

Doyle, State chairman, Michigan Republican State Committee; and Gov. Mario Cuomo of New York.

Question-and-Answer Session in Grand Rapids

October 29, 1992

Moderator. Okay, something about the questions that you're going to hear tonight: Contrary to some of the reports that some of you may have heard, TV-13 and Channel 4 in Detroit have selected the questions and selected the audience participants. There was no outside interference or approval from the Bush-Quayle campaign or the White House.

There are a lot of questions, so without further ado, let's get to them. Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to introduce you to the President of the United States, George Bush.

The President. Thank you very much. Fire away, Mort.

Moderator. Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you for being with us tonight.

The President. Delighted to be here, Mort.

Moderator. We have gotten a lot of questions from people all over this State. And needless to say, a majority of them have concerned themselves with the economy, jobs, the business climate, taxes, things that go directly to the wallet.

Job Retraining

Q. I have a question related to jobs. Despite the recent very minimal increases in growth, our economic crisis has resulted in a recent General Motors loss of more than \$750 million. We are told that as many as 40,000 more auto workers will soon be out of work as a result. Aside from your position on modification of CAFE standards, I'd like to know specifically what you plan to do that will assist the working men and women of our great State of Michigan.

The President. In the first place, I'm not sure I agree with your premise on the minimal growth; 2.7 is a fairly good growth. We have grown for six straight quarters. And yet the opposition keeps saying we're in a deep recession. If somebody's out of

work, I'm sure he feels we're in a recession or a depression. So what we've got to do is get them back to work.

I favor increasing our exports. Exports are going to lead us out of this global slowdown. I favor job retraining. You asked about people that might be out of a job. We have a vigorous \$10 billion job retaining program. I think that's essential. But the main thing is to stimulate the economy, particularly the small business sector, through investment tax allowances, through capital gains reduction. Democrats all say that's a big break for the rich. It isn't. It will help people start businesses. Then, of course, I think that that first-time homebuyers credit—take a family that wants to buy a home for the first time, give them a \$5,000 credit, and not only they'll get part of the American dream, but it will stimulate the entire housing industry.

I think those three specifics are good. But the big difference I have with Governor Clinton on this is they want to come in and invest, have Government invest. Government never produced a constructive job in its life. It has to be the private sector. So the big difference I have is when they say they want to raise \$220 billion in more spending and raise taxes. I think that would be the most counterproductive thing for an economy that is growing, albeit too slowly. Education, job retraining for the individuals you asked about.

Q. Among minorities, unemployment is a major concern. I'd like to know what specifically you would do to improve the educational and job training opportunities for minority people.

The President. Bernard, good question. We have a program called Job Training 2000. And it's a good one, and as I say, it takes people that are working and gives them a chance to get job training while

they're working. That's a new approach, apprenticeship approach.

The best answer has got to be—you asked about education. I can't see where he is—I guess out there—education. We have a bold, new program called America 2000; 1,700 communities are already participating in it. You know, school choice—parents should be able to choose the school of their choice, whether they're religious, public, or private. And say, oh, that will diminish the public schools. No, it won't. It didn't do it when you had the GI bill. It will be a good thing, and it's working in Milwaukee in areas very much like downtown Detroit.

So education is a little longer run; job training is the shorter run, job retraining.

Government Gridlock

Q. Mr. President, if you're reelected, how do you specifically propose to enact your post-cold-war economic agenda through a Democratically controlled Congress?

The President. Oh, that's going to be much better. First place, the time you get something done is the first part of your second term, no politics on the horizon, no more rallies, no more debates, maybe more of these kinds of things, but no more of the politics.

Secondly, because Congress, who has been controlled by one party for 38 years, has been in such disarray, they've disgraced themselves so much by fouling up a little tiny bank and a little tiny post office, you're going to have at least 100 new Members. Might have more than that. So what I'll do is sit down with these new Members, and they'll be listening to the same voters I am, and say, now let's get the people's business done. It's going to be done. I'm getting more confident. When I'm reelected, it's going to be done on the plan that I've been talking about, not the invest-and-grow-Government plan.

He calls our plans for the economy trickle-down. It's trickle-down Government to go back to what Governor Clinton's talking about. We're not going to do that. But the way of getting it through the Congress is to start right in, sit down with them before they even take their seats, and say, now look, you're all brandnew around here; you don't have to do it the way it was—always

been done by your leaders.

