

Coverage of political issues considered "tricky" business

by Karen Splawn
Staff Reporter

Journalists may not agree on much, but a panel speaking to a political journalism class on Oct. 29 agreed on this: Covering politics is not easy, especially during this election season.

It doesn't get any trickier, said Jim Behling, KTNV's general manager, than when it comes to covering such a divisive and thorny issue like abortion.

Behling said he wasn't sure whether or not the local media should be able to cover the controversial "Baby Adam" case (where the fetus aborted from a young girl was still living, and then ordered to be taken off life support by a doctor at Humana Hospital Sunrise), because of the effect it could have on ballot Question 7.

"Should [we] work real hard between now and Nov. 6 to get this story developed before you go

to the polls?" Behling asked.

He pointed out that there really hasn't been any stories on what exactly happened, just the reaction. "If the nurse who said, 'I won't take this child off life support' won't come forth publicly, is there a story?" Behling said.

More newspapers are changing their terms for groups on both sides of the coin, Behling said, partly because of a series of articles in the Los Angeles Times on the media's perceived bias

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towards abortion rights supporters.

"It's always good to be pro-choice, but then again, life is a good thing, too," said Jim Behling, general manager of KTNV, Channel 13, in reference to what terms are used by reporters to describe abortion rights supporters and abortion foes.

Because an election year is chock full of candidates espousing pie-in-the-sky rhetoric, it is the responsibility of journalists to get to the truth, said Jon Ralston, political columnist for the Las Vegas Review-Journal.

"The role of the media is to be a conduit in politics and put what politicians are saying in plain English," said Ralston. "Politicians rarely say what they mean."

If the media isn't doing the best job they can at exposing a politician's lies, they fail, he said.

One major problem with covering elected officials is that a reporter is always being used, Ralston added.

"The question you have to ask yourself when they come to you with that kind of information, is 'OK, I know this is self-serving, but is it also newsworthy?' he said.

Ralston said that local reporters should ask themselves whether or not they are being used by forces who oppose legal abortion in regards to the Baby Adam case.

Voters can also be duped by political commercials, such as former U.S. Senator Chic Hecht's 1988 commercial accusing opponent Richard Bryan of having a private jet. The ad was so successful that Hecht "almost flew back to Washington in that pri-

ate jet," Ralston said.

Ralston mentioned that the Los Angeles Times will run articles analyzing a candidate's claims, which is a very good idea.

John L. Smith, a columnist for the Review-Journal, said one way reporters can counteract any ulterior motives is to have "street savvy," and be able to judge the depth of a candidate's rhetoric.

Smith said he wasn't sure whether or not it's the duty of the media to expose wrongdoings, or "put their heads down" and just report the facts.

Smith said that Nevada's journalistic history is one of little ethics, but that is changing as the state grows.

