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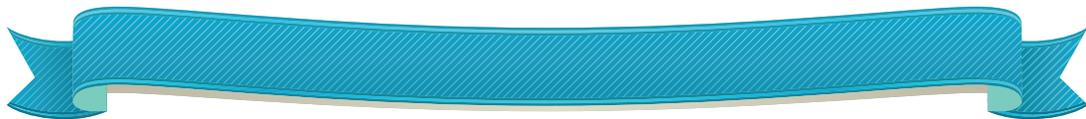


PHOTO BY TANNER HOISINGTON | Comedian **Stephen Colbert** speaks as part of a rally at the College of Charleston Jan. 20.

In the 2008 election, Obama claimed 66 percent of the vote of people ages 18 to 29. Current polls place Obama's support with the same age group closer to 52 percent. To win the election, he has to be able to bring those people back into the 60 percent range. How he is going to do that now is the question.

RICHARD BENEDETTO

ELECTION 2012



Caucuses and primaries provide enticing moments for coverage



PHOTOS BY GAGE SKIDMORE | Republican presidential candidates **Mitt Romney** speaks in Sun Lakes, Ariz., Sept. 14, 2011. | **Ron Paul** talks at a post-debate rally in Mesa, Ariz., Feb. 22, 2012. | **Newt Gingrich** addresses attendees at the Western Republican Leadership Conference in Las Vegas Oct. 19, 2011. | **Rick Santorum** expresses his views at a rally in Phoenix Feb. 21, 2012.

BY HOWARD SPANOGLA AND BRADLEY WILSON, CJE

When participating on a panel of political reporters Feb. 18, Torre Jessup explained he was 198 days away from the official start of the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, N.C. As the district director of the 2012 Host Committee, Jessup is thinking about engaging the community, the \$100 million to \$200 million economic impact, the \$36.5 million money-raising task and organization of 10,000 volunteers. Also, he mentioned a “small matter” of preparing for 150,000 media participants who will attend the first-day media party at the Charlotte Motor Speedway Sept. 3.

In comparison with those duties, advisers should easily rise to the task of inspiring a staff of 20 to 70 students to vote for coverage of the 2012 presidential election.

To help, though, advisers and editors can benefit from suggestions Jessup and his colleagues — Jim Morrill, Carol Hanner and moderator Phillip Jeter — made during a panel discussion at the fifth annual convention of the North Carolina College Media Association.

They opted for new strategies to match the challenges of the 2012 election.

UNLIMITED OPPORTUNITY

Morrill: If you can't get excited about covering politics this year, there's something wrong with you. ... The media has changed. Even if you weren't journalists, you'd be journalists. In a way we're competing with everybody now. [There are] cellphone cameras ... bloggers ... Twitter. Everybody's a journalist.

The news business has changed tremendously. You can get your news any time anywhere you want to. You can get it in your pocket. It's a 24/7 news cycle. All that's different. The industry has changed a lot. *The Charlotte Observer* has about half the newsroom size it had 10 years ago. We're doing more with fewer resources. There are fewer eyeballs watching legislators. Fewer reporters cover the legislature now. That means you have more news [in state capitals] being filtered through the eyes of fewer reporters.

North Carolina, [like other states], has changed in other ways too ... [as evident by] the demographics — a big Hispanic influx and people moving down from up north. All that changes the politics. It is one of the reasons Barack Obama became the first Democrat to win North Carolina since 1976. That was a pretty big transformation.

There's also a lot that hasn't

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TORRE JESSUP, deputy executive director of external relations for the Charlotte In 2012 host committee, has worked in U.S. Rep. Mel Watt's Charlotte office for 16 years, most recently as district director.



