

Transcript of the Gavin Newsom Show
June 14th, 2008

Announcer: From San Francisco, California, the epicenter of the progressive nation, this is the Gavin Newsom Show on Green960.

Gavin Newsom: Hi, this is Gavin Newsom, mayor of the city and county of San Francisco. Who would have thought? I've got my own radio show. Look out Bay Area. Finally, I am able to share with a much bigger audience, my passion, and my purpose, and give you a chance to get an insight into what it is we're doing, not only here in San Francisco, but what we're trying to represent in the context of the politics, and the culture, and the values that make this city and our region so unique and special. We'll hear from authors, we'll hear from architects, we'll hear from politicians, we'll hear from pundits, we'll have a chance to dialogue with you directly. And I am so pleased to have in studio today, my guest, Arianna Huffington, who's just come out with a book called *Right Is Wrong, How the Lunatic Fringe Has Hijacked America, Shredded the Constitution, and Made Us All Less Safe*. Welcome to San Francisco.

Arianna Huffington: Thank you so much Gavin, I am really honored to be your first guest.

GN: This is exciting—well I hope, I mean, this is—it's easy for me, to have you as my first guest. And I know you've been doing a lot of these on your book tour for your new book, *Right Is Wrong, How the Lunatic Fringe Hijacked America*. And I want to get to that in a moment, but I just want to take this time, and talk a little bit, about you, and talk about all your success. By any objective standards, even your worst critics, would have to acknowledge how prolific you have become, not just writing books. And you have written so many books on so many different topics, not just politics, and people forget that. But also as a syndicated columnist, as someone that's been apart of this extraordinary revolution now in terms of the blogosphere, and you seem omnipresent on national TV shows almost in every city in this country. And so, more personally, I'm curious, what is the motivation? Where is your passion driven from? Where's the energy come from? And what is it that you're trying to achieve? Do you have specific goals? What is it that you are representing in terms of your own convictions that's brought you so far so soon?

AH: Well, the ultimate goal is global domination (laughs).

GN: (laughs) Those modest goals.

AH: I feel what really drives me, is when I feel that by writing something or by speaking, I can help move hearts and minds. And I always really wanted to be a journalist, and I have always wanted to write and speak. And that's really, in some form or another all I've done all my life. At the time, it was telling a story that had some kind of message, even though it was not a hope, and then when I

started writing about politics, like my second book about political leadership, it was really again about my belief that it's very hard to move societies without leadership. And so it's an interesting moment now when I feel that the people are really ahead of the leaders, and yet the leaders need to define their realignment that has happened in American politics in terms of so many issues that we are seeing as left-wing becoming now mainstream. You know on Iraq, on healthcare, on corporate responsibility, and global warming. So, in different sort of forms, my interest in political leadership, and how it can help shift societies, has been there since my twenties.

GN: Let's talk about that, The War in Iraq. You just mentioned, I think you bring up wisely in your book, you make a strong case how all of this is interrelated. The lack of investment in infrastructure, the lack of investment in education and healthcare, and the lack of investment into the communities like our own out here in San Francisco, Bay Area. But also, you tie it in to the larger economy, where it doesn't seem to necessarily get the same kind of attention as the Iraq war and its relationship to the American economy. What seems to get all the attention now is the mortgage crisis and the like. Is there sort of a growing understanding that this war, this three trillion plus dollar war has had a profound impact on the current state of the economy or is that just exaggerated by progressives like myself and others, and you?

AH: I don't think it's stressed enough. Because when you think of all the things we were being told again and again we don't have the money to pay for, like expanding children's health insurance, or a GI bill that will give educational benefits to Iraq vets. And when we look at the amounts of money involved which are the equivalent of a few days of paying for the war in Iraq, it's very hard to deny the reality that if we have the money to spend everyday in Iraq, how come we don't have the money to spend on these urgent social needs. Clearly it's a matter of reverse priorities.

