

What was it about Bob Collins that made hundreds of thousands of Chicagoans tune in virtually every weekday morning? What was it about Bob Collins that enabled him not only to follow his fabled predecessor Wally Phillips, but to create his own following?

Well, like Bob, it is fairly simple. In an age of political extremes and shock radio, we found in Bob Collins an observant, thoughtful, plain spoken but fair and common man who never lost touch with the community he loved. He connected with us and with the families across Illinois and Chicago who were his loyal fans. Shaving in the morning, drinking coffee, fighting the daily commute, Bob was there at our side.

In addition to winning our ears and hearts, Bob's unparalleled ability to mix humor, human interest stories, and intelligent, thoughtful news won him award after award. His commitment to Chicago did not end when the microphone was turned off. He was always the champion of the little guy. He received the Salvation Army award known as "The Other Award" because of his spirit and his dedication.

His hobbies included motorcycling and flying. He was a man who enjoyed life and every minute of it. WGN's Spike O'Dell signed on this morning and announced: WGN Radio, Chicago. This is the Bob Collins Show." These words remind us that mornings in Chicago will always belong to Bob Collins, and he will continue to ride and fly and laugh through all of our memories.

Thank you, Uncle Bobby. Chicago is going to miss you.

THE PRESIDENT'S BUDGET

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, the topic this morning for our morning business is the President's budget, a budget released by the President several days ago that is a continuation of a strategy of the past 7 years, a strategy which has paid off for America. There are those who have rejected this budget. There are those who have said it is a disaster. There are those who have used the timeworn cliché that the President's budget is dead on arrival. For those who want to use this medical analogy, let me remind them of another medical admonition: First, do no harm. Those who would criticize the President's budget should come up with their alternative. Let them see if they can match the performance of the Clinton administration over the last 7 years. Let them come up with a formula that is sensible, that will move this country forward as quickly and as positively as President Clinton's plans have during the course of his administration.

His budget says we have a strategy based on fiscal discipline, a strategy which will bring down the national debt and say to our children: We will not saddle you or burden you with debt that we incurred during our lifetime for our purpose.

That is the linchpin and pillar of the President's budget, and it is sound. It is sound for our future.

The President says that as we bring down this national debt, we will preserve Social Security so it is there not only for the current retirees, but the baby boomers and beyond. We will invest in Medicare, an issue which many Republicans do not even want to discuss. We will make certain that the health insurance plan for the elderly and disabled in America is adequately funded and the doctors, hospitals, and health care providers across America know that Medicare has a bright future.

The Nation is witnessing the first back-to-back budget surpluses in 43 years, the smallest welfare rolls in 30 years, the lowest overall crime rate in 25 years, the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years. The statistics go on and on.

Whether it is a Presidential candidate or a Member of Congress who is critical of President Clinton's budget and approach, my challenge to them is: How would you do it better? What can we look to in history to point to a better model than what we have seen over the past 7 years? We reached a milestone in America's economic history. Our economic expansion is the longest, a remarkable 107 months of consecutive growth. In fact, it was reported yesterday that we have had productivity growth of 5 percent. America is on a roll, and those who would derail it for their own political purposes had best step back and think twice.

There are clearly differences which I will have with the President on specifics in the budget. There are differences which will come out during the course of the congressional debate, but whether they come from the Democratic side or Republican side, let us not lose sight of our goal.

Alan Greenspan, as Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, last year spoke to several committees in Congress—and he continues to do that—and admonished us to keep in mind the basic things we need to do as a nation to continue to progress. Bringing down the national debt is his highest priority.

President Clinton's budget invests money in those things that will keep this economy moving forward—in the people of America. He has not given up on the families and people who have made this economic recovery such a reality.

He is investing in education so the next generation of skilled workers and leaders will be there. He is investing in health care to take away one of the major concerns of every family in America: affordability of quality health care.

