

Interview With Dan Rather of CBS News December 18, 2000

End of the President's Term

Mr. Rather. Mr. President, when I was walking over here, I mentioned to one member of your staff, "Well, it must be a bittersweet time." And he bristled a little. He was gentlemanly about it, but he bristled a little. Do you see it as a bittersweet time?

The President. Well, only a little bit, actually. I'm very happy and very much at peace and very grateful for the chance to serve and grateful especially that the country is in such good shape as I leave office. But I think, for all of us, it may be bittersweet in the sense that people—virtually everybody that works here likes the work, and we tried never to forget that it was a job and that we were privileged to do it.

But everything comes to an end; you have to do something else. And I think we've had our time here. I'm just focused on doing everything I can in the days that remain, helping President-elect Bush have a successful transition and kind of savoring and being grateful for the good things that have happened.

2000 Presidential Election

Mr. Rather. The country is still in the midst of an almost 8-year boom. The country is at peace. You've had, by many measurements, if not most—perhaps even all measurements—at least a reasonably successful Presidency. Why are we having a Republican President come in behind you?

The President. Well, I think partly because of the prosperity. I think they both debated how to use the prosperity, and the country was evenly divided. One candidate won the popular vote, and the Supreme Court decided the electoral vote. People will be analyzing that for years to come. Maybe I'll have a chance to analyze it, too, after some time. But I don't know that I have anything to add to what's been said by others.

Vice President Al Gore/2000 Presidential Election

Mr. Rather. Maybe we ought to come back to that later. Through most of the 8 years of your Presidency, you and your Vice President seemed to all the world to be joined at the hip. There were historians who were writing that

Vice President Gore had been given as much or more responsibility than any Vice President in the history of the country.

The President. Oh, more. There's no question about that.

Mr. Rather. And that he did a very good job as Vice President.

The President. And he did. I think that when the period of this history is written and people who care about American Government look at how we organized and ran the administration, they will say a number of things, including the fact that we came here with a well-thought-out set of ideas and policies, and we basically did what we said we'd do in '92 and then again in '96, and that we had a real team operation in the White House, and that the Vice President had more responsibility in more areas than any Vice President in history and carried them out very well. I don't think there is any question that in the job of Vice President, he's the most effective person that has held that job and had more responsibility than anyone who ever had it.

Mr. Rather. That being the case, Mr. President, when he, in effect, ran away from you during the campaign, you had to be disappointed at that.

The President. Well, I think, first of all, everybody has got to run their own race. And it's a difficult thing running as Vice President. There is no accident that only two Vice Presidents in the history of the country have ever been directly elected President.

If you get to be Vice President, you've got an excellent chance of getting to be President, because something could happen to the President, and you've got a terrific chance of being the nominee for President of your party. But to be directly elected, it's only happened twice. And once, when Martin Van Buren succeeded Andrew Jackson, we were still virtually a one-party country. And the only other time it happened was in 1988, when basically there was an enormously contentious and negative campaign which succeeded in painting the Democratic nominee, Governor Dukakis, as virtually un-American.

This was basically a pretty positive campaign. They had a debate about what to do. They talked about the various issues, and the people split.

Mr. Rather. But back to the question—had to feel disappointed?

The President. I really believe every person has to decide what's best for them. And I thought that it was—let me just say, I thought that it was the right thing for me not to be out there very much until the end, the last week or 10 days. I did most of what I could do early by going to scores of events for our House and Senate candidates and for the Democratic Party, which helped the Vice President, of course, directly, the Democratic Party work did.

And when a Vice President becomes a President, he tries to figure out some way to establish his own identity and to get the benefit of the good things that have happened, but still to be an independent person. And I don't think that anybody else should second-guess that. Once your party has a nominee, then the rest of us should be on the team. I think politics is a team sport. It's about addition, not subtraction. And I don't believe the rest of us should second-guess the leader of the team, including me.

Mr. Rather. Do you agree or disagree that some of your failures, policy as well as personal failures in the White House, had an impact on Al Gore's losing?

The President. Yes, to the first; no, to the second. To say that people would hold him responsible for any personal mistake I made is an insult to the American people. I mean, people just aren't that unfair. The people of this country are basically good people. And moreover, there were a lot of surveys along toward the end of the campaign that showed that if I could have run again, I would have done fine. So I just don't think there's any evidence of that.

On the policies, however, there were—you know, I don't know if the fact that we drew the short straw and had that terrible mess with the Elian Gonzalez case cost him a lot of votes in Florida, but it could have. And if it did, I feel very badly about it, because this wasn't anything anybody dreamed up.

I don't think there's any question that a number of—in West Virginia, some people voted against him in the northern part of the State because they blamed us—I don't think they're right about it, but they did blame us for the

closing of a steel mill there that occurred more or less at the same time of the Asian financial crisis. They thought we should have moved more quickly than we did to stop the inflow of cheap steel.

I don't think there is—I don't know if you'd call this a policy failure, but I don't think there's any doubt that in at least five States I can think of, the NRA had a decisive influence because they disagreed with our attempts to close the gun show loophole and have child trigger locks, safety locks, and ban large-scale ammunition clips.

