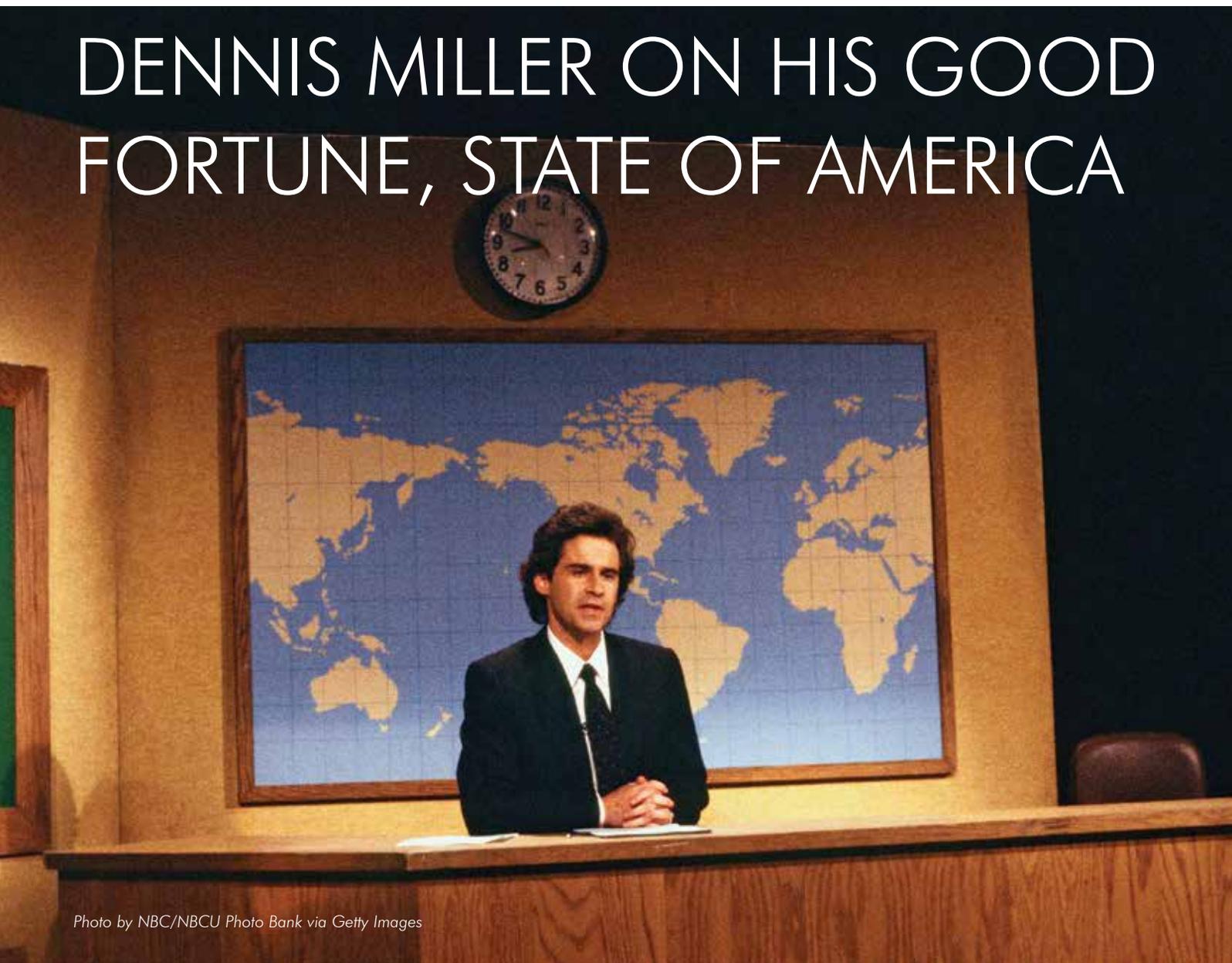


By Matt Ottinger

# 'THAT'S THE NEWS, AND I AM OUTTA HERE'

DENNIS MILLER ON HIS GOOD  
FORTUNE, STATE OF AMERICA



Dennis Miller credits his six-year reign as *Saturday Night Live's* "Weekend Update" host for solidifying his careers in both comedy and public policy commentary.

Conversely, he is often credited for reviving the segment. Case in point: *New York* magazine's pop culture web site *Vulture* recently ranked Miller at the top of "Weekend Update's" esteemed list of anchors through its storied history.

Miller, who still finds time for the occasional stand-up comedy special, has hosted talk shows on HBO and CNBC, wielded the mic in ABC's *Monday Night Football* booth for two seasons and currently *The Dennis Miller Show* can be found on radio stations across the country.

