriter, congressional staffer and best-selling author. He covered the fall of the Berlin Wall, the first free election in South Africa and the peace referendum in Ireland. His research produced a series of *San Francisco Examiner* scoops on the Nixon presidential tapes. He twice received the *Washington Post*'s Crystal Ball award for his successful predictions of US presidential elections.

Matthews is the author of four best-selling books, including *American: Beyond Our Grandest Notions*, *Hardball*, and *Kennedy & Nixon*. He was a print journalist for *The San Francisco Examiner* and *The San Francisco Chronicle*. He spent 15 years in politics and government, working in the Carter White House as a Presidential speechwriter, in the U.S. Senate on the staffs of Frank Moss and Edmund Muskie and was the top aide for Speaker of the House Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill, Jr.

A graduate of Holy Cross, Matthews did graduate work in economics at the University of North Carolina and was a trade development advisor with the Peace Corps in Swaziland. Matthews is married to Kathleen Matthews, an award-winning news anchor.

Martin Kaplan

The director of the Lear Center is Martin Kaplan, associate dean, USC Annenberg School. A *summa cum laude* graduate of Harvard, a Marshall Scholar to Cambridge University, and a Stanford Ph.D., he has been an Aspen Institute program officer; a federal education staffer; a Vice President's chief speechwriter; a Washington journalist in print, television, and radio; a deputy Presidential campaign manager; a Disney Studios vice president of motion picture production; and a film and television writer and producer.

The Norman Lear Center

Founded in January 2000, the Norman Lear Center is a multidisciplinary research and public policy center exploring implications of the convergence of entertainment, commerce and society. On campus, from its base in the USC Annenberg School for Communication, the Lear Center builds bridges between schools and disciplines whose faculty study aspects of entertainment, media and culture. Beyond campus, it bridges the gap between the entertainment industry and academia, and between them and the public. Through scholarship and research; through its fellows, conferences, public events and publications; and in its attempts to illuminate and repair the world, the Lear Center works to be at the forefront of discussion and practice in the field.
KAPLAN: Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Chris Matthews.

MATTHEWS: Thank you.

KAPLAN: So this guy has been on the air for the last couple of hours and then on the freeways.

MATTHEWS: That's okay. That's all right.

KAPLAN: My phone rang about a week ago. "Hey, Marty. It's Chris." Oh, really? And he said he was coming out here to do *Hardball* and the second thing he said was I would really love to be able to come down to USC and get together with some students. So we compliment you on your taste in institutions.

MATTHEWS: Thank you. Thank you.

KAPLAN: And are thrilled to have you here.

MATTHEWS: Thank you.

KAPLAN: The first question I'd like to ask you, Chris, and the format’s going to be we're going to talk...

MATTHEWS: You're so respectful, Marty.

KAPLAN: We're going to—well, we'll get there. We're going to talk. We're going to take questions. We'll talk. We'll interrupt, etc. First question is, do you know how loudly you speak?

MATTHEWS: No, I know that I'm louder on remotes. I know that if somebody's in another city or in another part of the city, my voice goes up as if I'm yelling through a Dixie cup, you know. I think I don't trust the mic. I know that's one thing. I know when I want to hype the show, I go louder. When I think people are falling asleep, I want to hype it.
KAPLAN: But how do you get that sense? You’re on TV. There's no audience.

MATTHEWS: My head. I have a sense of people turning dials, of looking for other things to do. And so I jazz it up. And up in the mountains, it's Grossinger's and it's a rainy Saturday afternoon in February. And the old ladies are going nuts because there's nothing to do. And I've got to go in there and be Shecky Green for a couple of hours, you know.

KAPLAN: Chris Matthews, my Irish-Catholic friend from Philadelphia is using analogies from Yiddish schtick in the Borsht Belt.

MATTHEWS: Well, that's the only language we've got for this business. The show business has Yiddish, you know. I even said it right. You know, I know I've been told by everybody to slow down—to not interrupt.

KAPLAN: Do you know that you interrupt?

MATTHEWS: You know, Churchill used to say excuse me while I interrupt my interruption. Churchill, my hero, every good person's hero, would say that his whole life, he said I've been trying to stop interrupting, but I can't do it. I don't know. It's coming from a big family. It's bad manners. It's keeping the ball rolling. It's the realization—now here's the case for it—that people on television, if they're guests, talk after they've stopped saying. They keep going. And they fill the time. It's like a police interrogation room. The trick is to just give them silence. And they'll keep talking. And so I always try to listen with my tongue. And so I gotcha, you know. I listen in “cable-ese.” Like you talk in cable-ese, you write in cable-ese. I hear in cable-ese. And so when I get the gist of it, I move on. And it works okay sometimes. But it
drives Southern people and older people crazy. But I never hear any complaints from Philly, where I grew up. The more faster-paced intellects of the big cities, you know. Philly and Trenton, Camden, places where I grew up, everybody talks fast. Like it sounds like Spanish and English, you know. We talk fast in Philly compared to everybody else. So...

KAPLAN: Do you think that...

MATTHEWS: Big families, too, you...

KAPLAN: Do you think...

MATTHEWS: Big families, you know.

KAPLAN: Do you think that your style of talking has had an influence on cable news and other news interview styles, talk shows?

MATTHEWS: Yeah. Because I think people think faster. They hear much faster than people talk. And let me give you the history of this a little more academically. In the 1930’s, when the big Orpheum Theaters were being built, the big Warner Theaters, the big modern theaters with fantastic acoustics came into being around the country, the great legitimate stage actors—Ronald Coleman and people like that who had grown up and went to Carnegie School—that perfect English elocution. And they were told by Frank Capra, that because of the beautiful acoustics here and the amplification system, you don't have to be Ronald Coleman. You don’t have to be John Barrymore to reach the last row. Nor do you have...

KAPLAN: Those were the Ben Afflecks of another era.