Yes, the President does have a tax cut plan, but it is a targeted, specific tax cut plan—not the broad-based, overwhelming plan which we hear from Presidential candidate George W. Bush or some leaders in Congress, but one

that is more sensible, more targeted, more consistent with maintaining our economic growth.

The President says families worry about paying for college education; let's help them; let's give them a deduction for college education expenses. In doing that, we will start to enable more and more young people to realize their dream of a college education and pass it along to their children. Is there anything more important for the future of our country?

The President says as well there should be a tax credit for long-term care for the fastest growing segment of the American population—people over the age of 85, our parents and our grandparents, many of whom will need help in their advancing years. Their sons and daughters care about them, and we need to help them with the long-term care tax credit.

The earned-income tax credit is a term with which many people are not familiar, but it is a tax credit for working families who are not making much money. We want to encourage work and help families, and the President, focusing on the earned-income tax credit, leads us in the right direction.

Of course, there are those who say if we are going to have a surplus over the next 10 years, then the first thing we should do is give a massive tax cut primarily to wealthy people. Yet we know quite honestly that is irresponsible. The American people know that intuitively. First, the surplus is not in hand and, second, to take whatever surplus we have and give it away as a permanent tax cut is to say to people across America that we do not need to pay down our national debt, we do not need to invest in America's children and families. We do not need to create tax cuts that are more targeted.

The President has it right. The President has said to the American people: Let us not ruin a good thing; let us move forward.

There are many things with which we need to deal in this time of prosperity which we may never have another chance to consider. If we cannot at this moment in time reach out to the American society and help those who are struggling with day-to-day problems in their family and life, when will we ever do it?

If we cannot extend the protection of health insurance, as the President has proposed, to children and families across America at this moment in time, when will we do it? Those who are 55 years of age who, frankly, may face retirement and loss of health insurance need to have the option of buying into the Medicare plan.

Those who are already retired and the disabled who rely on Medicare need to have the protection of a prescription drug plan, a benefit which is common to almost every health insurance plan. The President has said we can do that, consistent with reducing the national debt and protecting Social Security as well as Medicare. There are certain

things at this moment in time which we can do.

If we do not invest at this moment in time in education for future generations, how shortsighted we are. My friends on the Republican side of the aisle do not view the educational issue as many of us do. Their idea of education is a voucher plan to help those who would send their children to private schools.

I certainly can sympathize with these families struggling to do that. My wife and I sent our kids to Catholic schools and I attended Catholic schools. But our first obligation as a government is to the 90 to 95 percent of the students in public education, the kids in Minneapolis or Chicago or Los Angeles or New York who want to have the very best schools and the very best teachers.

The President has proposed money for teacher training to improve their skills so they can continue to bring the next generation forward well versed and well trained in the technology with which we are dealing.

There were statistics given to us yesterday about some of the things that have happened during the Clinton administration which are often overlooked by the critics of the President's budget. Let me tell you two or three which I think are amazing.

Record budget deficits have been erased. Do my colleagues know the Congressional Budget Office suggested that this year we were going to have a deficit of \$455 billion? That was their projection when President Clinton came to office. President Clinton came to Congress and said: I have a plan that is going to turn this around. Instead of deficits, we can move America forward.

Some of us believed the President was right. In fact, I voted for the President's 1993 plan. There were Members of Congress running around hollering, "The sky is falling if the President's plan passes; it will be nothing but a disaster." I invite those Members of Congress to look out the window at the bright blue sky of our economic prosperity because of the President's leadership in 1993, because Members of Congress, all Democrats, and Vice President GORE, who cast the tie-breaking vote, made a courageous decision. Some of my colleagues in the House of Representatives lost their next election because of that vote. If it is any comfort to them, they did the right thing for America, and history has proven them right because instead of the anticipated \$455 billion deficit this year, we are anticipating instead a surplus of over \$100 billion. What an amazing turnaround.

We have had the largest paydown of debt in the history of the United States. Those who argue the Democrats are not fiscally responsible cannot really say it at this moment because President Clinton's leadership and the following of Members of Congress have led to the paydown of more than \$290 billion in debt over the last 2 years, and we can continue to do that.