Let me give you one example. I favor a balanced budget amendment. That's not going to cure everything, but many States operated under it, including Arkansas. I want that for the Nation. It passed the Senate. We had it down so it's almost passing the House. We needed eight votes. The Speaker and Mr. Gephardt twisted the arms of cosponsors, people that had actually cosponsored the legislation, and we lost it by I think it was four votes, three or four votes. That won't happen in a new Congress.

You know, I want the line-item veto. I want the balanced budget amendment. I want a check-off so taxpayers can say, hey, we're worried about the deficit; make the Congress put this much money into deficit reduction. But the fundamental political science answer is new people get new things done.

The Economy

Q. Mr. President, last evening the ABC News went back to New Hampshire and talked with a lady about, well, about how well she had done over the past 4 years. During that time her employer had had layoffs but has recently hired back, I believe, 17. She has received this year an increase of 4 percent in her wages. She stated that she now has approximately \$4 per month deducted from her pay for health insurance, et cetera, that she didn't have 4 years ago. How do you answer people who appear to be living at about the same level as 4 years ago, and what do you feel that you can do for them for the next 4 years?

The President. Well, I'm delighted that somebody found somebody in New Hampshire that had some good news, because every time I see one of these network programs you find somebody that has bad news. The unemployment's gone down for 3 straight months. And yet the minute they say, well, unemployment is down, "Bad news for President Bush: job market shrinks." Here's Joe Schmaltz over here from New Hampshire, and he's having a tough time of it. So first, I'm delighted that somebody is doing a little bit better.

I think the answer—first place, our productivity is way up in this country. We are

more productive than any other nation. We are not a nation in decline.

Secondly, we've got interest rates down and inflation down, which poises this country for a real strong growth.

Thirdly, the biggest growth for jobs that will pay better for this woman will be in exports, increasing our sales abroad, creating jobs in America. We've got the best product, the best workers. And you do that through continuing on my approach for a fair trade agreement, free trade agreement with Mexico. I want to do the same thing with Chile. I want to do the same thing in Eastern Europe. And I know some of the labor union leaders don't like that. They try to tell the workers, rank and file, that's going to mean shipping jobs abroad. It is not. And it's exports that's going to lead this world out of this slowdown.

By the way, we are doing better than Japan and Germany and France and Canada. And I think I'd like to get that in perspective tonight because everybody listens to—those who listen to the other side think that the whole thing is in decline, and it's not.

That's what I'd say to her. And more productivity. If you want to challenge up into a higher level kind of job, look at our six national education goals. The first President to ever have the goals adopted for this country. All 50 Governors—and I give Governor Clinton credit for this; he was activist in this. He helped the President, me, get these six education goals set. One of them is you're never too old to learn, which means more job retraining. And the other one, the second one, is more math and science. It's very difficult for a woman who already has a job. But for the future, to get the levels of pay up, we've got to do a better job on education.

So it's a combination of these things, in my view, that will make her life better. But do not believe the American dream is dead. We're going to grow more. We've been told for months we're in a recession, and we're not. We've got growth out there. If we listen, have sound policies, and don't go back to the failed "misery index" days of Jimmy Carter with interest rates at 21 or 19, between 19 and 21 percent, and inflation at 15. Spend and tax, spend and tax got us

there. If we don't do that, I think that this woman has an enormously challenging and bright future.

Capital Gains Tax

Q. Mr. President, you propose a capital gains cut to stimulate the economy. Isn't it likely that this will only increase the bipolarization in the classes, since it traditionally favors the rich?

The President. I don't think so at all. There was a thing called the Steiger amendment in 1978, where capital gains rates were reduced. And it resulted in a splurge of new businesses being started. I realize that if you are just trying to get some facts out there, all you hear from the Democrats is that that helps the rich. It is small business that benefits from that. It is small businesses that get started from a capital gains reduction, particularly in the science and electronic fields.

So I would say it isn't just rich people that benefit at all. And it's going to stimulate the economy. So for those who think it's a break for the rich, I just disagree with them. And I've got evidence on my side through when Bill Steiger of Wisconsin got it passed in '78, it gave a real surge to the economy.

Moderator. President Bush, we thank you. And in a moment we're going to be back to talk about other issues that are obviously of great concern to people around the State of Michigan. One of those, perhaps ranking right up there with the jobs situation, at least for people in the city of Detroit, is the issue of crime. And we'll have a question on that subject when we return.

[At this point, the television station took a commercial break.]