MATTHEWS: So what the people learned is you can be Jimmy Cagney, Pat
That fast-paced way that people talk coming off of each other. And that was a faster clip than people had been used to in the Broadway stage. Because of the fantastic amplification system, you could talk real fast and people would pick it up. Ronald Coleman wouldn’t talk like this, you know. He’d be really bom-ba-bom. So, and then I think in the '60's when people got used to television and quick cutting where you’d be watching a commercial or you’d be watching, say fast commercials, fast cuts from one thing to another, people learned the short-hand of visuals. So that they could hear quickly how things would change and they’d be able to move quickly through ideas. I always talked about the example twenty years ago, LA Law, which I used to watch—like everybody watched those movies—those shows the first couple of years. And they were always good. Hill Street Blues, St. Elsewhere, they always had your great three year runs. Then they stayed on. But...

KAPLAN: Like your guests.

MATTHEWS: Yeah. My wife would go off and work. And she’s an anchorwoman. She’d come back and I’d say I’ve got to tell you what happened on LA Law tonight. And you’d be reviewing with her three or four significant plots. All took place in 42 minutes. Maybe a minor plot here or there. It took almost as long to replay the show, you know, as it did to watch it because people were being introduced to new characters quickly. People are so quick on the uptake today that they can pick up a new character, a new plot, so quickly. So I think people
do talk faster because they hear faster, because they’re used to quick cutting. Our minds are like—imagine watching a pro basketball game and you just got here from another country. You’d say, how can they throw the ball that far and hit that little spot? How do they do it? How can they move so fast? How can people type—do you watch somebody type? How can you type? It’s impossible to type that fast. People learn how to do things very fast. Horowitz on the piano or something. I think people in this country have learned to listen real fast. Really fast.

KAPLAN: There’s a case to be made—tell me what you think of it—that there are certain kinds of issues which are complicated, and that if you deal with them in this fast-paced, quick cut, back and forth—he said, she said, no, no—that you don’t and can’t do justice to the subtleties which are inherent in those arguments.

MATTHEWS: It’s possible. I mean, I had a band leader in high school who said if you can do it fast, you can do it any speed. Speed is your test of how good you are. I agree. I think there’s certain mellifluous, sort of FM DJ voice in the middle of the night you might want to listen to in the car. Bustamante has it. It’s not working for the guy. He’s got a beautiful, mellifluous voice. He’s the best spoken of all the candidates. Speaks slowly, a little condescending. But I didn’t think so, but everybody else thought he did. I think that in the middle of the night, this is beautiful music. Stay with us for the evening. We’ll be here ’til two in the morning. Quentin Quaalude, your host. I mean, I think that that’s one way to talk. Talk. To talk. I’m going to sell it because on weekends,
on this new show, I've been described as Clark Kent on weekends. Really a much more deliberate, four person panel. All journalists.

KAPLAN: Yeah. Someone said they thought you were on Quaaludes.

MATTHEWS: I know. Well, whatever gets you through Saturday night or Sunday morning. And I do know that I do listen because I have four journalists on. I don’t have flacks or hacks or has-beens or anybody else. I have four journalists on. And I do trust them more than I would the normal guests I have on the show during the week. I just really love having the people I've been getting on those shows. The weekend show is beating everybody but Tim. We've only been on a year. We’re killing Georgie Porgie. Killing him, which is nice.

KAPLAN: Georgie Porgie?

MATTHEWS: Stephanopoulos. Didn’t I finish the name? No, we're really beating him.

KAPLAN: Is anyone here a working member of the press?

MATTHEWS: That's okay. Ink is good. I think a weekend show is just a different pace. I mean, weekday *Hardball* is just “Let’s play hardball." I wrote the book in '88. I just came up with "Let's play hardball" the first couple of months or something. I just came with it one night. I just said it one night, "Let's play hardball." And then it became the show. And the fast-paced stuff is what I guess is my trademark. Tim Russert the other day said I'm a national cultural icon. Well, because of *Saturday Night Live*...

KAPLAN: What’s it like to see yourself on *Saturday Night Live*?

MATTHEWS: Well, because Darrell Hammond does me better than anybody. And
Darrel said that Lorne Michael, the producer of that show, said that to do Matthews, you’re a cougar up in a tree. And you get out—and you just, you get out like this. So he puts his chest out like this big cat. And he waits for somebody. And then he leaps. And that’s how you do me. And it’s great the fact that they put so much thought into it. But he also has my ridiculous hack—that thing I do. That ridiculous laugh I picked up from a friend of mine. I used to work with a general counsel to Tip O’Neill, Kirk O’Donnell. He died a couple of years ago. I picked it up completely from him.

KAPLAN: We first met when we both worked together in the Carter White House.

MATTHEWS: We were in the White House mess?

KAPLAN: You were a kid from South Philly. How’d you get there?

MATTHEWS: Well, actually, I grew up in a really sort of Irish-Polish, I guess, neighborhood in Philly. Row houses. It’s changed. I took the kids back there to see it. It’s a little rough. A little drug action stuff. And I took them back there to see the neighborhood with their little St. Albans peacoats on. And the irony is that my grandfather used to wear a peacoat to the factory at night. So now the kids, when they go to the prep schools, dress in the same coats that my grandfather wore to the plant every night, you know. He wore a cap, just like in the movies. The old Irish guy, Charlie Shields, with the cap and the peacoat. And went off to the plant every night. And was the Democratic committeeman for that area. And...

KAPLAN: So you grew up in a...
MATTHEWS: In that area. And then we moved up to northeast Philly, if anybody knows Summerton, it's right near Bucks County. It was nice. Very nice. You know, all sort of cows out back and everything—classic suburbs. And changing suburbs. And then I lucked out. And then I went to LaSalle High School and I went to Holy Cross. And then I went to North Carolina graduate school at Chapel Hill for a year. And then I went in the Peace Corps in Africa. And I was, for two years, I was a trade development advisor. I was teaching business to Africans in Swaziland. It was fabulous. I had a Suzuki 120 and I bummed around the country and did everything. I hitchhiked all the way through—up and down Africa by myself one time. Out of the East Coast. I mean, the ballsiest thing to do. I mean, today if you—I mean, I don't even—why I did it, what I was thinking of. I just said oh, I think I'll go out and hitch in Africa.

KAPLAN: Would you let your kids do that?

