

**Constitution Day Address**  
**Jason Ross, Staff Writer, “The Daily Show with Jon Stewart”**

**Dr. Alan Gibson:** Good evening. My name is Alan Gibson. I teach in the Political Science Department here at CSU, Chico. Thank you for coming to our Constitution Day Presentation with Jason Ross. Constitution Day is actually celebrated on September the 17th each year. That is the day when 28 of the 41 sweaty, harassed delegates who remained in Philadelphia signed the Constitution. This ended some four months in which they had grouched, compromised, conspired, extorted and, at times, even deliberated, to produce the 4400 word document that makes up the United States Constitution, and it has framed the governing of this nation in sickness and in health ever since.

By an act of Congress in 2004, all publicly funded educational institutions in the United States are asked to instruct their students in the meaning and the history of the United States Constitution on or near September 17. My colleagues in political science and I have taken this mandate as an opportunity not as an obligation. We've decided to make Constitution Day a moment of civic education at CSC, Chico, alongside Town Hall and other similar events. In a moment, Dean Gayle Hutchinson is going to introduce our speaker.

But before that happens, I have a couple of announcements, and then a bevy of thank you's to offer. First, take your cell phone out right now and turn it off. Okay. Just pull it out of your pocket and turn it off. I don't want to hear any Droids, whatever, going off in the audience. Second, Jason has agreed to take questions at the end of his presentation today. And you can see the microphone stand right in the middle here, and that's where people should line up after the presentation. So questions are only going to be taken from behind that mic. So work your way around it and in line if you want to do that.

Our gifts of gratitude for this event are extensive. Associated Students have co-sponsored this event and made it possible to access this capacious, enhanced room without charge. A special thanks to AS President Jay Virdee; the AS Government Affairs Office; and the great team at AS Conference Services, including Christina Hamilton, who created the vivid poster for this event. A special thanks also to Pi Sigma Alpha, the Political Science Honor Society, and its President and Vice President, Sean Toma and Michael Andreas; to the Community Legal Information Clinic, especially Professor Teddy DeLorenzo, the supervising attorney, one of the supervising attorneys, lead supervising attorney for CLIC; and student leaders Stephanie Leland, Victor Sayha [phonetic] and Alex DeLorenzo, and Charles Turner, Chair of the Department of Political Science, for this endeavor. And Lori Adrian and Cindy DeBon from the Political Science Department have worked tirelessly on this. I've seen Lori working every day of the last month on this. Lori, I'm going to embarrass you. Stand up please.

[ Applause ]

Finally, Leslie Schibstead and Jody Prusia from the Dean's office have helped us to plan and execute this event. And we're backed tonight by a team of technical experts who are giving us lights, camera and, yes, action. There is one person I really want to thank for this event though, and she is the prime mover,

Aristotle's efficient, the cause of everything that is happening tonight in this event, and that is Diana Dwyre. Those of us --

[ Applause ]

You're supposed to clap after you get through with all this. Those of you, of us, have had the opportunity to work with Diana -- students, staff and faculty alike -- know that she has a Midas touch. What few people realize is that Diana's golden touch is not simply the product of her intelligence but also of her sinew and her three AM's. She is impeccably organized, takes nothing for granted -- trust me I know that -- crosses every "T" and dots every "I." Her enthusiasm, conscientiousness and attention to detail are infectious. I wish they would infect everybody, actually. Diana, please stand, and we're going to say thank you.

[ Applause ]

At this point we have three student groups who want to present Jason with something. So they're going to be coming in order. So AS Students is going to come first. And come on up and tell them your name, and then present Jason with your gift.

**Keaton Bass:** All right. Hello, everyone. My name is Keaton Bass. And, as he mentioned, I am the Associated Students Representative. Unfortunately, Jay, our President, couldn't make it today. So this is one of the perks of being third or fourth or fifth in command. This, like many events similar to this, the Associated Students is really proud to support because it helps enrich the quality life of our students and the Chico community. As a student officer in a government, it's really fun to see somebody who pokes fun at government, because it's really easy. So I really enjoy Mr. Ross. But I think I speak for a lot of the student officers when I say, if you could lay off the California Government and the budget because they really have the best interest of our education system at heart. You know, that might have been from an earlier speech. That shouldn't have been [laughter]. Anyway, we know that you will not be here forever. So we got you some Chico swag, available for purchase at the bookstore, right here. So we have a T-shirt and a water bottle celebrating our 125th Anniversary. So thank you so much for coming to Chico.

[ Applause ]

**Swan Toma:** Well, hello, everyone, and thank you for being here. My name is Swan Toma. I'm President of the Political Science Honor Society, which is Pi Sigma Alpha, here on campus. Our organization served as a co-sponsor to the event. You know, all the professors and the [inaudible] have done so much work, and we've just been lucky to be a part of it. Today, our organization would like to induct Jason Ross as an Honorary Member into Pi Sigma Alpha. So we have a nice certificate for him.

[ Applause ]

**Jason Ross:** Thank you very much.

**Swan Toma:** I have more stuff.

**Jason Ross:** Oh, okay. I'll just stand here.

**Swan Toma:** We have another shirt for him. I have a feeling he'll get a few more of these. So this is a Pi Sigma Alpha shirt.

[ Applause ]

**Swan Toma:** And I have one more thing. I hope he lets me put it on his head. It's a Medallion, Pi Sigma Alpha as well.

[ Applause ]

>> His day. Again, thank you so much for being here. We're so excited to have Jason Ross here. I'm so privileged. Enjoy the show. Thank you for being here. Thank you.

[ Applause ]

**Victor Sayha:** Good evening, everyone. My name is Victor Sayha. And on behalf of myself and my co-administrative director, Stephanie Leland, and the 120 students that work at the Community Legal Information Center (CLIC), we want to welcome Mr. Jason Ross. Thank you for being here. At the Community Legal Information Center we've been providing free information for over 42 years to the North State Community. It's been an amazing run for everyone at CLIC. And I know that a lot of you and the [inaudible] are -- have been aware of that and have been a part of CLIC. So thank you so much. And we want to, again, welcome you again. As a token for all of the work that journalists do and for bringing to life challenges in our justice system, we want to present to you the gavel that all of our directors are presented when they finish their directorship. So thank you very much.