Urban Policy

Q. Mr. President, I see my neighbors locked behind their doors with bars on their windows. I've had two cars stolen. I see crackheads on the street. And I want to know what's your plan to combat the urban crime, the urban problem of crimes, drugs, and guns.

The President. You know, that's a very good question. And some of the areas that are impacted like his, really there's a sense

of hopelessness. Mothers don't dare go down to the corner store at night. I'll tell you what I think we need to do. I think we need to get some stronger anticrime legislation. Then I'll tell you what else I think we need to do. By stronger anticrime legislation, I think we need to back our police officers more, people that are risking their lives for his neighbors and anybody's neighbors. By that I mean we've got to pass changes to the exclusionary rule, a little technical, but it says if a police officer arrests a guy and then he has a slight technicality, not malicious, not willful, that that case is not going to be thrown out of court.

I want to see habeas corpus reform. I am not a lawyer. I wear that badge proudly. But I do think that these endless appeals make swift and sure and fair sentencing much less likely. And so we need to change the habeas corpus reform, reform habeas corpus. I happen to believe we need a stricter Federal death penalty for those who kill law enforcement officers.

So I am for much stronger legislation. Again, I've battled with the gridlock guys for a long time on that. But the new Members coming, I think we can get that done.

Now on the hope side. We have a program called "Weed and Seed." And it is an outstanding program. It's already working in Detroit under a program called Reach where a private guy, a minister, I believe it is, works with some Federal money to make it work. "Weed and Seed:" weed out the criminal elements through tough law enforcement and then seed the neighborhood with hope. That means enterprise zones, which we have been battling to get through in the Congress; more homeownership; tenant management, where the tenants manage the property to bring back pride.

But on his point, we must go with tougher law and Federal law enforcement. You know, I can't speak for the locals, but I back the police, and I was very pleased when eight guys from Little Rock, Arkansas, the FOP, the Order of Policemen, came up and endorsed me for President, because I think they know I back them with strong legislation. But I don't think there's any other answer to it.

One other thing. We've got to win the battle on our antidrug fight. We're doing

better on interdiction. Sixty percent lower use of cocaine by teenagers, that's good. But where we're not making progress is with these addicts, the addictive age. Crack cocaine is just brutal for them. So we've got to do better in terms of interdiction, and we've got to do better in terms of rehabilitation and treatment. And drug spending, antidrug spending from us is way, way up.

School Choice

Q. President Bush, this question goes back to the issue of education in our society. You have proposed allowing students to attend the schools of their choice, and this would mean that students who have more resources would be able to attend the more affluent schools, leaving those who are socio-economically disadvantaged in the poorer quality schools. How would your proposal help those who are socio-economically disadvantaged, and what do you propose for improving the quality of disadvantaged schools?

The President. The first place, my program for school choice was tried first in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. A Democratic Mayor and a Democratic legislator, a woman named Polly Williams, decided something different had to happen there. Polly was told that her kid was dysfunctional, going to a lousy school. They worked out a choice program at the Milwaukee level. And her kid is now performing well. And the school that wasn't chosen is making itself better.

The GI bill after World War II went to an individual soldier getting out of the armed service. He could choose public, private, or religious. That did not hurt the State universities. The same thing would be true with this plan. The answer to the socio-disadvantaged is to do what my program calls for: give them a stipend to choose whether they want a public school, fine; private school, fine; or religious school, fine. As you do that, you're going to find that the schools not chosen are going to better themselves.

There's plenty of examples. Rochester, New York, has some of that. Milwaukee, I've already mentioned. So we ought to try it. And my program's called the "GI bill" for kids. It helps the kind of person that she

properly was identifying with and talking about. I think we ought to try something new. Education and the control of the Congress are two things that haven't changed in years, and we ought to change both.

Moderator. President Bush, as a followup to that, there are those, and you're well aware of it, who claim that this program of yours is flirting dangerously with the separation of church and state.

The President. Uh-uh. No, because it doesn't go to the schools, it goes to the parents. Did anyone make that claim, Mort, after the GI bill? Is anyone saying that violates separation of church and state? It doesn't. It goes to the family. And the families can choose what they want. Does a Pell grant blur the lines between separation of church and state? I don't think so. So I would argue that since it goes to the people, goes to the family, it is not a separation of church and state problem.

