care about what the consequences to the country are. And like I said, you can't cover me much longer, so I'm not pandering to you, but I think—on the other hand, if you were here now—consider, suppose you were a 30-year-old, or however young you can be, 35-year-old television anchor, and you got the White House assignment, and you wanted to go further in life, and you were going to be judged partly by how hot you were on the screen and what your market share was, and you had to put this story together, and you had an hour to do it, you'd be under a whole different set of pressures, both in your work environment and in your head.

So I think that I would—that's one thing I would counsel any President to do, is not—fight paranoia about the press, and don't generalize about it.

I think both I and my wife's alleged aversion to the press has been way overblown. We've always been far more discriminating about the things with which we disagreed and the things with which we agreed.

Mr. Knoller. Mr. President, thank you so much, sir. It's been fascinating.

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 2:35 p.m. in Dover High School for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to Usama bin Ladin, who allegedly sponsored the 1998 bombing attacks on the U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania; Senator Christopher S. Bond; Ronnie L. White, whose nomination to be U.S. District Judge for the Eastern District of Missouri was defeated in October 1999; Gore 2000 campaign director William M. Daley; and former White House Chief of Staff Thomas F. (Mack) McLarty. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 15. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Exchange With Reporters at the Greenleaf Senior Center

January 15, 2001

[*The President's remarks are joined in progress.*]

Voters' Rights Legislation

The President. ——problems that are still out there that have to be—I believe should be addressed, and I hope they will be. But I think—looking at this in a positive frame of mind and hope to goodness that there will be a real common commitment that goes way beyond party interest.

Q. Are you encouraged, sir, by what you've seen so far?

The President. Now you guys know I'm not going to get into that. I'm on my way out the door, man; I shouldn't be talking about that. [*Laughter*] I just want to focus on the things that I said today and the message I sent to Congress. I think that there are a lot of problems. I hope that the President-elect will appoint a high-level election commission—I think it would be good to have former Presidents share it—to deal with all the voting rights issues that are out there. I hope that there will be something done on—some more done on the criminal justice system to give people of color, all racial and ethnic backgrounds, a sense that the system is more fair—and to make it more fair. And I gave some specific recommendations there. I'd really like to see some—I hope there will be some action on that.

President's Agenda for the Final Days

Q. Sir, more generally, going into your last week as President, what are your thoughts?

The President. That we've still got a few things to do.

Q. What are those things?

The President. We're working on—obviously, we're still involved in the talks on the Middle East. And we're working with Secretary Babbitt to try to finalize some more resource preservation action. And I have, as always happens at the end of a President's term, to see hundreds and hundreds and hundreds, literally, of requests for consideration for executive clemency of some kind or another for people who have been incarcerated or who are out and asked for pardons so they can get their voting rights back.

That's one thing I'd really like to see the Congress do. There's some legislation in Congress which would restore people's voting rights after they serve their sentences, and I think it would be a very good thing to pass.

We did that in Arkansas 24 years ago, so that now when someone serves their sentence, including the probation, they automatically get the right to vote back. It's a very cumbersome process. A lot of people, particularly less well-educated people, without much money, they have no idea how to get a Federal pardon or that they can get it. And the system often takes years and years and years. And I think—it would seem to me that most Americans would agree, when someone serves their sentence and pays their debt to society, we all, the rest of us, have a vested interest in their becoming law-abiding and contributing citizens.

And I think that there may be other reasons people want to or need to apply for a Federal pardon, but I don't think the right to vote is one of them. So that's one thing I would really like to see done. As I said, we amended the Voting Rights Act in Arkansas—or constitutional amendment—when I was attorney general in 1977, to do that.

And I regret that we couldn't pass the legislation this year. But I think that there's a lot of bipartisan interest in it, especially among people who have thought about it and have personal contacts. If you look at this whole Federal pardon process, part of—a big reason people do it is to get the right to vote back. And they understand that the pardon is not really a pardon saying it's okay what you did. That's not what this is about. It's about basically saying this person has lived a good enough life that they ought to be given a chance to be a full citizen.

So, when it comes to voting, I don't think they ought to have to get a pardon. I think they ought to just change the law—completed their sentence, including the parole period, they automatically get their right to vote back. And I think most Americans would support that. I've never had a word of criticism in my home State about it in 20-some years.

NOTE: The exchange began at 10:45 a.m. In his remarks, the President referred to President-elect George W. Bush. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary did not include the complete opening remarks of the President. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks at a Martin Luther King, Jr., Holiday Celebration

January 15, 2001

The President. Thank you very much. Normally, I don't think Presidents should get awards. But I believe I'll accept these, if it's all the same to you.

I want to begin by saying that I am delighted to be here at this university, in this great hall, with all the people who are here on the stage. I brought something to Mayor Williams and to Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton. He mentioned that we signed the—that we passed the Southeast Federal Center bill to spur community development with a public/private partnership on Federal property. At the time it passed, we weren't able to do a formal signing ceremony, so I brought Mayor Williams and Eleanor Holmes Norton a copy of the bill and the pens I used to sign it, and I'd like to give it to them now.

I want to thank the DC City Council Chair Linda Cropp, Kathy Patterson, and the other councilmembers who are here who helped to make my stay in Washington, along with my family's, so wonderful. I want to thank Robie Beatty and Shirley Rivens Smith from the King Holiday Commission.

I'd like to thank the people who are here from my administration, present and former. I want to thank Frank Raines, former Director of OMB, and Jack Lew, our present Director, for all the work they did, along with the indomitable Alice Rivlin, to make sure that the Federal Government became a better partner for the District of Columbia in the allocation of our money.

On this Martin Luther King Holiday, I want to thank my friend of almost 20 years, the Secretary of Transportation, Rodney Slater, who is always serving. And I want to thank the present head of the Corporation of National Service and the person who started our national service program, first Senator Harris Wofford, then Eli Segal. Thank you for bring AmeriCorps to life.

And I know we have AmeriCorps award winners and their families here and members and alumni. Thank you for your service. And thank you, Nancy Rubin, for your support. I also am proud to announce on Eli Segal's