MATTHEWS: Oh, I think it's crazy. I had no plan B. I mean, if I didn't get a hitch, where was I going that night? I don't know what. I'd be sitting there in the dark somewhere on some side road. But that was a great experience. I went to Israel for a month, hung out there in the old city. And then I stayed in an Arab hotel for a buck a night. And then I came home and worked as a Capitol policeman. It was the first job I could get—working for a Senator. Because that was the way—in the old days, you worked as a cop or whatever—mailroom, whatever kind of job. That's what's called patronage, you know. And then I became a legislative assistant. And then I...
KAPLAN: For a Democrat?

MATTHEWS: For a Democrat—Frank Moss from Utah. He just passed away. I just spoke at his testimonial. And then I went and worked with Ralph Nader for a while with the Capitol News Service. There were four of us he picked to cover the Hill. And cover things like campaign spending and stuff like that. It was tough. Then I went and worked in a campaign in Brooklyn for a guy named Sam Beard. He was Peter Beard’s brother, the African photographer. And then I went and ran for Congress myself against an incumbent Democrat in northeast Philly and I lost. But I did pretty well, 20-something percent. And then I came back and worked for Senator Ed Muskie because my old boss, Frank Moss, put me up for that job. And I worked for Muskie for three years. And then I was on a budget committee. And then I went to the White House...

KAPLAN: And at that time, how old were you?

MATTHEWS: Well, I came out of the Peace Corps at 25. By 28, I was working for Muskie. And then I went to the White House at 31. Then I met Rick Hertzberg, who became chief speechwriter. And we were pals. And then when he moved up to chief speechwriter, because Jim Fallows left to go to The Atlantic, he put me up for the job. And my tryout was to write the Catholic charity speech. I was the only Catholic on the speechwriting staff. So that was...

KAPLAN: The Al Smith dinner?

MATTHEWS: No, it was the Catholic Charities dinner, big fund-raising in Washington. Somebody helped me write something. I wrote some
poetry and I knocked that baby out. And they liked me. So I got to be a speechwriter. You know, it was a great job. I mean, it was a great with Mondale later. But I tell you, there's nothing like being a President's speechwriter. It was my favorite job of all time. Because you're on that plane. The plane's taking off and you're with the old Selectric 2 knocking out the next remarks for the next stop. And crazy Pat Caddell was approving everything. Isn't it amazing? Pat Caddell, you know. Who does he look like? Who was the advisor to the Romanovs? What was his name?

KAPLAN: Rasputin.

MATTHEWS: Rasputin. He looks just like Rasputin. He was the guy that was approving every word Jimmy Carter said in his re-election. It was frightening. And of course, of course, I was with Carter when we lost. We got the word the Tuesday night of the election, 1980. We're all on the plane. And a call kept coming through from Caddell with the bad numbers—that we're going to lose by ten. And I wasn't in the cockpit—I wasn't up with the President when he got the word. It was pretty bad. But that was an amazing time. I mean, even losing was unbelievable. I just loved working for Carter.

KAPLAN: The 444 days of the Iranian hostage crisis did put a wet blanket on things.

MATTHEWS: Well, we knew we were in trouble when we were in Ohio somewhere and Rick Hertzberg…

KAPLAN: Rick Hertzberg now the editor of The New Yorker, then speechwriter.

MATTHEWS: And Rick would—it was kind of old tech, but when Air Force
One would land, that’s when they could plug in TV. So the plug of the TV’s on the...

**KAPLAN:** Those were the quaint old days.

**MATTHEWS:** The problem is you couldn’t get it in the air, TV.

**KAPLAN:** And no computers.

**MATTHEWS:** And no computers. So it’s just electric typewriters. Rick turned on the news and watched the news that night with Cronkite. And Cronkite led the news that night, not with the election the next day, but with the anniversary of the hostage crisis. We were screwed and we knew it. If all the people were focusing on how miserable the hostage crisis was, we were going to go down the shooter. And we did. And he had to tell Carter when Carter got back on the plane what was on the news that night. That’s all you do is campaign to get on the news, you know. And we’re flying across the country. And we leave, like, East St. Louis, which is a minority community and very Democratic. I mean, that’s like Illinois, our last stop as we head westward with Carter to try to pick up some other states as the time zones elapse. And as we’re flying from East St. Louis, Illinois, right? All the way to Portland—David Rubinstein, who was on the plane with me—he now runs Carlyle Group. Somebody said to him why are we flying over all these states? And why don’t we stop somewhere? And he said because there’s not a single state we're going over we have a chance in hell of carrying. So all the way to Portland, Oregon. And then we get to Seattle and Carter gives a great speech. It’s the irony of politics. He finally gives a great speech. And there was a big airport and
he gives this—I guess the acoustics were right and it was reverberating. Carter gives this great speech. We get back to the plane. It was the first time Carter ever had a drink with anybody. And Rick says well, Mrs. President, Mr. President, you've got your stump speech down. This is the night before he's about to be canned. A little humor on the plane.

It was a great job. I loved it. And then I went to work for—I was Tip O'Neill's guy—assistant for six years for Tip O'Neill. Every single day of my life, I was worried about Tip. That was the toughest job in my life.

And then I ran a consulting company for about a year—a government research corporation with about fifty people working for me. And then I said to hell with money. I want to be a newspaper man. So I went to work for the San Francisco Examiner. And I worked for thirteen years as bureau chief and columnist. And then I...

KAPLAN: How many people in the bureau?

MATTHEWS: Me. Well, that's the way it is today. We could talk about that. You say...

KAPLAN: Well, you invented the Washington Bureau...

MATTHEWS: Well, that's right...

KAPLAN: And became the chief.

