



Secretary Antony J. Blinken Panel Discussion at the Media Summit of Americas Session: “A Commitment to Journalistic Freedom”

REMARKS

ANTONY J. BLINKEN, SECRETARY OF STATE
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SECRETARY BLINKEN: Thank you very much. Well, good evening, everyone, and it is wonderful to be in Los Angeles, and particularly wonderful to be here in this extraordinary building. And I want to start by saying thank you, thank you, thank you to Arizona State’s Cronkite School of Journalism, to USC’s Annenberg School of Journalism, to the Equis Institute, for partnering with us and putting this event together; and also, as important – more important, even – for their leadership in promoting independent journalism and civic participation, and for training rising generations of media professionals.

To the journalists and civil society leaders from across the hemisphere who made the journey to Los Angeles: welcome. We’re so grateful to have you here – and especially grateful for the crucial work that you do every single day.

Finally, to any of the J-school students in the audience, we are heartened by the path that you’re taking. Now, I say that with some degree of modest authority, as a one-time aspiring journalist myself. Now, I’m old enough that when I briefly practiced the profession, I did it on something called a typewriter. You can look it up. You’ll find it somewhere on the internet. But take it from someone who never fully realized that aspiration – it is a challenging path. I suspect you know that already. But I couldn’t be more inspired to see rising journalists here, and I’m really looking forward to reading your bylines and hearing you and seeing you in the media over the years ahead.

So starting tomorrow, the Ninth Summit of the Americas is going to bring together governments, civil society, youth, the private sector, and citizens from across our hemisphere to try to see how, together, we can tackle the fundamental problems that our societies face and do a better job at delivering for our people. That is the mission that we set for ourselves.

In every country in the hemisphere, for every goal that we want to achieve, for every problem affecting the lives of our people, a free, independent press is essential.

We see that in the reporting around the hemisphere and the world – including by some people who are here today – whether that’s digging into the toughest topics, like corruption or abuses by

security services; or lifting up the stories of grassroots leaders who are finding solutions to complex problems, like the youth activists in small island states who are helping their communities adapt to rising seas and other changes that are brought on by climate change.

Reporting on issues like these shows how a free, independent press is quite literally a cornerstone of healthy democracies. And at its core is an idea, the idea that accurate information is a public good – one that helps people understand the events and forces shaping their lives; spotlights problems and solutions that they otherwise might not see; and, fundamentally, empowers citizens to engage meaningfully in their communities, their countries, and the world. In democracies, we often look to the media to provide this public good.

It's also the reason it's so important that governments like ours are open to scrutiny, to questions from the media – even when occasionally it's not the most comfortable thing to do. And you can take that from me as well.

When I had the honor of becoming Secretary of State, one of the very first things I did was to reinstate the daily press briefing at the State Department. And our spokesperson, Ned Price, is here with us today. It's why, wherever I travel around the world, I make a point of holding press conferences where I take questions from local media as well as with some of the media colleagues who travel with us around the world. It's why I'll take questions from you when I get done with these remarks.

Yet today, we see that the right to freedom of expression, including freedom of the press, faces profound challenges in our own hemisphere and around the world. Challenges that, if left unaddressed, could threaten the foundations of our democracies.

So what I'd like to do in this time that I have now is to highlight three of the challenges that we see, and what the United States is doing – together with journalists, media organizations, NGOs, multilateral organizations, philanthropies, the private sector, and other governments – what we're all trying to do to tackle them.

The first challenge – this will not be news to anyone – is disinformation. Many speakers today have highlighted how governments and non-state actors are seizing on vulnerabilities in our media ecosystem to create, to disseminate, to amplify false or misleading information. We've seen how these falsehoods can polarize communities, poison the public square, undermine people's trust in health systems, government institutions, in democracy itself.

Today, the United States is launching the first hub of the Digital Communication Network of the Americas. Since creating the DCN in 2015, we've actually helped build a network of more than 8,000 journalists, educators, communicators and new media professionals, public officials and others around the world, who are working to combat state-sponsored disinformation and propaganda.

The network does this by developing and sharing evidence-based tools to help local actors provide people with accurate information.

Take one example, the pandemic. We've seen governments and other actors intentionally spread false narratives about COVID-19's origin, its transmission, and treatments in an effort to stoke fear, to sow doubt, including about safe and effective vaccines, to erode trust in democracy itself – including deliberately targeting Spanish-language social media in this region.

