Having been involved in one fashion or another with the media for a long time, I never cease to be amazed at how poor a job they often do in reporting the news. Amazed, but not surprised. Let me explain, because it bears on the challenges we now face.

Even as a part of the media for a quarter-century, based in New England, the Midwest and then in Washington, DC, I was frequently critical of the performance of the craft I worked in. Too often, we engaged in simplistic, superficial and sensationalistic reporting, with a good dose of pack journalism thrown in.

Take elections, for example. Every two or four years, as the bureau chief and reporters gathered in our Washington Bureau to plan campaign coverage, I’d make yet another plea to focus this time on the issues, instead of the horse-race aspect. Rather than writing endless stories about the polls, money-raising battles or candidates’ electoral strategies, I’d suggest that we delve into the actual positions candidates were advocating and how their policies would affect ordinary Americans. In other words, emphasize the substance of governing, not just the razzle-dazzle of politics.

The others would listen politely—regarding me, perhaps, as a hopeless idealist—and then we’d proceed to cover the election the same old way. Why? Because this approach generated clear story lines about who was winning, because it was easier to report on the horse race than to analyze complex policy issues, because journalists are creatures of habit, because editors felt this was what readers wanted. Subsequently, I glimpsed the media from a different perspective, for three years offering commentary or being interviewed on why labor remains as relevant as ever and how labor’s woes are linked to the assault on the middle class. While I experienced some thoughtful responses from rank-and-file activists, of course, is where you all come in, from NBAs to state presidents, branch leaders to支行 leaders, and then in Washington, DC, I was frequently downplayed the value of Saturday delivery. Editorial Assistant Jenessa Kiddell

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