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Bloggers Ruffle Feathers With State of Union TV Duties

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It was a political panel disparate enough to make you do a double take: Journalist Andrew Sullivan and "Wonkette" blogger Ana Marie Cox were being asked by CNN's Wolf Blitzer for their reaction to the president's State of the Union address and the blogging world's take on it.

It did not take long for snippy postings to pop up on the Internet, pointing to the imbalance of experience between the two panelists (who, ironically, have both very recently decided to stop their Web-based work for mainly print mediums). And though their criticism of CNN's casting job may be motivated by a certain degree of envy, the bloggers also raise a point: It takes more than a blog to make a decent television pundit.

Mr. Sullivan served as an editor of The New Republic, has written numerous articles in influential print publications, and authored books on homosexuality and gay marriage. He was an early participant in the world of blogging on his own Web site, where he posts his work.

Ms. Cox, a former journalist who worked for American Prospect and Mother Jones magazines, runs a Web site that's best known for a lively but raunchy mix of sex, gossip, and politics. She was the first to reveal the identity of Jessica Cutler, a Senate mail clerk who was posting tales of her exploits on her own blog, Washingtonienne.

Ms. Cox did not respond to requests for comment.

"You've got Andrew Sullivan analyzing the political importance, imagery, and language in an important context. Whereas [Ms. Cox] is just offering up snark and shallow superficial jokes," said Bill Adolino, 29, in an interview with The New York Sun.

Mr. Adolino, of Washington D.C., criticized Ms. Cox's live Web commentary on his blog INDC Journal, just after she compared the hug between a soldier's mother and the Iraqi voter to "something from Michael Moore's playbook."

"One serious question though, what [person] over at CNN thought that Wonkette was capable of valid, reasoned political analysis that didn't involve...sex?" wrote "Mark" on More Eclipse Ramblings.

Fausta Wertz, a blogger in Princeton, N.J., who runs The Bad Hair Day Blog, weighed in that there are bloggers with greater political experience. "If they want a blogger, why not have Roger Simon [of U.S. News & World Report and Rogersimon.com] or Jeff Jarvis [of Buzzmachine.com]?" she asked the Sun. "Wonkette is the Paris Hilton of blogging. Paris has gotten very far on publicity. Beats me what else there is to her."

But others see this as the equivalent of putting up writers from Newsweek and InTouch to offer contrasting

opinions. "Just as there are gossipy publications, there are gossipy blogs. Just as there are serious publications, there are serious blogs," said Rob Goodspeed, coeditor of DCist.com, part of the Gothamist.com network. "[Ms. Cox] has a funny site. She doesn't ever pretend to do more than be a gossipy blog."

Indeed, Mr. Sullivan saw the booking as a study in contrast.

"I think they're looking to reach out to bloggy readers. The blogosphere contains many multitudes and approaches," he said via e-mail. "We're very different, but maybe that was the point."

The hope of attracting "bloggy readers" was very much on the mind of CNN Washington Bureau Chief David Bohrman, who produced the segment. "There are several hundred really key bloggers who have something to say and who are being listened to," he said.

He's looking for those viewers to get news out of the "typical, 'Eat your vegetables!' look at politics."

And Mr. Bohrman said he wants it to get even nuttier: "If I had my way, I'd cover politics from a bar. That's where people like to talk about politics. There's no reason why you need to talk about politics like you're in a Fortune 500 conference."

For some, though, this segment missed the boat. "Though she certainly has her funny moments, she's just plain crude," said National Review Online's Kathryn Jean Lopez. "And to have her seriously tracking or, worse, representing blogosphere thinking is ridiculous. CNN could spare us Wonkette."

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