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Feazell blasts TV report at media roundtable

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DALLAS — The credibility of a 10-part television series which raised questions about McLennan County District Attorney Vic Feazell's performance in office was part of a live media roundtable Sunday.

Channel 13, the Dallas-based Public Broadcasting System station, aired the one-hour report of media accountability, which included a segment about Channel 8 reporter Charles Duncan's investigative series about Feazell.

Channel 13 pointed out that the public's confidence in the accuracy of newspapers and television newscasts has decreased dramatically, according to a recent poll.

Feazell was asked if the media was fair to public officials.

"There is no way to characterize the media as a whole," Feazell said.

"Channel 8 spent an hour over a two-month period during primetime spreading their poison, and I appreciate any opportunity to administer the antidote," he said.

Feazell said Duncan's reports, "opened his eyes to an aspect of the media I had never seen before. When some one can come in and seem to have a total disregard for what the truth is ... it smacks of Hitler's big lie."

"As far as debating point by point, I really don't choose to do that," said Marty Haag, Channel 8 news director.

Haag said Channel 8 asked Feazell to respond to the series while it was being made, but he refused, adding that it also gave Feazell a two-minute, unedited response after the series had concluded.

"The press' responsibility and duty is to vigorously investigate the activities of public officials," Haag said.

"First of all, Vic Feazell is not this poor, beleagured district attorney sitting down there in Waco with no access to the media. The Waco television stations, the Waco newspapers have told his side of the story," Haag said.

The roundtable questioned not only Feazell's decision not to talk to Duncan, but also Duncan's decision not to talk to *D* magazine when it published a critical report of the Channel 8 investigation of Feazell in its October issue.

Feazell said he declined to talk to Duncan because he was told by people Duncan had interviewed that, "Duncan was not looking for the truth." Haag said Duncan declined to talk to *D* magazine because of Feazell's statements that he was considering filing a libel suit against Channel 8.

"That I think was inpardonable," said Ned Schnurman, former executive producer of "Inside Story" and director of the now defunct National News Council.

"The press, when it comes to criticism of itself, is probably as thin-skinned as any element in our society. And this man (Duncan) went out and did a serious series of reports about this district attorney, and whether they were right or they were wrong, they were provocative.

"A respectable magazine asked that reporter (Duncan) to justify some of his reporting, and he should have been ordered to do it by his boss," Schnurman said.

The show will re-air at 3 p.m. Sunday.