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JIM MORRILL is the chief political reporter for *The Charlotte Observer* in North Carolina, where he has worked since 1981. jmorrill@charlotteobserver.com



PHOTOS BY GAGE SKIDMORE | Former presidential candidates **Herb Cain**, past CEO of the National Restaurant Association and Tea Party activist | **Michele Bachmann**, U.S. representative from Minnesota and founder of the Tea Party Caucus | **Jon Huntsman**, former Utah governor and U.S. ambassador to China | **Rick Perry**, three-term Texas governor. Cain dropped out of the race Dec. 3; Bachmann, Jan. 4; Huntsman, Jan. 16; Perry, Jan. 19.

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changed. It is still incumbent on us as reporters to tell people who is running for office. We have to sort things out and make sense of things and tell people who these people are and what they're all about.

FAIRNESS STANDARD

Hanner: If you're covering an election, you're doing one of the most (enjoyable) things you can do and one of the things with the most perils. Every word you write, tweet or post on Facebook will be analyzed.

People's standards for what they want to learn about are changing with social media. Reporters are not simply writing one story. You're writing a body of coverage. When people look back at your coverage, will they be able to say, "They really seem to treat everyone with an even hand."

Political reporting ... means getting information. ... A good standard part of any story is to go back to the campaign contributions. Where's the money? Campaign contributions are the source of that. Know that you're being watched not just for the quality of your story but for the quantity of your stories. You're being measured on that. There are people who will count the number of paragraphs devoted to the Democrats and compare that to coverage of Republicans.

REPORTING EFFORT

Hanner: Make sure you have phone numbers. How can I reach you later today? Be sure right up front to get



PHOTO BY GAGE SKIDMORE | **Mitt Romney** speaks at a town hall meeting in Sun Lakes, Ariz., Sept. 14, 2011. According to the Associated Press, Romney was leading with 415 delegates after super Tuesday March 6.

a phone number. When you're at the end of an interview and you ask questions that might rile the source a bit, the individual might be less willing to give you a phone number.

Always call one more person than you intended to, preferably two more people. You never know when that extra source will give you an extra piece of information. ... It'll make you a really good reporter. Be careful what you say. Any personal opinion you express is in public. There's no such thing as a private opinion any more. If you want to be seen as neutral, independent and fair-minded, then don't say things that indicate your personal opinion.

ONGOING CHALLENGE

Jessup: Our country has undergone challenging times since 2008. This is an opportunity to show that we can reinvent ourselves and move on [to current issues]: Youth engagement? Sustainability? Economic inclusion?

Hanner: Concentrating on issues is one of the most significant challenges for all media, whether it's local or national. It may be easier on the local level because you do not have the same level of ads or war chest that create drama. Some of the really important issues get second shrift.

Keep bringing the coverage back to the issues. Where does the candidate stand on the issues? Keep the campaign focused locally. People do position papers on where they stand on the issues. Write about them. Economy. Jobs. Healthcare reform. You can keep the stories focused on the topic by telling the interviewee, "I'm doing a story on healthcare reform."

EFFECTIVE PREPARATION

Hanner: Read. Read other political coverage. Read about the candidates. That's going to be your best source of understanding what is out there. It's very hard to cover a political candidate if you don't know what's already been written. Talk to other people who are covering that campaign or issue in politics.

Morrill: What's interesting to you? What are the politics behind tuition increases? Why are they doing it? What are the pressures they're under? Start with something that is interesting to you that affects you and your friends.

Jeter: Expose yourself to new ideas, different perspectives than the ones you are most comfortable with. ■



PHOTOS BY GAGE SKIDMORE | Presidential candidates **Rick Santorum** (2), former U. S. senator from Pennsylvania | **Ron Paul**, retiring U. S. representative from Texas | **Newt Gingrich**, former U. S. Speaker of the House from Georgia.



RICHARD BENEDETTO, an adjunct professor of journalism at American University, is a retired White House correspondent and columnist for *USA Today* and political columnist for Gannett News Service. He reported on local, state and national government and politics for nearly 40 years and continues to write political commentary for publications such as Politico. Benedetto, a founding member of *USA Today*, joined in 1982. He wrote the national newspaper's first Page One cover story. Benedetto covered the White House during the administrations of Presidents Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. He has covered every national political convention since 1972 and every presidential campaign since 1984.