Q. Mr. President, I represent many parents in this community that sacrifice greatly to send our children to the Christian schools so they can enjoy the religious freedom that this great country was built on. We also pay property taxes, which go to support the public schools. My question for you is, will your "GI bill" for children go far enough to give us relief from this double payment? And alternatively, what are your views on tax deductions or tax credits for this?

The President. Well, tax credits is a good idea, but I don't want—level with you, there isn't enough money around when we're operating at these enormous deficits to do that. But the school choice will supplement your family income to permit them to go to this school that you've already chosen. But I don't want to mislead you. I don't believe that you can, even though there's—you're choosing, you're choosing the school. I don't think I can offer more than this "GI bill" for people that choose.

I like the concept of tax credits. But I just don't want to mislead you. I don't think that that's going to be enacted in the next few years because of the deficit we're operating at and because of the need to try to live within our means a little more at the Federal level, thus stimulating more jobs in the private sector.

Bosnia

Q. Mr. President, what in your opinion is the main obstacle that hinders the United States from intervening in the killing of innocent people in Croatia and Bosnia?

The President. The main obstacle is that as long as I'm President, I'm not going to put American forces into a troubled situation unless I can see what the mission is, I can see how that mission is going to be achieved, and then I can see how those troops come out. I'm old enough to have learned something from my own experience in uniform. One of it was World War II. We fought and won. Everybody had everything they needed to get the job done. Vietnam, we didn't. And the horrible problems that your loved ones face cannot be solved by putting the 82d Airborne division into Bosnia. It simply can't be done.

He's torn because there's these tremendous historic ethnic rivalries that are now coming to the surface because of the collapse of Soviet communism and thus the iron hand that they once had over all these different, now independent countries. We are helping. The United States is helping with relief. We always do. We always should, as we are here, as we are in Somalia and elsewhere. But I don't want to act like we're going to solve this problem militarily.

We took the lead at the United Nations in passing a no-fly zone, so those Serbian aircraft would not bomb the hapless citizens. And it is working. The question is what do we do in terms of enforcement if it doesn't work, and that's a question that any President will have to face at the appropriate time. But it does not lend itself—I say this to him with great angst—to put American kids on the ground, in these mountains, down into an area that looks like Dien Bien Phu. And I simply won't do that as President, unless my respected military leaders, Colin Powell and Dick Cheney, come and say, "Now, look, here's the way you get them in. Here's their mission. And here's when you get them out." We did it in Desert Storm. We'll do it—but I don't believe that's going to happen.

Somalia

Moderator. Mr. President, a followup to

that. There are those who, having seen the pictures of the enormous tragedy in Somalia, the starving children, the death, the devastation there, feel that the United States with all of its wealth and traditional compassion has reacted too little and too late to assist the people of Somalia. Your response to that?

The President. My response is they're wrong. They're right in the angst and the agony one feels in one's heart when you see those ghastly pictures of those starving kids. But it is the United States that has taken the lead in relief.

And you've got a problem, Mort. Again, you've got almost anarchy over there. You have warlords controlling the ports. They're armed. They go—and they're shooting up the United Nations forces. We were very active in the United Nations to get U.N. forces on the ground. But they're having difficulty separating these warlords one from the other. We're sending our supplies in there. We are helping.

I had quite a positive report the other day, because some of those kids—the pictures, my gosh, they just kill you, the little skinny arms. And it just wrenches the heart of any American. But the good news is a lot of those kids getting any nourishment are coming back. And I think we can take pride that once again we have stepped up to the lick-log and done our share.

So I would argue with those who say that we're not doing our part. We are. And maybe you can say, well you never do enough. But then you've got to look at the situation on the ground. There's anarchy there. It's a terrible thing. Once the Siad government went out, you've got all these factions shooting, fighting, killing. Seventeen-year-olds with weapons from the former Soviet empire just shooting it up on the port, stealing the relief supplies, and taking them for their families and leaving these kids starving. It is tough.

Middle East Peace Talks

Q. How do you plan, Mr. Bush, to keep the Middle East peace talks going in a fair and representative manner? What do you hope that each side will ultimately aspire to, and how will it affect the global community?

The President. Dana, I never thought anybody would ask such an intelligent question, because I've been running this campaign—you might think foreign affairs don't matter. Look—and this gives me a chance to hit it partially out of the park. Because of what we did in Desert Storm, we were able—with the able leadership of a great team, Jim Baker, who's with me here tonight, and Brent Scowcroft in the White House and Larry Eagleburger and many others—to get these parties, historic enemies, talking to each other in the Middle East. If you'd have said when I became President that Arabs would be talking to Israel, nobody would have believed it. And we did it. We did it by defending our own foreign policy interests. We did it by helping kill aggression.

