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(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

ROBERTS: Well, the news this week was the interview of Juanita Broadrick, a woman in Arkansas who claims that 20 years ago, 21 years ago, then Governor Bill Clinton raped her. And she gave a very compelling interview, and the question is, now what? Do people -- George Stephanopoulos, pay attention to this -- the idea that the president might have raped somebody?

STEPHANOPOULOS: Well, who wasn't president. The people are not paying attention to this and I don't know where it can go. You know, one thing, if you look at this, there are a lot of patterns here. We have a pattern on the president, bad behavior with women, lying about it.

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ROBERTS: But this is beyond...

STEPHANOPOULOS: This is beyond bad. This is -- if it's true, it's well beyond that. I can't say it's true. I don't think that anybody here can say it's true. I don't know that it's not true. We also have a pattern, though I think is disturbing for our work, of this kind of pressure tactics to push a story into play before it might be ready.

You know, we've seen this from the very beginning. You have the Jennifer Flowers starts out in a Star tabloid. Paula Jones, the American Spectator, Monica Lewinsky with Matt Drudge, and now this on the Wall Street Journal editorial page. And I think we have a history of right wing pressure tactics to put things into play without verification.

WILL: All these women.

DONALDSON: George, I agree with you, we don't know whether it's true, absolutely not, but I think we should try to find out because I think it must matter if a woman was raped, or if a man is accused falsely of it. If that doesn't matter, think across the board...

STEPHANOPOULOS: Sam, I didn't say it doesn't matter.

DONALDSON: But you said -- you seem to suggest maybe there's nothing we can do about it.

STEPHANOPOULOS: Sam, the statute of limitations is up.

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DONALDSON: We want to hear the president's side of it.
STEPHANOPOULOS: Well, I agree with that.

DONALDSON: The president's lawyer has simply denied that there was any assault. I take it he asked Mr. Clinton. He does not tell us in his statement how he gets there.

STEPHANOPOULOS: This is another problem brought up by the last year. You know, the president's lawyer comes out and makes a statement and everybody has to start parsing it. What does the president say about this is a valid question.

WILL: One question that can be asked at the next press conference, were you in her hotel room on April 25, 1978?

DONALDSON: You don't have to be specific, George. Just say Mr. President did you, in fact, know this woman? Did you have any contact with her? Has she made it all up? Is it consensual if there was sex, what is your story, sir?

WILL: We're not hopelessly at sea in trying to evaluate a story like this. On the one hand, from the woman's side, did she make contemporaneous reports to friends? Yes she did.

More contemporaneous reports to friends than Anita Hill made in her alleged unpleasantness with Clarence Thomas. Second this, on the man side, is this out of character? Please.

DONALDSON: But we can't hang the president because there is a pattern here. This is a specific allegation.

WILL: Sure you can.

ROBERTS: The fact that the American people believe her, the polls -- the only poll that I have seen, a scientific poll have 60 some percent believing her, and it is because of the pattern. Believe her.

DONALDSON: The polls said the American people believe that the president has committed perjury, but leave him in office. Surely you're not telling me that the American people would say, I believe he's committed rape, but it's okay? I give up.

STEPHANOPOULOS: Wait a second. Believe me, I am going to say this again, I am not defending what may or may not have happened in 1978 in any way, but if this were a private citizen, the statute of limitations would have been up six years ago.

ROBERTS: But he's not a private citizen, and you know David Letterman made a joke this week about the next time we have a president, for God's sake, let's do a background check.

Now, this gets into the question, we are all accused all the time of asking too many questions about a candidate and about the candidate's life and all of those things. Here is -- this seems to me that you just ask more and more and more and more.

DONALDSON: Cokie you're right. NBC News should be commended for a fine job of journalism. They did not conclude the story was true, they laid out what they could about this story and what they could discover. Too many of us sit around in news

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rooms trying to figure out why we shouldn't tell the news. It's bad for the public, it's seamy, it's not good for the public, let's move on. Our job is to tell the news and let the public decide.

