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NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 4:15 p.m. on January 30 in the Library at the White House for broadcast on January 31. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 30 but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on January 31.

Statement on Provincial Elections in Iraq
January 31, 2009

I congratulate the people of Iraq on holding significant Provincial elections today. Millions of Iraqi citizens from every ethnic and religious group went peacefully to the polls across the country to choose new Provincial councils. It is important that the councils get seated, select new governors, and begin work on behalf of the Iraqi people who elected them.

The elections were managed and organized by the Iraqi Government with vital assistance from the United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq. Iraqi police and military forces helped secure the polling sites and protected voters as they cast their ballots. This important step forward should continue the process of Iraqis taking responsibility for their future.

The United States is proud to have provided technical assistance, along with the United Nations and other international organizations, to Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission, which performed professionally under difficult circumstances.

Interview With Matt Lauer of NBC's "Today"
February 1, 2009

The President's Mother-in-Law

Mr. Lauer. We're here in the Map Room at the White House with the 44th President of the United States. President Obama, it's great to be with you. How you doing?

The President. I'm doing great, Matt, thank you.

Mr. Lauer. So you've been President 12 days. So let me ask the question that's on everyone's mind right now: How's it going living with your mother-in-law? [*Laughter*]

The President. Fortunately, I love my mother-in-law and——

Mr. Lauer. I'm just asking. I'm not trying to start trouble.

The President. She is actually—she defends me whenever I screw up. So, Michelle, you know, she's about to come down hard, my mother-in-law comes in, intercedes so——

Mr. Lauer. Everything's copacetic.

The President. The longer she stays, the better off I'm going to be.

The First Family's Transition to Life in the White House

Mr. Lauer. I was driving over here, Mr. President; I was thinking about this enormous transition that you've been through taking on the reins as Commander in Chief, Mrs. Obama becoming the First Lady. But you've got a daughter, 10, and a daughter, 7, and this is a huge game-changer for them as well. How are they doing?

The President. You know, they—I said this, I think, in an earlier interview—people think I'm cool; nobody is cooler than my two girls. They just seem to take whatever comes with, you know, happiness and steadiness. And they're loving school, they're making friends—in fact, they've got some friends from school over today—and they've already joined some clubs. And Sasha, you know, I think maybe to endear myself to her, she decided she wanted to join a basketball team, so what more could I want?

Mr. Lauer. Are you getting to take part in some of the routines? I was thinking, you've been on the road basically for 2 years, although you got home a lot. Now, you're all under the same room, basically, for 12 days. Are you there for breakfast? Do you get to read them a story at night, tuck them in bed? How's it going?

The President. It's the best deal of this whole thing, is it turns out I've got this nice home office. And at the end of the day, I can come home—even if I've got more work to do—I can have dinner with them; I can help them with their homework; I can tuck them in. If I've got to go back to the office, I can. But I'm seeing them now more than any time in the last 2 years, and that's been great for the whole family.

The President's First Days in Office

Mr. Lauer. President Bush said in his last press conference here at the White House, he said he wasn't sure when it would happen for you, but there would be a moment, perhaps in the Oval Office, when you would stop and realize, I am the President of the United States. I'm curious, have you had that moment?

The President. There have been a couple of times, some wonderful, some sobering. Whenever you take that walk down the Colonnade and you go to the Oval Office, I do think you get this sense of the history that you're now a part of. Some sobering moments: having to sign letters for troops who have died and sending letters to their families, where you realize every decision you make counts, and you don't have time to spend a lot of time on inconsequential stuff. You've got to focus on, at this point, putting people back to work, but also reminding yourselves that you've got hundreds of thousands of people around the world who are putting themselves in harm's way, and you're the Commander in Chief.

Global Terrorism/U.S. Armed Forces

Mr. Lauer. You talk about sobering moments. Even as a Senator and member of the Foreign Relations Committee you were getting intelligence briefings, on the campaign trail also, and during the transition. But now, from what I understand, every day you go down there and there's that intelligence briefing on your desk, and it's got to contain some pretty sobering stuff.

There are millions, tens of millions of people watching this broadcast right now, Mr. President. If they were to have access to the same information you have now on a daily basis, how much less sleep would we all be getting?