MATTHEWS: Well, there had been somebody before. There had to be somebody—and John Broder joined us later on to cover the war. But I was...
generally there. I did two columns a week, sometimes three, for about six months or so I was doing three, which is a killer. And a big Sunday piece every other Friday, which is what we called a take-out piece for the front page. And those were heavily reported pieces. So I had a lot of heavily reported stuff, not just opinion stuff. And a bunch of magazine covers I've got on my walls now. I had done a lot of *New Republic* stuff with Rick before that. And then I got it syndicated. I was syndicated by King and I was syndicated by the *Chicago Tribune*. And then, and then I started to do right away *CBS Morning News* as a commentator. And then I did—for good money. And then they had a new boss. A new pharaoh came to Egypt and I lost that one. And then I went to work on scale for ABC's *Good Morning, America* for seven or eight years. And I lost that job when they brought George in. You notice a little animus there? But that was great because it made me—when I lost that job, that forced me to focus on the cable job, which was then called, I think, *Politics*. And I really took it seriously. And that's when our numbers were very good. And I started with a show called *In-Depth* for two hours a night with Terry Anzur, who's out here. And then I went to...

**KAPLAN:** Terry Anzur was a member of our faculty.

**MATTHEWS:** Right. Roger Ailes, who started me on TV, moved me out to CNBC before he left. And then I did that for a couple of years. And then I started up the new show, *Hardball*, or *Politics*, it was called. My first guest was John F. Kennedy, Jr. He was great. I knew him and he was a nice guy and a friend of mine. He came over and did the whole first
show, which was great. Got us started. And then *Hardball* came on in '97 and it did great numbers. And it's been on since.

**KAPLAN:** Born a Democrat, worked for Democrats.

**MATTHEWS:** I was actually born Republican. We were Catholic Republicans in Philly, which was—actually in Philadelphia, unlike Boston and some other cities, the Irish ran the Republican organization. The Irish in Philly—because there was a lot more tolerance ethnically in Philly than there was in other cities. The Quaker tradition, I think, did breed some tolerance. The Catholics didn't feel anti-Protestant like they did in other cities. It didn't have that sort of anger. So they didn't feel they had to be Democrats just to get even with the WASP's. I mean, the Irish, the Italians were, in Philly, heavily Republican. And they had been, you know, well before—when Frank Rizzo ran in Philly, the tough cop, he ran as a Democrat and all the Irish—in fact, all the Italians, had to switch registration to vote for a Democrat. So ethnically, Philly's hard to read. It's not...

**KAPLAN:** But your professional career very much ran...

**MATTHEWS:** All Dem.

**KAPLAN:** ...with Democrats. So if I were to do a poll of current Democrats, Chris Matthews, friend or foe, I don't think it would be evenly divided.

**MATTHEWS:** They'd all be my foes? That sounds like my wife tonight yelling at me for being tough on Gray Davis, yeah.

**KAPLAN:** Do you think you're an equal opportunity bastard?
MATTHEWS: Well, I follow my impulse. And I was tough on Terry McAuliffe tonight because of fundraising. I talked to a young guy who'd been a staffer with the governor. And I said what was it like working for Gray Davis? He says well, first of all, we raised the money from whoever would give us the money. And then we'd maybe raise it from both sides. And then after we got all the money on any issue, then we'd figure out how we could sort of end up slightly center left on the issue. It was all about money and then getting there with the interest groups. And I said that sounds about what I think it looks like, you know. So I was tough on him. I was tough on Terry tonight. But I said he was good-looking. I said you're so clean, you ought to be Common Cause. My wife said that was scandalous to be so ironic with him.

KAPLAN: Did you talk to her after the show?

MATTHEWS: She is furious at me. She says I'm in the tank with the Schwarzenegger campaign. She's so mad at me.

KAPLAN: So your wife thinks that you’re...

MATTHEWS: She's furious.

KAPLAN: …with the Schwarzenegger…

MATTHEWS: Furious at me. 

KAPLAN: …and she's angry at you for it.

MATTHEWS: Furious at me tonight. Well, tonight’s show she thought was totally slam dunk the wrong way...

KAPLAN: You’ve been doing this, covering this recall for quite a while.

MATTHEWS: I have been pretty straight about it. I think I follow my impulses. I
think, I think I change...

KAPLAN: Who thinks Chris has been fair?

MATTHEWS: No, who has watched me enough for a judgment?

KAPLAN: This is a group of Matthews watchers. Who think he’s been fair?

MATTHEWS: What’s fair mean?

KAPLAN: What’s fair mean?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You attack everybody equally.

MATTHEWS: Well, I don’t always. But in California, I do certain things. Like Arianna? I refer to her as a minor candidate. I don’t even say her name, which I think drove her crazy. But I don’t care. When she would always try to get in the picture with Schwarzenegger. It was always a photo op fight. I figure it’s just—she’s trying to get in the picture, you know. But I did have fun with Arnold because we had a show this week and I did—we had Darrell Hammond doing Arnold. Did you see him at the Emmy’s? Did anybody see him? He was great. He goes "Gray Davis is up there in Sacramento, passing laws and doing those things." And it was great. And so we got a copy of that. And then we showed Arnold talking about "those things."

KAPLAN: Do you think that California...

MATTHEWS: I mean, I take shots. I had some fun with the guy. I mean, I think he’s going to win. I think I’d vote for him if I were out here.

KAPLAN: Arnold.

MATTHEWS: Oh, yeah. I’d vote for him, yeah.

KAPLAN: Do you think the...
MATTHEWS: I always like the guy who's going to turn over the pillow to the cool side. I mean, try something new. You know, you're in the middle of the night. You can't get to sleep. Turn over the pillow.

KAPLAN: Does that mean...

MATTHEWS: Try something new, you know. The cold side. I've just had it with the other side, you know. I've been on that side of the pillow all night. And I want to feel a little refreshed.

KAPLAN: So is amusement and theater more important to you than...

MATTHEWS: No, not theater. Refreshment. It's bigger than theater. It's a sense of rejuvenation. And I think politics needs rejuvenation. Rejuvenation. I think that Thomas Jefferson was right when he said a little revolution now and then is good. It's like a thunderstorm in nature. You need to shake things up. And I think that hiring Johnson probably was right.

KAPLAN: You don't think experience matters in that profession?

