

'The Last Word with Lawrence O'Donnell' for Monday, June 23rd, 2014

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THE LAST WORD WITH LAWRENCE O` DONNELL

June 23, 2014

Guest: Julian Epstein, EJ Dionne

LAWRENCE O` DONNELL, MSNBC HOST: Thank you, Rachel. Thank you very much. And thank you for reintroducing me to the audience.

And if there`s any way, Rachel, is there any way I can convince you to hang around and maybe be my copilot for the next hour? Because I`m just -- I`m not sure I can fly this baby alone now, I don`t know.

RACHEL MADDOW, TRMS HOST: If you need help, you probably need bigger help than me. But I`m here for you, I`ll be your safety net, baby.

O` DONNELL: All right, stay close.

MADDOW: All right, will do. Welcome back.

O` DONNELL: Stay close, we`ll see how this goes.

Well, you know, as you know, this is the part of the show where we usually run some video. It`s often funny video about the hot story of the day. Then I hide behind that video fixing my tie.

But tonight, as you can already see, it`s a little different. We will get to the hot story of the day. And Rachel is actually going to come back and help me with that. She really is.

But first, I want to talk about crying, because I`m also going to talk about some things that have made me cry. And I might have to pause once or twice when I do that. So, I just want you to be forewarned, because what could be more shocking than an anchorman crying?

The first commandment of television is, anchormen don`t cry, which is why I will never be and will never feel like a real anchorman.

If an anchorman was ever going to cry, it would have been November 22nd, 1963.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

WALTER CRONKITE, TV ANCHOR: From Dallas, Texas, the flash apparently official. President Kennedy died at 1:00 p.m. Central Standard Time, 2:00 Eastern Standard Time. Some 38 minutes ago.

Vice President Johnson has left the hospital in Dallas. But we do not know to where he has proceeded. Presumably, he will be taking the oath of office shortly and become the 36th president of the United States.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

O`DONNELL: There is no moment in anchorman history that anchormen admire more than that, the composure, the strength, the authority. When the rational emotional response was to throw his hands down on the desk and cry. Cry for JFK, cry for his young children, cry for the country.

I was a kid at St. Brendan`s Elementary School in Boston that day, President Kennedy`s hometown. When we were let out of school early, every one of us was crying, every teacher was crying, adult men walking the streets of Boston carrying briefcases, men who looked like Walter Cronkite, were crying. Cops were crying, subway cars were filled with people crying.

But anchormen didn`t cry. I marveled at the anchormen who didn`t cry that day. I wondered how they got all that ice in their veins.

But now, I understand it. If an anchorman cries he will make the story about himself. There will be a giant headline saying, anchorman cries!

It was a Friday when those first graders and teachers were murdered in Newtown, Connecticut. I normally don`t do this show on Fridays. But the network asked me to do a special edition of THE LAST WORD that night and I said I couldn`t do it, because I would just sit at my anchorman desk and cry. And that would make the story about me.

No words came to me that day about what happened to those children, just feelings, because I`m not a real anchorman. I just play one on TV. And I`m not sure anchormen helping teach America how to suppress emotion in the face of tragedy has been such a good thing for this country.

Anchormen aren`t the only people who suppress emotion in the face of tragedy now. Did you cry when you heard about those college kids getting stabbed and shot by the mass murderer in Santa Barbara last month?

The constant recurrence of public tragic events has coarsened us all. But I`ve been shut off from all of that for the last several weeks. I`ve been consuming almost no news. It has been 75 days since I put on a neck tie and did my anchorman thing, and a lot has happened to me, beginning with the longest few seconds of my life.

It was just after dark fell on Saturday night in "Pirates of the Caribbean" territory, the Virgin Islands. I was in a taxi, a big van with three rows of seats. I was in the first row behind the driver, my big brother Michael was in the row behind me. He`s not bigger than I am anymore, but when I was 4 and he was 12, he was a lot bigger and a lot smarter and a lot braver.

You know, of all the advantages a boy can have growing up there`s nothing quite like a heroic big brother. And Michael O`Donnell`s three little brothers have always had that advantage every day of our lives.