JESSICA TAYLOR, a senior analyst/reporter at *The Rothenberg Political Report*, covers House, Senate and gubernatorial elections as well as the 2012 presidential contest. Previously, Jessica was editor of *National Journal's* House Race Hotline and an assistant editor for POLITICO's 2010 page, where she reported on House, Senate and gubernatorial races and managed their midterm website. She also worked for *National Journal* as a staff writer/online producer and then research director for *The Almanac of American Politics*.

People just don't seem to be able to warm up to Mitt Romney, while most seem to think it's inevitable he's going to win the nomination. "He looks presidential. ... If you were putting together a Hollywood casting of presidential candidates, he seems to hit all those buttons."

RICHARD BENEDETTO

Voices of experience

BY BRADLEY WILSON, CJE, AND MALENA CAROLLO

At the Jan. 24 Institute on Political Journalism at Georgetown University, college newspaper editors and reporters spoke with Richard Benedetto and Jessica Taylor about their analyses of the presidential election and both the House and Senate races.

What do you think will be the top five issues of the fall election?

Benedetto: This is easy: The top three are the economy, the economy and the economy, and all those things that fall under those headings such as jobs, homes sales, foreclosures, energy prices, health care, taxes and spending cuts.

After that I would see national security/foreign policy and then perhaps education. The media like to play up issues such as abortion, minority rights and environment, but they generally rank low in the minds of most voters when they select a president. I know this is considered heresy to say it, but it is true.

Much can happen with the economy between now and next September or October when we're really getting down to making the final decision. If the economy is looking better and people are starting to feel a little bit more confident, they will accrue to Obama's benefit. If not, if the Republican candidate is able to make a better case or sound more confident or give people more confidence, that'll be it.

Taylor: The economy is going to be front and center no matter who the nominee is for the Republicans. All other issues trickle down from that, including job creation, education, mili-

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PHOTOS BY GAGE SKIDMORE | Presidential candidates **New Gingrich**, author, speaker and assistant professor | **Ron Paul** experienced obstetrician-gynecologist | **Mitt Romney** (2), co-founder of Bain Capital and former governor of Massachusetts

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tary spending (as well as) reducing the deficit and government spending.

You're going to see Republicans make this much of what Obama has done even though when he took office, the economy was already on a definite downturn. You'll see Democrats argue that Republicans have been in control of the House this past year and what has happened.

If you were a high school reporter covering the 2012 presidential election, what angle would you take?

Benedetto: The youth vote (18- to 29-year-olds) was instrumental in electing President Obama in 2008. He received 66 percent of that vote, his highest percentage of any age group. However, he is now polling about 53 percent approval with that group today. Reporters should consider stories about how each candidate is trying to appeal to young voters in this election. Also, Obama came into office promising to do a lot to improve education. What effort has he made to fulfill that promise?

Taylor: The candidates will be discussing issues that will directly impact teenagers in the immediate years to come, including the economy, job growth, taxes, education and the military. Now is the time to pay attention to these issues.

How can high school students localize the 2012 national elections? Should they? Or should they simply focus on the big, national issues?

Benedetto: Local, local, local. Reporters should talk to a lot of students to hear what they are saying and to come up

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PHOTOS BY JOEL QUINONES | **YEEHAW:** Presidential candidate Rick Santorum greets Tea Party supporters after they presented him a cowboy hat in honor of his visit to Texas. **IN AWE:** The night after Santorum swept three Republican votes, he held a Tea Party rally in Collin County, Texas — the wealthiest county in the United States — as children watched.

A photographer's perspective

By **JOEL QUINONES** | McKinney (Texas) High School

Covering Rick Santorum's visit to Texas was a daunting task because I've done nothing like it. With Santorum sweeping the Colorado and Minnesota caucuses and the Missouri primary the night before, I knew there was going to be heavy coverage of his campaign so I was nervous.