MATTHEWS: Experience in surgery, yes. In flying an airplane, yes. In being independent? I don't think you get experience in being independent by being dependent. And I think you do get schooled in a certain kind of hack-dom in politics. Because every year, just to survive, you have to raise money from the same interest groups. And if you're a Democrat, those are well known. If you're a Republican, those are well known. And if you go away from the Blue Plate Special, if you do anything that isn't appropriate to those interest groups, you're held to account. And so after a while, you just say oh, the hell with it. I'll vote for Labor. I'll vote for Israel. I'll vote for the trial lawyers. It's easier. It's just easier than thinking and being independent. Because who wants
to pay hell to your friends who gave you the money? I'll do what you want. Here's your 100 percent. I'll do it. I think after a while, you just give up.

**KAPLAN:** Are you confident that Schwarzenegger would be independent?

**MATTHEWS:** I'm not confident, but I think a guy who's not there for his career, who could probably go back and make a buck somewhere else, I don't know. All I say is we know what the other side can do. I don't quite understand Bustamante's performance, though. I've got to tell you, I was impressed by him in early debates when he was in without Schwarzenegger. And something happened. What is it? It looked like he was throwing in the towel this last Thursday. Why did he sit there so disapprovingly and sort of diffident?

**KAPLAN:** What's your theory?

**MATTHEWS:** I don't have one. It's almost like in an old boxing movie. It ain't your night, kid. You know, I mean, who said it ain't your night? I mean, he's going to be within five points, don't we think? It's going to be close. A little extra effort there.

**KAPLAN:** You don't believe the CNN/Gallup poll?

**MATTHEWS:** No, I think tonight at ten, we're getting a...

**KAPLAN:** *The LA Times.*

**MATTHEWS:** Yeah, we've got to look at that. I think professionally, I'd take all three polls—Field, LA and the Gallup—and average them up and see what you've got. Because they've been very disparate. I mean, I think that the LA poll seems to be more pro-Democrat. You never know what goes into their sampling and screening. But the other one may
be screened too hard to the Republican side. They skew it. They said 46 percent Republican turnout. That's high in this state—35 percent registered Republicans. So why'd they skew it? But then again, you hear their argument. I said tonight on the show, the people that go to a movie want to see that movie. The people who vote in this recall want the recall. They're going to show up to do it. The people that don't want the movie aren't going to go to the movie. And this movie is recall. And so I think that—and I don't know where—I don't know where the votes are going to go in the more sophisticated suburbs. We have a lot of moderate Republicans and sophisticated Democrats. Sometimes liberals. Are they going to go for Bustamante? I don't see it. So what are they going to do when they get in there and they have to vote on the second half of that ballot? They're going to go—yeah, some people, working people might go straight Democrat—Labor people because you're supposed to be straight Democrat. But the independent softer Democrat—a weaker Democrat, we call them, who thinks for their own self, they'll go I don't know. Bustamante doesn't show much. He's got very high negatives. They might go with Schwarzenegger. So I think some no-votes are going to be for Schwarzenegger. It's going to be weird. And some yes votes will be...

KAPLAN: A good moment to interrupt.

MATTHEWS: So no, I don't think any yes votes—I think the yes votes will go to the Republicans. Yeah. Totally.

KAPLAN: There are mics on both sides here. And just because we're filming
this, we'd love to be able to actually have your voices amplified. So if
any of you would like to play hardball with Chris Matthews, or
softball, please come to the mics. And we'll continue the
cornerstone up here. But I'd also like to invite you all to join it. Yes,
Eric.

ERIC: Hi, Chris.

MATTHEWS: Hi.

ERIC: One of the things we've read in the LA Times is...

KAPLAN: By the way, he keeps his wife up by watching the re-broadcast of
you.

ERIC: Eleven o'clock, she doesn't get any sleep.

MATTHEWS: Oh, really?

ERIC: One of the things we...

MATTHEWS: Better me than you, huh?

ERIC: Yeah, that's right. We read in the LA Times how Cruz Bustamante is
keeping a limited campaign schedule. It's been reported a couple of
different times, you know, one or two events a day. In contrast with
Arnold Schwarzenegger, who's criss-crossing the state, albeit in
staged events. But still, I'm struck by the contrast. You've got
Schwarzenegger, who appears vibrant and dynamic, out there, you
know, usually in a short-sleeved shirt, doesn't wear a tie often. And
then Cruz, who seems to be more sheltered and often sort of not in
touch with the voters. Very much the establishment. And I'm just
curious on your thoughts.

And one of the early chapters is my definition of who wins presidential elections. And it's probably true out here. And it's so ephemeral, superficial. And you can usually predict, with exceptions like Nixon in '68—I caught the man with the sun in his face. If you close your eyes and imagine the candidate outside with the sun in his face, he wins. If you imagine the candidate inside at a desk, he loses. So the Dukakis' and Doles and Deweys and Stevenson's, they tend to lose. But the guy with the sun on his face, whether it's Eisenhower or it's Kennedy or it's Clinton, it's Reagan or it's this guy. They love being outside. There's something cowboy in our culture in this country. Bush may be as light as a feather. But the fact is when he campaigned, he always campaigned with that sort of pseudo-cowboy jacket. You know, the rich guy's jacket. And the boots. And the best scene in the whole movie—the whole movie—in the campaign, was him standing at the north 40 overlooking the fence—the north 40 at the fence with Colin Powell. I said this is the best picture of the campaign. Him with a guy everybody loves, Colin Powell, together, two guys checking out the ranch. I said this is it. But every time he puts a suit on, he looks like Alfred E. Newman. So there's something in our culture that, despite our urban ways and living on streets and row houses, that still says look for the cowboy—I mean, Roosevelt. The cigarette holder up in the air and Harry Truman from the back of the train. There's something primordial about our love of the outdoorsy looking candidate. And intellectuals among you might say that's a lightweight analysis.
Well, think about it. Because it is true.

**KAPLAN:** Is Wes Clark an outdoor guy?

**MATTHEWS:** I think he might be. I keep thinking, of the crop, who's got what I think tends to work? Who's the closest to Clinton? Wes Clark on TV is fabulous. Dick Gephart in person is fabulous. Life is unfair. Dick Gephart on TV is nothing. Somebody said it's like she keeps waiting for him to pull the skin down like some alien and reveal the true being. He also doesn't have eyebrows, which is a problem. The non-eyebrow thing, about women especially, I hear that so many times. What is it? He doesn't have any eyebrows. So superficial. But I think Wes, I think Dean. Dean has that great posture. He just, he's got this...