The President. Here's what I think is important for everybody to understand: We've got real threats, and we have to remain vigilant, but the quality of our Armed Forces has never been better. When you meet the people who are charged with keeping America safe, it gives you enormous confidence. They are on the case day in, day out, with extraordinary professionalism. But there is no doubt that we have to make sure that we don't let up, because there are people who would be willing to do us harm.

U.S. Troop Withdrawal From Iraq/Afghanistan

Mr. Lauer. Let's talk about some of those men and women who are serving this country overseas in Afghanistan, other locations, in Iraq. And I'm sure they're watching today; it's a big event for the Armed Services. And a lot of those people have a vested interest in one of your campaign promises to end this war and get them home as soon—within 16 months or so—as humanly possible.

So when you look at them, can you say that a substantial number of them will be home in time for next Super Bowl Sunday?

The President. Yes. I mean, we're going to roll out in a very formal fashion what our intentions are in Iraq, as well as Afghanistan. But in conversations that I've had with the Joint Chiefs, with people—the commanders on the ground, I think that we have a sense, now that the Iraqis just had a very significant election, with no significant violence there, that we are in a position to start putting more responsibility on the Iraqis, and that's good news for not only the troops in the field, but their families who are carrying an enormous burden.

National Economy

Mr. Lauer. The economy, I mean, people are going to watch this game today; they're going to blow off some steam; they're going to have a good time. But a lot of them are going to go to bed, they're going to wake up tomorrow morning, and the worry is going to start again. They're going to worry about losing their jobs and their homes and putting their kids through school and making ends meet.

How much worse is the economy going to get, Mr. President, before it gets better?

The President. Well, I think we're going to be in for a tough several months. We've got to get this economic recovery plan passed. We've got to start putting people back to work. We're going to have to straighten out the credit markets and make sure that credit is flowing to businesses and individuals so that they can start investing and hiring people again.

And, you know, as soon as Congress moves forward on the recovery plan, we are going to be also releasing our plan for the financial sector and regulating the financial sector. I have confidence we're going to be able to get the economy back on track, but it's going to take a number of months before we stop falling, and then a little bit longer for us to get back on track.

Economic Stabilization Legislation

Mr. Lauer. And when it comes to the stimulus plan, the House passed its version last week, but without one Republican vote. That disappointed a lot of people. The Senate takes up their version of the measure starting tomorrow. How important is gaining some more Republican support for that? How big a test of your leadership at this early stage of your Presidency?

The President. Well, look, the important thing is getting the thing passed. And I've done extraordinary outreach, I think, to Republicans, because they have some good ideas, and I want to make sure that those ideas are incorporated.

I am confident that by the time we actually have the final package on the floor that we are going to see substantial support. And people are going to say: this is a serious effort; it has no earmarks. We're going to be trimming out things that are not relevant to putting people back to work right now.

Mr. Lauer. Can you predict a number of Republican votes——

The President. No, of course not.

Mr. Lauer. You wouldn't do that?

The President. No, I wouldn't. But I'm confident that—look, I think that the House Democrats actually adopted a number of ideas that the House Republicans had offered. Obviously, the House Republicans wanted to make a statement. Now it moves to the Senate. We've got 535 people who feel it's their responsibility to represent their constituents and make their voices heard.

So this is—democracy is always a somewhat messy process. But the thing I want all of them to remember, and the thing I'm thinking about every single day, is the thousands of people who are being laid off of their jobs right now. They can't afford politics as usual, and old habits are hard to break, but now is the time to break them because we've got an urgent situation.

Bowl Championship Series/2008 BCS National Champion University of Florida Gators

Mr. Lauer. Let's lighten up a little bit. Let's move towards sports, okay? You came out and you said, "Look, in college football I'm not crazy about the current system for determining a national champion."

The President. This is true.

Mr. Lauer. "I'd rather see a playoff system like in professional baseball or professional football."

So will you look into the camera right now and talk to the people of Florida and their 27 electoral votes, and tell them that the Gators are not the national champions of football?

The President. Where's the camera, right here?

Mr. Lauer. There you go.

The President. Congratulations, Gators, on an outstanding season. Tebow is great. Wouldn't you feel better if you had beat every team that was out there through a playoff system?