**Jason Ross:** Thank you very much.

[ Applause ]

**Dr. Alan Gibson:** I want to take one more point of privilege here and introduce Bob and Sharon Ross, and have them stand for us. They are Jason's parents. I want to say thank you.

[ Applause ]

**Dr. Alan Gibson:** Bob was a department chair when I was hired. Bob Ross fights the good fight for this University, and he's greatly missed.

[ Applause ]

**Dr. Alan Gibson:** Okay. That brings me to Gayle Hutchinson. Gayle came to Chico State in 1990 and was named the Dean of the College of Behavioral and the Social Sciences in 2007. In her five-year tenure as Dean, Dr. Hutchinson has vigorously promoted the intellectual life of the College and the University. I don't have to tell anyone in this room about the serious physical state of the CSU system. Furthermore, Congress mandates that we have a Constitution Day, but they don't pay for it. Those of you looking for extra credit in 155, that is called an "unfunded mandate." [ laughter ] Okay. In Congress's absence, Gail

has tapped increasingly scarce resources to make this event happen. In doing so, she's been a friend to students, faculty, and the intellectual life of the University and the community. She understands that we need the exploration of ideas and the sense of community that these presentations foster, more in times of austerity than we do even in times of abundance. Please join me in welcoming and thanking Gayle, Dean Gayle Hutchinson, for her efforts. And she will introduce Jason.

[ Applause ]

**Dean Gayle Hutchinson:** Good evening [applause]. Before Alan escapes, Alan, would you just stand please. He is also the co-director for this evening, and I think it's only important that we thank Alan for all his effort as well. So Alan, Thank you.

[ Applause ]

**Dean Gayle Hutchinson:** I have the distinct pleasure of introducing our guest tonight. And we are thrilled that Jason Ross is here. But I -- it's amazing what you find out when someone is from Chico. So Jason, you are a Chico native. And we're thankful to Sharon and Bob for having you. Jason went to Chico High. And what I understand, when Jason was there -- and if you are from Chico High or if you can remember back to high school, assembly is a big deal, and at Chico High, assemblies are just really at the core of student activity. Well, good word has it that Jason and several of his friends got together and they formed the Blues Brothers and did a Blues Brothers impersonation I think at one of those assemblies of which they became very famous.

Jason has always been into creativity. Although, some of the teachers, with whom I spoke, called it "mischievous." And I do know that there's rumor afoot. And I don't have, you know, first-hand confirmation on this that there was some kind of underground paper that was going around in high school to the point where the administrators never figured out who it was, but that someone, resembling this person here...And some of his friends were seen delivering this paper or handing it out to students. And it was hilarious back then, but handing it out to students at Chico High a block from campus. So I'm honored to learn that Jason did graduate from Chico High in 1988. Go Panthers! But he did assure us via email that his juvenile record was sealed by the courts. And today, there are no outstanding warrants.

He also, after graduating Chico High, he graduated from UC Santa Barbara. At UC Santa Barbara, Jason was news editor and then editor-in-chief of the student newspaper, the *Daily Nexus*. In the summers, he spent them here in Chico. And he was an actor in the original Butcher Shop theater in the Latimer's family back yard. And for those of you who are from Chico and perhaps those who are not, the Latimer Family Theater is the genesis for the Blue Room Theater that we now celebrate in Chico.

[ Applause ]

**Dean Gayle Hutchinson:** After college, Jason worked for the travel book publisher, Moon Publications, for a few months, where he met his future wife, Nicole. And she, Nicole Revere, is a 1993 graduate of Chico State in the Department of Journalism [applause]. They now have two children. And from 1994 to

1997, Jason worked at *Chico News and Review* as a writer and arts editor. In 1997, Jason moved to New York and began a five-year journey pursuing his passion to become a comedy writer, which was realized in 2002 when he was hired as a comedy writer for the “Daily Show with Jon Stewart.” He and the other writers for this show have now accumulated six Primetime Emmys. He is also one of the authors of the shows, two bestselling satirical classics, “America: The Book,” 2004, and “Earth: The Book,” 2010. Ladies and gentlemen, help me welcome Jason Ross.

[ Applause ]

**Jason Ross:** Thank you. And thank you, Dean Hutchinson. I -- you know, I feel sorry for anybody with the title, Dean, in front of their name, because as a comedy writer, you're just automatically the bad guy. Like, every movie, you know, “Oh, boy, here comes Dean Hutchinson.” But [inaudible] I partied with Dean Hutchinson last night. She's one of the good guys. I also want to thank Diana Dwyre and Alan Gibson for inviting me; all the sponsors, of course; the entire Political Science Department, which continues to be so good to my family; the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences; Associated Students Government; CV and his crew for setting us up, up here; Pi Sigma Alpha, who I got to meet with today. Some of you are out there. That was a lot of fun. The good people at CLIC, who I'm always in kind of awe of, the good work that you do. And -- but the person who -- with whom none of this would have been possible is my patient and surpassingly lovely wife, Nicole Revere, who is at this very moment putting to bed two children, who are by all evidence mine.

[ Laughter ]

And thanks to you all for coming. I heard that admission is free, and I guarantee that I will try to make it worth that price of admission. I want to start by confessing my discomfort, as Professor Gibson alluded.

Constitution Day is a federal requirement, an unfunded mandate, and a recent addition to our national calendar. It used to be called, Citizenship Day, and celebrated those who take the oath of naturalization. I've always been rather fond of our newly minted countrymen. They're the only Americans who have proven that they can find America on a map. They got here. The rest of us are -- “are we the boot?” And by the way, we're not the boot. But in 2004, the name and object of Citizenship Day changed, as did its burden on our secondary education institutions. Today, colleges and universities are compelled to celebrate Constitution Day upon threat of having their federal funds revoked. Congress is forcing universities, in a sense, to sing for their suppers. And while Article One clearly gives Congress the power to grant and withhold monies in just about any way it sees fit, I can't help to think that this isn't quite what Thomas Jefferson had in mind. It's sort of a wash.

