

chance to meet the big challenges of the future, we will win because you've given us the resources to be heard and he's found the candidates to run. And believe me, you owe it to these little kids in this room and people like them all across this country.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:35 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to dinner hosts Terence and Dorothy McAuliffe and their daughter Mary; saxophone player Timmy Capello; and former Representative Jane Harman.

Excerpts of an Interview With Peter Jennings of ABC News December 16, 1999

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Mr. Jennings. This room, sir, this fireplace and others in the White House obviously remind me of President Roosevelt. His relationship with the public was of such a magnitude that people, in many cases, thought he was a god, placed absolute faith in him. Do you think there will ever be a time when another American President gets that kind of commitment?

The President. If the country is under that kind of threat. It was in this room that President Roosevelt gave his fireside chats. And keep in mind, he took our Nation through two huge threats: first, the Depression, where 25 percent of our people were out of work, for the only time in our history; and second, in the Second World War, with Hitler and the Axis powers.

I think the people in this country are—they nearly always get it right if they have enough information and enough time. They're very hard to stampede. And I think they would follow a good leader in a tough time like that.

Cynicism

The President. When I leave the White House, I will be more idealistic about the American people and the American system of government than I was when I showed up here. And I think cynicism is a cop-out and a refuge now. I think skepticism is good. I think demythologizing is good. I think cynicism, because it's fundamentally a negative and self-defeating emotion and it gives you an excuse not to think, is stupid.

Mr. Jennings. I don't mean to belabor the point, nor will I, but I think many Americans

believe that you contributed to cynicism about politics. And I assume if there's anything you could take back over the last several years it would be the Lewinski affair.

The President. Why should you be cynical? If someone makes a mistake, and they say they make a mistake, and they do their best to atone for it, then you can say, "Well, people aren't perfect, and I'm disappointed." But that shouldn't make you cynical about the American political system, the American system of government.

Berlin Wall

Mr. Jennings. I'd just like to pick a couple things that the century will always be remembered for and get your take on them. What did the Berlin Wall mean to you?

The President. It was the symbol of what was wrong with communism. It was about control and keeping people back and keeping people in. You know, John Kennedy had that wonderful line in his speech, "Freedom has many difficulties, and our democracy is far from perfect. But we never had to put up a wall to keep our people in."

Atomic Bomb

Mr. Jennings. What difference did the atomic bomb make?

The President. It reminded us that we had the capacity to destroy ourselves completely, and it humbled people. And I think that's very important, because people with power—and I include myself—you give anybody a lot of power,

and if they're not careful, they will make arrogant decisions, unheeding of the most fundamental desire of people: to have life and liberty and to enjoy the blessings of normal life.

The President. We will look back at the development of the atomic bomb in some ways as one of the most humbling events in all of human history, because we finally had to come face-to-face with the fact that we could take it all away. You know? Beyond the gas chambers, be-

yond the pogroms, beyond the killing fields of the Somme and the Marne in World War I, we could actually make it all go away. And I think it sobered the world up in a way that was oddly reassuring.

NOTE: The interview began at approximately 10 a.m. in the Diplomatic Reception Room at the White House. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 18. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these excerpts.

The President's Radio Address December 18, 1999

Good morning. The holiday season is a time when America's remarkable religious diversity shines brightest in so many homes and different places of worship and schools. Today I want to talk to you about the role of faith in our lives, in all of our religious diversity, and, particularly, in the education of our children.

America's Founders were men and women of faith, many of whom fled oppression overseas to find freedom on our shores. They believed the best way to protect religious liberty was to guarantee, first of all, the right to practice religion by the dictates of their own conscience; and second, to forbid our Government from imposing or establishing any religious belief. In their wisdom, they enshrined these two principles in our Constitution.

But of course, reconciling these principles has not always been easy, especially when it comes to our education system. Finding the proper place for faith in our schools is a complex and emotional matter for many Americans. But I have never believed the Constitution required our schools to be religion-free zones or that our children must check their faiths at the schoolhouse door.

Americans expect our schools to teach our children the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in life. We also trust our schools to strengthen the moral foundation of our society, to reinforce the values taught at home and in our communities.

Studies show that children involved in religious activities are less likely to use drugs. Expe-

rience tells us they're more likely to stay out of trouble. Common sense says that faith and faith-based organizations from all religious backgrounds can play an important role in helping children to reach their fullest potential. That's why I've always supported individual students' rights to voluntarily practice religious beliefs, including prayer in school or to engage in religious activities on school grounds, but not to have any kind of enforced such activities.

Now, in 1995 our administration released a set of principles for protecting religious freedom in our public schools. We did so in response to parents and educators who asked for help in knowing what kinds of religious activities are permissible in public schools and what is not permissible. They asked for help in respecting the rights and beliefs of all students, from the most observant from all religious backgrounds to those who choose freely, as is their right, to completely abstain from any religious activity.

Those guidelines we issued make it clear that students do have the right to pray privately and individually in school, the right to say grace at lunch, the right to meet in religious groups on school grounds and to use school facilities just like any other groups do. They have the right to read the Bible or other religious books during study hall or free class time and the right to be free from coercion to participate in religious activity of any kind. Now, since we first issued those guidelines, appropriate religious activity has flourished in our schools and continuing in our country. Today I'm announcing the release