The President is right, this should be our highest priority. We collect every single day in America \$1 billion in taxes from individuals and businesses and families to pay interest on our debt. If we follow the President's lead and eliminate the publicly held debt, it will dramatically reduce those interest payments, and that is good for this country. That is money that can be spent on good programs for education and health care and given back to families in the form of tax cuts.

We have seen Government reduced and diminished in size. We have seen as a percentage of the gross domestic product the percentage spent on Government coming down. This is what America asked for; this is what they received.

Of course, with the President's budget, there will be a great amount of debate. The Congress will get its chance. The Republican leadership in the House and Senate can come up with its work product and put it next to the President's, and we can make our choice.

I will tell you this. It should be measured by one standard: Does it meet the test of common sense? Will the proposals coming out of this Republican Congress keep America moving forward? Can they explain to families across America that we should break with a policy that has done so much for so many in this country? I think they are going to be hard pressed to do it. But it is the nature of our deliberative process that they will have that opportunity.

Mr. President, at this time I am prepared to yield the floor and the remainder of our morning business time to my colleague from the State of Minnesota.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, first of all, if it is all right with my colleague from Illinois, I will speak on two matters. I thank him for his eloquence. It turns out on some of the issues that my colleague raised, we are not 100 percent in agreement, but I think Senator DURBIN is a Senator who speaks with sincerity and marshals his evidence for his point of view. I think Democrats are very lucky to have him as a Senator speaking for our party and for the country.

CHECHNYA

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, yesterday I spoke about what is happening in Chechnya. I believe I should speak out about this. I hope other Senators will, as well.

I have a letter that I ask unanimous consent be printed in the RECORD. This is a letter to President Putin.

There being no objection, the letter was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

U.S. SENATE,

Washington, DC, February 8, 2000.

President VLADIMIR PUTIN,
*Russian Federation, The Kremlin,
Moscow, Russia.*

DEAR PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN: We are writing to express our deep concern over the

conflict in Chechnya and your response to the humanitarian tragedy there. We recognize the importance of Russia's territorial integrity, and your government's obligation to protect its citizens from terrorist and other acts of aggression. This responsibility, however, does not and cannot justify the use of indiscriminate force against civilians and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of persons.

Since October 1, the Russian military offensive in Chechnya has involved a relentless bombing and artillery campaign that has killed thousands of innocent civilians and displaced over 200,000 people. Reports from those fleeing Chechnya detail incidents of widespread looting, summary executions, detentions and rape.

As you know, Russia has assumed obligations under the Geneva conventions and commitments under the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security. Common Article 3 of the Geneva Convention states that in "armed conflicts not of an international character, persons taking no part in hostilities . . . shall be treated humanely." Article 36 of the OSCE Code of Conduct states that "if recourse to force cannot be avoided in performing internal security missions, each participating State will ensure that its use must be commensurate with the needs of enforcement. The armed forces will take due care to avoid injury to civilians or their property." Russia's campaign in Chechnya violates these commitments.

We urge your government to allow into Chechnya and Ingushetia an international monitoring mission. This mission should have unfettered access and a broad mandate to monitor and report on the humanitarian situation. Your government should immediately allow civilians safe passage from Chechnya, assist those persons who have been displaced from Chechnya as a result of this conflict and allow representatives of international humanitarian agencies full and unimpeded access to those persons in order to provide humanitarian relief. Finally, we urge your government to initiate investigations into alleged human rights abuses and to hold accountable those responsible.

President Putin, we believe it is imperative that you devote every effort to achieve a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Chechnya. Neither the use of force in 1994-1996, which left over 80,000 civilians dead, nor the current use of force in Chechnya will enhance the prospects of a durable settlement to the conflict.

We hope you share our concerns and look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,

PAUL D. WELLSTONE.

Mr. WELLSTONE. I will just read part of this letter:

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