Congress, the Constitution's creation, is ordering a celebration of the very document that gives it any power to order anything at all, leaving us back where we started minus speaking fees. Sorry. I did thank the sponsors, right? It strikes me as not quite unconstitutional but anti-constitutional. But there's a catch, as Professor Gibson alluded. Congress doesn't say how we have to celebrate Constitution Day. My hosts evidently thought, well, we have to do something. Let's get that Ross kid here and see what happens. What could possibly go wrong? Let's find out.

People of Chico, I bear a message of dire warning. The Constitution of the United States is in serious peril, not from people who would topple it but from those who would overpraise it. At tea party rallies, people literally cheer for the Constitution as if it can hear them. Congressmen are prone to pulling it from their breast pockets and waving it in the air like Bibles. And while I'd rather they wave a Constitution than a Bible, do we have to wave anything? Can't we just maybe wave? If you listen to people puff up the Constitution and then you actually read the thing, big letdown. Have you done it lately?

[ Laughter ]

Oh, where in the hell are we?

[ Laughter ]

Everything between the Preamble and the First Amendment is a total snooze fest. But that's not the Constitution's fault. It was never meant to be an object of near religious reverence. It's just a set of bylaws. It contains very little poetry and absolutely zero secret maps to our national treasure. I'm sorry kids. That particular Nicholas Cage movie was based on a false premise, unlike the one where he comes back from the dead riding a flaming motorcycle. That you can do.

The Constitution I submit to you today is being marketed all wrong. Nothing could live up to the Hosannas, as we've been heaping upon it. Put another way, it's just our national rule book. Every sport needs one or else you have chaos. But the only people who cheer for the rules of their sport are golfers. And damn it, we're better than that.

I get that self-governance and the peaceful transfer of power are together a minor miracle. I understand the freedoms granted in the First Amendment, that allow me to stand up here today without fear of an evil king cutting off my tongue with a hot knife. Game of thrones anybody, Season One? Awesome. But at some point I think we have to stop patting ourselves on the back for granting ourselves these freedoms and start judging ourselves by what we choose to do with them, which is obviously a far messier story. We have the freedom of speech. Good job, us. Just please cover your children's eyes at the county library's computer table while one of your fellow freedom loving Americans is exercising his First Amendment right to watch girl-on-girl on guy-on-chicken porn.

We have the right to bear arms. The uniqueness of this freedom may or may not come as consolation to the families of those people lost to our nation's Tarantino-S gun violence. We have the right to keep our home secure from unreasonable search and from the quartering of soldiers against our consent. Our homes are our castles. And what did we do? We cashed out our equity to buy his and hers matching jet skis and accidentally destroyed the world economy. Good job, America.

And while we're on that topic, pity the poor Third Amendment. No soldier shall in time of peace be quartered in any house without the consent of the owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law. So tough, so defiant and yet rendered so ridiculous by the passage of time. The Third Amendment reminds me of an angry teenager's neck tattoo. Screw you dad. It was so cathartic at the

time. And now that we're grown-ups, we always have to explain what it meant. Oh, see, there was this king and we were really mad at him. And I don't know. He was such a dick. And anyway, this place is nice. Right? How's the pasta? Good? Huh? Was the pasta -- was it good? If anyone ever tells you our Constitution is perfect or that it was whispered into the ears of our framers by the sweet breath of our Lord, just remind them of our national neck tattoo. I probably confirm, as Dean Hutchinson suggested, I grew up in Chico in the 1970's and 80's. So for most of my formative years, this is what I thought college was like. Think about that.

[ Laughter ] I recall one afternoon being driven home from school by my mother and spotting two young men riding their bikes one-handed, barely supporting between them a large metal cylinder.

[ Laughter ]

Mom, I said, what's that? It's a keg, my mother replied. What's a keg? It's a barrel of beer. I asked the obvious question. Why did they need a whole barrel of beer? My mother adjusted the sun visor against the afternoon glare. Because, she said, it's finals week.

[ Laughter ]

Where upon she sighed the sigh of a professional educator. Pioneer Days. I know it now has an infamous history. But when I was a child, it was no joke. The highlight of my year. It was Christmas, Halloween and the Fourth of July all wrapped up into one. The whole town got in on it. My elementary school classes would go on field trips to the quad to see the little old West town that the clubs had built. The parade on the weekends, my God, it was -- and I'm not exaggerating -- the greatest parade in the history of man.

[ Laughter ]

Fire trucks, floats. I rode my bike in that parade. I'm not joking. Pioneer Days was the quaintest most wholesome piece of Americana I have ever been a part of. So I was just as surprised as anyone when I got a little older and learned that basically the whole school was on a cocaine binge of Scarface proportions. Had been for decades.

[ Laughter ]

I was 17 years old when Pioneer Days burned into its second to last iteration. My high school friends and I, we did our best to blend into college parties, a couple of high school seniors trying to get into a fraternity house. It worked. Something was going wrong. Some unspoken threshold had been crossed. And when the sun rose over the still smoldering embers on that Sunday morning, we could feel that the jig was nearly up, as indeed it would be the following spring. But my birthright, as a native Chicoan, left me, has a source of dubious wisdom. In my first weekend away at college, my dormitory friends and I ventured off campus into the streets of our new town. And there, at the center of a perfect ring of young people glowing through Pacific mist, crackled one of the icons of collegiate celebration. What's that? Someone asked. Now it was my turn to play my mother. That, I said, is a burning couch. You can see they doused the left armrest in lighter fluid, and now the foam rubber cushions are fully involved.

And it's probably getting some assistance from the tar and the asphalt underneath there, and that's going to leave a mark on the road. In fact, the fire department usually shows up right about, oh, here they are. Shall we pelt them with rocks?