**KAPLAN:** He's dressed like a cougar.

**MATTHEWS:** No, he's got—no, no. He's got these great Popeye forearms, you know. And he grabs the lectern and it's him. It's the posture. He looks like a guy who's calling power to account. He looks like what he is. And he's a doctor. And that fool Gephart attacked him on health care the other day. Excuse me. He's a doctor. He's probably saved thousands of people—old people, young people. He's been there caring for them. And you're making fun of him because you're really trying to suggest he's against health care for seniors. Do you really mean that? Or does he think HCFO needs to be restructured? Which is what he...

**KAPLAN:** The Health Care Finance Organization.

**MATTHEWS:** See, see, I don't think it was fair. And it was gotcha journalism and
gotcha politics. So I guess those two. As much as I like John Kerry personally, he looks like indoor. He looks like he’s been on Mt. Rushmore. He looks like he’s from there. He looks like he’s already been President. I can't remember when he was President. But he seems like he’s been President.

I worked for Ed Muskie. I know what the problem is. Politics, like marriage, is binary. You get married or not. I'm sorry. That’s really what it comes down to. Aye or nay. Elections, basically two parties. Aye or nay. Life is binary. Do you want to vote for the war or vote against the war. Aye or nay? He now has this new way of filtering it and defining it. He voted for the war. But now he says well, I didn’t. I voted for the right to go to war. The threat. Yeah, I mean, to give a gun to Bush is to say we're going to war. Go ahead. Do what you want. I don't care. I'll go to war. I mean, I just think that his attempt to try to define himself out of having voted for the war when you had this doctor who says I'm against it. Sorry. I'm against the war. I'm against the tax cut. Keep it simple. You can’t have it all. You've got to make decisions.

I think young people—I'll speak for this group. I'll bet it's true. You like people that make decisions. Because life is so hard and you hate making decisions. But when somebody does, you go that's a leader. And he says the tax cut sucks. Let's get rid of it. I'm not going to change it. Oh, let's be really courageous and get the top
one percent. And we'll get 56 percent believe we should tax the top because they’re not in the top one percent. 99 percent should support taxing the top one percent. That makes sense. Yeah, why don't we tax them? Tax them. So I think that those two guys have the sun in their face. So watch for those two.

And I'm looking at the numbers and Clark leads this week's *Newsweek* poll in the primaries that matter. Iowa, look out. Look out. I think Dean's got Iowa. He's isolationist, he's anti-war. He's perfect for Iowa. Good government. You can't criticize Democrats. Democrats will not let you criticize other Democrats in Iowa. They will not put up with it. So it's going to be very hard for anybody to assail his numbers. They don't like it. Remember? The attack video? When Maureen Dowd did the thing on the—somebody put together Neil Kinnock's speech and Joe Biden's speech. And showed that Neil Kinnock’s speech was the basis for Joe Biden's speech. And gave that out to the press. And the people in Iowa hated that.

KAPLAN: John Sasser. John Sasser did it.

MATTHEWS: Blamed it on Mark Johnson, too.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thanks for coming to SC, Chris.

MATTHEWS: Sure.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I wanted to know your opinions on Bill O'Reilly.

MATTHEWS: He's a very smart, deft broadcaster.

KAPLAN: Oh, be impolitic. Come on.

MATTHEWS: Well, I've watched his formula. I debated him one time. He's got a
formula. First of all, don't support the war. Support the President on the war. Blame everything on Hillary and Teddy. Don't support the President’s economic policies because the working class guys who like him don't benefit from it. So it's very calculated. It's not conservative. It's brash, but it's very calculated to cherry pick among conservative causes. Don't defend the economic policies of the President. Don't defend hawkishness. Just attack anybody who's not. And blame everything on Hillary. I don't care if the Republicans have been in office since '94. Blame everything on Teddy and Hillary. Or Clinton. To me, it's formula.

KAPLAN: Why does...

MATTHEWS: But it works because people are so angry in this country at the establishment that they'll watch him. But just remember, he's up against NBC, CBS and ABC and CNN. And he's the only conservative. And so his percentage is low if you figure it as a portion. It's only like a good 90 against a 2, which is a huge cable number. But compared to the broadcast...

KAPLAN: The 2 means how many people are watching?

MATTHEWS: About two million. But the broadcast guys are pulling big numbers, you know. I think a combined 15 or so. And, you know, the broadcast liberals, if you will, although you know the only people that you can say definitely are liberal I think would be—Dan is. Dan's a Democrat. And Peter Jennings is a Liberal Party guy in Canada. And Tom Brokaw’s sort of establishment. Maybe liberal, but mainly establishment. Apparently, coming to our
focus groups, people love the term fair and balanced. And then they
laugh at it. They know it's a joke and they love it because it's a way of
sticking it to the liberals. So they say yeah, we're fair and balanced.
Take it or leave it, you know. It's like shove it, you know. They love it.
But they know it's not fair and balanced. But they say yeah, we're fair
and balanced. Hmm! So people are very shrewd.

KAPLAN: Yes?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: During the sixteen word scandal thing, it seemed like you
were one of the few people that really talked about how Cheney had
told the CIA to go check out the nine year documents and all that.

MATTHEWS: Yeah. More on that this week.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: And now that it's resurfaced, you don't hear anything about
Cheney possibly being...

MATTHEWS: Oh, tonight on Hardball, Howard Fineman, my hero, said watch the
Vice President's office in terms of this leak.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Well, how come the rest of the media doesn't talk about
Cheney's involvement in that?