The spread, the reach of disinformation online is, quite simply, staggering. One study that measured social media traffic over a 90-day period of the pandemic found that the entire World Health Organization COVID-19 site received only 25,000 social media engagements, compared to 2.1 million hits – million hits – for a single false story claiming that the coronavirus is a bioweapon stolen from Canada. That's wrong, by the way.

In response, DCN has connected investigative journalists, data scientists, public health officials to share effective strategies on disseminating accurate information about COVID-19 and debunking harmful myths on social media.

The strength of DCN is in the diversity and flatness of the network that's been created. It doesn't try to prescribe one single solution, but what it does is it makes it easier for participants to learn from one another's responses – whether through webinars or trainings, online learning hubs or research exchanges, even games and apps. The new Americas chapter will complement DCN hubs in Africa and Europe, further broadening our network of partners and the ideas that they bring to the table.

Even as we take steps to counter disinformation, we have to always guard against measures that give governments overly broad powers to criminalize, to censor, or otherwise quash freedom of expression, as we've seen in the rash of so-called “fake news” laws passed by governments, some of which have been abused to harass or lock up journalists whose critical reporting the governments didn't like.

This brings me to a second challenge: the ongoing threats, harassment, the violence faced by media workers across the region.

You all know this, because many of you are living it.

At least 17 journalists have been killed in this hemisphere in this year, according to the UNESCO observatory of killed journalists, including – most recently – Yesenia Mollinedo and Sheila Johana Garcia, the director and a reporter of the news website El Veraz, in Veracruz, Mexico, shot to death on May the 9th.

No region in the world is more dangerous for journalists.

Crimes like these persist in no small part because the people who order them and carry them out are so rarely held accountable. That sends a message that these attacks can continue with impunity.

Repressive officials are also using new technologies to monitor journalists, to surveil their private communications – a practice unearthed, fittingly enough, through very dogged reporting.

Governments are using sweeping legislation to quash free expression, as we saw in the recent slate of amendments adopted by El Salvador in March and in April of this year.

In Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, the simple act of carrying out investigative journalism is a crime.

In Nicaragua, journalists and political opposition candidates Miguel Mora and Miguel Mendoza, newspaper publisher Juan Lorenzo Holmann are currently unjustly imprisoned, after being sentenced under abusive legislation in trials that lacked basic due process. Dozens of independent journalists have fled the country due to persecution and threats, including Anibal Toruno, Luis Chavarria Galeano, Jackson Orozco, who are with us this week at the summit. In Cuba, independent journalists are subjected to systemic abuses, including house arrest for days, weeks at a time, beatings, forced exile.

When individual journalists are attacked, when they're persecuted, when they're imprisoned, when they're targeted in any other way, the chilling effects reach far beyond the immediate victims. Sometimes this can lead to the shuttering of a publication. Other times, it can lead other reporters to self-censor or to leave the profession entirely.

So here's some of the things that we're trying to do about that.

The United States is working across the region to strengthen the rule of law, investing in training judges and prosecutors to investigate and prosecute such attacks, as well as those on human rights defenders and other civil society leaders.

We consistently speak up and speak out about attacks on journalists, in every country, in public and in private. We document governments' efforts to curtail freedom of expression in our annual human rights report.

We're deepening our engagement with multilateral bodies that advocate for freedom of expression and the safety of journalists around the world, using our seat at the table to try to make them even more effective. One of the reasons that it was so important for the United States to come back into these international organizations was to be able to assert some of this leadership at these tables. And we're helping to stand up new bodies to address emerging threats.

We're very proud to join the new OAS Group of Friends of Freedom of Expression and Journalism and we welcome the creation of the OAS's new Center for Media Integrity. Luis, thank you for your leadership on this. It's very, very important. And we're deepening our engagement in the Media Freedom Coalition.

We're also doing some very practical things that we hope will make a difference. For example, increasing support for journalists who are facing threats of harassment. USAID will provide up to \$9 million to support a global Defamation Defense Fund for Journalists, which will offer liability coverage for journalists and news organizations targeted with unjust litigation. This is one of the tools that repressive governments use. They try to turn and distort the law against

journalists by going after them with lawsuits that they can't afford to defend. We will help make sure that they can defend themselves.

The State Department is investing up to \$3.5 million to launch a Journalism Protection Platform that will provide at-risk media professionals with physical and digital security training, psychosocial care, and other assistance when they are in one way or another under attack.

