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## Interview With Michael Jackson of KABC Radio in Los Angeles, California

*February 14, 1994*

***Mr. Jackson.*** Good afternoon to you there, sir.

***The President.*** Hello, Michael, how are you?

***Mr. Jackson.*** I must tell you, Mr. President, when people heard that you were coming on this morning, their already broad beams grew broader. People are very, very delighted that you've taken the interest, sir, and the direct concern that you have with the suffering out here. But it's an inspiring morning.

Good morning, sir.

***The President.*** Good morning. It must be inspiring. The courage, the determination demonstrated by the school's administration, faculty, and students to get the campus back in operation so quickly, just a month later, is very impressive. I want to compliment President Blenda Wilson and everyone else who worked on it. I think she's there along with Cal State University Chancellor Barry Munitz. And I just have heard so much about it.

FEMA spent a lot of time out there. I think Dick Krimm's with you there——

***Mr. Jackson.*** Yes, he is. He will be on shortly.

***The President.*** —and we've had so many reports from Henry Cisneros and Federico Peña and all the people I've had out there and all the people from California who work at the White House who have been out there.

I couldn't believe that you sustained $300 million worth of damage. And all of your 53 buildings were damaged, and you're back open a month later. It's a real tribute to you. So I'm glad to hear the California spirit alive and well. I can hear it in the background from all the clapping and everything.

***Mr. Jackson.*** It's here.

***The President.*** The Vice President is coming out to Northridge on Wednesday to inspect the damage. And I hope you'll all go see him. He's younger and has less gray hair than I do, so more college students should like seeing him. [*Laughter*]

***Mr. Jackson.*** Did he write that comment, Mr. President?

***The President.*** No, no, but he might have. I mean, he's got a pretty good sense of humor about it. We kid each other a lot. And his sense of humor is great, especially if the jokes are at my expense. [*Laughter*]

### *Federal Aid to California*

***Mr. Jackson.*** Mr. President, why does it take an earthquake, a disaster of this magnitude to get such a generous response from Washington? I mean, shouldn't some of the Federal aid and assistance be available to people who are dislocated by, for example, the closure of so many cold-war-related industries here in California?

***The President.*** Absolutely. Absolutely, it does. It should happen. Since I have been in office, we've worked very hard to dramatically increase the amount of assistance in terms of job training and in terms of alternative development of jobs for use of defense technologies, for commercial purposes, and in helping communities put themselves back together.

I came in here with a real philosophy that we ought to be spending a lot of money every year on defense conversion and on other things that dislocated people who wanted to work. So last year we spent $500 million on defense conversion. This year we're going to spend much more. And we need to do more.

Now, keep in mind, one of the things that constrains us now is the enormous Government deficit, which the Congress is normally willing to suspend in the case of an emergency. So that's one of the reasons these things happen more quickly. But we are moving toward investing more in communities and in workers and in new technologies. And it shouldn't take a natural disaster to get us to plan for and take care of the fundamental needs of our people.

### *Natural Disasters*

***Mr. Jackson.*** Mr. President, Mother Nature really has socked it to us and given most of the Nation a devastating few months. As you read and study the reports and you watch the news, do you have an overall comment that you'd care to make about the way that citizens impacted by hurricanes, blizzards,

floods, fires, and now earthquakes have responded to these disasters?

***The President.*** Well, I'd say the American people get an A-plus for the way they've dealt with this. You know, there was a 500-year flood in the Middle West. I visited there several times—just stunned by it. Then in the last several months you've had the fires in California, plus the mudslides and the terrible problem of the earthquake, and of course, another earthquake and the problems in Los Angeles just a couple of years before that. So this is really an enormously difficult time for people, especially in California but in many other parts of the country. And then in the East Coast, you know, we had the bitterest winter in over 100 years and many, many people died there.

But it seems that when these things happen, when nature reminds us that we're not in full control of our destiny, somehow people almost relax more, and they come together; they think about what's really important; they trust each other. I think it's fascinating in how many communities the crime rate dropped dramatically after this earthquake occurred, when presumably it might have been easier to go out and steal from people. People didn't want to do it as much.