Michael saw the crash coming and yelled something, a billionth of a

second before the noise started. I was looking down at a map on my iPhone. And so, it was the deafening noise that told me we were in a collision. The noise seemed to go on forever. I couldn't see anything in the darkness except the light of the radio in the center of the dashboard in front of me.

And as the front end of that taxi was being crushed that radio just kept moving closer and closer and closer to me. And I had what felt like a very long time to think about dying and what a stupid way to die this was, and to think about my daughter.

And then the radio suddenly stopped moving. And the noise stopped. And I wasn't dead. I could see. And I could hear. And I could move my hands and my arms worked.

I wasn't dead. I was lucky to be alive. That cliché, lucky to be alive, was suddenly so true to me, so profound. It was such a warm feeling.

We should all feel it all the time but a lot of us don't, until we get this close to the end. I had a couple of near-death experiences in my teens and 20s, a motorcycle, that kind of thing. But I was too young to learn the lesson. But at 7:45 p.m. on April 12th, 2014, I finally got it. Lucky to be alive.

I felt so lucky to be alive that if you told me then that I just lost a leg, I would have said, that's OK. I'm lucky to be alive. When the noise of the crash finally stopped, there was a new noise in the van. It was a sound I had never heard before. My big brother in agony.

Michael instantly and correctly self-diagnosed a broken femur. His thigh bone was broken. It's the biggest bone in the body. It takes tremendous force to break it. It's one of the most painful bone fractures you can get.

I thought I was OK. I couldn't see my legs below the knee. They were trapped under the driver's seat. Michael asked if I could move my toes. I said I could. And then and only then he told me that meant I wasn't paralyzed.

When someone leaned into the taxi and asked how many injured, I said just one. I was wrong. Luckily both of the drivers were uninjured. The drunk driver who hit us was saved by an air bag. Our taxi driver, a wonderful man, had his livelihood ruined that night but his seat belt allowed him to go home to his wife that night and visit us in the hospital the next day.

The little island we were on as a little hospital that can do X-rays but cannot do surgery. The X-rays showed that Michael needed surgery for the broken femur, and I needed surgery for a broken hip that didn't really begin to hurt until I was pulled out of the taxi.

And then my family went to work. Not the O'Donnells this time. My work family.

You know those people who tell you that the company they work for is like family to them? And you don't believe them? How's this for family?

A team led by the president of this network, Phil Griffin, and Pat Fili-Krushel, head of the NBC News group, worked through the night to get me back to New York for surgery and they did exactly the same thing for my brother Michael. They didn't have to do that. They sure didn't have to get my brother but they did. That's what family does.

At some point in the rest of the years that I work here, I hope to find the words to adequately thank Phil and Pat and Izzy Povich (ph) and Greg Cordic (ph) and everyone who worked those 18 hours to get two air ambulances to bring me to New York and Michael to Boston so he could be with his family when he came out of surgery.

Our planes landed around midnight Sunday night. An ambulance took me to a place I had never heard of, the Hospital for Special Surgery. It's rated number one in the country and therefore the world for orthopedic surgery. The first words I saw when I was rolled into the hospital was the name "David H. Koch." Yes, that David Koch.

Now brace yourselves, please, for the first positive words said about David Koch on this program. I agree with Harry Reid's critique of the Koch brothers' contributions to American politics, but that is not the only thing they contribute to. They have given \$100 million to Lincoln Center. They have given huge amounts of money to medical research and treatment. David Koch has given over \$25 million to the hospital that put me and many other men, women, and children back together, people with much worse injuries than I had.

David Koch's money helped make their hospital experience a better one and that is a very, very good thing.

F. Scott Fitzgerald spoke to what some of you are feeling right now when he said, "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function."

You can pass that test. I know you can. You can be outraged by what the Koch brothers do with their money in politics, and you can appreciate what they contribute to hospitals and medical research. And you can do that at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.

Look, I'm doing it right now. And I'm still sort of functioning.

And so yes, I feel some gratitude to David Koch, and I feel much more gratitude to many more people than I will ever be able to thank. The emergency medical technician in Portola (ph) who got Michael out of that taxicab and then got me out of that taxi scab, both of us on stretchers. I wish I knew his name. Or the names of the strong men in that neighborhood who rushed from their houses, they rushed in there to help lift our stretchers out of that taxicab.

