

Interview With Mike Whitely of KDKA Radio in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania April 17, 1993

Mr. Whitely. For everyone listening on KDKA Radio, I'm Mike Whitely, KDKA Radio News. We're here at the Pittsburgh International Airport and with me is the President of the United States, Bill Clinton.

And I'd like to welcome you to the area and to KDKA.

The President. Thank you, Mike. Glad to be here.

Los Angeles Police Trial Verdict

Mr. Whitely. There are a lot of things we'd like to talk about in the brief amount of time we have, but some news is just breaking from Los Angeles. I guess the entire country has been kind of holding their breath, wondering what's going to happen in the trial of the four Los Angeles police officers. We just heard that two of those officers—the sergeant, Sergeant Koon, and Officer Powell—have been found guilty, and two officers have been found not guilty.

It's a situation that's been building for over a year since the first trial and now this trial and this verdict. And I wonder what your thoughts are this morning on how you see the situation in Los Angeles in connection with your administration and what you're trying to do.

The President. Well, first of all, I think the American people should know that this trial, in my judgment, is a tribute to the work and judgment of the jury, as well as to the efforts of the Federal Government in developing the case.

The law under which the officers were tried is a complex one; the standards of proof are complicated. The jury decided that they would convict the sergeant who was responsible for supervising the officers and the officer who on the film did most of the beating. The jury acquitted an officer who kicked Rodney King, but also plainly tried to shield him from some blows, and another officer who was a rookie.

No one knows exactly why they did what they did, but it appears that they really tried to do justice here. They acknowledged that his civil rights were violated. And I think that the American people should take a lot of pride in that. But I hope now we can begin to look ahead and focus on three things: first of all, the importance of trying to bring this country together

and not violate the civil rights of any American; secondly, the importance of renewing our fight against crime.

I think it's important to recognize that in the poorest areas of Los Angeles and many other cities in this country, people may be worried about police abuse, but they're even more worried about crime. It's time that we renewed our efforts to go to community policing; put 100,000 more police officers on the street, pass the Brady bill that would require a waiting period before people could buy a handgun, and do some other things to reduce the vulnerability of our people to violence and drugs.

And the last point I'd like to make is it seems to me that we have got to rededicate ourselves to the economic revitalization of our cities and other economically distressed areas. If you just think about it, if everybody in Los Angeles who wanted a job had one, I don't think we'd have quite as many problems as we do.

I laid out a very ambitious program in the campaign to try to bring private investment and public investment to bear in our cities. I have dispatched the Commerce Secretary, Ron Brown, to California to try to come up with some strategies for that State, because it's our biggest State with our highest unemployment rate, which could then be applied around the country. I want to talk to him and to the Attorney General, to the new head of the NAACP, to Reverend Jackson, and to several other people, and then I'll decide where to go from here with regard to Los Angeles and the other cities of the country.

Stimulus Package

Mr. Whitely. Let's talk about what brings you to the Pittsburgh area today. I guess there's been a lot of discussion on Capitol Hill about your stimulus package. You've been locked in a battle with the GOP. Yesterday, as you said earlier in your radio address, you made some moves to break that gridlock. What brings you to Pittsburgh, in particular to Allegheny County, in particular to Pennsylvania, with that battle?

The President. Well, there are two reasons. First of all, Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, and Pennsylvania supported me in the last election because they wanted a new direction in eco-

economic policy. We have passed our overall economic plan. It gives the country a very different budget for the next 5 years than we've had in the previous 12. We reduced the deficit and, at the same time, increased investment in jobs and education and health care, in the things that will make us a stronger country.

But in addition to that, I asked the Congress in the short run to spend a little more money, a modest amount of money to create another half-million jobs in the next year and a half, to try to cut the unemployment rate by half a percent but also to try to spark job creation in the private sector more. The plan passed the House. It has the support of a majority of the Senate. At the present time, all the Republican Senators as a bloc are filibustering the bill. That is, they won't let it come to a vote.

I believe that Senator Specter would like to vote for the bill. And I believe that Senator Dole, the Republican leader, has put a lot of pressure on a lot of the Republicans to stay hitched. And they're all saying that this bill increases the deficit. It doesn't. This bill is well below the spending targets that Congress approved, including the Republicans, for this year. This bill is paid for by budget cuts in the next 5 years. This bill is designed to give a jumpstart to the economy. And I must say, a lot of the Republican Senators that are holding it up, when Mr. Bush was President, voted for billions of dollars of emergency spending of just this kind, much of it was totally unrelated to creating jobs.

So what I'm trying to do is to break this logjam. I've held out an olive branch; I've offered a compromise. But I think that we ought to try to put some more Americans to work right now to show that we're changing the direction of the country. And that's the purpose of the bill.

Mr. Whitely. Have you been in touch with Senator Specter or his office lately?

The President. Well, we've been trying to talk regularly, through my White House congressional liaison operation, to the Senators that we think are open to this, Senator Specter, Senator D'Amato from New York, Senator Jeffords from Vermont, Senator Hatfield from Oregon, and five or six others whom we believe know we need more jobs in this economy and know what we are paying for this with budget cuts over the life of the budget I presented.

You know, it has a lot of appeal to say, "Well, we've got a big deficit. We shouldn't increase it more." But the truth is that we are paying for this with budget cuts in the whole life of the budget over the next few years. And more importantly, we have this program well below the spending targets that Congress has already approved for this year. And they've done this for years, with the Republicans voting for it, many Republicans voting for it, for things that weren't nearly as important as putting the American people back to work.

So I just hope that this doesn't become a political issue. It ought to just be about the people of this country and the need for jobs.

Mr. Whitely. I have some questions from people who supported you, and some people who are skeptical about your administration. It has to do with their hopes and also with their fears. A lot of people who supported you and voted for you in Pennsylvania, I think some of them are now saying, "We're glad we got him in the White House, but now look at this incredible process he has to go through. Look at these problems. Look at this gridlock." And they're beginning to wonder: Is this going to work; can you pull it off? And of course, your skeptics are saying, "Well, I knew it was going to be like this."

The President. Well, I'd ask people, first of all, to remember that we are, frankly, moving very fast. The budget resolution that the Congress passed is the fastest they have ever passed a budget resolution, ever in history, setting out the next 5 year budget targets. So we are moving really rapidly. And we've got them working on political reform, welfare reform, health care reform, a whole wide range of things.

But it's a big operation. You can't expect to turn it around overnight. It took 12 years to produce the conditions which led to the victory I received from the people in November, and we can't turn it around in 90 days. But I think we're making real, real progress.

I would urge the people not to get discouraged. We're not going to win every battle, and not everything is going to happen overnight. But we are definitely moving and changing things.

NOTE: The interview began at 10:40 a.m. in the USAir terminal at Pittsburgh International Airport.