Furthermore, he's a weekly guest on *The O'Reilly Factor* on Fox News, in which he offers his conservative-leaning takes on the news du jour.

The veteran comedian will entertain the audience at the Indiana Chamber of Commerce's 25th Annual Awards Dinner in Indianapolis on November 6. He spoke with *BizVoice*® about his career and challenges facing the country.

**I grew up watching you on *Saturday Night Live* and enjoyed your recent exchange with fellow ex-cast member Seth Meyers on *Late Night* about being on the show. What did you enjoy most about *SNL*?**

**Dennis Miller:** "It changes your life. Can you imagine? You're a comedian. You're out of the loop, like most comedians are. Then all of a sudden not only do you get in a warm tent, it's like John le Carré or something – 'The Spy Who Came in From the Cold.' Then to get the 'Weekend Update' thing. I'm not much of an actor to begin with, so to get the part where you can sit there and kind of be yourself for 10 minutes in the middle of the show. To get it for six years – that's the biggest break I've ever had."

**How long does it take to get tired of the grind of being on the show?**

**DM:** "No, I wasn't tired; it's a great gig. I just felt eventually you should move on just because I do think it's a younger person's show, and I didn't want to be the guy coming back to the fraternity party the year after he graduated trying to (relate to) undergrads at the keg."

**What do you like about doing radio? Is it challenging coming up with content every day, or does the chaos in our nation's capital keep you in full supply?**

**DM:** "What I find is that if you ever try

radio, around a month in, you should try to do a show free associatively. If you can't, I'd get out of the business – because it's too hard. I just remember planning shows at the beginning and thinking 'Oh my God, I don't know if I can do this every day.' Let's face facts, out of a three-hour show, I believe you end up talking maybe an hour and 40 minutes ... but you can't really cobble together an hour and 40 minutes of (prepared) chat. And if you do, it's amazingly stilted and sounds like a kidnap note. So at some point, you have to think, 'Alright, there's around five things happening in the world. I'll lay them out there and take some phone calls.'

"I'm eight years in now and I like doing it. It's the same stuff I used to tell a shrink for \$300 an hour; now they pay me."

**You've been touring throughout the country with Bill O'Reilly on the *Bolder & Fresher Tour* for the past few years. How has that experience been?**

**DM:** "I don't know Bill all that well. We're friends, but he's a man unto himself. But I do know this; he makes a lot of money at the end of that show on books, pencils, doormats. Well, I can't speak to the books; he keeps a portion of that. But he gives everything he sells in that store to children's causes and (The Wounded Warrior Project). He's a man who walks the walk and I admire him."

**How was your experience with your latest stand-up special, "America 180," on the premium entertainment network, EPIX? Do you feel like it was well received?**

**DM:** "I didn't see any reviews, but I don't think I'm a darling of the media right now. But I spoke my piece; I felt good about it. They told me the first week at least it was the most downloaded comedy special in America. So I was happy about that for the people who put the money up. It was my ninth special. I think George Carlin has 13 and I might be right there in the two slot. I'm going to try to do a Crash Davis (Kevin Costner's character in the baseball film, *Bull Durham*) and stay out of the way and keep doing specials and maybe get up to Georgie someday."

**You've made a career for yourself in this realm of public policy commenting. Did that feel like breaking into a new field or is that a seamless transition for a comedian?**

**DM:** "'Weekend Update' led me there in an odd way. Once you get known for being a news guy on *SNL*, you kind of continue to do that. I got known as a topical comedian. I look at doing *The O'Reilly Show* once a week as being back at that 'Weekend Update' gig where I have eight to 10 minutes a week.

"Listen, I have no complaints with show business. My God, I'm 60 now and started going after it wholeheartedly in my late 20s. To have over a 30-year run, man, I hit the mother lode. I got lucky."

**I saw your Tweets (via @DennisDMZ) about the World Cup, and it seemed like you were genuinely enjoying the competition. (And I'd imagine theater enthusiasts enjoyed your reference to *The Producers*: "The World Cup produces more flops than pre-'Springtime' Bialystock.")**

**America was obviously as into this as its ever been. Some of your Twitter followers seem fearful that the country is becoming a nation of Europhiles, however. As a commentator on society, why do you think America was so into it? And is it a reflection of our shifting status or changing worldview?**

**DM:** "Yeah, I like the World Cup; I don't like soccer though. But it's a fellowship of man. It's a great big crazy confluence of the world, and young kids are more prone to view the world through the prism of America as a cog in the world – as opposed to America being its center point. So I think it's a fitting



**"California's going to Hell in a handbasket – and we don't even manufacture the handbaskets in-state anymore."**

– Dennis Miller

groove for kids today; they like to be part of the big, worldwide scene and there's nothing more emblematic of that than the World Cup."