I've thanked my brilliant surgeon, Dr. David Helfet many times and I'll never stop thanking him. Dr. Helfet, like many friends in showbiz business today sent me an e-mail joking about how he can't bring himself to say, break a leg tonight.

Living among the medical community as I did for weeks was a huge

revelation to me. I`d never been hospitalized before. I had never seen the extraordinary daily kindness and heroism of nurses up close. I had never depended on them.

For weeks, I was completely dependent on them. I had only one real day and night of pain in the hospital after surgery, and it was a giant order of magnitude. The worst pain I have ever experienced. It is actually an ordeal that many post-surgical patients go through and I cannot get into the details now, because it is just too gross, trust me. I`m not kidding about that.

And if you`ve been through it, you know what I`m talking about. A nurse named John Frank Ellis got me through that night. It was in its way as hard a night for John as it was for me. I`ve never been more dependent on anyone in my adulthood and never been more grateful.

The next time when John came back on duty, I gave him a thank you note in a sealed envelope, with some cash in it. A lot of cash in it. A token of my indescribable gratitude.

John took the envelope, the sealed envelope, he left the room, a few minutes later he came back in and he said my thanks was all that mattered to him, and he handed me back the money.

And he told me that it was against his personal ethics and against hospital policy to accept gifts like that. I had no idea. I had no idea I`d crossed a line. This was all new to me.

So, you can tip people who clean your room in hotels but you can` t tip nurses, I didn` t know that. Great nurses don` t do it for the money. Yes, they care about and they rely on their paychecks, but they couldn` t do the work they do, the great nurses couldn` t do that, they couldn` t do it the way they do it, if the motivation didn` t come from the goodness of their hearts.

You wouldn` t recognize John as a hero if you saw him going to or from work on the subway with his backpack and John doesn` t ask to be treated like a hero. None of the nurses I met want that. They want to make a living that allows them to support their families and they want to help people in the process. People they don` t even know, including people who will forget them.

The doctors and nurses I have met have something that most of the rest of us don` t have. The absolute certainty every time they go to work that they`re going to do something important today, something invaluable, for someone else.

All the physical therapists who have been helping me learn to walk again have that same quiet kindness, that same dedication.

When you watch us on TV getting all caught up in the news of the day, which often means the bad news of the day, it`s worth trying to remember that an awful lot went right in this country today. Yes, we have a dysfunctional Congress. But not far down the street from them, we have people working in hospitals doing remarkable things to save lives, every day.

When's the last time you saved a life? I've never done that either. If you saved a life, a baby, a mother, a grandfather, don't you think you would feel that was more newsworthy than what some angry, ineffectual politician said in Washington today?

I'm not sure there's anything we in the news business can do about that, but you can. You can listen to what we think the news of the day is but never lose sight of the fact that more good things happened in America and the world today than we can possibly report to you or that we know how to report to you. Don't ever lose that perspective.

The nurse who spent the most time with me in New York is Shannon Lawrence. Our shared name was less interesting to me than her first name, Shannon. As an Irish-American kid growing up in a place like Boston, I developed an ear for the ethnicity in every name. On our first day together I asked Shannon how she got an Irish first name.

She said her father was wounded in World War II and was sent to a hospital in England for treatment. The nurses there literally did not want to touch the black soldiers in that hospital. Then an Irish nurse came along and took good care of Shannon's father. The Irish nurse's name was Shannon.

It would be a beautiful story even if Shannon didn't grow up to become a nurse. But she did. And so, it's a perfect story.

My nurse Shannon has spent her life sharing the same healing kindness and grace that her father's nurse did. And on my last day in New York -- I told Shannon that if I had another daughter, I would name her Shannon.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

O'DONNELL: We have a new service here this sum over THE LAST WORD. I'm going to call them 60-second updates.

A lot of you are taking vacations, a lot of you are unplugging from news for a while in the summer. You're going to need to be updated on what's going on.

And the first person who really needs to be updated on what's going on is me.

And joining me now to help with that is Rachel Maddow who has hung around.