So the talks are going on, and in my view they will continue to go on. There were some cross-border problems in Lebanon and Israel the other day, but I think the talks are going to go on because I think all sides want it. You're seeing progress. You're seeing Syrian Jews permitted to leave, and you're seeing much more in the way of talking.

You asked what do I aspire for, to do: Simply to have peace in the Middle East. It's got to be based on the U.N. Security Resolutions 242, 338, which talks about getting the borders adjusted, safe and secure borders for Israel. And you're going to—have to be compromise. But they're talking. And it is a dramatic accomplishment.

There's so many factions there, the Syrians and the Palestinians and the Lebanese, that I can't give you a formula in 10 seconds about it. But I am convinced that the talks will continue. They want peace. And all the Arab countries are pitching in. We are the first administration to ever bring about that kind of widespread negotiation.

Moderator. Do you think if you were re-elected for the next 4 years, it is possible to get some kind of a settlement once and for all?

The President. I would think it's possible. I wouldn't want to hold out a false goal. But I think it's possible, yes. That's a good word for it, possible. But it's very important that it do happen. We have a special relationship

with Israel because of the way we've conducted our foreign policy. Again back to the Gulf, we have very strong relations with Saudi Arabia.

I took a little flak for talking to Assad of Syria in some quarters. But it was the right thing to do, and now Syria is having some discussion at these peace talks with Israel. Who would have thought that possible?

So I think it is possible. I certainly hope it's possible.

[At this point, the television station took a commercial break.]

Polls

Moderator. And we are back in Grand Rapids for a live statewide town hall meeting with the President of the United States. We're going to talk politics just a minute, oh my goodness. We're going to talk about the polls that have been out in the last couple of days. They've shown a narrowing, no matter how you read them. How do you respond? What do you think is happening?

The President. Well, you're talking to a guy that berated the pollsters when they were looking horrible—[laughter]—about a week ago or 2 weeks ago. You're talking to a guy that was written off by the talking heads in the national media. So I think it might be inappropriate to try to analyze the polls when they're looking very, very encouraging, because then the talking heads will come on and say on Sunday morning with the Republicans, Democrats, all of whom have written me off, "Hey, here he is. Said he doesn't count on polls, and he's talking about how great the polls are."

Leave the poll aside; something's happening in the country. There's some change. There's something that's beginning. I'll tell you what I think it is. I think people get serious at the end. And I think they are really saying, who do you trust with your family, in a crisis, to be in that Oval Office? Who has the character? Who do you trust? I honestly believe that's what's beginning to happen out there.

So I'd rather not comment on the polls because I'll get hit in the face with them if they goose up about three points tomor-

row, you know. [Laughter]

Moderator. You don't still consider them all nutty pollsters, though, now.

The President. Well, I'm less inclined to say that, but—[laughter]—but to be very candid with you, but look, how do they jump around? How does one poll have 10 points and the very same day the other one have 2 or 20 points and 3? Something's strange. And I don't know what it is. It's the weirdest political year I've ever seen in my life. And the pollsters can fit right into there. Now they do seem to be coming together in a—you know, but we'll see. I just don't know.

Ross Perot

Moderator. As a good reporter, I have to tell you what I observed. And during our break a while ago, President Bush got a big laugh from this audience when he picked up a magazine and flipped through it and said, "I want to be like Ross Perot and have my flip charts."

Well, we do have a question about Ross Perot.

Q. Good evening, Mr. President. My question is rather brief. If you are reelected, do you have any intentions of putting Ross Perot on any economic committees?

The President. Well, not the one in charge of gas taxes—[laughter]—because he wants to raise gasoline taxes 50 cents a gallon over 5 years. I don't want to do that. I think all people that have to drive to work, particularly with long distances, it's a bad thing to do. I don't think we need to raise the taxes. I've got a difference with him on Social Security, where he thinks all mandatory programs must be cut to some degree, and he included at one juncture Social Security. I don't believe we should touch Social Security. It's a sacrosanct trust, and I don't think we ought to do it.