GN: Right, right. And so—It's an understatement, and one that is measurably frustrating, especially if you live on the front lines, and you're dealing almost exclusively in cities across America with historic budget deficits, states with historic budget deficits, there isn't money for the kind of needs that all of us believe in, and education being fundamental to that, health and welfare and the like. But the question I think for everybody, and it's a question that you pose, and I think answer brilliantly, is how in the heck did we get here? Aren't we smarter than this? Don't we have to safeguard and stewardship of this quote unquote liberal media? Don't we have the checks and balances in Congress and the courts? I mean, how is it possible, with the indictment that is represented in your book *Right is Wrong*, and the indictment that the American people are feeling against this current administration, that the people in this day and age, with all the outlets and the technology, and the media that does exist, be it blogs, Youtube, and everything else, that we would be so foolish? How did this happen?

AH: Well that's actually the main reason I wrote the book. Not to catalogue what went wrong, but to try to explain why. And I have identified three main reasons. The first being the media, that have enabled the right's hijacking of America. And when I talk about the media, I make a point of separating those who got it right, and having an honor roll for those who got it right say on Iraq and the lead up to the war.

GN: It's a short list.

AH: It's a short but very significant list, which shows that there were those who got it right, but they were drowned by those who got it wrong. So, I think that the way the mainstream media presents every issue as having two sides is very instrumental here, because all the right needs to do is spread confusion and doubt about global warming, or Iraq, or evolution even. And that's all they need to do to in order to—in order for the right to win. And the other reason I mentioned is the use of fear. You know the use of fear has been a very powerful weapon. We have seen it again, and again, and all for it was al Qaeda wants John Kerry to win. Which is a laughable and lonesome...

GN: But now, you're hearing Hamas prefers Obama.

AH: Exactly.

GN: Same thing.

AH: So we are going to see the fear card played again, I just think it's going to be less powerful than it was in '04, because people are confronted with the reality of the right's success over the last seven years—seven and a half years.

GN: Has the media begun to reconcile it? Have they reflected on it? Are they acting to your mind, significantly differently than they acted with the run up to the War in Iraq or in substantially different ways or even just generally in terms of waiting the priorities of the American people against what they're reporting.

AH: Well, the difference is that we now have a lot more independent media like the Huffington Post, like George Marshall Talking Points Memo. We have a lot more centers of information working twenty-four seven. So it's such an exciting time, so that we are not as dependent on the few networks, and the few key newspapers to get the message out.

GN: Right.

AH: And at the same time there are a lot darker—there are a lot of dark sides. There was the ABC Debate with Charlie Gibson and George Stephanopoulos kind of buying into the right-wing messaging. You have the New York Times hiring Bill Kristol, Newsweek hiring Karl Rove, CNN hiring Tony Snow, which—stunning kind of developments, giving that these are right-wing advocates. You know, they

are not conservative thinkers with whom you can disagree like David Brooks or Tony Blankley, or David Frum. The Third point that I mentioned is the lack of leadership. You know, so we have the media, fear mongering, and lack of leadership, the third component to what explains how the right was allowed to hijack America.

GN: And when you say leadership, you mean, Democrats.

AH: Yeah, I mean the way they went along with the war, the way it took them so long to speak out against the war. It was interesting that the first serious Democrat to speak out against the war was Congressman Jack Murtha, who was a Democratic hawk, and very close to the American military, and clearly was not free-lancing when he spoke out. His friends in the military had talked to him. So it was very powerful.

GN: And Chuck Hagel on the other side.

AH: And Chuck Hagel on the other side. Absolutely. Yes. Which disproves the idea that being against the war is being a member of the left.