Rachel, as you know, I'm the Rip Van Winkle of news. I've slept through the last 75 days. And when I went to sleep, the one thing I was sure of was the Iraq war's over. Can you give me the 60-second update on that?

RACHEL MADDOW, TRMS HOST: I can. I have to tell you, your opening remarks were absolutely stunning. I will struggle through my emotional reaction to them and tell you what's going on in Iraq.

So, you know that Iraq is majority Shiite. Saddam was a Sunni. Had a sunny despotic government. We overthrew Saddam and installed a Shiite government.

Remember a few months ago, you may have heard that Fallujah was overrun by Sunni militants? Well, that same group of Sunni militants that had overrun Fallujah has now overrun a whole huge swath of Iraq, including the very large city of Mosul. They've basically erased the border between Iraq and Syria and the Syrian civil war, including taking over two border crossings.

The United States has sent 300 Green Berets and we've beefed up our embassy security presence as well. President Obama so far says no U.S. combat in Iraq for a second round.

It's really, really bad and I'm glad you missed most of it.

O'DONNELL: And so, Rachel, I assume Dick Cheney has apologized for wreaking this havoc in that region of the world?

MADDOW: Not exactly. That's not really how it's worked out.

Nor has the media apologized for considering all the neo conservatives to be expert in the region in 2003 and they keep booking them to talk about it now. It's terrible.

O'DONNELL: All right. Well, I'm going to actually start doing some homework and filling in the blanks myself.

Thank you very much, Rachel. I really appreciate it.

MADDOW: Welcome back. We love you, Lawrence.

O'DONNELL: Thanks, Rachel.

All right. Coming up we're going to have more on this, Steve Schmidt is going to join me, we're going to hear some surprising remarks from Rand Paul.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

BARACK OBAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: The test now, not just for Mr. Maliki, but all of the leadership in Iraq is, are they able to set aside their suspicions, their sectarian preferences, for the good of the whole? And we don't know. The one thing I do know is that if they fail to do that, then no amount of military action by the United States can hold that country together.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

O'DONNELL: That was the president on "MORNING JOE" this morning saying, of course, the obvious, that the U.S. alone cannot solve the problems in Iraq.

And Republican Senator Rand Paul said essentially the same thing yesterday on "Meet the Press."

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

SEN. RAND PAUL (R), KENTUCKY: I look at it on a personal basis. I

ask, do I want to send one of my sons or your son to fight to regain Mosul?
And I think, yes, these are nasty terrorists, shouldn't we want to kill them?

But I think, who should want to stop them more? Maybe the people who live there. Should not the Shiites, the Maliki government, should they not stand up? And if they're ripping their uniforms off and fleeing, if they don't think Mosul's worth saving, how am I going to convince my son or your son to die for Mosul?

(END VIDEO CLIP)

O'DONNELL: The Paul family has always been out of sync with Republicans on the Iraq war. You will remember that Rand Paul's father Ron Paul was a vocal opponent of the war and when he was running for president, he was one of seven lawmakers who voted against it -- but when he was running for president, he actually introduced anti-war rhetoric into the Republican presidential debate forums.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

THEN-REP. RON PAUL (R), TEXAS: There was no al Qaeda in Iraq. And they had nuclear weapons and we had to go in and I'm sure you supported that war as well.

It's time we quit this, it's time -- it's trillions of dollars we're spending on these wars.

My point is, is if another country does to us what we do to others, we're not going to like it very much. So, I would say that maybe we ought to consider a golden rule in foreign policy. Don't do to other nations what we don't want to have them do to us.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

O'DONNELL: Dick Cheney seems to believe now that there is a statute of limitations on public quotations about going to war.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

DICK CHENEY, FORMER VICE PRESIDENT: If we spend our time debating what happened 11 or 12 years ago, we're going to miss the threat that is growing and that we do face. Rand Paul, with all due respect, is basically an isolationist. He doesn't believe we ought to be involved in that part of the world. I think it's absolutely essential.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

O'DONNELL: Joining me now is Steve Schmidt, MSNBC political analyst and a Republican strategist.

