

HE'S BUSIER THAN EVER

By **Bob Schmidt** and **Bob Fairbanks**, Capitol Morning Report

The last vacation **Jack Kavanagh** remembers taking, he said, "**Matthew Brady** and I went to Yosemite and he took some nice pictures." **Matthew Brady**, of course, was the famous Civil War photographer, so it's possible **Kavanagh** was exaggerating some.

But it is understandable that it would seem that long. **Kavanagh** started his seven-day-a-week Rough and Tumble web site (rtumble.com) in 1997, and except for a couple of times when his body or his computer let him down, he hasn't missed a day.

And for some time now, that day has been getting longer. It used to be that **Kavanagh** could rise before dawn to spend three hours or so looking at stories on the websites of California's major newspapers and some others around the nation. From each, he would choose the stories (largely about government and politics) that he would then briefly summarize and place on Rough and Tumble along with a link to the original.

Kavanagh still does that. But as newspapers and other news gathering organizations move more and more of their content to the web, where updates and new developments can be posted at once, **Kavanagh** must stay abreast of it all and update his site accordingly.

Furthermore, there are bloggers to watch: not only reporters who post items to their papers' websites but also independents, some of whom may have been downsized from a news job and now write about topics they formerly covered. "These are not people who are 20-years-old and suddenly show up at the table with a point to make," **Kavanagh** said of the latter. "These are people who have past careers in public policy in California."

Among those he mentioned were **Ed Mendel**, formerly with the San Diego Union Tribune, who writes about the colossal financial business of state pensions; **Greg Lucas**, formerly with the SF Chronicle who writes about activities at the Capitol; **Jerry Roberts** and **Phil Trounstone**, former Capitol journalists who write about state politics.

Kavanagh also picks up items from **John Myers**, Capitol reporter for KQED public radio who maintains a news blog on the station's web site; and from **Joel Fox**, proprietor of the business oriented Fox and Hounds website.

What he won't pick up, he said, is "pure, political campaign pandering." He says he argues regularly "with people who think that because they write an op ed somewhere, they should be published."

Asked how he selects the blogs to watch, he said "It's my judgment. I look at who is writing, what he or she is writing about, and if that fits with right now, if it's relevant right now."

In any case, all this effort makes for a long day. "You can't do this unless you do it 24/7," **Kavanagh** said.

Because Rough and Tumble averages about 400,000 views per month, many people in the news business like the added exposure that **Kavanagh's** site provides. **Kavanagh** estimates that he looks at about 900 stories a day and says that he must move quickly through them. To be chosen, be brief. **Kavanagh** is no fan of what journalists call "the narrative lead;" that is,

stories that don't tell the reader what's happening until the third or fourth paragraph down.

"I don't have time to read through," he said. "If they can't write a lead, and they can't come up with a headline, I can't help them."

Kavanagh, now 62, started Rough and Tumble while covering the Capitol for a local TV station. "I was trying to get the producer to understand that there were important public policy issues that we weren't covering. I started putting together brief descriptions of the stories on those issues that the newspapers were publishing, just to show him the scope of issues that state government was dealing with.

"I put the compilation, just one or two sentences on each of the public policy issues being reported by the various papers, and put it on the Internet so the producer and the different bureaus we have could see it. Once it's on the Internet, anyone can see it

"My selling job failed, but enough people involved with public policy saw it and liked the idea of a daily snapshot of how issues were being covered., and one thing led to another and I started Rough and Tumble.

"There's no original content. I'm just helping people stay aware of what is being written about public policy issues in California."

Kavanagh said Rough and Tumble had no ads at the start, "but that just kind of happened. Business and issues people came to me and wanted to advertise. Now, Rough and Tumble pays the mortgage."

He's his own best salesman. "It's simple, it's free, and anybody anywhere in world can get a quick snapshot of public policy in California."