I've already consulted Ross Perot when I was Vice President on the POW thing. I give him credit for having a dedication in that area. But I don't really know on the overall economic—anybody that makes himself \$3 billion has got to be pretty bright on some of the economic matters. So I would reach out to a wide array of people. But I've got to be a little vague because we do have some fundamental differences as

what we need to do to get the economy going.

AIDS

Q. The 1991 report of the National Commission on AIDS states that the people of the United States must either engage seriously the issues and needs posed by this deadly disease or face relentless, expanding tragedy in the decades ahead. Mr. President, you've been accused of failing to respond to the recommendations of your committee. How do you respond?

The President. One, it's not my committee. And two, I respond by saying we've increased AIDS spending dramatically. I requested in the last year \$4.9 billion. That is 10 times as much per AIDS victim as is spent on cancer. We've got a strong program. The NIH researchers, National Institute of Health researchers, are the best in the world.

We get plenty of criticism, but here's my view on it. We must continue with AIDS research at substantial levels. We have sped up the coming to market of AIDS-related drugs, having to stimulate, get that FDA to move those drugs to market. And then I've got to do a better job on education, because AIDS is a disease where behavior matters.

I said that one time, and a bunch of these crazy ACT-UP, the extreme group that hurt their cause, came up to a little town where Barbara and I were and started saying, Bush ought to change his behavior. When you're doing something that is known to cause the disease you ought to stop doing it, whether it's a dirty needle or some kind of a sexual behavior that is known to cause the disease. In addition to being compassionate, in addition to spending money for research, we ought to be sure that everybody knows what causes the disease. People that do things that cause it ought to stop doing them, whether it's dirty needles or what I've just referred to.

I feel uncomfortable talking about it. But the people at NIH asked me to make clear to the American people that AIDS is a disease where some of it is behavioral. So we ought to change behavior if it's going to cause more of the disease.

Moderator. Mr. President, speaking of your Commission on AIDS, in a much-pub-

licized move, Magic Johnson, of course, resigned. Why do you think he did that?

The President. I'll be darned if I know. I had a good meeting with him in the White House, and said, "If you've got any specific suggestions, let me know." I never heard from him after that.

I do have some differences with the Commission. The reason I answered her tersely is that it is not a Presidential commission. It might be Presidential level, but some of the people on there are not appointed by me; some are. And I have respect for them. But they are far out. They want more, more, more. And I have to sort out priorities for all diseases that the Federal Government can help spend money on. How about cancer? How about heart? How about all of these diseases? We're dealing with somewhat limited resources. In spite of that, AIDS—I want to say doubled since I've been President, but it's a major increase. But I have some differences with the Commission.

I've met with the Commission. I've gone to NIH and held a seminar with AIDS victims, young kids whose lives were going away, teenagers and young men, and held AIDS babies in my arms. But somehow the extreme elements in that community refused to say that we care about it.

You know, they had this big quilt ceremony out on the lawn, south of the White House there. It was a very moving thing, because I saw a lot of pictures of it. And one of the AIDS activists said, "Well, why didn't you go?" And I said, "I didn't want to go to take something solemn and sensitive and be a lightning rod for the extremes." That's why I didn't go, and that's why Barbara didn't go. She's a very caring person.

Abortion

Q. Many college students support the freedom of reproductive choice. If you would support your granddaughter's choice to have an abortion, then why would you not want us to have that same choice?

The President. I don't support her choice of having abortion. The question was, if she had an abortion, what would I do? I'd love her. I'd hold her in my arms and comfort her. If she came to me for advice, I'd say,

“Hey, listen, I come down on the side of life.” I’m appalled that there’s 28 million abortions. So it’s a very tough issue. It divides everybody. People get mad at each other. People get hurt on the issue. I happen to opt for life because I—and we have two adopted grandchildren. Thank God they weren’t aborted. So I feel that way.

But I’ll tell you where I think choice—let me ask you something. I can’t—through this television set here. But let me ask you: A 13-year-old can’t get her ears pierced or take medicine without getting the parent’s approval. Yet a 13-year-old, according to some of these people, ought to be able to have an abortion. I don’t think that’s right. I think parents should have to have a say in this. There’s a big difference I have with some of the women’s movement out there.

But I will say this: I do recognize there are strong differences. I have just concluded, after a lot of agony and evolution of position, that we ought to err on the side of life and not on the side of more and more abortions.

Environmental Policy

Moderator. Mr. President, a lot of people believe that the ultimate ability to sustain life on this planet will be directly linked to how well we preserve it and take care of it and clean it up. Environmental issues are big this year with a lot of people, and we have somebody standing by in Holland right now who has such a question on their mind.