Steve, it's kind of fascinating to see this. This Paul splinter in the Republican Party over this kind of issue. We saw it a long time ago in the Democratic Party when an anti-war faction, and it was only a faction, developed during Vietnam.

Do you see parallels to then and now?

STEVE SCHMIDT, MSNBC POLITICAL ANALYST: I do. First, Lawrence, it's really great to see you back and thank you for sharing that extraordinary opening with everybody watching tonight. It was really incredible.

O'DONNELL: Thanks, Steve.

SCHMIDT: Look, I think we throw this term around, isolationist. That has a very specific meaning. And the Republican Party, last time we had a big debate on this between the internationalist wing and the isolationist wing of the party, 1952 between Eisenhower and Taft.

But if you look at Eisenhower as the quintessential Republican internationalist, it's important to remember Eisenhower chose not to intervene militarily in Hungary in '56, chose not to intervene militarily in the Suez crisis. Had a great deal of restraint and a lot of circumspection about the use of American boots on the ground.

So, what is it that we are defining as isolationism? Is it the unwillingness to send in a large American land army to Baghdad, to Iraq, for the third time in 20 years? And I don't think that labeling someone an isolationist because of their opposition to that is going to hold water necessarily in a Republican primary, because I think Rand Paul is where the country is. And I think where he is where an overwhelming majority of Republicans on this issue.

I don't think there's any constituency that wants to see American ground forces engaged in a huge way fighting ISIS in Iraq right now. And the reality on the ground is, we have two sets of American enemies. We have Shia extremists and Sunni extremists who are now in a death match, a death struggle with each other, and the Iranians have enormous equities in being able to keep their supply routes across Iraq open into Syria.

So, you know, we have a national security interest I think in seeing both groups of enemies degrade themselves, and certainly, ISIS, the Sunni extremists, they are awful, they are a threat to the security of the United States. But the president is entirely right. There's no amount of American action that can recork the sectarian hatreds that have been unleashed here.

Shia and Sunni have been fighting an intractable war against each other for the better part of 700 years. There's no amount of American manpower that's going to be able to stop that. So, we have a very difficult situation on the ground.

We have a prejudice of news coverage in the country, Lawrence, where we think that everything that happens in the world is derivative of something United States does or does not do. And in fact, culture and religion are powerful forces and we see it all playing out as these lines drawn after world war I now are beginning to unravel in this country effectively partitioned in the way Joe Biden suggested it should almost a decade ago.

O'DONNELL: Steve, when Rand Paul yesterday was given that forum in which he could have done like other Republicans, tried to blame the current chaos in Iraq on President Obama, he very specifically said the words "I don't put blame on President Obama." It's kind of extraordinary to hear

that, although when you understand the Paul family`s consistency on this position, that`s all we`re seeing here is someone being consistent.

SCHMIDT: And I do think that there are some big differences between the father and the son`s views on foreign policy. But for sure, you know, the person to blame here overwhelmingly is Prime Minister Maliki. We were hoping that Iraq would produce a George Washington. What we got was a Shia sectarian politician who has uncorked all of this and it`s a great tragedy unfolding.

O`DONNELL: Steve Schmidt, thank you very much for joining us tonight.

SCHMIDT: Great to see you again, Lawrence.

O`DONNELL: Thanks.

Coming up, Darrell Issa tonight. More of Darrell Issa. The things I missed while I was away.

We`ll be back.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

REP. DARRELL ISSA (R), CHAIRMAN, HOUSE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE: This was a targeting of the president`s political enemies, effectively, and lies about it during the election year.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

LAWRENCE O`DONNELL, MSNBC ANCHOR, THE LAST WORD: In the spotlight tonight, Darrell Issa called a very unusual after-hour committee hearing which is actually still going on right now. It`s about Lois Lerner`s lost e-mails which Darrell Issa likened to this.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

ISSA: This event in history, like Watergate, like teapot dome, like many other historic events, will be studied by future generations.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

O`DONNELL: Here was the IRS commissioner`s basic answer to the question of the missing e-mails.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: You told us that all e-mails would be provided.