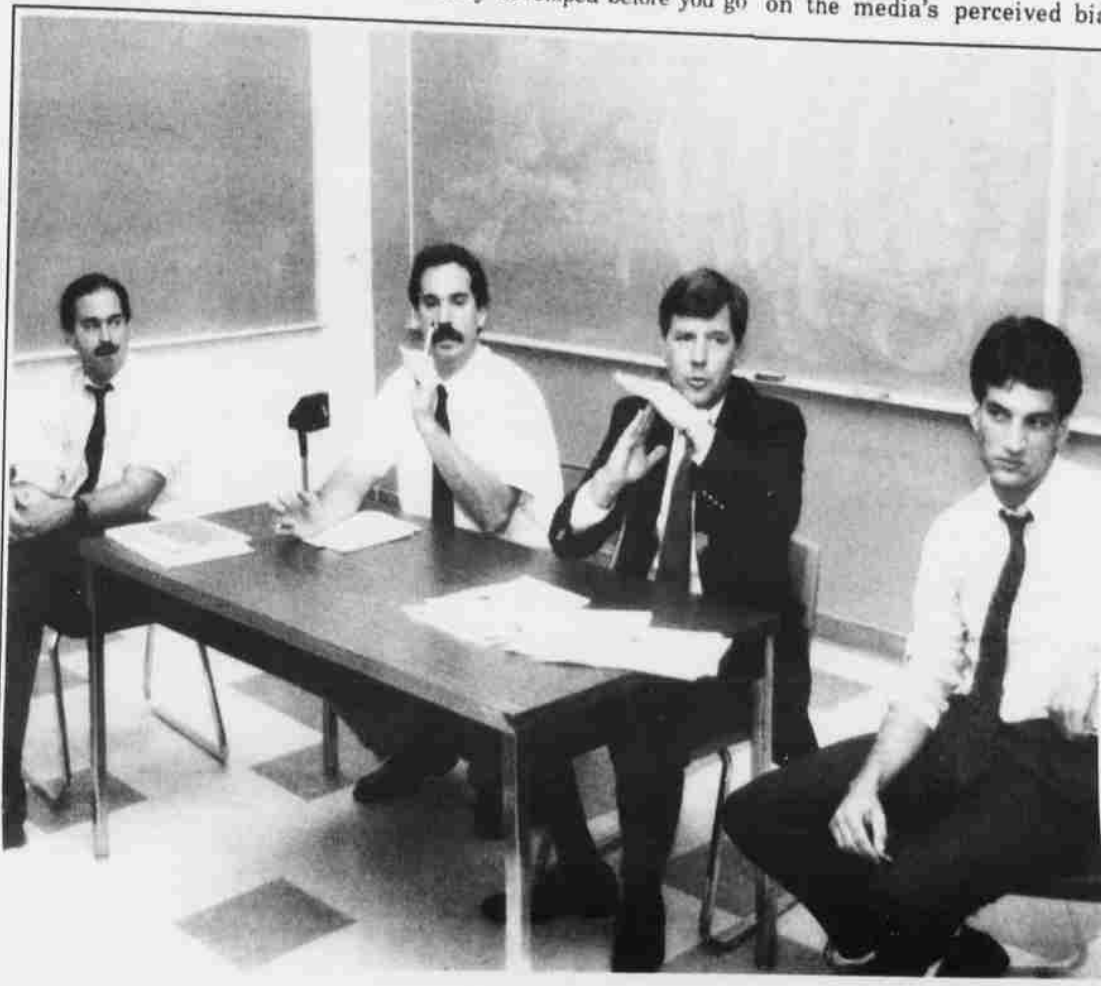
Eric Spillman, a reporter for KLAS-TV, Channel 8, said television news coverage of politics is not the same as print. "There is an emphasis on stories that are visual, and government isn't," he explained.

He added that in broadcast journalism reporters are so pressed for time that they can't possibly present the details of a political story the way a newspaper can.

"A lot of times, people can say things to us, and not be challenged," Spillman said. "Accuracy and proof are hard things to nail down. Finding out what really happened is not an easy thing to do."

Television does have a certain advantage, however, in that it can show a politician's demeanor.

Another serious problem, Ralston said, is "pack journalism," where reporters grab on to an issue and blow it out proportion.



Yell Photo / Robert Anderson

Political reporting - Jon Ralston (RJ), John L. Smith (RJ), Jim Behling (TV13) and Eric Spillman (TV8) discuss the tricky business of covering politics.

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Posting of fliers rule added to campaign

Homecoming candidates in the next elections will not be able to post their own fliers where they want, said Mike Kennedy, Student Government Elections Board director.

The board recently approved a new rule forbidding candidates to post their own fliers because so many fliers were sabotaged during the last campaign, Kennedy said.

Most of the violations handed out to candidates involved fliers,

he said, adding. "The fliers had become a nightmare [problem]." The board will decide where exactly fliers will be posted at a later time, Kennedy said.

The board also voted to make candidate meetings mandatory, due to a Judicial Council case involving candidate Kent Emerson, who said that he was not aware of his \$38 in fines, which were levied at meetings he did not attend.

Spooked steer stampedes dorm room, gets death penalty

(CPS)—A steer broke free from a research pen at Colorado State University Oct. 9, crashed through a dorm window and sent 400 students fleeing into the night until it was finally corralled hours later.

Trapped in the room of students Matt Simons and Rick Lombardo, the steer crushed a

guitar and a stereo system, yanked clothes from the closet and sprayed shampoo all over the walls when it stepped on a plastic shampoo bottle. The captured beast, along with three other steers brought to campus for a class project, was shipped off-campus to a slaughterhouse Oct. 10