Mr. Lauer. Twenty-seven electoral votes. [*Laughter*]

The President. I love you. I think they could have taken on anybody through the playoff system. By the way, one of our Secret Service guys, his son is a tackle on the Florida Gators, so, you know, I've got soft spot for the Gators.

Mr. Lauer. You've got a connection.

The President. Absolutely.

Super Bowl XLIII

Mr. Lauer. Let's talk about this game today. You came out—and most Presidents don't pick a team—you came right out and you said, "Look, I know the Rooneys. They've been good friends of mine; they endorsed me." I think you got the AFC championship ball——

The President. I did.

Mr. Lauer. So you said, "Other than my dear Bears, they're closest to my heart." But I'm having a hard time understanding how you, of all people, wouldn't associate with the Cardinals.

The President. Underdog——

Mr. Lauer. I mean, it is a Cinderella story. The team that came from nowhere to the big game, the audacity of hope.

The President. Not to mention the fact that Kurt Warner is close to my age. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Lauer. Right, exactly. How can you turn your back on the Cardinals?

The President. I love Kurt Warner's story. I love—Larry Fitzgerald seems like just a wonderful young man. It's a great story. But Rooney didn't just endorse me; that guy was out going to steel plants campaigning for me. Franco Harris was out waving towels at my rallies.

Mr. Lauer. Do you have a Terrible Towel in the other room?

The President. I do, actually, so——

Mr. Lauer. Are you going to be waving them at the party?

The President. I'm not going to be rubbing it in. We've got some Arizona Congressmen here, and I may need their vote on the recovery package. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Lauer. Give me a score. What's the score going to be in this game?

The President. You know, it's tough to predict, but I think the Steelers are going to eke it out in a close one.

Super Bowl XLII

Mr. Lauer. All right. Well, last year, you predicted the Patriots over my Giants. I don't have a question here; I just wanted to rub that in a little bit. [*Laughter*]

The President. Well, I'm still wondering how the guy made that catch.

Mr. Lauer. The Hail Mary?

The President. He has some Stickum on his helmet.

Mr. Lauer. David Tyree.

The President. He had Stickum on his helmet.

Mr. Lauer. They just dissected that play in about a 5-minute segment on the show.

The President. It was one of the greatest plays in pro football history.

The President's BlackBerry

Mr. Lauer. Let's talk about the BlackBerry, all right? You got to keep it.

The President. I did.

Mr. Lauer. Can I see it? Do you have it?

The President. You know, I didn't bring it down here.

Mr. Lauer. No?

The President. No, it's like Inspector Gadget; you know, the—if you touched it, it might blow up.

Mr. Lauer. I kind of envision that it's like Q in the James Bond. Did they give you, like, fingerprint recognition technology or something?

The President. The works. The works. It turns into a car if I have to make a quick getaway. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Lauer. How many people have that e-mail address?

The President. A handful. Look, there are security issues involved, and so we've got to make sure that I'm not creating a situation where, you know, potentially people can comprise our system somehow.

Mr. Lauer. But, like, world leaders, can they contact you on that BlackBerry?

The President. Typically, world leaders are going to be contacting me through the Oval Office. They know how to reach me there.

Mr. Lauer. Sasha and Malia?

The President. Sasha and Malia can always contact me.

Mr. Lauer. Oprah?

The President. Well——

Mr. Lauer. Maybe. You're not going to hook me up, are you?

The President. Matt, do you want one?

Mr. Lauer. No, I want your e-mail address. [*Laughter*] I want to communicate with you during the game.

The President. I like your son; I might give it to him. I'm not going to give it to you. Jack, he might get one.

Mr. Lauer. Jack, give it to your papa, okay? [*Laughter*]

The President's Public Image

Mr. Lauer. Let me end on some—not only did you just become President, obviously, that carries a certain amount of fame with it. But you have achieved a certain rock star status outside of that.

The President. Outside of my house. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Lauer. Well, let me show you. This is the current issue of US Weekly, and here's a great picture of——

The President. Oh, it's a beautiful——

Mr. Lauer. ——you and Michelle and your daughters. The reason I bring this up—I think it's funny—it's a great picture. But I want to show you the cover. Look what they did: they took you off the cover; they cut you out of it.