I think that sometimes we need to remember what it was like in the midst of one of these natural disasters and see if we can't behave more like that all the time and realize we need each other and we are a community, and when we pull together and work together, we can do unbelievable things in a very short time. When we fight with one another, when we're divided, when we're shortsighted, then none of us can become what we ought to be.

### *Natural Disaster Insurance*

***Mr. Jackson.*** Mr. President, I know you've toured the area. It's so easy to assess the damage and compare the scene with a war zone, but I think that's where the comparison ends. But this is a campus of 25,000 students who are hell-bent and determined to get on with life, to get on with their education, and they don't look like refugees from a battlefield. Sir, should——

***The President.*** Good.

***Mr. Jackson.*** Good. Mr. President, should there be such a thing as automatic sort of mandated natural disaster insurance so that no one is left out when the hurricanes and the earthquakes, et cetera strike?

***The President.*** Well, we're looking at that. Let me say, we're trying to do more to try to reduce the cost of people and property of natural disasters by doing a better job of thinking ahead, by choosing where we will build with an awareness of potential disasters, by constructing what we do build very well, by retrofitting where it's cost-effective. You know, a lot of the retrofitting that was done on the highway structures in California really worked. And if we had had another 6, 7 months before this last earthquake, we would have retrofitted more and had even less damage. So these are things that we have to really invest a lot more time and effort in.

With regard to having a Federal disaster insurance fund, I think that you have to remember that insurance works when the risk is spread broadly. And that requires a lot of people to participate, including many who don't think they're particularly at risk and others who may not be particularly at risk.

So when the taxpayers do it like this, we spread the risk very broadly across all of us who live in America because some of us are in trouble. If there were a way to use insurance mechanisms to do a better job so we wouldn't have to increase the deficit, that would be better still. But we have to ask ourselves whether that would be putting even more burden on people who are really not at risk.

We're thinking about it, and we're soliciting ideas. And there are a lot of bright people in universities all over California and in businesses who may have some good ideas about this. And I assure you that—three or four have already been presented to us, and we're going to research them all very carefully and eagerly look for other options, because we have been very fortunate that we could get the money through the Congress to deal with the floods and to deal with the earthquakes. But it is a difficult thing.

***Health Care Reform***

***Mr. Jackson.*** When we have health care reform, will the new system, whatever its final shape, better serve the masses in time of a major disaster?

***The President.*** Oh, absolutely. I kept wondering, when I was out in California and I realized how many people were hurt or needed medical care or thrown out of their homes and maybe subject to overexposure, how many of those people didn't have health insurance, whether they didn't go to the doctor or didn't visit the hospital just because they didn't have any coverage, or whether they did, took medical care, and now wonder whether they can afford to pay for it or whether they're at risk of bankruptcy.

If we would simply join the ranks of all the other advanced countries in the world and provide comprehensive health care that can never be taken away through a system of guaranteed private insurance, it would stabilize life for working families enormously. I also will say that according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office study issued about a week ago, small businesses would benefit perhaps more than big businesses because their premiums would go down and everybody would be covered.

We have simply got to stop making excuses and saying, ''Well, America's the only country in the world that can't figure out how to cover its folks.'' You've got almost one in four people living in California without any health insurance—citizens, never mind the immigrant population, citizens who don't have health care. We have got to do a better job.

***Mr. Jackson.*** Mr. President, Blenda Wilson, who's the president of CSUN, would love to ask you a question if she may. And by the way, I've just realized why it was difficult for you to get through to Boris Yeltsin, sir. He was worried that you might have been calling for disaster relief. [*Laughter*]

***The President.*** I thought I might have to get on the phone and phone around the world to get enough money to deal with it, but we made it. [*Laughter*]

***Message to Students***

***Blenda Wilson.*** Mr. President, we're delighted that you would join us on this opening of our spring term. While we've been talking about disaster relief and health care, I recall your work several years ago with the education commission of the States and found you to be a strong advocate of education, partly because, I think, you realize as we do that the young people and middle-age people, for that matter, who attend California State University will be those citizens and employees and employers and entrepreneurs that are essential to economic development. When you think about the relationship of disaster relief and higher education and work-study programs, which are very important to you, what would you say to the students that are gathered here at this public university?

***The President.*** Well, first of all, I'm proud of the fact that Congress was able to come up with the money to fully reimburse Cal State, Northridge for the losses it incurred, along with a 10 percent match coming from the State. I'm very proud of that.