You know, presumably, some people voted for him because we were for those things. But one of the sad things about all gun safety legislation is that people tend to vote for the issues, but when they're voting for candidates, the "antis" tend to be more intense than the "pros." I mean, if you look at Colorado, which is basically a Republican State now, the Vice President lost there, but closing the gun show loophole passed 70–30. In Oregon, because of the Nader candidacy, he only won a narrow victory, but the gun show loophole closing carried 2–1.

So I think you have to give the—so the policy issues that we fought out, I don't think there's any question they cost him some votes. I think that, on balance, I believe he gained more because of the economic success of the administration, because we have 8 years in a row of declining crime, because the welfare rolls were cut in half, because of the millions of people that were benefited by family leave, because of the things we did.

So I think, on balance, it was more of a plus than a minus by a good long way; two-thirds of the people thought the country was going in the right direction.

But in a race like this that's so close, you think about some of the issues we had in West Virginia on that steel mill or the Gonzalez case, and you wonder—I mean, President Kennedy once said that "victory has a thousand fathers, and defeat is an orphan." In this case, where the Vice President won the popular vote and, by decision of the Supreme Court, lost the electoral college, defeat may have a thousand fathers, too. We'll all be chewing over this for—heck, people will be writing about this 100 years from now.

Supreme Court Decision on Election

Mr. Rather. I have so much ground I want to cover with you, about your legacy, about the future, and I don't intend to spend the rest of our time talking about the election just finished. But anyone who's ever been around a courthouse knows that judges, high and low, frequently engage in raw politics—all hope they'll deal with the law.

You mentioned earlier the Supreme Court. To those who are absolutely convinced that the Supreme Court, they just had a Republican majority, wanted a Republican as President, and voted politics, not the law—as an attorney and as our President, you say what?

The President. I say, when I get out and start teaching constitutional law again, I'll tell you exactly what I think about it. [Laughter]

The important vote there, the 5–4 vote—there were actually three separate opinions, but the 5–4 vote was a vote to stop the vote count—

Mr. Rather. That was the clincher.

The President. —6 days in advance of the electoral college meeting. And the American people will just have to make their own decisions about it. But I think that it will be viewed in history as a momentous decision, and I think that it will be debated a long time. But it's very interesting. You know, there's a lot of stuff already been written about it. I noticed there were three articles in this week's *Economist* about it, basically critical, even though the *Economist* endorsed President-elect Bush. There's going to be a lot of stuff written about it.

But I think that from my point of view, as long as I'm President, what I should be focused on doing is telling the country that we should accept it, because the principle of judicial review has served us well. And all of us believe, looking back in history, that there were periods when the Supreme Court made serious mistakes, but when they did, they normally were corrected over time.

So I think the Vice President spoke for all of us when he said he strongly disagreed with the decision, but he accepted it. And right now we need to focus on pulling the country together, giving President-elect Bush a chance to get off to a good start, to hit the ground running, dealing with all these issues that are out there. And there will be lots of time for me and others to say exactly what the elements of

the Supreme Court decision were. But I just don't think I should say more than that now.

Mr. Rather. We're going to move on and talk about the economy. Before doing so, as one who taught law, as an attorney, were you surprised that this Supreme Court ever took the case? I ask this, again, for backdrop. Many attorneys I've talked to, of all persuasion and all parties, said they were surprised—some say stunned—that this Court would have even taken the case.

The President. Well, let me say, I think most lawyers—or a lot of them—are surprised they took the case. Even those that were surprised they took the case were shocked when the vote count was stopped on the Friday.

Mr. Rather. Were you?

The President. No. No, not after 8 years in Washington, I wasn't. But I hadn't found a single lawyer who believes that there is precedent any time in American history for it. I've asked probably 50, 60. But I wasn't surprised, no.

They had the power to do it, and they did it. And it's done, and we should accept it, because the country has to go on. We can't reverse the principle of judicial review, and we shouldn't. And we should try to help the President-elect get off to a good start, give him a chance to govern the country. I hope he'll be given a decent honeymoon. I know what it's like not to have one, and I hope he will get one.

And I think we should—we ought to just—right now, everybody can think what they think about it, but for me, I believe I owe my country. The people of this country have been good to me, and I've had a chance to serve in this job. It's hard enough under the best circumstances. The President-elect won the electoral college, and he deserves a chance to have a good start. And that's what I'm going to focus on, and I'm going to try to give it to him.

National Economy

Mr. Rather. Let's talk about the economy. I think, by any reasonable analysis, that the incoming Bush administration is trying to position the economic picture in the following way: The economy is starting downward, maybe headed toward a recession, and therefore they're positioning themselves to be able to say, whatever happens on the downside, particularly if we have a recession, "Don't forget, it's the Clinton/Gore

administration, not this new incoming administration.”

The President. Well, they do that. You know, you can’t blame them for trying to buy low and sell high if they want to try to do that. But I personally believe that no one knows how long we can keep this recovery going. But the overwhelming majority of the experts believe that we’re going to have a pretty good year next year.