The President. Yes, it's a little hurtful.

Mr. Lauer. You got replaced by Jessica Simpson.

The President. Yes, who is in a weight battle, apparently. [*Laughter*] Yes, oh, well.

The President's Message to the American People

Mr. Lauer. What would you like to say to the tens of millions of people who are watching this game today?

The President. Well, listen, have a wonderful time. The Super Bowl is one of the finest American traditions. I want to give a special shout-out to our troops overseas who are going to be watching this, because you allow not just this game to take place, but our liberties to be preserved, and we're very grateful to you.

Mr. Lauer. President Obama, it's a pleasure. Thanks for welcoming us to the White House. Enjoy the game.

The President. Have a great time.

Mr. Lauer. Thank you. We certainly will.

The President. I'll see if I have to eat my words again next year.

Mr. Lauer. We'll see; we'll call you tomorrow, okay? I'll e-mail you. [*Laughter*]

[*At this point, there was a break in the interview, and then it resumed as follows.*]

Bipartisanship in Government

Mr. Lauer. You talked a lot during the campaign and in your Inaugural Address about bipartisanship, getting people to work together, about unity. And then people watched this vote on the stimulus package in the House, and they saw that not one Republican voted for it. What would you say to the people who were watching that speech of yours at home and maybe the 2 million people who were freezing out there on the Mall, who were saying, "You know what, we thought we could change, and maybe we were naive"?

The President. Oh, listen, it's only been 10 days. People have to recognize that it's going to take some time for trust to be built not only between Democrats and Republicans, but between Congress and the White House, between the House and the Senate. You know, we've had a dysfunctional political system for a while now. And the fact that we have been able to move what is by all accounts a historic piece of legislation through this quickly, and that the Senate is having a serious debate about it, and we still expect it to be on my desk for signature before President's Day, is quite an achievement. But it's going to take time for people to start getting used to the fact that we don't have to score political points on every issue. Once in a while, we can take the politics out of it and just focus on getting the job done for the American people.

National Economy/Economic Stabilization Legislation

Mr. Lauer. You were pretty agitated this past week when the news broke of these Wall Street bonuses paid out in 2008, even as some of the firms that paid them out had their hands out looking for Federal assistance. And is there some—is there an audit underway right now, or can there be an audit that takes place to make sure that none of the taxpayers' monies goes to anything but stabilizing these firms?

The President. That's what I've asked my Treasury Secretary to do: to put together a clear set of guidelines. If a bank or a financial institution is getting relief, then they've got to abide by certain conditions. Now, as I said when I blew off a little steam in the Oval Office, the American people don't resent folks for getting rich. That's part of the American way. But they do expect that you share in the pain, and they do expect that if taxpayers are having to pony up the bill, then these folks are going to show some restraint. Obviously, they're not doing it on their own. We're going to have to make sure that it's part of the package that we put forward in terms of how we spend money in the future.

Mr. Lauer. Well, we've seen some crazy examples; I mean, when the auto executives arrived in Washington for those hearings in Congress in those private jets, these bonuses. The American people might worry that the bailout, you know, could be off course, because if the money is going to people who simply are out of touch, it's not a confidence builder.

The President. Right. Well, and that's why it's my job as President and Congress's job to make sure that there are some rules of the road that people are going to abide by, and that we've got transparency and accountability, that this stuff is being posted. And one of the things that we're going to do is put together an independent board on the recovery package——

Mr. Lauer. Right.

The President. ——that actually looks at these programs and the money before it goes out the door. Nothing is worse than finding out after the fact——

Mr. Lauer. When it's too late——

The President. ——when it's too late that money has been wasted. We're going to make sure that on the front end, this stuff has been evaluated.

Mr. Lauer. It's hard to estimate because there are so many different numbers going around there, Mr. President, but it seems like somewhere in the neighborhood of $300 to $350 billion in TARP money has already gone out and been spent. And you're hearing more and more people saying, it's going to take much, much more. I'm curious, though, have you heard anyone credible be able to put a real figure on how much it's going to take to fix this, and, B, who can say, "And this money will work; it will fix the economy"?