MATTHEWS: They don't focus on the structure of the White House, which I think
somebody in the White House referred to as "the leadership." I think
Cheney is really powerful. And his chief of staff, Scooter Libby, is
immensely powerful within the sort of the neo-conservative network
and the ideologues around the President. I think he's almost the
switcher. It all comes through him. And you know, working in the
Vice President's office and all the paper that has to go through you, I
think they really exploit that. I think this Vice-President is an executive
Vice President. Vice Presidents under the Constitution have no reporting responsibility to the President. They have no executive authority at all. They're simply Presidents of the Senate and in line to replace the President. They have no executive authority. This guy has gone beyond Mondale or anybody. He's become, I think, in effect, the chief of staff. And I think it's powerful stuff. And the evidence of that is when he was asked to help the President find a Vice-President. He helped him. He was head of the search committee. And he came out with the parameters—for him. The specs. And the guy is amazing. He is so tough. He's a hawk like I've never seen. I was with him in Grenada. I mean, he will defend any hawkish move. He's unbelievable. There's something about his personality that's driven that way. And I think the President allows him to put his thumb on the scale between Rummy and Colin Powell. The idea was Rummy and Colin Powell would be sort of balanced. Like Seward and—who's the guy with Lincoln? The other guy? Chase. But they don't balance anymore. It's all the thumb on the scale with the Vice President. He just is always hawkish and Colin Powell has become almost a kind of minister. He always does what he's told.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I was just wondering, we're always talking in our classes about the evils of corporate ownership and commercial expectations and requirements. If you were freed from that sort of need to compete with Fox or for audience share, how would you change your...

MATTHEWS: My idea of a fabulous job would do what Charlie Rose does. Or what
Dick Cavett used to do. I mean, to sit around with the equivalent of Gore Vidal and Norman Mailer and Bill Buckley or Truman Capote and to spend a half hour with them talking about their art. Or doing what Charlie did one night brilliantly with Richard Gere, where he described movie acting. I mean, and how it works. Those kind of interviews are just fascinating to me. I mean, I just think they’re the greatest. As much as I love the rock and roll of politics, I think the big culture interviews are great. That’s my thought.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah, hi.

MATTHEWS: But there’s no money in it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah, and going off on that, I may be fighting a losing battle here. But what does the Green Party have to do to get mainstream media representation?

MATTHEWS: Camejo looks good. What do you think he’ll get? You think he’ll get five?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah, he’s not going to get much. But even tonight you've mentioned, well, you didn’t mention Simon, but everyone else except Camejo until now. I was just wondering…

MATTHEWS: Well, you know, it's hard for—you know, last time around, Gore fought the Green Party. He fought them from nine down to three. And the Democrats are always going to see the Green Party as a threat. And, because the last election was probably, Gore won the popular vote by poaching on the Greens, taking six out of their nine. And that's a hell of a graph. Nader was flying high there, especially out of here. And then he went out and became populist and got very
tough and fierce on his sort of economic populism. I mean, Gore went back and grabbed it from you guys. Your Green guy. I just think it's always going to be a competition. Like Republicans and Libertarians, you know. I just think this country seems to have a two-party nature that just—it separates us from the French, whose political parties are very hard to figure out right now. And we're like the Brits. We're like the Brits. Or like Israel. They're a two-party system. But they, no, actually, they've got so many parties with two coalitions and two blocks. You know, they have the Likkud block and Labor. But Canada has all gotten fractured now with the Reformed Party of the West. I just think it's the American people like the two-party system. And it's become more ideological. When I was growing up, there were a lot more Republican moderates and liberals. John Lindsey, Jake Javitz, people like that. They're all gone. Today there are very few conservative Democrats. Frank Lautenberg, see, people like that, they're all gone. It's all basically liberal to moderate Democrats and conservative to mostly conservative Republicans. And that leaves—it just screws guys like you.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** I have two questions. The first one is do you think that speaking ability is a lot of what makes a person effective in politics and in the media? And secondly, do you think our education system today loses something by not teaching children good public speaking ability?

**MATTHEWS:** That's a great thought. I think, getting back to Churchill, he said that if you have the ability to speak, you could be rejected by your
party, by the public, by everybody, you can always go out there and impress an audience. And I think that one thing that TV has done is killed really good orators. Because you're answering in sound bites and you don't have to develop an argument. You don't have to say, can I have twenty minutes and give a great speech in twenty minutes. Or in the old days when you'd speak for two or three hours in the sun. Or Castro for four hours.

**KAPLAN:** Are you part of that problem?

**MATTHEWS:** I gave four commencement addresses this year.

**KAPLAN:** No, I don’t mean you. I mean what you do to your guests.

**MATTHEWS:** Well, I give them a lot of free time. See, they're on my show for about ten minutes and then they have the rest of their lives. I don't really feel that I crowd them in terms of their ability to learn to speak in public. They have plenty of free time after they're done with me. So I do crowd them. But I do think that orators—isn’t it interesting that the last thirty years, Jesse Jackson, Mario Cuomo, Reagan...

**KAPLAN:** Sharpton.

**MATTHEWS:** And maybe Sharpton. But I've never seen him give a full speech. I hear he's a great wise guy. And maybe Clinton. But Clinton doesn't have the natural poetry. He's effective, but he doesn't have the poetry. Jesse Jackson is almost impossible to beat. And there are so many different personalities to that guy, as we know. There are so many Jesse's. So many. There's the hero, the historic figure, the hold-up. Anyway, there's every Jesse. There's the minister. There's—
there’s the not minister. There’s every kind of guy. But one of the Jesse’s is really a brilliant orator. I’ve seen his scripts where somebody types something or it may be his first draft of it. It gets typed up. And then you see his chicken scratch handwriting. Now I don’t know how he deciphers it. But it’s rhythmic. It’s beautiful. His sweeping references to poor people—about the woman who takes care, who works in a hospital as an orderly and can’t even get in the bed when it’s her time to be sick. And, oh, he grabs you with personal connection. And, of course, Mario Cuomo is a great speaker. If you, young man, if you were to become an orator, you’d be a hero. It’s doable. If you can go out and give a really good speech, I mean, I’ve done twelve commencements. And there’s not one I haven’t felt proud of. Eleven, I guess. And giving a good commencement address is great, I just love it. I do speeches for money but I basically wing it. But when you prepare it and you write it, like I’ve done a bunch of Churchill addresses and things like that, and friendly Sons of St. Patrick’s dinners. We have to really be good because the Irish are cruel if you’re not really, really good. And you have to time it exactly right. I think it’s fabulous. It should be a great major, I think. Oratory, rhetoric. But it’s so different than TV.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Are you going to run for Congress again?