[ Laughter ]

I will note that the Princeton Review's latest rankings of party schools have Chico State not even making the top 20; whereas, my own alma mater still holds strong at seventh place. So I guess you guys just couldn't keep up. All right. My job, as Aristotle famously wrote in his treatise on comedy, --

[ Laughter ]

[inaudible] anybody? Aristotle's treatise on comedy appears to be lost. That's one for the classic's majors. Can I get a [inaudible]?

[ Laughter ]

Our sense of humor has vexed philosophers for ages. Why should such a noble creature as man, harnesser of fire, plotter of the heavens, splitter of atoms, why should we cease all rational thought just because a hippie keeps saying the words, "Dave's not here, man"? I used to wonder myself. But lately I've -- I think I've figured it out. And I believe this as strongly as I believe anything, talking 30-35 percent, that humor is an evolutionary adaptation by which the species, *Homo sapiens*, manages not to murder our own children. Killing one's offspring, of course, is the ultimate genetic paradox. Of course, you want to kill them for the sake of your sanity, for your neighbors, for the sake of the very procreated act that brought them about in the first place. I'm not talking about personally hurting them. I just mean maybe going on a fun hike into bear country. And then you sit them on a log, you give them your iPhone, you scatter a few warm pies around the area, and you hightail it back to the car. But we don't do that. And I submit to you today that the reason we don't allow large omnivores to do our dirty work for us is because our sense of humor tips the infanticide or knot scales in the child's favor. Because, it's true that parents will never have a good night's sleep again. That, at four in the morning, you're entirely liable to be shaken awake and told these words. Daddy, you know your iPad? I pooped on it. That's it. We're going for a walk in the woods, except that every day you also hear something akin to what my own daughter said recently. Daddy, when the asteroid hit the earth, is that what killed all the zombies? Or my son, a few years older, who recently told me, I thought Turkey was in New York. No, son. Oh, right, he said, I was thinking of Buffalo.

[ Laughter ]

Surely, the first time in human history that the city of Buffalo, New York was confused with a secular Islamic Republic on the banks of the Mediterranean. Now if they just say something funny every day for the next, call it 4,000 days, they might make it to college. So if that's why we have this capacity to laugh, how we use it, of course, is up to us. And like most of our evolutionary gifts, we've turned this vital tool of survival into one of personal amusement. I won't regale you today with the noble history of classical satire, for two reasons. One, it would take all night. And two, I don't -- what's the word -- know anything

about it. I know a few fancy Greek names but not really what they wrote. But here's the great thing about working in a business like this. I don't have to know anything about Aristophanes to have learned from Aristophanes, because I did learn satire from Jon Stewart, who learned satire from David Letterman, who learned satire from the Smothers Brothers, who learned satire from Red Skeleton, who learned satire from Vaudeville, all the way back through the centuries until you get to an Aristophanes.

In some ways, what we do with the Daily Show is brand new, but in -- but every day in ways that we're not even aware of. We're following patterns laid down thousands of years ago. So why? Why did all these societies enjoy seeing their most treasured values held up and then piddled upon? I submit to you it's for the same reason I enjoy watching my son on the far side of the window press his lips to the glass and blow, creating a pink spitty snail's foot. Because, for another day, we'll allow each other to live. And that I submit to you is all that satire accomplishes.

I am proud to be a writer at the Daily Show, a record holder for consecutive Emmy Awards, a program that has arguably redefined what's possible in the genre televised comedy program. So often and so lovingly quoted by my journalist friends that I sometimes wonder if the *New York Times* op-ed page shouldn't just give us a byline and be done with it. All points of tremendous pride for me. But at the risk of sounding ungrateful, I feel a nagging unease at all the accolades, because, when you add them all up, I'm left with a suspicion that at least some of these people are confusing what we do with doing something, and, trust me, we're not doing anything. We are literally shouting back at the TV. Together, in a morning meeting, we shout back at the TV, and then we spend the next few hours working as hard as we know how to craft those shouts into written and produced television so that hopefully people watching that night will say, wow, that is an awesome thing to shout at your TV, way better than what my drunk neighbor is shouting at his TV.

Don't get me wrong, I love those viewers and I want them to be happy watching us, or if happiness is off the table, sleepy. But never, ever mistake watching a TV show for doing something, because it's pretty much the opposite of doing something. So a good rule of thumb is do two things and then watch TV, and it will net out to doing one thing. Luckily, not every critic is fond of our program. One recently wrote in the *Baffler*, quote, what's Jon Colbert do most nights is convert civic villainy into disposable laughs. They prefer Horatian satire to Juvenalian -- I have no idea what that means -- and thus treat the ills of modern media and politics as a matter of folly, not concerted evil. A little later, he writes, what's missing from this formulation is the idea that comedy might, you know, change something other than your mood. Let me be clear. Comedy will never change anything other than your mood. In fact, most times it won't even change that. Only the good stuff changes your mood. My boss is fond of pointing out that the best satire, the most biting, the most erudite, the most withering in its take down of the prevailing powers, occurred in Vimar, Germany in the 1930's, and look how that turned out. And since I always like to close my arguments with a Nazi reference, I'm going to leave it there. Thank you very much.

[ Applause ]

As a postscript, I'll say it's also uncomfortable for me to be received in a way such as this based on my association with people who are more talented and more famous and more visionary and harder

working than me, and I'm talking, of course, about my parents, Bob and Sharon Ross, who distinguished themselves as faculty here and who will distinguish themselves further tomorrow when we observe their 50th wedding anniversary which they will celebrate tomorrow by driving me to the airport [applause]. Mom and Dad, you're welcome.

[ Applause ]

**Jason Ross:** Are we doing questions? Middle aisle. Middle aisle. Anybody got questions? I got all night. Plane leaves at one-thirty.

**Audience member:** Hi. Good afternoon.

**Jason Ross:** Hi there.

**Audience member:** Mr. Ross, can you hear me?

**Jason Ross:** Yeah.

**Audience member:** Okay. A big fan. So this is kind of a long-winded question.

**Jason Ross:** I will match your long-winded question with an absurdly long-winded answer.

**Audience member:** Okay. Feel free. Number One, comedically, who are your influences? Number Two, who, either past or present, whether that be a writer or on-air performer, would you say is the funniest? And Number Three, do you have any interest in becoming an on-air personality or a correspondent? Thank you.