Third, we're working to make independent media more sustainable. Put simply: we will not have a vibrant, independent press if more and more outlets are shutting down because they can't find a viable business model.

The United States is working with business groups, with the private sector, to help independent media become more financially sustainable. We're providing direct financial assistance to at-risk outlets. We've committed \$30 million to the International Fund for Public Interest Media, which will focus on assisting media in resource-poor and unstable settings, and \$5 million to improve the financial viability of independent media outlets.

We're also encouraging other countries to engage in similar means of support. We had, as some of you know, a Summit for Democracy that President Biden convened last year. One of the main areas of focus of the summit was finding ways collectively to provide support to independent media.

In my own judgment, it's hard to think of a smarter investment in our democracies – given the incredibly brave and innovative work that journalists are doing throughout our region. Journalists like Catherine Calderon, who many of you heard from, I think, earlier today. Back in 2015, she was an activist. She was helping to organize demonstrations against corruption in Honduras. She kept running into Jennifer Avila, a journalist who was covering the protests. The more they talked, the more they saw a similar gap: For all the ways Hondurans were hurt by corruption in their everyday lives, no media outlet was conducting independent, rigorous reporting on the problem.

That, of course, was no accident. For years, Honduran activists and reporters who have tried to document corruption – and in particular, women – have been silenced through harassment, through threats, through discrimination, through violence.

So Catherine and Jennifer decided to launch a media outlet that would close that gap, and it was called *Contracorriente*, or counter current. Since 2015, *Counter Current* has flourished. It's unearthed corruption at the highest levels of government, the military, the police, and it's led to high-profile resignations and even prosecutions. Reflecting on the founding of *Counter Current*, Catherine said, and I quote, "Now, more than ever, I feel it was necessary. We had to exist...to be a space where we have the possibility of doing journalism...without being silent."

The same is true for free, independent press across the hemisphere: It has to exist, now more than ever, for the well-being of our people, for the well-being of our communities, for the well-being of our democracies.

The United States is committed to being a partner not only in protecting this space but expanding it. Thanks very much. (Applause.)

QUESTION: I want to know how you justify the invitation to Dr. Ariel Henry from Haiti when he is ruling with no mandate in contravention of the nation's constitution, and then he's been implicated in, I think you would admit, very serious crimes, including the murder of a Haitian journalist just this February by the Haitian police.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: So we'll have plenty of opportunity, I think, in the days ahead to talk about the summit, the participation in the summit, who's here, who's not. In Haiti, we continue to work for a transition that leads to appropriate elections that are supported by all the Haitian people. We continue to work to deal with gang violence that is afflicting the country and is doing terrible damage to the Haitian people. We continue to work to try to find ways to support the Haitian people, who have borne more than their share of trouble in the last years, both human and naturally made.

So in all of these ways we're working, including with partners in our hemisphere, to try to support the Haitian people. But we want to see them have a truly representative government, and that goes down the path of getting to new elections in the coming time.

QUESTION: But Prime Minister Henry is refusing to negotiate with civil society. Again, he is actually governing with no constitutional mandate. His government has been implicated in many different crimes, including potentially the murder of the past president. You yourself have said in your speech here today and in previous statements that countries like Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, that you mentioned are being excluded from the Summit of the Americas because you deem them to not be democratic.

But how can you use that as your justification when you have the so-called prime minister of Haiti, who is ruling under no sort of democratic mandate here, despite the fact that this is well-known in terms of the repression of journalists, the repression of protesters, and his previous involvement in the coup against President Aristide that *The New York Times* has at least alleged the United States Government was supportive of?

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Again, we, like many other countries, are determined to get into the facts of what happened in Haiti, including the assassination of the previous prime minister. We're determined to find the facts wherever they lead and to whomever they lead.

QUESTION: What about (inaudible)?

MS THOMAS: Okay, and now – well, now we would like to get started on our conversation that we have planned here today.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: I —

MS THOMAS: Yes, I'm excited to get started on this, and I think everyone will enjoy it as well.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MS BAIETTO: And we'll have more time, of course, to answer these questions after the discussion that —

SECRETARY BLINKEN: We'll be happy to follow up with these questions.

MS THOMAS: For sure.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Thank you.

QUESTION: But Secretary Blinken, what about Shireen Abu Akleh —

MODERATOR: Thank you, all. We really want our panel (inaudible).