Now, it’s already the longest economic expansion in history. We had over 22 million new jobs. I don’t think you can totally repeal the business cycle, but it’s certain that it’s changed. And what has changed it?

First of all, you have to give the American people a lot of credit here. You have this explosion of entrepreneurial energy, not only among small businesses and dot-com companies but people integrating technology and productivity into big old traditional firms. There’s no question that technology has enabled productivity to grow much more rapidly than in the past, and that keeps these recoveries going.

And we’ve kept interest rates down, and we continue to invest in the education and training of the American people. And we continue to open new markets around the world and at home. Those are the things that I think are important for the Government to do.

Now, for the last couple of years, we were growing at a blistering pace. In other words, we’ve been growing ever since I got here, but we’ve been growing at a blistering pace. No one believed we could continue to grow at 5 percent a year. Most people believe next year growth will be around 3 percent. And I believe that the important thing is to just keep following a solid economic policy.

I think we can have a tax cut; I’ve always said that. But I think it needs to be modest enough so that there’s no question that we’re going to continue to pay down the debt and pay it off within a decade or so, at least 12 years. I think that will keep interest rates down. That’s a big tax cut to ordinary people and to business people and to investors, because it keeps the market up and it keeps inflation down.

Then I think it’s important to save back enough money to invest what we have to invest in education and our other responsibilities, including national security. I think it is important to save back enough money to deal with the long-term challenges to Medicare and Social Se-

curity. You’ve got the baby boom generation about to retire. And depending on what you decide to do with it, it costs more or less money to do it.

But I think that—there’s no question that we can. I believe we should have a tax cut. The question is, how big should it be, and whether you can meet your other obligations? But the most important thing people want is to keep this economy going. And I think, you know, it’s got quite a little life left in it, I think.

Mr. Rather. Quite a bit of life left in it, you say. Mr. President, with respect, you know as I know that in politics, a lot of it is trying to pin a tail on somebody else. This economy goes down even a little, it’s fairly clear that the tail is going to be—at least they’ll try to pin the tail on you.

The President. Well, they’ll have the microphone, of course. But I think that what—the American people hire us not so much to place blame as to produce. And over the long run, that’s how we’re all judged, I think. And I don’t think any—at least no economist thought we could continue to grow at 5 percent a year indefinitely.

Interest Rates

Mr. Rather. Are you in favor of interest rates staying low, or do you think they need to be raised some or lowered some?

The President. Oh no, I think—well, no, no, no. I think—I like low interest rates, which is why we’ve been paying the debt down. Now, if the Federal Reserve believes that the economy is slowing too much, they might want to cut short-term rates again and try to get a little more investment going. And I think that that’s something that they have under consideration.

I have found that, basically, Chairman Greenspan has had a pro-growth policy. He’s tried to see this economy grow as much as it could without inflation. On a couple of occasions over the last 8 years, he may have made a call different than I would have made it, but on the whole, I think he’s managed this thing in a responsible way, and I’ve tried to manage my part of it in a responsible way. And that’s enabled us to have the longest expansion in history with low inflation.

You know, I’d just like to—when I took office, the deficit of this country—the debt had quadrupled, and the deficit was \$295 billion. This year we’re going to pay off—we will have paid

off, in the last 3 years, \$360 billion on the national debt. And I just learned, about 30 minutes before we started this interview, that with the budget we finished last weekend, we're going to pay off another \$200 billion on the national debt. So we will have paid down \$560 billion on the national debt over 4 years. Now, that's a huge impact to keep interest rates low and growth high.

So I still think they can—if this thing is managed properly, I think they'll have some more growth here. Now, like I said, I don't know—no one knows how much you can combine the entrepreneurial spirit of the American people, the explosion of technology and productivity growth, and proper Government policies, and how long you can keep this going. No one knows the answer to that, but I think they can—I think we can keep it going quite a while longer.

Mr. Rather. So to move on, are you in favor or not in favor of cutting interest rates now?

The President. For 8 years, I have refused to second-guess the Fed publicly, and I don't think I should change as I'm going out the door. The press indicates that they have that under advisement, that they're thinking about it. And it's something I think they ought to think about. It depends upon what the data shows about how much they think the economy is slowing. Everyone—they wanted—the Fed's raised interest rates, you remember. They knew it had to slow some. If we kept growing at 5 percent a year, there was too big a risk we'd have an explosion in inflation or an explosion of interest rates or both.

But then we had the increased fuel prices, which slowed things down some, and a few other developments and some corrections in some of the high-tech stocks. So I think they've got it under consideration. I think that if they do it, I think it will certainly be an understandable decision.

But my point is, the thing that keeps interest rates really low is the fact that we're paying the debt off. That will keep interest rates low, inflation low, and if we keep investing in education, investing in technology, investing in scientific research, staying on the cutting edge of change, and opening new markets around the world—something I think that this incoming administration and I agree on—I think that we've got quite a bit of life left in the economy. The American people are still working hard, and

they're very innovative. So I expect them to have a good year next year.