STEPHANOPOULOS: But the news, not rumor, innuendo, unverified reports. I agree with you.

(CROSSTALK)

I think NBC and the Washington Post reported this quite responsibly, but that's not how it got into play. It was in play on talk shows on the Internet long before that.

DONALDSON: Because too many of us didn't look into it earlier, either through fear or some, as I say, wrong desire to keep the American people pristine in this matter.

STEPHANOPOULOS: Maybe out of responsibility to check the facts before you report the story.

DONALDSON: We're all just checking the facts, I agree with you. That's what NBC did. They held the story, they said, so they could check the facts and they were right to hold it until they were satisfied.

ROBERTS: And there is always a certain intimidation factor of the legitimate press. I mean, campaigns -- campaign '92, there was a certain intimidation factor. I do think that sometimes it has to get in through the other means because people in the mainstream press get scared.

STEPHANOPOULOS: I think there's a lot of examples of intimidation on both sides.

DONALDSON: I'll never forget the time that Ronald Reagan joked with an open microphone before a radio address, he said, well, I've outlawed the Soviet Union, the bombing starts in five minutes. It was clearly a joke. That was recorded, however. But for hours news executives sat around trying to figure reasons why we shouldn't report that.

Finally, when someone else reported it, then we all did. We were very brave then.

ROBERTS: Where do you go from here with something like this?

WILL: There are obvious questions to ask the president, if and when he has another press conference suitable for this.

DONALDSON: He will in mid March, we're told.

WILL: But in fact the president will deny it. He will amplify what Mr. Kendall -- I don't know what role Mr. Kendall plays in this. This is not a lawyer's job to be a mouthpiece for the White House. He will deny that it happened and there it will sit.

DONALDSON: Maybe it didn't happen. He has a right to deny

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it George. We do want to hear Mr. Clinton's side of the story. He cannot hide behind a lawyer, who I suppose again asked him, sir, is this true or not. Mr. Kendall would not have made up this statement.

WILL: There are ways of denying I was not in the hotel room on April 25, 1978. I did not talk to her and ask to be forgiven or whatever it was in 1991.

STEPHANOPOULOS: It's probably not going to go very far at all with respect to President Clinton. I think is exactly right, he will get asked at some point he'll have to answer it in some fashion. The question is, what will happen in the next campaign? You already see a lot of the candidates trying to figure out different ways to block off questions.

George Bush Jr. saying that when I was young and irresponsible. I think that may work.

DONALDSON: He may have to explain that, don't you think?

ROBERTS: But I'm really curious about that because on the one hand, I did think that until this story. That everything else surrounding Bill Clinton, the people are tired of all of that and other candidates might be able to deflect those questions. But then when it gets to something this serious, I think the people start saying, as that David Letterman joke implies, maybe we better know more.

DONALDSON: Cokie, you can deflect the questions by saying -- all right, here are the answers and I'm going to lay it all out and then after this, I'm not going to discuss it anymore. You guys can discuss it if you want, but until someone comes clean, the questions will never stop.

STEPHANOPOULOS: I don't think you're going to see any charges of rape in the year 2000 campaign.

ROBERTS: That would be a blessing. And Sam and I will be back in a moment.

MORE .ETX

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(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

DONALDSON: Now here's a quick look at what's coming up from ABC news.

(ABC NEWS PREVIEW)

DONALDSON: Cokie, lot of people say, I don't want to hear more about this scandal. I'm tired of it. But I bet you that that'll have almost a Super Bowl style rating from people who don't want to hear about the scandal.

ROBERTS: Well, I'm going to be watching it. I hear it's a riveting interview and I'm really eager to see it.

DONALDSON: It's ground-breaking.

ROBERTS: So, that's all for us this Sunday. Until next week, that "This Week."

END .ETX

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