



Opening Shot



PRESIDENT BUSH unveils his proposed 2006 Federal budget. How would you cover the story to not only get beyond the handouts of the administration and its opponents but to also make your readers understand and care about what the budget figures mean? (See “The Numbers Game,” p. 10) Find a copy of the budget and write about one aspect of the story in under 1000 words. Add a paragraph at the end, explaining your methodology and your reasoning.

Talking Points

IN THIS issue, several articles discuss the ramifications of what appears to be increasing hostility toward the mainstream press. A press that is frequently attacked, whose credibility is seen as in decline, and which is increasingly targeted by the courts, is a press that is in trouble.

What is at the root of the hostility? What could be the consequences for all Americans if the antipathy continues or gets worse? How can the situation be ameliorated? Your career — even our democracy — could depend on it.

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ATTACK AT THE SOURCE, PP. 29-37:

Why is the Plame case “so scary”? Why is it important for reporters to protect confidential sources? How does the public benefit from that protection? What are the different reasons why pressure is put on reporters to reveal their sources? Should reporters be legally protected from having to reveal confidential sources? Why or why not? What might be the benefits and drawbacks of a federal shield law? According to one expert quoted in the story, the Bush administration sees the press as “simply another interest group.” Why is that? Is the mainstream press less important than it has been in the past? Explain. **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** Find several examples of state shield laws and, using them as a guide, write what you think would be the best law that protects both journalists and the public interest. In your bill, offer guidelines for deciding who should be considered a journalist. Select one of the cases cited on page 30. Research the issues involved and discuss how they relate to freedom of the press.

HOW ARE THE KIDS?, PP. 22-28:

How has the No Child Left Behind Act changed education reporting? Why has the act come under criticism? According to the story, many reporters covering education fall into the trap of reporting from the top down. Why is that? What are the inherent dangers in relying mostly on official sources for information? How can you determine when an official source is telling you the truth about any story? What is the best way to find a source who is most likely to tell you the truth?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES: Pretend you are the city editor of a major newspaper and you are training a new education reporter. Write a memorandum for the reporter explaining the goals of the beat and the best way to cover it. Get a copy of the No Child Left Behind Act and read through it. Afterward, report on what it taught you in terms of how to read laws and how to look for stories buried in them.

DARTS & LAURELS

From your local newspapers or TV news programs, write up two darts and two laurels based on what you see or read.

FROM ALL SIDES, PP. 22-29:

Compare and contrast the importance of war reporting to the armies and/or governments making war and to the people who follow the coverage. Why do governments or armies seek to control coverage? How can tight controls on coverage backfire? Why does embedding reporters not always result in the most accurate reporting? Do you think that the US forces are deliberately targeting Arab journalists? Why or why not? What would be the point of detaining journalists in a war zone? Should the U.S. military be prevented from detaining reporters? Explain. **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** Find out how and why the rules of war reporting during World War II and Vietnam have since been changed. What are the results of these changes? How has new technology also changed war reporting? Find examples of excellent war reporting from World War II and Vietnam. Explain the reasons for your selections. Visit *Al Jazeera's* Web site. Compare its coverage and points of view to those of its American counterparts.

THE 'FEELGOOD', PP. 38-43:

How is the term 'feelgood' used two ways in the article? Cite some examples that help define "feelgood" news. Why do Indian publishers feel the need to reflect that attitude in their news pages? Is it wrong to do so? Explain? What is the appeal of that kind of newspaper? Ultimately, who benefits from 'feelgood' publications? Reread the last quote in the story. Do you agree? What do you think is the right balance for a quality newspaper? **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** List some of the complaints offered by the editors who are interviewed in this story. Find some examples of how American newspapers may be headed in the same direction. Find the Web sites of the *Times of India*, the *Telbeka* and *The Indian Express*. Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of all three. Compare them to American papers with which you are familiar.

Between the Lines

- 1) Is criticism of editors who emphasize the number and/or names of the dead in Iraq fair? If you were an editor, how would you cover that aspect of the war?
- 2) Comment on the implications of a recent poll which indicated that more than a third of high school students feel that the government should censor newspapers.
- 3) After reading about the Intellitext system (p. 19), would you object to its use in your online publication if you were a reporter? Why or why not?
- 4) Find an example of comics journalism that you enjoy. Explain why it is effective and what makes it stand out.

THE TRUTH ABOUT TV NEWS, PP. 8-10:

How did the owners of the major broadcasting networks from the 1920s through the 70s or 80s differ in outlook and ideals from those that own the major networks today? How have cable news operations changed the way news is reported and produced? Westin writes that in TV journalism opinion is displacing the search for the facts. Why is that so? What are the implications of it? **ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:** Watch an hour of CNN, one of Fox News, and a half hour of any major network news show in one night (record if necessary). Compare how they handle fact and opinion. Select one story that is common to all three shows and compare how it is handled. Look into the story on your own and decide which of the networks handled the story the most accurately and completely.