Q. Mr. President, 4 years ago you claimed to be an environmentalist. But last summer in Brazil our country failed—and was one of the only countries, if not the only one, that failed to sign on to an agreement to protect biological diversity. And furthermore, our country sought to weaken one on protecting the global environment from increases in global temperature. Repeatedly your administration has also sought to weaken the Clean Air Act and the Endangered Species Act, as well as to permit increased oil exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The President. We’re strongly for that.

Q. And also to decrease the amount of protection to wetlands. My question then is if you’re elected for another 4 year term,

are we going to continue along the same path vis-a-vis environmental issues, or are we going to see some change in environmental policy that a lot of folks in the country think is important?

The President. Well, professor, you sound like Ozone Man, Mr. Gore. I am not an extremist. We have a good, good record on the environment. We’ve done more for the oceans. We passed the Clean Air Act. We’ve done great things for the forests. But I do not consider it leadership to go down to Rio de Janeiro in front of a bunch of NGO’s, non-government organizations, and try to buy their favor by getting in line, buy a lot of other people who want to go after our biodiversity proprieties, our research. We have a strong record in biodiversity. But I simply don’t think that just getting in line and signing up for a treaty is a good thing to do. We’re the leaders on it, and because of what I did, we will be in a much better position to share our research with other countries.

On climate change, we did change it a little bit, because I don’t want to see us burden the automotive industry with the kind of costs that the Europeans wanted us to put on the industry.

What I’m saying—you mentioned the Endangered Species—yes, I came down in favor of a more moderate consideration for this owl out there, the spotted owl, because 30,000 American families—somebody ought to think about them, too.

So I think we’ve got a good record. But my difference is, when you come up here to the auto industry and suggest we put 40- to 45-miles-per-gallon CAFE standards, these fuel efficiency standards—who’s going to think of the auto worker’s family? Yes, it would be nice to be able to say that. Who’s going to be able to produce cars with that kind of thing right away? Nobody. And so we’ve got to find some balance.

Moderator. President Bush, on the subject of CAFE standards, you have repeatedly charged that Governor Clinton has set 40 or 45 as something he would like to legislate. We’ve gone back and listened to the tapes and examined his speeches. He insists that he has set that as a goal, that it’s something

we ought to aspire to. Would you accept that as a goal?

The President. No. I don't want to set it as a goal until I'm told by good scientists it can be achieved without putting a lot of people out of work. I wish I had my notes here with me, because I read a specific quote from Clinton's energy strategy that had it calling for legislation.

Yes, he's changed his position. But that gets back to a whole other argument I've got with him. You're changing wherever you go, whether it's the free trade agreement, whether it's on your own record on the draft, or whether it's clean air standards. You can't do that.

So if you want to set a goal for way out there, fine. But let's not go to the extreme on these environmental matters. We've got a very good record on the environment. We've got a great environmentalist in Bill Reilly heading EPA. We've got a good record on wetlands. But I'll tell you, with all respect to the professor, maybe he's pretty reasonable, but I couldn't tell it from the way the question came out, because we can't go off to the extremes and still talk about how we're going to help all these people that are looking for jobs.

Leadership

Q. Mr. President, you were elected to provide leadership in the governance of this country. Good leaders get results through working with people and through people. Good leaders are also held accountable for results. My question is why are you constantly blaming Congress for your failures?

The President. Well, I'm not always blaming them. I'm just trying to shift some of the blame where it belongs, to the Congress. They appropriate every dime. They tell me as President how to spend every dime. I have gone up—I'll give you a good example, Larry. It was Larry, wasn't it? I'll give you a good example anyway, whether it was Larry or not. [*Laughter*]

Look, after South Central riots over there in Los Angeles, I sat down with Mayor Bradley, a big Democrat out there; the Governor, a Republican; Peter Ueberroth. They said what we need is enterprise zones. Every one of them agreed on that. I went to the boys club there in the neighborhood

that had been wiped out by these rioters. Everyone said we need enterprise zones. I invited them back. We met with the Democratic leadership, Speaker, Mitchell, Gephardt. I still haven't got the kind of enterprise zones legislation that would have helped South Central and would help Detroit today. It's not my fault that the Congress refuses to go along. Here was a bipartisan appeal. I give you but one example of that.