QUESTION: — who was murdered by Israeli forces, right? CNN just agreed to this. These are your two greatest allies in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and Israel.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Again —

QUESTION: They have murdered American journalists and there have been absolutely no repercussions, and you're sitting up here talking about the freedom of press and democracy. The United States is denying sovereignty to tens of millions of people around the globe with draconian sanctions for electing leaders that you do not like. Why is there no accountability for Israel or Saudi Arabia for murdering journalists? It is one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a journalist in Palestine.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: I deplore the loss of Shireen. She was a remarkable journalist, an American citizen, as you well know. And there too we are determined to follow the facts and get to the truth of what happened to her.

QUESTION: The facts are established, Secretary Blinken.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: No, they have not yet been — no, they have — I'm sorry, with respect, they have not yet been established. We are looking for —

QUESTION: Yes, they have.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: No, they have not. We are looking for an independent, credible investigation. When that investigation happens, we will follow the facts wherever they lead. It's as straightforward as that. That has not yet happened, but it's something that we very much want to see happen. Thank you.

MS BAIETTO: And we'll have time after the panel, of course, to talk more about this. But Madison, go ahead.

MS THOMAS: Yes, so thanks for joining us here tonight. I'm super honored and excited to be here. Now, one thing you mention in your remarks which I want to talk about a little more is the safety issues in journalism. Journalists in countries, including democracies, put their safety and

lives on the line in order to do their job. And I know you talk about it a little bit in your remarks what the U.S. is doing, but what more do you think needs to be done to help ensure their safety? And to the other journalists up here, is that something that kind of worries you guys entering this workforce?

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Well, I think especially for reporters who are working in areas of conflict or working on societies where governments are engaged in repressive actions, the risk of doing the job is acute. And as I mentioned, in our own hemisphere just in this year, a year that is only half over, 17 journalists at least have been killed, as documented by UNESCO. So this is something that we take very, very seriously.

And a number of things I mentioned go directly at trying to help give journalists, especially in independent media where the resources may not be the same as for major media organizations, some tools to more effectively protect themselves faced with these dangers. And it goes from everything to having the right tools to deal with their cyber security, to deal with their physical security, and also to deal with their legal and economic security. All of these things are very practical programs that we're working on, that we're putting in place. And not only are we doing it, we're trying to do it with other countries around the world. As I mentioned, at the Summit for Democracy that President Biden convened last year, this was one of the lines of effort that we put into place.

It's also really important that we provide support for NGOs and other groups that are engaged in this kind of work in helping journalists, but we want to make sure as well that we're hearing from people so that we understand exactly what they're facing and maybe how we can be more helpful in helping them face it.

MS THOMAS: Yeah, and do one of you guys want to answer? Yeah.

MS BAIETTO: I think part of why I love doing this is because it's always new every single day. You don't know what you're going to get yourself into, but that comes with a lot of safety issues. Granted, I'm a journalist right now in Illinois. It's not somewhere where there's a ton of conflict in terms of places abroad like we've seen. There's a lot of emotion when it comes to that. But I think it fuels me more than anything to keep on going, and I just hope tonight we can kind of come to a consensus and find solutions and push the conversation forward to make sure that people feel welcomed to start in this path and keep it going.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: But is this something – as you're thinking about and are engaged in careers, is this something that you're actually thinking about that's a concern, that is a —

MS BAITTO: Definitely.

MS THOMAS: Oh yeah, definitely. Even here in the U.S. when there has been different protests in the last several years, you see videos surface of stuff that happens to journalists. So me seeing that as someone who's entering this career field, that's something that scares me. You can go out and cover something, emotions are high, and something can happen here and abroad.

MS VILLALOBOS: There was something in your remarks that stuck out to me because there was a student at Cronkite that was part of her grad program. She was trying to see if there are some courses that we could put into place about teaching safety to journalists, how to defend yourself when you're out there, or even just teaching things that might not be common sense to everyone about keeping yourself safe. And just hearing that in your remarks, seeing that we may be doing things like that on a national level, it just really resonated with me. And I think that that's a great idea.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Well, it's kind of an extraordinary observation and comment because the idea that that would have been part, for example, of a journalism school curriculum 25 or 30 years ago, probably not. So in many ways it's a sad commentary, but it's also, I think, a commentary on the fact that at least in different ways we're trying to step up to this problem. And I certainly hope that it doesn't have the chilling effect that it's designed to have, but that takes incredible courage. It takes determination. But what I found is a common denominator in the many years that I've been either a journalist myself for a brief period of time or working with journalists is an almost unquenchable desire to get at the truth, to get at the facts, including our two friends who raised questions just a few minutes ago.