Advice for the President-Elect

Mr. Rather. Let's have some fun. If you could recommend one book that the incoming President, George Bush, should read, what would it be?

The President. That's hard. But if it were only one book, I'd probably tell him to read David Herbert Donald's biography of Abraham Lincoln.

Mr. Rather. If you could recommend he see one movie that you think might help him in his years here, however long they would be, what would that be?

The President. "High Noon," because Gary Cooper does the right thing, even when people leave him, and even though he's scared, he doesn't pretend to be macho. He's scared to death, and he does the right thing anyway.

Washington Politics

Mr. Rather. You're not going to believe this, but when I went over with my staff what your answer would be, I told them, "High Noon." I want you to check it later. *[Laughter]*

Let's move along. When you look back over your 8 years, what's the one thing now that you wish you had known 8 years ago?

The President. Oh, boy, that's hard to answer. There are so many things I wish I had known 8 years ago. But I wish I had understood better, 8 years ago, exactly how what I do here both is seen by and reacted to by Congress and by the American people, better than I did then. I could give you lots of examples, but I think if I had done that, I think a lot of the—some of the early conflicts that I had would have been different.

I also wish I had understood better than I did when I came here the different views generally held by the two parties on the nature of political power and its uses in Washington—ways that I just didn't understand then.

1993 Economic Plan Legislation

Mr. Rather. Your finest hour as President?

The President. That's very, very hard to say. I had a lot of great times, for which I'm very grateful. But I think when we prevailed in both Houses by one vote on the economic plan in '93, that's what really turned the economy around and made possible so much else that

happened. If we hadn't had a functioning economy, I don't believe the welfare reform efforts would have worked as well as they have; I don't think the family leave law would have benefited 25 million people; I doubt if the crime rate would have gone down for 8 years in a row, even though we had a good crime policy; and I'm not sure I would have had the support from the American people to end the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Kosovo, or be involved as I was in Northern Ireland, the Middle East, a lot of other places. We might have had too much trouble here at home for me to do that. It probably—the fact that we had that lonely battle that only succeeded by one vote probably made so much else possible.

Somalia

Mr. Rather. Your darkest hour?

The President. I've had more than one of them, too. But certainly one of them was when those 18 American soldiers were killed in Somalia. It was awful, because of the circumstances, which I hope to be able to talk about in some detail someday. But to lose them all in what was a humanitarian mission, because they were asked to try to arrest a person who had been responsible for killing our Pakistani comrades who were there also on a humanitarian mission, and then to wind up with all those Somalis dead and losing 18 of our people, it was a dark day.

Impeachment

Mr. Rather. Impeachment had to be a dark day.

The President. Well, by the time they got around to voting, I knew what was going to happen. And I didn't—no, my darkest day came long before that when I had to come to terms with the fact that I made a terrible personal mistake, which I tried to correct in private and which then got dragged into public. That was dark for me. By the time they got around to voting on impeachment, I knew what it was, and it didn't have any—I felt that to me, if we could defeat impeachment, it was like the second big battle of the Gingrich revolution. The first was when they shut the Government down, and that was the second one.

That doesn't mean that I didn't make a terrible mistake, but there were 800 people, including a lot of Republicans, who were legal and constitutional scholars, who wrote a letter saying

this was not an impeachable offense and shouldn't even be considered. And they all knew that, too. That was a political battle we were involved in. I didn't seek it. I didn't want to fight it, but I was only too happy to take it up, because I believe the real purpose of it was to try to weaken me and our side and what we believed in, and to strengthen their side and what they believed in.

Mr. Rather. In that, they succeeded.

The President. Well, I'm not sure they did. In 1998 we won seats in the House of Representatives for the first time since 1822 in the sixth year of a President's term. So I'm not sure they did. It may be that, after the fact, that what they did will acquire some historical legitimacy. But what I regret about that was what I did wrong, not the fact that they impeached me, because that was wrong, too. I agreed with Joe Lieberman, as I said at the time. I agreed with what he said, that what I did was wrong and what they did was wrong. And I think that's the way history will record it.

President-Elect George W. Bush

Mr. Rather. Mr. President, the clock rolls. Allow me to pick up the pace a little. I want to read you off a list and ask you to tell me the first thing that comes into your mind.

George W. Bush.

The President. President-elect.

Mr. Rather. Like him?

The President. I don't know him very well. I like his father very much, and I've actually had more contact with his brother, who is the Governor of Florida, than I have with him. But I have a lot of friends in Texas who like him, who say he's a good man, like his wife very much, like his daughters. And I hope he'll succeed.

Vice President Al Gore

Mr. Rather. We'll go down the list, and we'll stop on each one.

Al Gore.

The President. Best Vice President this country ever had, a partner who without I could not have been successful as President.

Former Speaker Newt Gingrich

Mr. Rather. Newt Gingrich.

The President. A brilliant adversary and a complicated man.

Mr. Rather. A bit of an adversary?

The President. Brilliant. A brilliant adversary.

Mr. Rather. Brilliant adversary.

The President. And a complicated man. He's a complicated man, interesting man.

National Rifle Association

Mr. Rather. The National Rifle Association.