GN: So as much as anything else, the media, but also leadership in developing a spine. Boy, it's just—there's nothing harder in politics than hearing politicians saying one thing privately, and expressing something completely different publicly. And I hope if there is any lesson in the last ten years, it's just that. We come and go, and there are a lot of people right behind us, and you don't want to look back and dream of regretting. And I think so much of the last decade has looking back at the absence of leadership, and in resolve, and conscience as it relates. And I want to talk about the media a little bit more as it relates to all these just blatant lies that were perpetuated. You, I think identified it as it relates to leading up to the Iraq war. Was it nine hundred and thirty-five specific lies? And you must mention half of them in your book. I mean it's one thing to present everything in a balanced setting, one side verses the other, but it's another just to spew outright lies. Has the media at least on that front begun to council their own consciences as it relates to fact-checking as opposed to listening to assertions, but also then questioning those assertions on the basis of people's rights to their opinions, but not their own set of facts.

AH: Well, exactly. That is the key, not their own set of facts. I think that the media did another bad job when it came to the surge. You know, the idea that the surge is working became like the conventional wisdom. The media are just totaling buying into the conventional wisdom again. And even though, we've had this explosion of violence in Iraq. You know, the proof that the surge is working was a reduction in violence. Right?

GN: Absolutely.

AH: Even though the surge supposedly was there—had been brought about in order to have a sort of pause in violence to bring about political reconciliation, political stability. So even none of those things happened, most of the major benchmarks went unmet. The media continued to say the surge is working, using the reduction in violence as the only real evidence. Right? Then, violence explodes, and you see no accountability in the media.

GN: Right.

AH: You don't see any like—bringing back all the people who said the surge is working and say what happened? How come you thought the surge was working, and now violence is exploding everywhere. No, it's like we've moved on, it's as though nothing had happened. That is for me one of the most disturbing aspects in the media. That people can come and say anything they want, and not be held accountable, when they are clearly proven completely and utterly wrong.

GN: My guest is Arianna Huffington, and coming up after the break, we're going to be talking about John McCain and the presidential campaign. Again, you're listening to the Gavin Newsom Show on Green960.

GN: This is the Gavin Newsom Show on Green960, and you are listening to my guest Arianna Huffington, who's just come out with a book *Right is Wrong*. John McCain, and the straight talk express, walking us right into war to begin with. I think in '03 in your book you say the end is in sight, McCain says. We're on the right course he says in '04. A lot of progress is being made in '05. We're succeeding in '08. You were pretty critical in this book about John McCain, a *friend* of yours, one that you reference quite favorably in your book; in your previous relationship that you had with him which was more favorable? What's gone on? Or what's gone wrong with John McCain?

AH: I have filed for divorce.

GN: (laughs)

AH: Actually, it's been really hard, because John McCain is somebody I deeply respected and had a real affection for, and followed him around in New Hampshire, and was really inspired and believed in him. And, so it's not like any—your average politician kind of flip-flopping. This is a man, who at some point decided to really sell his soul to the right, in order to be the President of the United States. So, in issue after issue, he's basically sold out. From tax cuts, remember, he used the term, I cannot in good conscience vote for those tax cuts in the middle of a war, and now he wants to make them permanent.

GN: Right

AH: On torture, this man was tortured, and voted against the bill that will prevent the CIA from using torture. On immigration, he said and now says he will

not be voting for his own bill. You know, it's just really—there isn't really much of the John McCain that people fell in love with left.

GH: And you also referenced his decision, and back to one that's near and dear to all of us out here in California, the issue of the constitutional ban on same-sex marriage in his own state of Arizona after his—I thought his quite principled position against George Bush righting against discrimination in the Constitution. You talk about his vote on limiting the right of habeas corpus. And then one that doesn't get the attention, and I appreciate you bringing it up in the book, is his position on clean tax credits and the energy bill that was—that he took a duck on recently as it relates to solar incentives and the likes. So his environmental record stewardship is questionable.