**Jason Ross:** Okay. I wasn't taking notes. The last of your three I'll answer first just because you -- no, I -- you know, I was talking to some students this morning and, you know, I like being able to walk through the airport without being recognized. I see the burden that, that puts on some people who I work with who have -- who don't get to do that. And if I can just keep, you know, moving in this career, that would be more than enough for me.

Influences. I listened to a lot of Steve Martin as a kid. I just -- and my parents are to be thanked for letting me listen to Steve Martin as a kid. I think child services would probably have something to say about that. And when I became a teenager, I discovered on my own by just staying up really late, I discovered David Letterman. I had never heard of him before, found him all by myself, which sort of made it more special. And I -- you know, here was this guy who was, you know, really creating something that was speaking straight to me. That's right about when I started. Monty Python too. So you know, all the big names, nobody obscure were my influences.

And in terms of who's doing the best job right now, obviously that would be Jon Stewart at the Daily Show. Come on, bro, what do you think I got to say? Honestly, here's the thing. I honestly don't -- I don't really think in those terms of hierarchy. I just kind of think of, like, well, there's a crowd of people who I like and who I pay attention to and the participation of everybody else. So you know, I mean, again, there's not going to be a lot of strange names in there. You know, I think Stewart and Colbert are doing

incredible things. I like keeping up with the Kimmel show. They're working new media and stuff into their program in a way that's really -- that's brand-new. I think 30 Rock is the best sitcom on TV. There's one that I am willing to put at the top. You know, just kind of, you name them, I'll probably like them. You know, it's a big world out there. Hi.

**Audience member:** Hello. I think that me and a lot of people in the room would agree that satire is an important part of a way for us to challenge, kind of, government and institution, and just make fun of it and laugh at it. But a lot of, like, political satire scholars say that's important to balance education and satire at the same time. Given the kind of population of your audience, are you ever worried that your satire is being taken as truth? And that, what -- sometimes when you're poking fun at things, that those -- that kind of information is being seen as news instead of just humor?

**Jason Ross:** Yeah, short answer is no. I think there's some -- some people have bad assumptions about - - I think there's -- I was having some good conversations about this last night. I think there are some people confusing correlation and causation, because a lot of young people are incredibly cynical about the news, and a lot of young people are watching programs like ours, and they think that they're getting cynical from us. No, no, no. The cynicism comes from everything else they're seeing, and it drives them to us for some sense of recognition that at least we're -- that they're not crazy for feeling cynical. Where, yeah, we see the same thing you do and it's fucked up and we're going to talk about it every night.

[ Applause ]

I think that's, you know -- and I spent the last part of my speech downplaying what we do, but that is part of what we do. And while I still wouldn't quite classify it as doing something, you know, it is -- I am proud to be associated with a franchise that will just call it like it sees it at every turn. And if that makes us, you know, the most trusted news people -- you hear that thrown around. That's just for lack of the competition, you know. That's on them. That's not on us. When the news is presented as combat between two pundits, how can you not be cynical? Why would you ever go -- make -- why would you ever go out of your way to watch that? I have to do it. I get paid to do it. I don't know if any of you would.

So the cynicism I think is -- here's another thing. People mistaking our satire for truth, I think that -- I give people a little more credit than that. I think in order to get our satire, they have to already have a lot of knowledge about things. So I think, you know, there are all these studies that young kids don't -- that we're their primary news source or something. I just don't buy it. I think what that's saying is they don't watch televised news, which is totally different from not having a news source. You know, we're in front of screens for how many hours a day? Those screens are throwing things at us all day long. And I think you need to know a lot about the actual news in order to get a lot of our jokes. And I think it's pretty clear in terms of satire versus truth. I'm not quite comfortable with that distinction because I think there's a lot of truth in our satire and the points where it goes too far are -- if you're laughing, then you know it's going too far, and you know where the silliness begins and the facts leave off.

Yeah. Hi.

**Audience member:** Yes. Good evening. I'm Mike Hawkins. Some years ago, when you worked for the *Chico News and Review*, --

**Jason Ross:** Uh-oh.

**Audience member:** -- you did a "gotcha" with the *Chico Alternative*, the local --

**Jason Ross:** Yeah.

**Audience member:** -- newspaper.

**Jason Ross:** I did.

**Audience member:** And a gentleman named John Thomas McCoy --

**Jason Ross:** I recall.

**Audience member:** -- wondered if you would relate that story for generations who were not here at the time.

**Jason Ross:** But he's not here.

**Audience member:** I've --I had great joy from telling this story lots of times. To my knowledge, now, Mr. Thomas is not with us today.

**Jason Ross:** Yeah, yeah. It's free. He might be here.

[ Laughter ]

**Jason Ross:** All right. Does that paper still exist?

**Audience member:** Yeah.

**Another audience member:** I don't know.

**Jason Ross:** Well, I got yeses and no's. Split decision. Well, we'll just have to leave it there for tonight. This is CNN.

[ Laughter ]

**Jason Ross:** There was and maybe still is a paper called the *Chico Alternative*, which has a conservative ideology, which I have no beef with. I disagree with a lot of conservative ideology -- not all of it, but a lot of it. But I have no beef with somebody, you know, doing that. But the trained journalist in me was deeply, deeply offended by just about every other aspect of this thing. And to me it was, it -- people who maybe didn't -- or maybe weren't as sophisticated news consumers as I was, being a news, you know, practitioner. I thought they needed to see just how low a standard this place was operating under. So I created a fictitious persona named Navin [assumed spelling] Johnson, which -- can somebody tell me what that's from?