The President. An effective adversary, but I think, on balance, a negative force, because they're trying to convince their people that we're trying to do something we're not trying to do.

Mr. Rather. Which is?

The President. Take everybody's guns away. That's why I like giving speeches in debate with them, because I always tell everybody I talk to, if you missed a day in the deer woods or a single sport shooting contest, you ought to vote against me and our whole crowd. But if you didn't, they must be telling you something that's not true here. Let's look at what we're really for.

So I think the NRA did a lot of good things in Arkansas when I was there—hunter education programs; they helped me resolve some property disputes. They really did some good things, but now they're just into terrifying people and building their membership and raising money. And it's just not true we're trying to take their guns away. It's just not true that we've interfered with legitimate hunters and sports people. And it's just not true that we've done enough in America to protect people from the dangers of criminals and kids having guns.

But you've got to give it to them; they've done a good job. They've probably had more to do than anyone else in the fact we didn't win the House this time, and they hurt Al Gore.

Attorney General Janet Reno

Mr. Rather. Going on down the list, Janet Reno.

The President. Good woman, tried really hard to do a good job. She's a good person.

Virginia Kelley

Mr. Rather. Your mother.

The President. First thing that comes to my mind? I still miss her every day.

First Lady Hillary Clinton

Mr. Rather. Hillary Rodham Clinton.

The President. I love her, and I'm really proud of her.

Chelsea Clinton

Mr. Rather. Chelsea.

The President. I love her, and I'm really proud of her.

Mr. Rather. Do you expect her to run for something some day?

The President. Oh, Lord, I kind of doubt it. Although, I'm proud of her; she got into this deal helping her mom, and she traveled with me some when Hillary couldn't go the last year and 3 or 4 months. She cares about public issues and public life, and she's got a big heart. And she's really interested in all of it, but I don't know that she would ever run for office. But if she did, if she wanted to do it, I'd sure support her and do whatever I could to help her. But it's totally up to her.

Lincoln Bedroom

Mr. Rather. The Lincoln Bedroom.

The President. It's the place where Lincoln freed the slaves.

Whitewater

Mr. Rather. Whitewater.

The President. Biggest bogus issue in modern American politics—classic. It was a fraud from the get-go, and a lot of the people that were propagating it knew it was a fraud. And in that sense, people will look at this years from now and be amazed that anybody rode it as hard as they did for as long as they did.

Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr

Mr. Rather. Special Prosecutor Kenneth Starr. Independent Counsel.

The President. First title is better than the second. But I don't have any—he just did what he was supposed to do. I don't have any particular bad feelings about him.

Mr. Rather. He did what he was supposed to do?

The President. Yes.

Mr. Rather. What was he supposed to do?

The President. They put him in there because Fiske was a fair, balanced man, and the whole thing was going to be over before the '96 election, and they didn't want that. And so they put him in there, said, "Drag it out and get a bigger body count." And that's—he just did what he was supposed to do.

But I don't really have any—that group, that faction of the Republican Party controlled those independent counsels, and that's what they did.

But I don't have any personal animosity toward him like that. I mean, he really—he's part of that crowd, and they really believe it. They think that whatever they do to our side is okay, and that's what they really believe.

I didn't—I underestimated that when I got here. I just didn't really believe it. I always had good relationships with Republicans at home, even very conservative ones, members of the so-called Christian right. We always dealt with issues head up. And I just didn't understand that before I got here, but once I figured out what the deal was, I could sort of let it go. I realized they just had a different world view than I did.

Republican Leadership in Congress

Mr. Rather. At the end of my list—well, first, the Republican leadership on Capitol Hill.

The President. We got a lot done together and could have gotten more done if they hadn't given their rightwingers veto power from time to time. For example, we had—look what we got done this year. We just passed the best education budget of my entire 8 years as President, huge increases for after-school programs, school modernization and repair, nearly doubled the number of kids in the after-school programs, big increase in Head Start. We've now done more to expand college access than anything since the GI bill. We passed the China trade bill, the Africa-Caribbean Basin trade bill. And we took the earnings limit off of Social Security. We did a bunch of stuff this year, and we did for the last 6 years.

But we have a majority in the Congress—in this Congress, not the new one coming in, in the one that went out—we had a majority for campaign finance reform. We had a majority for a Patients' Bill of Rights. We had a majority for an increase in the minimum wage. I believe we had a majority for closing the gun show loophole.

Mr. Rather. But you couldn't get that through.

The President. No, because the rightwing blocked the leadership from letting us have a full and fair vote on that. So that I regret. But I worked with them, and I have very—personally, I like Senator Lott; I like Speaker Hastert. I've even acquired—

Mr. Rather. Do you like Tom DeLay?

The President. I've even acquired a rather jovial relationship with Dick Armey. We've gotten to where we joke around with each other.

I think—Tom DeLay I don't know as well. I told him, I said, the only thing he ever said about me that really hurt my feelings was when he said he didn't believe my golf handicap was as low as it was. And I sent him—I think I sent him a score that was in the Syracuse newspaper. [Laughter] But Tom DeLay worked with Hillary. They both got an award—Tom DeLay and Hillary both got an award from an adoption group because they'd done so much to try to facilitate adoptions. And that's the one area that I found real common ground with him on, that I think he's really genuine on.