JOHN KOSKINEN, IRS COMMISSIONER: All the e-mails we have will be provided. I did not say I would provide you e-mails that disappeared, if you have a magical way for me to do that, I`d be happy to know about it.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

O`DONNELL: According to my people monitoring the hearing tonight, it was not Darrell Issa who had the must-see exchange of the night. Watch this.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

KOSKINEN: The inspector general will issue a report. We will all get the benefit of that report. And then we can determine what the appropriate action is --

REP. MICHAEL TURNER (R), OHIO: I have always believed that what happened in your agency with Lois Lerner is a crime. I believe that there were others involved. I believe the e-mails that are missing are the ones that would probably give us an ability to establish that. And I believe that somebody undertook criminal act in its destruction. And I believe that since you can't tell me I'm wrong and it's enough of a doubt in your mind as the commissioner of that agency you should call the FBI.

KOSKINEN: That's an interesting set of belief with no facts behind them.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Gentleman's time is expired.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

O'DONNELL: Joining me now is Julian Epstein, former majority staff director of the house government operations community.

Julian, first of all, what are they doing at this hour? I have never seen a hearing take place at this hour.

JULIAN EPSTEIN, FORMER MAJORITY STAFF, HOUSE GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMUNITY: Well, it is very odd. Originally when the hearing was scheduled, the ways and means committee got in front of the government reform and oversight committee, scheduled a hearing for Friday. What the hearing was originally supposed to be scheduled for Tuesday so Darrell Issa tried to jump in front of another committee and schedule it on Monday night so he could jump in front of the ways and means committee. The ways and means committee actually held a hearing on Friday.

And it looked like children just kind of scrambling to be the first to try to get the headline. It underscores the fundamental point that these hearings have from the very beginning been about nothing other than cheap shots and headlines and still, after dozens of hearings, after hundreds of thousands of pages of documents, after tens of thousands of e-mails that have been produced, scores of witnesses, the Republicans have not produced a scintilla of evidence to back up any of the charges they have made in this matter.

O'DONNELL: And Julian, I'm prepared to be corrected on anything I say here tonight because -- but as I understand it, they have an awful lot of Lois Lerner's e-mails. They have hundreds and hundreds of her e-mails. They just don't have them for a certain calendar period, right?

EPSTEIN: Right. They don't have them for a certain period of time. Most of the period of time -- there was a crash in Lois Lerner's e-mails where she lost e-mails from January of 2009 to about June of 2011. That was before the investigation had started. That was before Lois Lerner knew that the Cincinnati office had engaged in the improper enhanced screening of conservative organizations.

The IRS has been able to find most of these e-mails by going to people she sent e-mails to or received e-mails from. So most of the e-mails in question have been -- will be produced to the committee. The e-mails after 2011, 2012 remember was the period that was being most heavily scrutinized, have all been produced.

Again, this is just kind of more showcasing and I think demagoguery by Republicans that are looking for an issue, because they have invested, they have invested so much into trying to produce some evidence of wrongdoing by the administration. They produced none.

E-mail crashes occur regularly as Koskinen pointed out tonight, three to five percent of the IRS computers crash regularly. In the Bush administration you'll recall during some of the most important investigations, the investigation into Valerie Flame, as many as five e-mails may have disappeared. And the investigation into the firing of the U.S. attorney, the special counsel in that case, Mr. Fitzgerald reported that scores of e-mails were lost by the White House and improperly used their private accounts during the torture memo investigation. Lots of e-mails weren't able to be accounted for. You never heard the Republicans going to the microphones and going before the cameras to complain about it then.

Again, this is a story that hasn't fundamentally changed. It was a Republican staffer in a Cincinnati office that led a rogue operation to do this enhanced screening. No evidence of any White House or treasury department involvement in the enhanced screening. Democrat and Liberal groups were also targeted.

As you have pointed out, this enhanced screening should have occurred because many of the groups in question were gained in political activities. The problem is more liberal groups weren't also screened at the same time. But none of the fundamental narrative has changed which is the Republicans have made the most irresponsible accusations. They've behaved in the most disrespectful manner to John Koskinen, who is a revered public official, and they have produced no evidence whatsoever to back up any of the claims of impropriety.

O`DONNELL: Julian Epstein, thanks for monitoring the hearing for us tonight.