[ Inaudible ]

Thank you. John Thomas McCoy didn't get that reference. And I started writing -- I started submitting columns to the *Chico Alternative* under that name and I became their newest columnist. And I did I think three. I think there were three pieces that I wrote, and they were just these really kind of idiotic blowsy, like a jocular recounting of slaughtering a bunch of Vietcong, just, you know, really things that you just shouldn't probably publish without at least calling the guy first to seeing if he's getting professional help. And -- but he printed them. He printed about three of them. And then we kind of pulled the trigger and ran the story in the *News and Review* that, that was me and, you know. Isn't he ashamed that this is a newspaper that has those standards? You know, I'm a little uncomfortable about that piece only for this, not for playing the prank on them. That's -- I think that was fair game. I mean, if he's just going to take things and put them in the paper, like, you know, you can't do that. But I'm a little -- I wish that I had gone the full mile and confronted him for the piece in the *News and Review* so that he would have at least been able to have his say, and I didn't do that. And I think it's because I'm pretty conflict of verse, which made me a not great journalist. Like, you need to be able to really get in there every day and, you know, duke it out with people and not take things personally. And I think I just didn't have the nerve after doing that to the guy to actually face him down and say that was me. What do you have to say for yourself? And I wish I had. So I -- it's not exactly a high point in my career that -- but it's -- you know, if people enjoyed it, then I'm glad. Hi.

**Audience member:** Hi. Yeah. I think that the ability to -- or the freedom to laugh at our politicians is profoundly great. It's our --

**Jason Ross:** I'm with you, brother.

**Audience member:** Yeah. But I was just walking up the sidewalk going to a bar and I saw the people coming in here.

**Jason Ross:** Which bar?

**Audience member:** Oasis. I was --

**Jason Ross:** Oasis?

**Audience member:** -- wondering, more importantly -- you don't spend a lot of time answering this --

**Jason Ross:** Sure.

**Audience member** -- but do you know if the cafeteria is still open?

**Jason Ross:** I don't know. Can we get a confirmation for the man?

[multiple voices] No.

**Jason Ross:** No. We got -- okay, we got a negatory on that, sir. Happy to be of service. Thank you for coming.

[ Laughter ]

**Jason Ross:** You almost made it, man. Three more blocks. The air-conditioning was just that sweet, wasn't it? Hi.

**Audience member:** Hi. Day in and day out you guys are writing great material. And I was wondering, could you take us through maybe a day in the [multiple speakers]?

**Jason Ross:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. I didn't -- I know a lot of people are curious about that. I didn't put it in my speech because it's been documented in a lot of other places, but I'm happy to go through it in a sort of abbreviated way. We start our days at -- well, I start my day about nine-fifteen. We have a morning meeting with most of the writers, all of the producers. We have this incredible studio production team that has been there for about an hour before us laying out, making dubs of coverage that they think we should see in the morning meeting. And those guys are really the eyes and ears of the program. You know, when you ask how is the Daily Show catching this or that? You know, things that got said on some channel, that's all our studio production department. You know, occasionally one of us writers will see it but it's almost always them. And so our day starts about nine-fifteen.

We watch some video that has either been -- it's either been requested that this is what we watch, or it's just the producers making their pitch as to what they think is the best material. And we spent about an hour in that meeting. And we come out of there. And Jon comes in at the end of that meeting, kind of hears how we've sifted through it and what our ideas are. And in that meeting we're like shouting out ideas, and some of them are catching and a lot of them aren't. But by the end of that meeting, we have some assignments that go out to the writers who are available that day. There might be some other writers who are already working on something from the night before, and those assignments are usually due in about an hour and a half. We usually break the meeting at about ten, and they're due at about eleven or eleven-thirty, depending. And then they get read by usually a roundtable of our head writer, executive producers, and Jon. And then they call us in for notes. They say, you know, this thing, this is good. This is good. This is not so good. Let's -- and this is kind of missing from it. So let's make a new draft that incorporates these changes. And so we -- a lot of times we get that assignment and we go back and do the notes. Sometimes it gets kind of taken from us at that point and our bosses will start cobbling something together from what we write.

But those scripts are due at two-thirty to our script supervisor, who actually turns them into usable TV scripts. And at that point we will probably start. Well, just before that point, we'll start getting some calls to have what we call, gangs, which are -- every writer who's available. We meet in one office or another. It kind of rotates around. And we just start trying to plug holes in the script that -- whichever executive producer's working on that says, you know, this here, we need a joke here. This isn't good enough. So we'll get everybody at the same time, spend 10 minutes knocking out five good jokes for that -- well, two good ones -- and sending that back. And that might happen two or three times in a day, or sometimes five or six times in sort of a rough day.

Rehearsal is at four and we all watch that. And after that happens, sometimes if -- particularly, if you're working on Act Two, the second segment of the show, if you worked on the Act Two, a lot of times you

go down and you get notes from Jon right after rehearsal about what he wants to change, and then you'll go and incorporate his changes into that right away. If it's -- if you work on Act One, he kind of does the rewriting with the EP's and the head writer in something we call the rewrite room, where they have a big wall monitor. And you know, there are substantial changes from rehearsal to the show. It is a complete rewrite of stuff as well as a shortening down because we always go down with too much material. And taping is at six. And then we start it all over again the next day. Oh, oh. There are three o'clock -- right before rehearsal we have a three o'clock meeting where we talk about the next day. And so a lot of people will get assignments at that point also that are due the following day. And you know, you can work on that as late as you think you need to. Yes. Hi.