My problem with him is, his whole view about how you should treat your opponents is very different from mine. I just think he's got a total scorch-and-burn policy: take them out, whatever the cost, whatever you have to do. And he's real nice about it. If you smile, you'd have a very cordial conversation with him. I think he really believes that. I think he thinks that's the way you're supposed to treat your political opponents. And I just don't agree with that.

For example, I never would have sent—I wouldn't let someone from the White House go to a contested State and try to intimidate vote counters. I wouldn't do that. I just don't believe that. That's not who I am. I don't think—I think that a great country has to have some voluntary restraint on the exercise of authority. But he's a very able guy, and if you don't stand up to him, he'll run right over you. So he's a worthy adversary.

Monica Lewinsky

Mr. Rather. At the end of my list—and you expect it—Monica Lewinsky.

The President. Sad chapter in my life that I wish were not public, but it's in the past. And for her, I wish her well. I hope she has a good life.

Mr. Rather. Do you take the responsibility, the personal responsibility, full responsibility?

The President. Absolutely. I did, and I do.

President's Future Plans

Mr. Rather. There was a report today you're thinking about hosting a television program. Anything to that?

The President. [Laughter] No. You guys make more money than I have, though. Maybe it's not a bad idea. I hear it costs a lot of money to support a Senator. Maybe I ought to look into it. [Laughter]

Mr. Rather. Don't believe everything you read, Mr. President. [Laughter]

The President. I don't have an offer on the table. Is CBS getting into the bidding here? [Laughter]

Mr. Rather. What about running for something? Are you going to run for mayor of New York?

The President. No.

Mr. Rather. Governor of Arkansas?

The President. No.

Mr. Rather. Governor of—

The President. I loved it—no. Let me just say something about running. I think it's very important that—first of all, I need to take a couple of months and just go down. I need some rest. I've been working like crazy for 27 years. And I want to help Hillary, however I can, to succeed, because I think she—I'm so proud of her, and I think she is immensely talented, and I think she'll do very well. But I've got to support my family. I want to try—I've never had a chance to save any money. I want to try to save some, so they will be all right if anything happens to me. I've got to make sure we've paid all our bills. And I want to have some time to rest and just be a private citizen again.

And then what I would like to do is to find a way to be a useful—to use all this incredible opportunity I've had as President to work on things that I care most about, here in the United States and around the world, but to do it in a way that does not in any inappropriate fashion get underfoot of the next President. I don't want to do that. I just want to try to be a good citizen.

And I think there have been two truly great former Presidents in terms of their public service, John Quincy Adams and Jimmy Carter.

Mr. Rather. John Quincy Adams because he went back and served in the House?

The President. He went back and served in the House, and he served 16 years—or served 8 terms, anyway—

Mr. Rather. Any chance you would do something like that?

The President. —and he's great. Well, let me finish. Then William Howard Taft went on the Supreme Court, served with some distinction. And for some years, Teddy Roosevelt kind of organized another political movement. Herbert Hoover did a lot of good. He went out and headed the commission for President Tru-

man. So they also did well. Thomas Jefferson did some productive things after he left the White House. So there's evidence that if you don't just vegetate, you can do some good. And I'm going to try to use my center and foundation to do some really good things.

But I think that what I need to do is, I just need a little time to sort of decompress. And like I said, I want to try to take care of my family and just see what happens. But I care a lot—I just gave a speech in Coventry at the University of Warwick for Tony Blair, talking about, sort of, these big issues for the 21st century.

Mr. Rather. Your globalization speech.

The President. Yes. How do you put a human face on a global economy? How do you empower poor people in America and around the world? What are we going to really do about AIDS and the breakdown of public health systems around the world? How are we going to figure out—how do you deal with global warming and still have economies growing? Unless we can break the link between putting more stuff into the air, greenhouse gases, and getting richer, we're going to have a disaster on our hands, because people are not going to agree not to become wealthier, and they shouldn't. These big questions, these are things that I care about.

I ran for the White House—sometimes I feel like a fish out of water, especially like this interview. We spent more than half our time on kind of like political questions. But the reason that I had some success as President, I'm convinced more than anything else, is that I always thought Presidential elections and Presidential administrations were about ideas that resonated with the values of the American people but were appropriate to the present and the future. And I still believe that.

If somebody asked me for advice, I'd say, "Figure out what you believe, what's your vision of America; come up with a strategy to achieve it; then make your specific tactical move here. Decide what ideas you're going to push." I think that's very important.

So when I'm not President, that's what I think I ought to be doing, fighting for the things that I believe in, helping the people that I'd like to help, people that would be—people or problems that would be ignored by a lot of other people. So I hope I can do that. That's what I care about.

And finally, of course, the great work of my life has been in racial and religious and ethnic reconciliation. And I've tried to carry it forward here as President. And I hope I'll be able to make a contribution on that in the future.