You talk about leadership. I didn't need Congress in the war, and we forged the coalition. We made a tough decision. We dragged some of the reluctant ones along, and we did what had to be done. And so there is a difference between national security policy, foreign affairs, and some domestic policy. We got some things done early on with Congress. The best piece of civil rights legislation in this decade is the Americans for Disabilities Act. We passed it. We got a good child care bill. We now have a highway bill.

But I'll tell you, they made a decision: The only way we are going to win the White House is by denying the President success on some of this terribly important domestic legislation. That is the fact. And if you want to help change it, clean House. Clean House, and give some new ideas a chance that are just stymied by these old thinkers.

President's Motivation for Reelection

Q. Mr. President, why do you want 4 more years as President? What's your motivation?

The President. Well, I'll tell you something, that is a profound question, because—look, Barbara and I have got a pretty good life. This has been the ugliest year I can ever remember in terms of politics. It has been terrible. Ironically, it's true around the world if you look—have a broad perspective. But I like to finish what I've started. I believe that this country is not in decline. I believe we're a rising nation. I believe we can ameliorate the problems that we're hearing about here tonight with the answers that I've given you here tonight. And I just feel driven to try to help achieve our education goals, to win the

battle against narcotics, to do better with the new ideas I've got on housing.

So get in there and finish what you start. And that's what does it. Because, beckoning out there, let's face it—everyone knows everything about my worth or lack thereof, or debt or lack thereof. Life's been pretty good to me. I'm big in the grandchild business now, and someday I'll get a lot bigger in it.

But you set these things aside. I want to finish and try to help people. That's what motivates us. Because otherwise, in this kind of year, why in God's name would anybody in his right mind want to be in this arena, when anybody can take a cheap shot at you. It's the worst. I've never seen the national media, ever, anything like this. I've never seen them having seminars—"Have we been fair to President Bush"—before, a President. They're doing it. Ted Koppel comes on, "Oh, yes, they're wondering whether they've been fair." They know darn well they haven't.

Go around them. Go to the people. Get the job done. But it isn't much fun. But it's going to change after the election. Help me.

Moderator. Speaking of change, Mr.—I'm sorry?

The President. No, no. I'm finished.

Asian Americans

Q. My question is, you've made a concerted effort to hire African Americans and Hispanic Americans to your Cabinet. You often speak of Asian Americans as like a model minority, but very few can be found in your administration. What plans do you have to redress this issue?

The President. Good question. And I think we can do better on that. There's none that I know of in the Cabinet. We have, I think—you know, all these people, "We have appointed more Asian Americans"—I believe I have, at high levels; not in the Cabinet. But I take your point. I think we ought to strive to do better. But I think if I could—I don't know how to get a hold of you—but send you the analysis of Asian Americans in high-level jobs, I think you'll find that it has exceeded the record by any other administration.

But I take your point on Cabinet. I think

there's some status and standing to Cabinet that gives groups of all persuasions a certain hope. Maybe we can do better there.

Urban Policy

Moderator. Mr. President, there is a perception, certainly in the city of Detroit—I can't speak for all American cities—that beginning with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, nominated in the city of Detroit, as you well know, that the administration simply has ignored the cities; the theory being that inner-city people aren't voting for Republicans, so therefore let's go out and work with the areas where we're getting the most votes. Is that a true perception? If it's not, how do you break it down?

The President. It's not a true perception because I have just cited some things that would in a very likely way lift up and give hope to urban America. And I'm talking about empowerment of people as opposed to Government jobs. I'm talking about enterprise zones. I'm talking about home-ownership. Again, I'll cite "Weed and Seed." I believe that those programs and those ideas ought to be tried.

Some say there's no new ideas. They're new until they've been tried. Instead of that, you have a lot of these bosses in these cities that haven't had a new thought in years. They promise the people one thing, tell them to vote the straight lever, and then the people say, "Hey, I didn't get anything out of anything." Why don't they try some new ideas? Why aren't they willing to try what I've said, for example, start out on enterprise zones?

Moderator. Mr. President, time flies when we're having fun. And we do thank you. The hour is up. It's been a pleasure having you in Grand Rapids to address the people of Michigan through this statewide network.

The President. Thank you, Mort.

Note: The question-and-answer session began at 8 p.m. at the West Michigan Public Broadcasting Center. News anchors Lee Van Amede, WZZM-TV, Grand Rapids, and Mort Krim, WDIV-TV, Detroit, served as moderators for the session.