**We have a new professional soccer team in Indiana (Indy Eleven) that actually sold out its season tickets before this inaugural season. Team officials say Millennials are really driving that.**

**DM:** "Oh, that's great. I can see them coming together over that. I don't think (younger people are) as predicated on wins and losses, but rather the journey and all that. Listen, everybody's generation moves on. My generation was predicated on Vince Lombardi saying, 'Winning is the only thing.' That's the way we were raised. But I've been to enough tug-of-wars at grade schools where they call it a tie after a couple minutes to know that's not as integral in a kid's DNA today."

**Since you mentioned Coach Lombardi and that other type of football, what did you enjoy about your experience in ABC's Monday Night Football booth? Also, what did you learn from it?**

**DM:** "Listen, any time they offer you *Monday Night Football*, you should take it – even if you suffer the slings and arrows. It's like my mother used to tell me when I first started showbiz: 'Oh quit whining, it's a good job.' I knew half the country would hate me and half would like me. In the beginning, I actually think more people disliked me, but by the end of the second year I'd worked it up to half and half."

"And I'm fine with that. I couldn't have predicated taking a job in the booth of *Monday Night Football* because I might be disparaged on Twitter – although I'm not even sure if that existed then. But I remember they used to vote on me on AOL the next day and half would hate me and half would like me. But I did notice there were about 700,000 people voting and I thought, 'Well, I guess if you're going to have this job, that will just be the nature of the beast and you should block it out and enjoy the gig.' So I had fun there for two years."

**At the Annual Dinner, you'll be speaking to Hoosiers, including many business leaders. You're a Pittsburgh guy – and it's a similar environment with regular folks and steel country. How will that drive your comments that evening? What do you plan to speak about?**

**DM:** "I'll talk about Quinn Buckner, Bobby Wilkerson, Kent Benson, Scott May and the greatest college team I ever saw at 33-0 (actually 32-0) – instead of the Steelers, that's how I shift it up for Indiana (he chuckles)."

"I remember I met (former Indiana University men's basketball coach Bobby Knight backstage at a speech in California. It was one of those things where they get a bunch of speakers together and hold an all-day seminar. I come off stage and hear, 'Miller!' It was almost like O'Reilly before his show. I look up and it's Coach Knight. Honest to God, I felt like I was in the military or something. I had such admiration for the guy and said, 'Hello, Coach Knight.' That's all I could get out (he laughs). So I'll talk a little about Coach Knight."

"And like you said, there's some overlap. I think Pittsburgh is closer to being a Midwest town than it is an East Coast town, and there's a commonality of experience there."

**What's the view of Indiana from out there on the West Coast? Is it a flyover state, or one that stands out in any way?**

**DM:** "I never view any place as a flyover state. I view California and New York as destinations, where you have to fly over the interesting states to get to them. California's going to Hell in a handbasket – and we don't even manufacture the handbaskets in-state anymore. It's not like I look at Indiana and think, 'Oh, those silly little people.' I look at Indiana and think, 'I wish my vote counted in a real place.'"

**Our state prides itself in getting things done – and our business climate is quite positive. But Washington still seems mired in gridlock. What will it take for it to be functional again?**

**DM:** "(Politicians need to) stop being a\*\*holes. I guess you can't print that."

"The Democrats always decry big corporations. Fine. I just happen to view government as the biggest corporation. Until they get to a point where money in equals money out, I'm not even going to pay attention anymore. I can't; it's too frustrating. These seem to be the most simple-minded things we could implement right away: term limits and a balanced budget amendment. If we're not going to have those, I can't get up every day and watch it. It's just too maddening."

**As we look forward to the presidential race in 2016, what qualities are you looking for in a candidate to lead America in the right direction? I've seen enough of your interviews to know you're no fan of Hillary Clinton, but what do you think the nation needs most as we try to right the course?**

**DM:** "Common sense. Like I said, we've got smart candidates, but they seem to have left common sense behind. I'm looking for somebody who gets it in a really pragmatic way – like (Ohio Gov. John Kasich), to pick a state near you."

**Is there anything you haven't yet accomplished that you'd like to?**

**DM:** "I'm fine; I got more than I deserve. Whatever happens from here is cool with me. I'm a 60-year-old man. I'm looking to do less, not more – and I've been lucky, brother. I'm not going to get greedy and think about what I haven't done. I've done everything I hoped to and more."



Dennis Miller offers insights during a panel discussion at "The Network Presidents" Newsmaker Luncheon in October 2005 in Los Angeles, California. (Photo by Stephen Shugerman/Getty Images for HRTS)