EPSTEIN: And so happy to see you back, Lawrence.

O`DONNELL: Thanks a lot, Julian.

Coming up next, now it's time for the good news. A story that could have ended in a bad way and didn't.

And in the rewrite tonight, a very special rewrite. A lesson in political disagreement and comedy.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

O`DONNELL: And now for the good news. 27-year-old Marian Ibrahim is free tonight after being sentenced to death in Sudan for marrying a Christian man. A Sudanese court ordered her freed after she was imprisoned

for marrying outside the Muslim religion. Ibrahim has one son who lived with her in jail and she gave birth to another child in jail last month. And now she is free.

Coming up next, "the rewrite," and if you remember when David Letterman was the hot new thing in late night, you are going to love tonight's "rewrite."

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: It's like looking in the mirror.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: I know. God! When did I get so ugly?

(END VIDEO CLIP)

O'DONNELL: Jimmy Fallon is doing things in late-night TV that we've never seen before. He is rewriting the comedic possibilities for late-night talk shows. Where David Letterman does funny interviews with Brian Williams, Jimmy makes Brian sing.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

DAVID LETTERMAN, COMEDIAN: How about a little Regis. Just before you go, you're leaving to go to Russia, how about a little Regis.

BRIAN WILLIAMS, NBC NIGHTLY NEWS ANCHOR: Dave, I'm having a series of lunches at the Russian tea room here in New York city. But try to get up for the game to get ready for the trip over there to see Vladimir Putin and those Russian mountains and the Palm Trees down at ground level. This is an unbelievable place over there!

JIMMY FALLON, COMEDIAN: Obama's got Republicans in a compromising position and now he's ready to push his package through Congress.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

O'DONNELL: But long before Jimmy was the hot new thing in late night, Dave was the hot new thing in late night. That's right, people under 40. The current oldest comedian in late night was once the hot new thing. Back when he was doing stuff like this.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Theoretically I'll -- I'll hit the wall and stay there, right?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Yes. Theoretically.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: OK.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Go high.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: High as I can go. OK. Could you --

(END VIDEO CLIP)

O`DONNELL: Dave was a great Velcro man. But Dave didn`t invent Velcro man, he just played the part. Beautifully, wouldn`t you say? Let`s take another look.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: OK, could you --

(END VIDEO CLIP)

O`DONNELL: I wanted to take another look because it`s a look inside the mind of Sandy Frank. Velcro man was Sandy Frank`s idea. Sandy was a math major of Harvard, then went to Harvard law school, signed up with a big boring corporate law firm in the town in Manhattan, and was of course, instantly bored.

He reached back to his Harvard lampoon, humor writing skills and wrote a submission to the letterman show which Dave loved. And Sandy suddenly was in show business. Here`s a picture of some of the Letterman writers in those days. There`s Sandy right beside Chris Elliot.

Sandy sometimes played wildly crazy characters on the show. Sandy won four writing Emmys working for Dave. Then he got another Emmy nomination writing for "in living color." Sandy went on to write for other comedies.

I hired sandy for his first job in drama on a series I created for NBC. I couldn`t have done that if Sandy hadn`t given me my first job as a TV writer on a comedy pilot that he was co-writing with Matt Wickline.

I had been close to Sandy in college and we grew closer after college. He helped me through some depressing years of struggle writing a book which he also helped show me how to write.

Two years ago Sandy was diagnosed with a form of cancer that no one survives. The day after my surgery in April, I got the news that I knew was coming at any moment. Sandy was gone, 59 years old, a wonderful wife, three strong, smart, loving daughters.

We all discovered knowing it`s coming doesn`t make it easier. In our four decades together, Sandy and I never once agreed about politics. We never once voted for the same person, not once. We talked about politics a normal amount, which is to say, not a lot.

Certainly not as much as we talked about writing and movies and books that we love and our families and friends and all sorts of other things. We never avoided politics. We talked about it whenever it naturally came up. That`s the way most people who aren`t professionally engaged in politics talk about politics.

We never once had a tense moment when talking about politics. Sandy was a real right-wing over some things and a solid conservative Republican on others. And I`m, you know, a socialist. Have been since college. Every day Sandy knew me.