Future Residences and Offices

Mr. Rather. Mr. President, the clock is running quickly here. First of all, are you and the First Lady planning on selling the place in Chappaqua, New York?

The President. Gosh, I hope not. I've gone to a lot of trouble to fix that place up.

Mr. Rather. Are you buying a place here in Washington, in Georgetown?

The President. [Laughter] I don't know. But you've got to have a place to live here. And I hope—we'll either have to rent a place or buy a place, and we'll figure out what to do about it. But—

Mr. Rather. Haven't bought one yet?

The President. No, we haven't bought one yet, and we're definitely not going to sell our place in Chappaqua if I've got anything to say about it. We've just got it all fixed up. We've done lots of work on that house. It's a delightful place. I'm going to have an office, Presidential office, in New York City. I'll have a—I'll have my transition office here for 6 months, but I'll have my permanent office up there. And I'll have the home in Chappaqua, and I expect we'll spend virtually all of our weekends there. But you've got to have a place to sleep down here.

First Lady's Memoirs

Mr. Rather. Now, the First Lady is going to be paid now—I'll go to my notes here because this figure is a whopping figure—\$8 million for her memoirs. What is she going to say about you in that book?

The President. [Laughter] I don't know. I don't know if there's \$8 million worth to say. You all know it all already. But she's had two bestsellers, and she gave all the money away from the first one. The second is on the best-seller list, the book on the White House now. It's a really good book, I think. And she's given all the money away to that. So she just auctioned this one. I think she was probably as surprised as anybody that the auction brought that price. But the publisher that won it published her other bestsellers. I guess they think she's got a third one in her.

Mr. Rather. I want to say this respectfully, Mr. President. Surely you don't want her writing about Paula Jones, Monica Lewinsky, and all those things again. Is she likely to do that?

The President. You ought to ask her. She can write about whatever she wants. I tell you, I bet it will be a good book.

Senator-Elect Hillary Clinton's Political Future

Mr. Rather. The First Lady's future. It's assumed among Democrats she's going to run for President. I guess the question is, does she do it in 2004 or 2008?

The President. Well, I'll tell you what I believe. I believe that that's worse than idle speculation. I can tell you what I've urged her to do. What I've urged her to do is, number one, solidify her roots and her ties with the people of New York State; have an agenda for New York; have an agenda for America, because every Senator is a Senator on American issues, too; stay on the forefront of ideas, keep pushing and getting things done; and the future will take care of itself. But I think—she said she intends to serve her term in the Senate, and I believe that's what she intends to do.

We already assume there are a lot of other people who will run for President again 4 years from now, including the Vice President. And of course, he would have a big leg up, because he won the popular vote this time.

Mr. Rather. Do you consider him head of the Democratic Party now?

The President. I certainly think he is the leader of the party, and he won the election—the popular vote, I mean. He won the popular vote. And I think he will decide what he's going to do. Then other people will decide what they're going to do.

But look, the world will look entirely different—could look different 6 months from now, a year from now. No one has any idea what it will be like 4 years from now. When I ran for President—this is why I said ideas are the most important—when I started running for President in late '91, my mother was about the only person who thought I could win. That's not quite true; Hillary did. But the incumbent President, President Bush, had an approval rating of over 70 percent. These things are not predictable. And I think people waste so much energy thinking about them and maneuvering.

I want Hillary to enjoy being a Senator and to be the best Senator she can be. This seat

was held by Senator Moynihan and Robert Kennedy, and they were great Senators. And that's what I want for her.

Mr. Rather. You do, or do not, think it is a given that she'll one day run for President?

The President. Oh, I don't think anything is a given like that. I don't think it's a given that any—if you could name me any person in this country, Democrat or Republican, and say, do you think it's a given that they'll run for President, I would say no, because I don't.

Abraham Lincoln once said about this—I think he'd always thought he'd run for President. He's the only person, apparently; we forgive his ambition. He once said, "I will work and get ready, and perhaps my chance will come." That's about all anybody can do. But no, I don't know if any of them are going to run.

Post-Presidency Legal Issues

Mr. Rather. Mr. President, I'm so sorry to step on your line. I'm so afraid time will run out on us. And you've been very generous with your time. Do you expect to be indicted after you leave the Presidency, by a current independent counsel, the successor to Kenneth Starr?

The President. Well, that's up to them. We had a bipartisan panel of prosecutors testified in the Congress that no ordinary prosecutor would do such a thing, would even think of it. There were five of them that testified to that. And the Republicans in the Congress argued that they didn't have to have an indictable offense; you could impeach somebody for something that you wouldn't indict them for.

So I don't know. I may have more to say about that later. Look, I don't have any idea. I don't have any control over that, and I don't spend much time thinking about it. All I know is, Whitewater was a fraud; the civil lawsuit was a fraud. They knew that for a long, long time; everybody did. And a lot of innocent people have already been hurt for purely political reasons. And if I had to do it all over again, I still would, because the country is in better shape.

So all I can tell you is, nothing can take away my feeling of gratitude for having had the chance to serve and my feeling of gratitude that it worked out so well for the American people.