**Audience member:** Hello. My name is Christopher. I'm a long-time viewer of the Daily Show. And --

**Jason Ross:** Great to hear it. Thank you.

**Audience member:** Yes. I was wondering what segments do you work on most? Two, --

**Jason Ross:** The funny ones, man.

**Audience member:** Funny ones? Well, specifically?

**Jason Ross:** Yeah.

**Audience member:** Two, --

**Jason Ross:** Yeah.

**Audience member:** -- the -- what's your favorite Colbert segment? And Three, how tyrannical is Jon Stewart?

**Jason Ross:** Well, you've seen him do the T-Rex thing, right?

[ Sound Imitation ]

**Jason Ross:** Jon -- There's no question that it is Jon's show, and he runs it to his liking. But -- and you know, he won't -- he rewrites everything himself. He -- you know, it's a thousand percent what he wants to say, and it's our job to help him to say it. And, that said, he's probably the nicest boss in show business, from what I hear about every other place. He's extremely respectful of our time and our feelings. You know, there are a lot of tough decisions that get made. And you know, he knows when he's giving you bad news. And I couldn't think of another boss in this business that I would want to work for, more than him. I think there are a lot of -- not a lot. There's some nice ones you hear about, but he's definitely, you know, at the top of that list. My favorite Colbert segment, I got to confess, I don't watch it regularly enough to give you a good list like that. I mean, I watch, you know, when somebody says, yeah, you got to see what they did. I -- you know, I'll check it out. But between my job and watching our show and trying to get home at night, it's -- you know, I don't catch Colbert every night.

[ Pause ]

**Jason Ross:** What else was there?

**Audience member:** What segments do you [inaudible]?

**Jason Ross:** Oh, yeah. We -- there are some that I work on more than other people, but there's no hard fast owner. There's no real ownership of segments. So I've been lucky enough to have worked on a lot of the Larry Wilmore segments, our senior black correspondent, because he -- yeah, he's fantastic. And that was just -- that was really luck, because I had a spare desk in my office for a while. We worked two to an office, but the -- somebody had left, so there was an empty desk. And so he would just come in and use that desk. And so we started working together the first few times and we developed a really good relationship. And so we still work on those whenever I'm available, which is a lot of fun, because it just allows us to explore territory, just -- you know, you just can't do it with -- in a normal Daily Show segment. It -- you know, we get to -- it's like having a whole new -- it's like Disneyland opens up a whole new land. You know, you get to go -- yeah, we're in Raceland. We can do this.

[ Laughter ]

And I kind of -- I became the default "economy guy" back during the crisis, which I think we're still in just as bad a crisis as we were before, because I just kind of got interested in it and try -- started trying to figuring out what was going on. And so I kind of educated myself about the capital markets, and so I sort of became the go-to guy on that. And it was -- you know, which is great, and I'm happy to do it to the best of my ability. But as I was telling someone else today, there were -- even our best show about the economic crisis just was never that funny. It's really, really, hard to make that stuff funny because there's no shared body of knowledge. You know, everybody needs to have comedy. You need references that everybody gets. And when you're talking about, you know, interest rates, you're not going to get there. So it was -- that whole process was an interesting exploration and the -- you know, how successful can you be with jokes about the economy that aren't something, like, well, screw your credit card company? When -- we did a lot of that too. You know, I'll say it right now. Screw your credit card company. But you know, we wanted to go deeper than that. And you know, there's really only so far you can go with that stuff before the audience just kind of looks at you, like, okay. I think that's one of the reasons we went after CNBC so hard is because there was something that people understood. Like here, there's just some people who missed the biggest story of their lives, and that was something that -- there was a comedic angle there that everybody could understand. Yes. Hi.

**Audience member:** As I'm standing here, I'm realizing people are looking at me, like, oh, shit, they're going to ask another question. So I guess one more that I'm kind of interested in.

**Jason Ross:** Sure.

**Audience member:** So obviously, you're somebody who's enjoyed considerable success. And for all of us college students who are about to go out into the world and the terrific job market that is waiting on us, --

**Jason Ross:** Yeah, there are no more jobs.

**Audience member:** Yeah. It's pretty --

**Jason Ross:** Pretty -- the last one got taken like, --

**Audience member:** Yeah.

**Jason Ross** -- I think about three days ago. It was in Biloxi, Mississippi. Some guy showed up, like, right before they opened, which isn't even really fair, right? And now it's gone. No, I'm sorry. Please go ahead.

**Audience member:** No, no, not at all. No. What suggestions do you have for, you know, a roomful of people that will be entering that pretty soon?

**Jason Ross:** Okay. Here -- this is going to be, this is -- here's the abbreviated Jason Ross success plan. Okay. Wait five years and then -- no. When you get out of college, here's a piece of advice. Buy a box of thank you cards, and within the first three months of getting out of college, make sure they're all gone. It doesn't matter who you sent them to. If somebody answered your call that day, they get a thank you card. If -- obviously, an interview. They get a thank you card. They're quaint. They're a pain in the ass. But if you want somebody -- if you want to stick in somebody's head, it's somebody who will be conscientious working for their company. That's a great way of saying that you are a conscientious person.

I was telling some journalism students today that I think -- when I decided not to do journalism anymore and to try to do comedy, it was a huge risk for me because I had this career already going. And I was going to turn down a job and really shift gears and, you know, try for something that was very, very difficult. And I would recommend that all of you at some point take a huge risk. Whether it pays off or not, you will be grateful that you did it. Otherwise, you're always going to wonder what would happen if. And you know, some of you, you might have already taken that risk to come here. Maybe, you know, college is a huge step for somebody in your family or something like that. And I commend you for that. But if this is sort of, you know, the next thing you moved onto that you were, you know, being groomed to be a college person and now you are one, and now, you know, you're going to try to get a job in your field of your major, you know, that -- at some point that might feel like steps are being laid out in front of you that you -- even though it's your life, you might feel like you don't control it anymore. But if you take a big risk, you know that, that was you who did that. And whether it works out or not, you'll always know that. In terms of the job market, God, I wish I could have something hopeful to say. I really -- Like, I -- it's just -- it's criminal. It's -- you know, you look at the numbers. And do you know who I really pity, of course, is your parents because that's who you're going to have to move back in with. And like, that ain't right. Think about the parents. No. I -- but I wish everybody luck. And you know, that's about all I can say. Yeah. Hi.

**Audience member:** Hi. Sorry. I got on the phone., I have a terrible memory. You said earlier that the program's intentions are not to spark change in the viewers apart from the [inaudible]. Statistics show, however, that America hasn't been this divided since the Civil War. And I was just curious about your opinion on the emergence of shows such as Newsroom and shows that are intending to spark change?