The President. Here's what I've heard from a range of economists across the political spectrum. The banks, because of mismanagement, because of huge risk-taking, are now in very vulnerable positions. We can expect that we're going to have to do more to shore up the financial system. We also are going to have to make sure that we set up financial regulations so that not only does this never happen again, but you start having some sort of trust in how the credit markets work again.

Mr. Lauer. Right.

The President. So all that's going to have to happen on parallel tracks. How much it's going to end up costing taxpayers is going to depend in part on how well we manage the process, how well we are overseeing the spending. And that's why I've said before we put out more money, what we want to do is set up very clear guidelines. That's the charge of my Treasury Secretary, Tim Geithner; that's the charge that Larry Summers, my national economic adviser, has. And I do have confidence that we're going to be able to get it right, but it's not going to be overnight, and there's no silver bullets to this. The fact of the matter is, is that we are suffering from a massive hangover from a binge of risk-taking.

Mr. Lauer. And it's still getting worse.

The President. And that's still getting worse. And it's going to take some time for us to be able to dig ourselves out of this hole.

Mr. Lauer. One of those parallel tracks you talked about—are you planning in the near future to announce an idea that will buy up the toxic debt from the balance sheets of these banks with perhaps a so-called bad bank, similar to what happened with the savings and loan crisis? And if so, what do you think that could cost? Because Chuck Schumer came out and said, since we don't really know what those debts are worth, this could cost $4 trillion.

The President. No, it's a—we're not going to be spending $4 trillion worth of taxpayer money. It's conceivable that we have more—not only is it conceivable, it is likely that the banks have not fully acknowledged all the losses that they're going to experience. They're going to have to write down those losses, and some banks won't make it. Other banks are going to make sure that we strengthen. All deposits are going to be safe for ordinary people, but we're going to have to wring out some of these bad assets and——

Mr. Lauer. Are you going to set up a "bad bank" or whatever it would be called?

The President. Well, look, I don't want to preempt an announcement next week. And there's a lot of technical aspects to it, and if I say that we're doing one thing, then the markets might interpret it differently from what it ends up being. But the basic principle: that we're going to have to see some of this debt written down; that the Government is going to have to support some banks; that others that are not viable—essentially, that we're going to have to do something with those assets.

You know, that's all going to be part of a overall plan that not only strengthens the credit markets, but more importantly, puts people back to work, because that's what people are experiencing right now. They're seeing their jobs lost every single day. Their neighbors, friends, or, you know, coworkers are losing their jobs. And what they want to know is, is that Congress and the White House has a single-minded focus on making sure that people can be put back to work.

Mr. Lauer. Let me ask you about a exit strategy, and I'm not talking about in Iraq here, although there's been a lot of talk about that. But do you have an exit strategy for this bailout? In other words, at some point will you say, "Wait a minute, we've spent this amount of money; we're not seeing the results; we've got to change course dramatically." Is there that kind of strategy in place?

The President. Well, if we are doing things properly then what you'll start seeing is slowly trust get rebuilt, banks' balance sheets will start to strengthen; they'll start lending to each other; they'll start lending to companies; they'll start lending to small businesses. There will be some institutions that continue to be weak, and we're going to have to do something with them. Over time, as the market confidence is restored, then what we can do is start getting rid of some of these assets, some of the stock the taxpayers now have in some of these companies start being worth more. We sell them off to private parties, and taxpayers can recoup that money.

So you know, it's going to have to happen in stages. The key thing, I think, for the public right now is they have to know that I'm going to be spending all my time making sure that their money is not wasted, because I'm going to be, ultimately, accountable. Look, I'm at the start of my administration. One nice thing about the situation I find myself in is that I will be held accountable. You know, I've got 4 years and——

Mr. Lauer. You're going to know quickly how people feel about what's happened.

The President. That's exactly right. And, you know, a year from now, I think people are going to see that we're starting to make some progress, but there's still going to be some pain out there. If I don't have this done in 3 years, then there's going to be a one-term proposition. And I welcome that responsibility, because I think now's the time for us to start shifting and thinking about long-term economic growth.