Mr. Rather. Do you think President Bush will pardon you to keep—possibly prevent an indictment, or in case of indictment?

The President. I haven't given any thought to that. But I doubt it. I mean, no, I haven't thought about that.

Mr. Rather. There are those who say, "Look, it would be a great unifying thing for the country," quote, unquote, for him to do that.

The President. Well, since I don't believe I should be charged, I don't want that. I'll be happy to stand—I told you before, if that's what they want, I'll be happy to stand and fight.

Presidential Pardons

Mr. Rather. Speaking of pardons, you still have your power to pardon people. True or untrue that you've considered pardons for the financier Milken, for Hubbell, for others involved in the Whitewater case, and for the killer of two FBI agents, Mr. Peltier? Any truth to that?

The President. I have been asked to consider pardons for hundreds and hundreds of people, and we are reviewing them all. And I will make decisions at an appropriate time. I don't want to discuss them until I make the decision about them.

I'll just mention one. On the Milken thing, the main thing I've heard from there is the people that are involved in prostate cancer, because he's been so active in that—I've heard a lot from people who say, "He served his time. He paid a big price. You ought to do this because of the contribution he's made to the fight against prostate cancer."

Mr. Rather. It sounds like you might—fair to say you might?

The President. No, it's not fair to say I will or I won't. I haven't made a decision about that.

North Korea

Mr. Rather. Foreign policy, I wanted to talk to you about your legacy on foreign policy. This time it didn't work out that way. Are you planning a trip to North Korea?

The President. I haven't decided yet. We worked hard with North Korea. We made a big breakthrough there with the Secretary of State going. I'd like to do what I can to make sure that—we started this administration with the North Korea problem being the number one national security threat to the United States because of their nuclear program. We terminated that, and we're trying to figure out a way to terminate the missile program. If there was

some way to do that, I might consider doing it.

But I wanted to wait until we had a President-elect because they'll have to have their own Korea policy. It may be something they prefer to do, maybe something they disagree with doing. So I just thought, while I don't think that the President-elect should have a veto—like I didn't—President Bush went—did the Somalia thing after the election 8 years ago—I think it should be something that we discuss and we just try to work through what the best thing for America's interest is.

Cuba

Mr. Rather. Do you agree or disagree that U.S. policy in Cuba is out of step with your approach on other countries and has more to do with domestic policies and domestic politics than it does, actually, foreign policy?

The President. Well, I think it had a great deal to do with domestic policy and politics for a long time, in the sense that we have a lot of people in America who were personally hurt by the Castro regime and whose families were hurt and who lost their property, and they even lost their lives, lost their loved ones. So it's, in that sense, more personal. But I don't think there's any question that we would have made more progress with Cuba than we have if they hadn't shot those planes down and murdered those innocent people a few years ago.

Mr. Rather. The "Castro regime" meaning Fidel, himself?

The President. Yes. They shot those Brothers to the Rescue planes down in blatant violation of international law. We don't believe they were in Cuban territorial waters. But even if they were in Cuban territorial waters, it was illegal. Cuba is a signatory to the Chicago convention, which specifically says how you have to handle planes like that. It governs what we do when we see planes take off from South America, small planes that we know are unarmed that may have drugs on them. A lot of times we have to follow them until they go down somewhere, or do that. What they did, it was a deliberate, illegal killing.

Mr. Rather. That's a matter of foreign policy.

The President. Yes. And when they did that, the Congress reacted basically by passing the so-called Helms-Burton Act, which dramatically restricted the ability of any President to relax relations with Cuba. And it made me wonder

if the person in the whole world that least wanted the embargo lifted was Fidel Castro. I mean, I've often wondered whether he and the people in America that don't want any change in relations are in some sort of unconscious dance with each other, because as long as that embargo is there, he's got an excuse for the failures of his regime.

China

Mr. Rather. Mr. President, last question, China. There are reports out of China that they're razing church buildings, blowing them up, burning them down, on the eve of Christmas. And they've been doing this sort of thing for a year and a half. Are you now ready to recommend that the United States back this resolution at Geneva, before the United Nations Human Rights Commission, to condemn this kind of thing?

The President. Well, let me say, I have been—I have worked, I believe, as hard as any President for religious liberty at home and around the world, even for people who disagree with me on a lot of things. And I have had innumerable conversations with Jiang Zemin and with other Chinese officials about this. I think that their view that people who have strong religious convictions represent a political threat is just wrong. So I will do what I think is appropriate at the time on this.

Mr. Rather. Does that include considering backing this resolution?

The President. I gave an answer. That's all the answer I want to give right now.

Mr. Rather. Mr. President, you have been very generous with your time, and I appreciate it.

The President. Thank you, Dan.

Mr. Rather. Thank you.

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 4:28 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to Cuban youth Elian Gonzalez, rescued off the coast of Florida on November 25, 1999, who returned to Cuba on June 28, 2000; Senator Joseph Lieberman; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; and President Jiang Zemin of China. The transcript was embargoed for release by the Office of the Press Secretary until 9 p.m. on December 19. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.