Secondly, I hope that during this clean-up effort, there will be even more jobs available in the short run, which will help a lot and which some of your students will be able to get.

But thirdly, and perhaps most important of all, the average age of a college student today is a little over 26 years of age. More and more people recognize that if they want to get a good job with a growing income, if they don't want to have the kind of stagnant wages that most American workers have been saddled with for 20 years, they've got to have at least 2 years of post-high-school education and training. And we are busily engaged here in Washington in passing some education legislation and some training legislation which will make it easier for every person in America to get those 2 years of post-high-school education and training. That's the most important thing of all. If you stay there, if you see it through, if you go on and get a 4-year education, the more you have, the better your prospects are. But we know, based on the 1990 census, we actually now have hard evidence that the global economy is punishing high school dropouts, punishing high school graduates, and rewarding people who have 2 years or more of post-high-school education.

So if we want to restructure the California economy and we want new jobs in high-tech

areas without the guarantee of defense, we've got to make sure that every young person and every not-so-young person in California who will go to a place like Cal State, Northridge, does so.

***Mr. Jackson.*** Mr. President, I can't think of an occasion when a Chief Executive of the United States has aligned himself so immediately and completely with a Californian concern or issue, in this case a natural disaster. Our leader locally is Mayor Richard Riordan, of course.

***The President.*** Is he there?

***Mr. Jackson.*** Yes.

***Mayor Richard Riordan.*** Mr. President?

***The President.*** I had to do it, otherwise he would have camped out on my doorstep here and never gone home. [*Laughter*]

***Mayor Riordan.*** Well, I feel like you've been camping out on our doorstep. I'd like to thank you on behalf of not only the students, faculty, and staff of Northridge but all the citizens of L.A. for your A-plus effort and your A-plus team. We've had, I think, more Cabinet members in Los Angeles in the last month than you've had in Washington.

***The President.*** Thank you, Mayor.

***Mr. Jackson.*** Mr. President, thank you so very much, indeed, for taking our call on the spur of the moment like that, sir.

***The President.*** Thank you, Michael. Let me just say one thing. I want to compliment the Mayor and everybody that we've worked with in California. I know you could say that they're so good at this because you're becoming experts at dealing with disasters. But let me say, I was a Governor for 12 years. I went through floods and hurricanes, I saw whole little towns blown away. I have lived through a lot of these things. And I cannot say enough about the leadership of the Mayor and the people out there. The work that they've done, it's just been terrific.

And in terms of doing this radio program, you know, one of the things I said I'd do if I ever were fortunate enough to be elected President is to try to give this job back to the people of this country and their real concerns. And you know, I just left a very important meeting with the President of Kazakhstan. That's a long way away, but it affects American interests. But our interests can only be affected there if people in California can succeed, if the people who are listening to this radio program can succeed.

So, I think I did my job today by talking to you, and I just loved it. I thank you for giving me a chance to do it.

***Mr. Jackson.*** Thank you, sir.

***The President.*** Thank you. Bye bye.

NOTE: The telephone interview began at 2:35 p.m. The President spoke from the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Dick Krimm, Assistant Associate Director for Response and Recovery for the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

## Letter to Burmese Opposition Leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

*February 10, 1994*

*Dear Daw Aung San Suu Kyi:*

Let me take the opportunity to express again my deep concern about your welfare and to applaud your remarkable courage in pursuing human rights and democracy for the people of Burma. Despite your four and one-half years of detention, your determination and courage continue to inspire friends of freedom around the world. Recent resolutions adopted in the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Human Rights Commission make clear the international community's outrage over your continued detention as well as that of all other prisoners of conscience in Burma.

I also want to assure you of the United States' continuing support for the struggle to promote freedom in Burma. The 1990 elections handed your party an overwhelming mandate from Burma's people and firmly rejected military rule. Obviously, the path to democratic change must be worked out by the Burmese themselves who have assigned you a key role in bringing about such a democratic transition. We strongly condemn the effort to deny you the right to participate freely in the political life of Burma.

You have my utmost admiration for your stand. Like your courageous father, you symbolize the authentic aspirations of the Burmese people. History is on the side of freedom throughout the world and I remain confident that your cause will prevail.