**MATTHEWS:** No, I think I’ve...

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Why not?

**MATTHEWS:** Well, because—because I’m doing this thing.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Well, eventually, wouldn’t you think that you should? No?
MATTHEWS: I would love to. I’d love to run for the Senate. That’s someday.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You would run for the Senate?

MATTHEWS: I would love to.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: When?

MATTHEWS: Give me the money. No. No.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I’ll give you my resume.

MATTHEWS: We’ll talk. One recruit in the whole room. Thank you, though. Thank you very much. Oh, God, you’re tough. Yes, sir?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I’m a broadcast journalism grad student here. And I was just wondering what you thought of TV news today as a whole. Do you think it’s as bad as some people claim it is? And what do you see happening in the future?

MATTHEWS: Well, I grew up with, as I say, Cronkite and Severeid and it all depends on how good the news is to watch. There was an incredibly wonderful time in my life and probably in Marty’s in 1968 when, starting around the march on the Pentagon. I was there in ’67 and when politics was so exciting. And I always tell my kids about the ’60’s. And they were really great. Especially in that mid period.

KAPLAN: Especially if you can remember them.

MATTHEWS: Well, if you come back. See, we went through the grim period after Dallas for a couple of years. The British invasion. Weird things were going on. It’s kind of a carpe diem. But by ’67, things just started to light up again. And McCarthy ran. And every night at North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I would race over to the student union building and watch Cronkite describe the McCarthy campaign with Eric Severeid
doing commentary. And I thought that was great. And then, of
course, Bobby got in the race and everything. It was an unbelievable
time. So there was a poetry to the times. Things were happening. Of
course, there were all these tragedies that year. But I don’t see the
poetry in this President. I don’t see it. I don’t see poetry to
our politics. There’s no rhythm to it. There’s no reach. I don’t see any
of the candidates, except maybe Dean, reaching and trying to say
something big and challenging. And challenging the people. I see
mostly sort of opportunism. And a sort of prosaic message.

KAPLAN: And you’re still for Schwarzenegger.

MATTHEWS: Well, it’s a slow track.

KAPLAN: Yes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi, Chris.

MATTHEWS: Hi.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: My name is Shiva.

MATTHEWS: Hi, Shiva.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi. I wanted to ask you—I remember hearing Arianna

Huffington was the head of her debate squad but it didn’t show
when she was debating on TV with the rest of the candidates. So I’m
wondering, do you think Arianna really wanted to win the
governorship or was that a way to further her activities?

MATTHEWS: Isn’t that sarcastic ad hominem style very British in their debate?

KAPLAN: Mmm hmm.

MATTHEWS: What we call cheap shots is ad hominem. They relish that stuff. So
maybe what she was doing was what they did at the Cambridge
Union. Remember how high school debate works in this country? Did you do high school debating? It's all evidentiary. You know, you get *US News and World Report*. You get a bunch of statistics in one way or another. And then you go out there and you get all your facts and you’d make your case. Well, in Britain, it's all sarcasm. I would expect that of you. You know, they're sort of back and forth. You know, nice try. You know, I think the Brits use that sort of ad hominem sarcasm. And I think she probably learned how to do it.

KAPLAN: Let's get a few more questions in. Yes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: My question is you thought Arnold Schwarzenegger coming into California and we'd rejuvenate the government. And we're seeing this...

MATTHEWS: Well, maybe. I mean, I don't want to get on the trail here. I mean, yeah, compared to the options, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. But don't dig me too deep in here.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You're already off the answer. No.

MATTHEWS: I'm hedging.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I see...

MATTHEWS: My wife gave me a hard time tonight. My wife gave me a hard time. A real hard time for being...

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Binary, Chris. For or against.

MATTHEWS: ...I mean, a really hard time.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Well, you see entertainment and politics fusing together. That's what I see.

MATTHEWS: I think that...
AUDIENCE MEMBER: Do you think that's beneficial?

MATTHEWS: No, I think that almost everything in life, there's an entertainment factor. I think that folk music, anti-war music, civil rights music, blues, almost every kind of music has to have entertainment. Sure, there's a message to being a Western singing country music. But there's always fun. It's fun. Bob Dylan used to say that. I'm not a serious guy. I'm an entertainer. I think politics has to be fun. It has to enlighten, it has to grab people. I feel good going to an anti-war demonstration. I feel good voting for this guy. I feel good he's in office when I get up in the morning. I love reading him in the paper. This guy's a leader. LaGuardia, you know. Roosevelt. You know, and people like real leaders. They're fun. Guiliani. You know, that's good. You know, Jesse when he was hot. And, you know, Mario Cuomo. I mean, you like leaders like that. Stevenson made you feel great. At the end of a Stevenson speech, everybody felt smart. You know? He gave great speeches. And I think politics, yeah. I like the word entertainment. And everybody says well there's something wrong with entertainment. No. You don't understand entertainment if you say there's something wrong with it. Entertainment is do you like doing this? Do you get an interest out of it? And John Huston once said when he was real old and he's got emphysema and everything. And Dick Cavett once said to him well, what do you, what do you want? And here's a guy who couldn't have sex anymore probably. He couldn't really breathe well anymore. He had a tank and he had nothing really left in life. He said I want
interest. I want interest. And if a politician can't interest you, if he can't excite you and turn you on and make you glad you're alive and he's alive, then what the hell's he doing there? If he's just a tinkerer, hire a mechanic. Hire a technocrat. But a leader's a person who's supposed to make you feel. Cuomo used to say to me every speech should end upbeat. You give a twenty minute speech, at the end give them hope. Don't just bitch.

KAPLAN: That is the perfect moment for me to interrupt.

MATTHEWS: Okay.

KAPLAN: And say that though you have more questions, we're going to continue this conversation upstairs. Chris is going to be available for a reception. Please join me in thanking Chris.

MATTHEWS: Thank you.