Guantanamo Bay Detention Facility Closure

Mr. Lauer. Let me go on quickly if I can to some other subjects. You signed an Executive order in your first week that says you'll close the military detention center at Guantanamo within

a year. So the clock is ticking. And already you've heard the criticism that you don't know what you're going to do with the 245 prisoners being held there. Peter Hoekstra, the top Republican on the House Intelligence Committee, said the decision to close Guantanamo by a year from now "places hope ahead of reality. It sets an objective without a plan to get there."

The President. Let me say this. We had a long campaign between myself and John McCain. One thing we did not disagree on—in fact, something that John McCain was as adamant as I was, was that we needed to close Guantanamo. It's the right thing to do. Ultimately, it will make us safer. You've already seen in the reaction around the world a different sense of America by us taking this action.

Now, is it going to be easy? No, because we've got a couple of hundred of hardcore militants that, unfortunately, because of some problems that we had previously in gathering evidence, we may not be able to try in ordinary courts, but we don't want to release. How we structure that is something that I'm going to do carefully. Our lawyers are reviewing it. I have absolute confidence that, ultimately, we're going to be able to find a mechanism, with the cooperation of the international community, with the cooperation of some very smart Republicans, like Lindsey Graham, a former JAG who knows this stuff well. I have confidence that we're going to be able to find a solution to this problem.

Guantanamo Bay Detainees

Mr. Lauer. Are you at all worried—and some of these people may be released, the ones that seem to be less of a threat. But if one of those people that's released goes back and takes part in the planning of or carrying out of an attack against U.S. interests, you're going to have a Willie Horton times 100 situation on your hands. How are you going to deal with that?

The President. Of course I'm worried about it. Look, the—I have to make the very best judgments I can make in terms of what's going to keep the American people safe, and is what—what's going to uphold our Constitution and our traditions of due process. And what I'm convinced of is that we can balance those interests in a way that makes all of us proud, but also assures that we're not attacked.

Now, can I guarantee—or can anybody guarantee, for that matter—that some of the people who have already been released—keep in mind, I mean, the Bush administration released a whole bunch of folks out of Guantanamo, some of them have rejoined some of these militant organizations—can we guarantee that they're not going to try to participate in another attack? No.

But what I can guarantee is that if we don't uphold our Constitution and our values, that over time that will make us less safe and that will be a recruitment tool for organizations like Al Qaida. That's what I've got to keep my eye on.

Military Operations and Troop Levels in Afghanistan

Mr. Lauer. Let me ask you about Afghanistan. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said this is going to be a long slog, and that it's our greatest military challenge. You're going to send 30,000 additional U.S. troops in there. Can that make a difference in a country that's had 2,000 years of trouble and that's been called the "graveyard of empires"?

The President. Well, first of all, I haven't definitively authorized the 30,000 troops, although planning has been done. And I think that it is very important that we have enough troops on the ground that we're not putting those who are already there at risk, and that we can accomplish some core missions.

We are not going to be able to rebuild Afghanistan into a Jeffersonian democracy.

Mr. Lauer. So what's the mission there now?

The President. What we can do is make sure that Afghanistan is not a safe haven for Al Qaida. What we can do is make sure that it is not destabilizing neighboring Pakistan, which has nuclear weapons. And that's going to require not only military efforts, but also diplomatic efforts. It's also going to require development efforts in a coordinated fashion. And that's why I've asked the Joint Chiefs that

have produced a review. David Petraeus is reviewing the situation there. We assigned Richard Holbrooke as a special envoy to the region. They are all working together. They will be presenting to me a plan.

But the key is the point you made. We've got to have a clear objective. And there's been drift in Afghanistan over the last couple of years. That's something that we intend to fix this year.

The President's Security Detail

Mr. Lauer. Two last questions. One is about security, not national security, but your own. There was an article in the Washington Post that some of the big donors who were invited to some of your Inaugural functions were—I think the word they used was "shocked" by how easy it was to get access to you. And they expressed concerns that not enough was being done to secure you. First of all, just your opinion on that.

The President. I have complete confidence in Secret Service. These guys and gals are unbelievably professional, they know what they're doing, and I basically do what they tell me to do. Now, sometimes I'm the first one to admit that it chafes a little bit being inside this bubble. It's the hardest adjustment of being President, not being able to just take a walk or——

Mr. Lauer. I watched you walk down the halls a couple of times, and there's someone in front of you and someone behind you.