That's what we need. We need to continue. We need to be held accountable, but we also need to make sure that the structures, the protections are in place to allow people to do their jobs without fear of retribution of whatever kind. And yes, the only way this should really happen is for our friends in the press to be yelling at me, not to have other people yelling at them.

MS THOMAS: Of course.

MS BAIETTO: And one thing that I think is significant, you wanted to kind of get into the journalism field and have had practice in it. Do you think, when you had the idea to possibly go forward with this, was there – as a – was it as pervasive back then to be scared and to have some apprehensions in possibly becoming a journalist?

SECRETARY BLINKEN: It really depended what you were doing. I had a good friend when I started out; we were on our college newspaper together, and then after school he went into reporting professionally and he wound up going to Central America in the 1980s. So that was a challenging time, and that was not without its own kind of dangers. Other reporters famously were in Asia and other places in times of – in places of conflict.

So I think there's been a long history of reporters obviously being in places of conflict. I think what's changed in a sense is that the terrain of conflict has broadened out, and the kind of practices that some governments and others engage in has changed to make it more challenging for journalists in a broader variety of places than before.

MS THOMAS: Yeah, and one thing I've noticed is as generations go on, I feel like there's been a loss of trust in media. I was actually talking to my grandfather about this the other day, and he said when he was growing up, he would watch the news, he would listen to Walter Cronkite, and you just trusted. You had this trust. But now I feel like we've lost so much trust as journalists, and I think in the past few years we've definitely seen people in power say things about the

media and it obviously – other people start to believe that too. So how can we rebuild that trust to get it to where it was once or even better?

SECRETARY BLINKEN: It's one of the \$64,000 questions and I'm not —

MS THOMAS: Yeah.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: — sure that there's a good answer. But you're exactly right, and the Walter Cronkite example is a good one. When I started out as a reporter after college – this is in the mid-1980s, just to situate in time – as a practical matter, most Americans got their news from one of the three networks at night: ABC, CBS, NBC. There was a little bit of talk radio. There was obviously no internet, no social media. And there were these curators of the news at the networks and at the major newspapers – the *Times*, had the *L.A. Times* out here, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal* – and that was where a lot of people got their information. And of course, there was vitally important local media, which I'll come to in a minute. But you had these relatively small number of people who, in effect, edited the news that you consumed.

And in many ways, I think there was an expectation – I certainly had it – that the democratization of information that we've seen over the last 25 years would actually be a good thing, because there's something that isn't – doesn't quite sit right with a small handful of organizations having such a dominant role in shaping the information that most people receive. But we've also seen some of the downside of that, to state the obvious, and it's very well known to just about everyone in this room. We've lost these trusted mediators, trusted curators. Now everyone is a publisher. Some claim they're not publishers, but that's another matter. And as a result, we have an incredible ecosystem of information that people, myself included, have a real hard time deciphering, and finding sources that are genuinely trusted is something that is increasingly a challenge for people.

So whether we can recapture that in some fashion, I don't know. Now, one of the things that we've tried to do is to help give people some of the tools to have digital literacy, to be able to separate the wheat from the chaff, to try to make their own judgments about the news and information that they're consuming and not simply to take it at face value. But this, of course, gets into all sorts of other complicated complications about where people go to look for their information, and the fact that we're all, in effect, relegated to silos of our own choosing. There's a tremendous amount of self-selection, and we are all constantly looking for affirmation of the views that we bring to the table to begin with. That also doesn't make for the most healthy ecosystem.

So there's a lot that goes into this, and ultimately, it ideally starts with the individual consumer to somehow demand that that kind of trusted information be what is – what's out there on the market. But there's a lot that we could talk about.

But let me ask the three of you: So how do you see this? As people who are going into this field now at a time when trust for most institutions has been on a downward slope, including the media, how does that make you feel about the profession, and what would you want to do about it?

MS BAIETTO: So I've been working for two years, now that I graduated – I was the first class to graduate during the pandemic – and I started journalism school 2016, when I think that's the year we saw a huge shift in trusting the media. And so this is all I've ever known. I've only known that people don't like us and that they don't trust us, right? I mean, there's – the majority of us – people realize what we're doing and I think so, but there's bad actors there that totally might not really get behind what we're doing.