First, being new, I figured I would dress up for the occasion. The first thing I learned was that press photographers do not dress up. While I was sweating my rear off and cleaning my foggy viewfinder, the press around me was dry and comfortable. They kept shooting so I learned to dress comfortably to avoid missing good shots.

The second thing I learned was to read and use my press pass. When I arrived at one of Rick Santorum's rallies, there were about 3,000 supporters waiting to see him. I kept wondering how I was going to get a shot of him when I couldn't even get inside. Fortunately, my pass enabled me to go beyond the velvet ropes straight to the VIP section next to Santorum's location.

The third thing I learned was to fight for your shot. Believe it or not, I was not the only press photographer at the rallies. There were supposed to be at least 10 different media outlets showing up so I knew that it was going to be a tight fit — and it was. With photographers and video camera operators from CNN, CBS, NBC and MSNBC all around me, there was no room for personal comfort. When Santorum began his question-and-answer time with the press, things really got hectic. Every photographer there, including myself, needed a shot so I had to do whatever it took. Leaning over someone's shoulder or nudging someone to get Santorum in your frame — anything. It was nothing personal. It was all business.

My advice?

1. Dress comfortably. You're not there to impress the speaker.
2. If your press pass says "All Access," it truly means you don't have to stay with the other press photographers. Move around and get a variety of shots.
3. You must fight for your shot. Don't be timid.



JOEL QUINONES, a senior at McKinney (Texas) High School, is a producer for the school's broadcast, MHS1.



PHOTOS BY GAGE SKIDMORE | Rick Santorum responding at a rally in Phoenix Feb. 21 | Newt Gingrich explaining ideas at the 2012 Conservative Political Action Conference in Washington, D.C., Feb. 10 | Mitt Romney speaking at a grassroots rally in Mesa, Ariz., Feb. 13 | Rick Santorum talking in Phoenix Feb. 12.

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with stories based upon what they hear — not what reporters wish they heard or expected to hear but what they actually heard. Test ... issues on them, such as how the lagging economy affected their families or them directly. Also, consider stories about how students are involved in campaigns, presidential or local candidates.

Taylor: National issues are local issues to voters. ... That doesn't mean student journalists shouldn't look at the smaller and bigger pictures, which can coexist in the same narrative.

The national election is the prominent one. But there are tons of other elections from "dogcatcher" to school board to county commissioner to governor. Should students cover those elections? Why or why not?

Benedetto: It goes without saying that local elections are interesting to local voters when the media cover them.

I can honestly say that I never had more fun and never was more powerful than when I was covering local government and politics early in my career. It taught me to respect and admire people who offer themselves up as public servants, a respect and admiration I never lost throughout my career. Young, aspiring reporters should try to get to know local politicians. They will come away from the process less cynical.

Taylor: Local elections and particularly statewide elections are important. These are the future leaders who we'll see playing larger roles going forward, and it is important to follow and scrutinize them now. ■

Our primary purpose was to help students get a sense of what the issues are and where they might fall on the political spectrum.

ELIZABETH WILSON

From *The A-Blast*, Annandale (Va.) High School; Alan Weintraut, adviser Elizabeth Wilson and Tricia O'Neill, co-editors

ELIZABETH WILSON, IN-DEPTH EDITOR | Our primary purpose was to help students get a sense of what the issues are and where they might fall on the political spectrum because as we saw through our first story, most teens are not engaged in the political debate this election. A teacher at our school provided interesting insight into why students are less engaged. As the students in the article demonstrate, many feel that the issues are too complicated. To help simplify things, we created the chart and compiled the definitions as well as information about how to register to vote. We specifically went for hand-drawn cartoons over real pictures of the candidates to make the page more accessible. That's also why we included the funny quotes from the politicians, survey results and an overall bright color scheme. We wanted to show students they do have something to say and they can engage in the debates.