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TV Beats Even the Pols in Illusion, Chicanery

By ELIZABETH JENSEN

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AS SEVERAL THOUSAND members of the media crammed into New Hampshire to cover yesterday's Republican primary election, some reporters wondered if that wasn't several thousand too many.

ABC's Jeff Greenfield, who frequently reports on the media, says this year's extravaganza is the most intense he's seen. "It's earlier, more obtrusive, and there are just more cameras, to the point where it seems like the candidates can't breathe," he says. When one candidate went out looking for voters to shake hands with, Mr. Greenfield says, it reminded him of a hostage situation, there were so many cameras around.

New Hampshire has a "college reunion aspect" for the reporters, he says. "Not being here is like not being invited to what seems like a neat party." The result of the media crush, he says, is that journalists' "judgment cycles" are faster than ever. "Candidates are elevated, scrutinized and discarded in the space of 48 hours," he says, all as a result of the "churn of gossip and speculation."

In fact, some reporters came to New Hampshire not to cover the political process at all, but to cover the coverage. TV Guide, Details magazine, Media Week, the Associated Press and this reporter, among others, tracked the comings and goings of the likes of Peter Jennings, Tom Brokaw and Dan Rather and their behind-the-scenes producers. "60 Minutes" corre-

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spondent Mike Wallace was in town not to report on the candidates, but to work on a profile of New York radio host Don Imus, who was broadcasting his morning show live from the High Five restaurant in Manchester. WMUR-TV, the local ABC affiliate, interviewed ABC News's Mr. Jennings, correspondents Cokie Roberts, Jim

into the next century.

CBS won't say how much it spent for the greenhouse-like addition, which required adding steel supports and air conditioning to compensate for the hot TV lights. Lane Venardos, CBS News's vice president of special events, says the money was well spent: "We'll save many times what we

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Wooten and Catherine Crier and political director Hal Bruno.

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FINDING A PRIME SPOT to anchor from is key for the broadcast networks. While ABC News took over WMUR's new anchor desk overlooking its impressive two-story newsroom, CBS News solved the quadrennial problem in an unusual way: It paid for the Wayfarer Hotel in Bedford, just outside Manchester, to remodel a balcony to accommodate a removable anchor desk used by Mr. Rather, the morning news and "Face the Nation." For its money, CBS has first dibs on the spot well

would have if we had to do it from scratch every four years."

The result is a snowy New Hampshire scene overlooking two waterfalls and a pond, so picturesque that one rival network executive thought CBS was using a fake backdrop. In the off years, Mr. Venardos says, "I'm sure it's a nice place for Bill and Martha who are celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary to have their picture taken."

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THE OPPOSITE SCENE was the muddy parking lot at WMUR, where a number of ABC affiliates, unbeknownst to

viewers at home, are broadcasting live reports out of the backs of U-Haul trucks.

ABC's NewsOne service for its local affiliates claims it came up with the idea over the weekend as a way to ward off the elements while still providing an outdoor backdrop for its live reports. "They were saying there was supposed to be a Nor'easter" on election day, explains Mike Simon, a NewsOne cameraman.

The broadcasters have equipped the \$20-a-day vans with high-powered heaters; when it's time to report, the back door is rolled up, the lights are turned on, and the correspondent sits on a plastic equipment case facing inside the truck, with the camera pointed out.

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THE BIG THREE networks aren't the only ones contributing to the media crush: Turner Broadcasting System Inc.'s Cable News Network is camped out in a building owned by local WMUR, and News Corp.'s Fox has a significant news operation at the primary for the first time. Though Fox has no national newscast as yet, it has former NBC correspondent Mike Schneider giving reports for affiliates from a cloth-draped table in the middle of a room in yet another space owned by WMUR. Fox has 80 people milling around with no discrete anchor location, so everyone in the room has to be quiet when the camera is on. Local stations are out in full force, as

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