But I think if I have been able to navigate how to ethically and factually report during this tough time, I'm ready to be thrown whatever is ahead. But just to be frank, I think we talk about the future of journalism and there's a lot of responsibility put on the new generation, as we should, right, because we're the ones on the front lines – the next ones. But if you guys don't have the answers, we definitely don't either, right? But I think together we can find them.

But it's going to be a give and take. It's going to take some time. It's going to take a lot of time, and it needs to start with education. It needs to start with media literacy. People need to understand how to transparently obtain a news outlet where they should go, where shouldn't they go; what is factual, what is not; how do you figure that out on your own computer, on Facebook, on all these different outlets; and, honestly, to lead with compassion. I think a lot of us as journalists and some of the ones that have been veterans and have had great, long careers get desensitized, as they should. And I'm sure one day I will, too. But I still have a lot of feelings towards everyone that I interview and all the stories that I tell, and I hope I don't lose that because I think when you do, you lose humanity and what we really are here to do is – and it's just give a voice to people that are – that don't have a platform.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Yeah, well, that's a wonderful way to look at it. I think it's a wonderful motivation. I hope you don't lose sight of that. But here's the hard truth: We're looking to you —

MS BAIETTO: Of course.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: — and to your generation for the answers. We —

MS BAIETTO: We'll get there.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: You're the ones who need to figure this out. We'll try our best.

MS BAIETTO: Yes, yes.

MS VILALOBOS: One of the points that you brought up earlier was about information overload, and that was actually one of the points that was brought up in a panel here earlier. How do you personally sift through your social media feed and everything? And I'm sure sometimes your own face pops up on there. How do you handle that? How do you find what you think is the sources that you want to trust and things like that, and how can – if you're handling that, how can the public handle that as well?

SECRETARY BLINKEN: It's the single biggest challenge that I think anyone in government faces, and it's a challenge that I've seen evolve again over the last almost 30 years that I've been doing this. When you had just a relatively limited number of sources of information 25 or 30 years ago, not only could you manage your day, but the pressure to respond was much less acute than it is now, than it's been for the last decade or so. There was a cushion, there was a gap in news emerging and then it really getting into the bloodstream of your community or your country.

Now it's instantaneous. It's an intravenous feed, and that puts incredible pressure on people who are actually in government to react, to respond, to do something immediately. Having the discipline to try to take a little bit of distance – to not just jump at a report that concludes X, because maybe it's not conclusive; to actually have the distance and the remove to say no, we need to get to the facts, and even if there's tremendous pressure to respond to what seem to be the facts – that's not easy.

When I worked for President Obama, one of the, I think, thoughts that he had about this was that his job in a sense was to be something of a circuit breaker and to try to create that distance that no longer really exists, that moment of reflection, of deliberation, of trying to understand what the facts are before you simply reflexively respond because there's pressure to do it and because you're perceived as somehow weak or feckless if you're not responding immediately. That's not an easy thing to do, but I think it is incumbent upon those of us who are in government or positions of public responsibility to at least try to do that.

And I think the challenge that media faces between – it's a perennial challenge, but it's gotten worse because of the immediacy of information. The challenge between getting it right and getting it fast – there's a huge responsibility that comes with that, too. And that's a responsibility you're increasingly going to have to face in your careers, because the pressure on you to get it immediately – even if maybe you're not getting it right, right away – is pretty intense.

MS THOMAS: Yeah. And then going on to like another topic, people these days with social media – anyone can be a journalist. Anyone can get their phone, livestream something, post a picture that could be taken out of context and post it somewhere, and then people start to believe that this is true and then you have the spread of fake news. But another issue with fake news I think we're seeing a lot is people will see something that could be factual, but it doesn't align with their preconceived ideas and this other thing that is actually fake does, and they call that fake news, and that spreads. And that's another issue with social media. Do you feel that there needs to be any more regulation with social media?

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Well, one of the things I'm going to try not to do is to delve into anything that smacks of politics or —

MS THOMAS: Yes.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Because, happily, my job lets me stay out of that. But I think we're – clearly this is a fundamental debate that we're having, and now to get the – how to find where the right balance is is incredibly, incredibly challenging.