So come on, America. We can do this. We can disagree about politics without hating each other. We can disagree about politics the way we disagree about movies and music and food. It`s OK. You don`t have to hate

me if you disagree with me. You don't.

But one politician I worked for understood this. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan was a liberal democrat who invited his conservative friends and his liberal friends to the same dinner tables and there they sat merrily dining and disagreeing about politics.

Yes. That used to happen in Washington. Because people like Pat Moynihan understood the difference between disagreeing and fighting, he difference between disagreeing and insulting.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: The energy tax a fight until death or are you willing to compromise a little bit with senator borne, modify it --

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Fight to the dead over taxes? Oh, you know. Women, country, God, things like that. Taxes? No.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

O'DONNELL: Of course, disagree is easier if you're laughing. And Sandy Frank always found the joke in everything, including politics.

Maybe the next time I have a conservative on the show we should begin with a clip of "Velcro Man," just to get the conversation going the right way, with a laugh.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: OK, could you --

(END VIDEO CLIP)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

O'DONNELL: In our next segment, everything I know about it will be what I read in the teleprompter. But E.J. Dionne is here to help me through it. Be right back.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

O'DONNELL: Republican Senator Thad Cochran of Mississippi will get a second chance tomorrow night. The GOP Senate runoff between Cochran and tea party challenger Chris McDaniel has drawn national attention, mostly because of how heated the campaign has been.

McDaniel narrowly beat the 7th term incumbent in the primary on June 3rd because McDaniel didn't cross the 50 percent threshold. The runoff is scheduled for tomorrow. The Senate race has been one of the strangest in the country.

Joining me now is "Washington Post" columnist and MSNBC contributor E.J. Dionne who has been in Mississippi covering this very strange race.

E.J., give me something strange about it.

E.J. DIONNE, COLUMNIST, THE WASHINGTON POST: First of all, welcome back. And you almost made me late tonight because I was just sitting there

watching that extraordinary introduction. People don't say thank you enough. And you said it beautifully. So thank you for that.

O'DONNELL: Thanks.

DIONNE: You know what's extraordinary about this is that Chris McDaniel will probably win tomorrow unless African-American voters vote for a Republican candidate. And you have a conservative Republican candidate, senator Cochran, going all-out to get African-American voters down there to do something that they would never dream of doing, which is voting in a Republican primary, partly because McDaniel is a kind of neo confederate. Partly because Cochran has been open to African-Americans and has done things for particular constituencies down there.

But culturally, it is very hard in Mississippi for an African-American to vote in a Republican primary. I was down there for the primary. I visited a precinct. You have a table. Republicans here, Democrats here. All the Republicans were white. All the Democrats were black. It's really racially polarized. So it's going to be a fascinating day tomorrow.

O'DONNELL: And there's been a little bit of a few awkward moments. According to my notes that I was just cheating, looking at here while you were speaking, E.J.

DIONNE: A few awkward moments. Well, there were moments when Cochran had seemed out of it.

O'DONNELL: Yes.

DIONNE: McDaniel has gone over the top on a bunch of issues, including some of his past as a talk show host. It's not easy to be a talk show host and run for the Senate. And -- but it's also just been vicious. And you've got governor -- former Governor Haley Barbour and his relatives who have really been all-in for Cochran. And the amazing thing would be beating Haley Barbour's machine which McDaniel seems on the vernal of doing.

O'DONNELL: How much of this is Thad Cochran's out of shape, he's the senior senator, he hasn't had a challenge like this?

DIONNE: I think that's a lot of it, he's been there a long time. He didn't really want to run, a lot of people say, and was pushed into it because he was going to be chair of the appropriations committee if the Republicans took over and Mississippi wanted the money.

Here's my fantasy. McDaniel wins and Travis Childers, the conservative Democrat, is a pretty strong candidate. The Democrats hold the Senate by one seat winning Mississippi in November.

O'DONNELL: We're saving that video, E.J., for the night that that becomes that video for the night that comes true.

E.J. Dionne, thank you very much for joining me tonight help me out.

DIONNE: Welcome back.

O'DONNELL: Thanks.

Chris Hayes is up next.

END

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