

cowboys out there deciding.” But her independent streak makes her just as likely to agree with Scarborough and to cross swords with him. By early February, she was on board with her co-host in slamming Obama’s \$825 billion stimulus package.

“I feel as a taxpayer that we are getting completely hoodwinked all over again, just like with the bailout,” she said on the air.

“What we celebrate on our show is the exchange of ideas and being open to evolving on issues as we explore the details,” Brzezinski tells Newsmax.

Whatever they’re celebrating, it’s working. *Morning Joe* took over the three-hour MSNBC slot made vacant by the ouster of Don Imus’ morning show in the spring of 2007. It has since surpassed Imus’ ratings, delivering 384,000 total viewers per episode last year, up 27 percent from 2007, the strongest delivery ever for the network’s three-hour slot.

One turning point in the show’s popularity involved a celebrated incident in June 2007, when Brzezinski refused to read a story about Paris Hilton’s release from jail. She first threatened to burn it, then shredded it on the air. The incident generated tens of thousands of e-mails from fans who cheered Brzezinski for the move.

“It made me realize that we do what we want to do and have developed a format where we are not pressured to fall into the typical patterns of TV,” she recalls. Brzezinski says she gets her independence from her mother, sculptor Emilie, who clung fiercely to her identity as an artist even while playing the role of high-powered political wife in the late 1970s.

Her mom saw family as a gate to self-expression, and it’s surely a definition of motherhood that Brzezinski clings to as she struggles to integrate

mother, wife, and journalist into a seamless identity.

To that end, Brzezinski has taken the next obvious step. She has a book due out by 2010 that addresses, among other subjects, balancing work with family, particularly her own journey toward realizing how her role as a journalist is an important part of what she wants to convey to her children.

“It also has a lot to do with what people are going through right now,” she says of the tome, under the Weinstein Books flag. “It’s a different look at self-reinvention and how it’s important to be able to take a step back.”

That sort of perspective made Brzezinski a staunch, if a bit incongruous, defender of former Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin.

“I was transfixed by her,” Brzezinski says. “Here’s a cool, attractive woman with five kids who is wired to work — 150 percent.

Not 80 percent or 50 percent. Not flex time. Not half time. She jumped into it without a shred of guilt on her face. I respect not only the fact that she shows no guilt about who she is, but that . . . her husband has no issue with it.”

She snatches a photograph from a vast bank of family pictures and memorabilia on the wall above her desk that includes a large shot of Carlie on horseback jumping over a white fence. She presents the photo, a snowy scene of their girls with her husband, crack WABC-TV News investigative reporter Jim Hoffer.

“Part of my balance is struck by the fact that I have a husband who has taken on everything that a wife would take

on when her husband goes into politics. And he doesn’t feel bad about it — and he works full time.”

Working full time is not the half of it, she stresses. Hoffer is an “Emmy-magnet. We have so many Emmys in our house you can fall over them. And he takes on a hell of a lot with the kids, the household, everything. It wasn’t something we ever discussed. It just happened. And the more he takes on all these things . . . I find it very attractive.”

Of course this speaks directly to her admiration for the moose-hunting former VP hopeful. “I think the whole [Palin] family was incredibly progressive, including her husband, Todd. I’m discovering that conservative men are more progressive. The guy I work with, by the way — very progressive. Never once has Joe questioned whether I could rise to the occasion on something.” □

“For the first time, I’m happy with all the pieces in my career and my life.”



BALANCING ACT Mika has become an expert at juggling her career and making time for daughters Emilie, 13 (above, left), Carlie, 10.



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