And this is kind of a two-parter. And then Jon Stewart seems to have an opinion that some news media have been poisonous to the American people. And I was just wondering if you share that opinion?

**Jason Ross:** Well, I certainly think that a lot of journalism is -- well, a lot of televised journalism is certainly useless and might -- I don't know. It might be like -- poisonous is such a strong word, but, you know, maybe one of those kind of weak poisons that's just in the water, and then, you know, every 50th person dies.

[ Laughter ]

I mean, I don't like to be an alarmist that much. But you know, I think that, as I was saying earlier, when your format, when your news format is let's get two people who disagree about everything and have them argue when they're not even being honest. There's nobody on that stage you can trust. There's somebody who's pushing the Republican talking points. There's somebody who's pushing the Democratic talking points. And in between is a moderator who might or might not hold them to some standard of honesty. But you know, most of the time he doesn't because he wants them to come back and, because, if they fight a lot, then that's good television. And the moderator doesn't want to come down on one side or the other. You know, there's this -- the whole, you know, the, you know, fair and balanced joke of, you know, well, some people say the world is round but others disagree. We'll have to leave it there. You know, that's where a lot of them leave it. That was one of my favorite Daily Show joke bits, where we caught CNN saying "we'll have to leave it there," about 100 times, at exactly the time when you shouldn't leave it there. That's the time when you got to keep going. Okay. So media poisonous shows. Okay. Shows trying to -- that try to change. Here's the thing. We --

[ Pause ]

**Jason Ross:** Jon has been very clear that he is making a show that makes him feel good. And that, he builds up but he reads the news. He builds up all his bio and then he -- all day long we work on turning the bio into joy, and we find the joy that's in there somewhere by laughing at the ridiculousness of it. And at the end of the day he feels great and he can go home and go to bed, and maybe the viewers feel a little better and they can go to bed, too. I -- you know, I think that is not a contradiction of what I said about still not doing anything. You know, I think if we acknowledge, if we are helping you, you know, if we're validating people's feelings, their frustrations, then, you know, we're happy to do it. But that result comes from an intention that is kind of personal. It's -- you know, we're going for things that feel good to us, that feel right to us. That's what -- we want to -- it takes a long time to figure out what we want to say sometimes, but it has to do with doing justice to our own ideas and impressions and just trusting that there is an audience out there who's going to enjoy that.

The Newsroom, I found really interesting. I found it -- I don't know, that, you know, Aaron Sorkin, I don't know how activist he considers himself in terms of trying to change things. I kind of consider what he does as a fantasy version of how he wishes things were. And you know, I -- you know, he has said that Jeff Daniels is, you know, the Republican that every Democrat dreams of. And you know, I think that show and the West Wing were versions of reality as he wishes they were, where, you know, the good argument always wins. I don't know that he would posit that he's trying to change anything. But I will

say that I've had fun watching that show, even though it's, you know, preposterous in a dozen different ways.

But the idea of dramatizing journalistic decisions, I found very compelling. Like, you know, no, we're not going to just because two other sources are saying this thing. We're not going to report it until we really know it's really true. Like, having -- just seeing journalists who have a standard that they're holding to. It was -- I found it almost embarrassingly moving. Like, wow, they're really trying not to fuck it up. Think how rare that is these days. The mic is empty. Is that it?. Hi.

**Audience member:** Hello again. Me, Dusty Bottoms.

**Jason Ross:** Hi, Dusty Bottoms.

**Audience member:** The -- another two-parter. What issue do you wake up? Or do the writers go into the next day? I mean, just stoked, ready to go to work and say, oh, I'm so glad that we got to work today. We can, you know, do a joke on this. And Number Two, if there's one or two, you know, issues aside from, you know, the Republican debate, because that's a gold mine. But Number Two, would you work for the Daily Show if Craig Kilborn was still there?

**Jason Ross:** Oh, I'll answer the second part first. I loved the Daily Show under Craig Kilborn. I went to a taping. I was a big fan. And I, like a lot of people, didn't think it needed to be improved, but Jon Stewart did and he improved it quite a bit. You know, I don't know if any of you saw the Kilborn Daily Show, which was from -- yeah, from, I think, '96 to '99, maybe. It was a lot more non-secular type jokes, much not -- it wasn't like an act-long argument the way we now kind of present a long piece of oratory for every act, but that's tied together. It was sort of weekend update style jokes. You know, here's a news item and here's a joke and here's -- and I thought they did a great job. But when -- you know, I read an interview actually. I haven't had this conversation with Jon, but I read an interview with him where he described working in that style for a while. You know, he didn't come in knowing exactly what he wanted to do with the show. And working in that style a little bit, he found that we were -- that we weren't even -- well, I can't say we because I wasn't there yet, but the show wasn't even viewing to a single point-of-view. Like, it would have a joke about somebody who was a sexist, and then two jokes later make a joke that some lady was fat. And that's -- there's no cohesive point-of-view there.

So you know, the first thing I think he worked on was, you know, let's have a point-of-view here and, for starters, let's make it mine. And from there, you know, it was off to the races and it's been changing ever since. He is a really tireless -- you know, at the risk of sounding like I'm just getting up here praising my boss, who's already been praised enough, here's something a lot of people don't know. He is a really tireless boss. He's into all the processes at the show. How did this thing get assigned? How did the draft come in? Who rewrote it? How did this video get -- you know, he's into how the entire machine runs. And you know, he has never rested, which I think has made a huge difference in how the show has kept up its quality and probably even improved its quality over the years, rather than sort of having a huge spike and slow decline, which I think is the standard late-night talk show kind of graph. Was that both your questions? Oh, an issue that we wake up. Oh. Well, here.

[ Pause ]

[laughter] Any questions?

[ Applause ]

It's a gift from the heavens. It's like -- that's like some lawyer knocking on your door and saying are you Jason Ross? Your long-lost aunt just gave you a billion dollars. Bye. It was like so unexpected and such a windfall. I still can't believe it happened.

[ Laughter ]

>> That it? All right. Thank you guys.

[ Applause ]