AH: Yes. You know that's why I think the media once again used the framing that John McCain wanted them to use when he gave his speech on global warming, which was McCain breaks with Bush. Right? That is obviously the whole point of the framing. And there wasn't the discussion about his refusal to vote on this critical aspect of the energy bill that would have allowed more renewable energy to be brought about, nor is there enough discussion about that fact that he did not vote to increase fuel efficiency standards. I mean, how can you be serious about global warming, if you don't vote to increase fuel efficiency standards. You know, it's just basically the cosmetics. You know, walking in the woods, and doing photo-ops.

GN: You know, here we are walking into another presidential campaign. You make a compelling case of how the right is wrong; you see public opinion polls, seventy, thirty against this president and the war, yet John McCain—all these national polls is head to head depends on the day of the week. Sure, he's down five points, up five points against Barack Obama. What the heck is going on? How is that possible?

AH: It's possible because people have not yet updated their images of John McCain. And when I say people, I mean both people in the media and ordinary Americans. And that's our job. I think our job between now and November is to convince the twenty percent of Americans, twenty-eight percent being those approve of George Bush, forty-eight percent those who say they will vote for John McCain. That twenty percent, we need to convince that they are thinking of voting for a John McCain who is not on the ballot. He does not exist, the John McCain of 2000. That's our job. The most important thing I'm trying to do in my book is that.

GN: Are there issues as we finish up here—what are the issues that you think are going to define this November's election? Not what you think the media or the politicians themselves want, but what at the end of the day objectively, looking at the state of our economy, looking at the state of our world, looking at the state of the media, looking at the state of mind of millions of Americans. What do you think this election will be decided on?

AH: I think that every election since 9-11 will ultimately be decided on national security. It will ultimately be decided on the answer to the question, who is going to keep me and my children safer. And that's it. Period. The end. Democrats have better wake up to that, and not allow themselves to sleep by thinking the economy is so bad, that the economy is going to be the most important issue. And they should stop listening to polls, because you know, you look at polls, and first of all, most of them separate Iraq and the War on Terror. They should always combine those two, because that's—the numbers of those two—the answer to those two come together, because Iraq is part of War on Terror. And also people maybe particularly worried about what's happening right now to gas prices or their home being foreclosed, but in the end, people will always vote their fears, put their survival or their family's survival before anything else.

GN: So, the political punditry then would suggest that that's the strength of a John McCain verses a Democrat?

AH: No, I think, you see that's the exact opposite. That's where I think the media are a problem. John McCain should be at the bottom of the barrel when it comes to national security. He has supported the war as you indicated with the comments you read from the beginning has misled the American people. From the beginning he's been a thousand percent behind the war, the surge, all of which have made this country less safe. He has the worst national security credentials. The fact that he was a war hero has nothing to do with what his judgment is right now, and where this country is going.

GN: And for Barack Obama, what do you think he needs to communicate in order to close what may be the perception gap, though you eloquently state should not be?

AH: He needs to start dictating the game. He needs to stop playing defense, and he needs to move into total offense. For example, when I watched him at the ABC Debate that was not his finest hour, I was just like—I just kind of visualizing and kind of dreaming if you want, of what he could have done. He could have literally moved forward and done it kind of Michael Douglass in *The American President*, and said I'm not going to take this time of the American people, arguing about lapel pins, sixties radicals, and Reverend Wright. This country is facing serious problems; we need to rise up to these challenges. He could have given an eloquent speech like that; the public would have been so with him. So that's what he needs to do going forward.

GN: Well, you've been listening to Arianna Huffington. Thank you very much for coming on, and I want to again, encourage everyone to pick up this book, *Right is Wrong*. This is a must read for people who want to understand where we've been so that they know where we're going, and dare we forget the history. You can talk about the Peloponnesian War, and we forgot about history in our history books, and if we missed that, we could miss this. And I just want to thank you very much

for being a guest on my first show on Green960, The Gavin Newsom Show.
Arianna thank you very much.

AH: Thank you so much Gavin, it's a real pleasure to be on your first show.