You mentioned as well, and these – a lot of these things join together – having the appropriate literacy to try to pull apart the information from the disinformation, the real from the fake, that's something that needs to start really, really early. One of the things we've seen, for example, is that as we rightly devote a lot of resources, for example, to STEM education or STEAM education in our countries, well, usually they're finite budgets. And when you look at budgets in schools, one place that the money that goes to STEAM or STEM often comes from is civics. But if we're not teaching civics, we're not teaching the foundations that you need for something like digital literacy. And that creates a problem very early on that just builds and builds and builds, and then if you don't have a citizenry that has the tools to be able to deal with this information system, it makes it very, very challenging to deal with.

MS BAIETTO: One thing that I'm a little curious with, just checking your Twitter, there's been about more than a dozen tweets put on in the last 24 hours. Clearly you're not the social media influencer behind all of them, but what —

SECRETARY BLINKEN: (Laughter.) Every single one.

MS BAIETTO: Every single one, word for word. But what is the process in which your team or one person, whatever it is, what is kind of the process that a tweet has to go through or any social media content has to go through when it has your name on it?

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Yeah, it's a great question and one that I and we take very seriously, because if I'm putting something out, then I'm simply here as a representative of the United States Government, so anything that we put out is supposed to be – to represent the government, to be reflective of it, to be reflective of our policies, and I'm simply a vehicle for doing that.

So we have a very carefully married-up operation between the folks on our communications team, the folks on our policy team, myself and other colleagues depending on what the subject is, and they need to know and understand each other in – almost intimately, because we have to make sure that whatever is going out under the State Department banner, whether it's in my name or anyone else's name, is an accurate reflection of the policies of our government and the President.

So a lot of care goes into that. We don't always get it 100 percent right, but we work at it every day.

MS VILALOBOS: And this social media topic, I think that it's interesting. We as journalists are always writing headlines, writing topics, things like that. This era of clickbait culture and at-times sensational journalism, I think this is more of a – not so much a question as an idea. This is just taking over, and I think that – I think that just the – there's so many things that can go wrong when there is more drive for engagement in the headline rather than actual content in that headline.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Well, this goes to something we were talking about, and I was talking about a little bit earlier – is that there is a race to survive too. The economics of this

business are increasingly challenged, increasingly complicated. That's especially true, of course, in print media. And so even social media, the clickbait phenomenon is part of – is partly making sure you get as many eyeballs as you can on something and then maybe drive the advertising revenues or drive your – so what used to be called readership. So all that pieces together. One of the reasons we're trying to look for ways to build support for independent media is to help take some of that pressure off, and at least create a space where journalism is not motivated by that necessity.

Now, having said that, I often thought it would be really great fun writing headlines for tabloids. (Laughter.) That just sounds like a great job. And just to date myself, again, one of the – I think the greatest – and I know I shouldn't comment on individual publications, but I always thought growing up that the headline writers for the *New York Post* have one of the best jobs in the business. (Laughter.) Because the inventiveness of those headlines are incredible, and there's just one that stuck with me from many, many years ago, back in the days of the Soviet Union. One of the leaders of the Soviet Union passed away and the headline in the *New York Post* the next day was "Red Head Dead." (Laughter.) That's pretty good.

MS BAIETTO: And I think for everyone we were really able to really talk about hopefully a good idea of where the future of journalism is going and hopefully inspires others.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Well, let me —

MS THOMAS: Thank you for joining us.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: No, let me just say to the three of you, first of all, it's really inspiring to be with you. It's inspiring to see others out here, both colleagues who are engaged in the profession today, people who are just joining it. I am so glad that you're doing this, as I'm dead-serious about the proposition that this lies at the heart of our democracies. And as goes journalism, as goes a free media, so go our democracies.

So what you're doing is incredibly important. It's also incredibly challenging. It goes to, I think, what you were saying about, first of all, trying to find the humanity that's usually at the heart of things – to remember that, ultimately, you're reporting on, writing about real people, complicated, imperfect as human beings are, to try to reflect that. I know how hard it is too, because having been on both sides of this – when you're in government and you're in a room with 10 people and you're talking about a policy, and then if you ask the 10 people in the room who said what and what were the conclusions, you'd probably get 10 different answers from people who were actually in the room. You're not in the room and you're trying to figure out what was said in the room.

It's incredibly hard, but it's incredibly, incredibly powerful and incredibly necessary. And I think having that drive to try to learn about something, to understand it, to know it, and then to be able to communicate it to your fellow citizens is a wonderful thing. So it's great to see all of you going into it. Thanks.