The President. That's exactly right. So it's tough. But I have complete confidence in their ability to keep me safe.

Peanut Butter Products Recall/Food and Drug Administration

Mr. Lauer. Last question. There's been a massive peanut butter products recall in this country over the last several weeks. Most of the products track—trace to one plant down in Georgia that has a bit of a history of sending out products even though there have been traces of Salmonella found.

The question—the obvious question people want to know, is the FDA doing its job?

The President. Well, I think that the FDA has not been able to catch some of these things as quickly as I expect them to catch. And so we're going to be doing a complete review of FDA operations. I don't want to prejudge this particular case, but there have been enough instances over the last several years, and at bare minimum we should be able to count on our Government keeping our kids safe when they eat peanut butter. That's what Sasha——

Mr. Lauer. It seems a simple thing.

The President. That's what Sasha eats for lunch, probably three times a week. And I don't want to have to worry about whether she's going to get sick as a consequence of having her lunch.

So we are going to make sure that we retool the FDA, that it is operating in a highly professional fashion, and most importantly, that we prevent these things, as opposed to trying to catch them after they've already occurred.

Mr. Lauer. I really appreciate your time.

The President. Thank you so much.

Mr. Lauer. Thank you.

[*There was a break in the interview, and then it resumed as follows.*]

The First Family's Transition to Life in the White House

Mr. Lauer. Has there been any surprise in terms of life in the White House? Is there something that the White House has you didn't think they had or doesn't have you thought they did have?

The President. You know, the bowling alley doesn't seem to be improving my game. [*Laughter*] That's the one thing I've noticed.

Mr. Lauer. Have you used it?

The President. We did. We took the kids down, and I wanted to use the bumpers, but Michelle said that's only——

Mr. Lauer. If it doesn't work, you had the gutters at least? That's good. It's good to know you're not cheating in bowling, good. [*Laughter*] You're playing horse on the basketball court.

The President. That's right, playing horse on the basketball court. There is a horseshoe pitch out there, so I'm going to have to practice that a little bit.

Mr. Lauer. After 12 days—it's a minuscule amount of time—are you and Mrs. Obama

more or less confident that you can keep a real sense of normalcy in the girls' lives?

The President. You know, I think that we're going to be okay. Look, Malia is 10, so 3 years from now, she's 13. Who knows what happens to teenagers.

Mr. Lauer. Right.

The President. But if there are a pair of kids who can handle this weird fishbowl, it's those two. They're just even keeled; they're happy, cheerful—the prettiest, respectful kids.

Mr. Lauer. You're starting off from the right place.

The President. That's exactly right. And having—this is where having the mother-in-law, you know, who won't take any guff from them, really helps. So we feel pretty good about it.

Mr. Lauer. Well, we all wish you luck.

The President. Thank you so much.

Mr. Lauer. Go enjoy the game.

The President. Good.

Mr. Lauer. Thanks for your time. I really appreciate it.

NOTE: The interview began taping at 5:07 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to his mother-in-law Marian Robinson; Tim Tebow, quarterback, University of Florida Gators; Daniel M. Rooney, chairman, Arthur J. Rooney II, president, and Franco Harris, former running back, Pittsburgh Steelers; Kurt Warner, quarterback, and Larry Fitzgerald, Jr., wide receiver, Arizona Cardinals; David Tyree, wide receiver, New York Giants; Jack Lauer, son of Matt Lauer, host of NBC's "Today"; Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commander, U.S. Central Command; and Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke, Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Mr. Lauer referred to entertainer Jessica Simpson; Willie Horton, convicted felon and subject of a 1988 political campaign advertisement; and television personality and entrepreneur Oprah Winfrey. Portions of this interview could not be verified because the audio was incomplete.

Remarks Following a Meeting on Economic Stabilization Legislation and an Exchange With Reporters

February 2, 2009

The President. Well, I want to thank Governor Douglas for being here. We met early on during the transition period with all of the Governors from across the country, and with very few exceptions, I heard from Republicans and Democrats the need for action—and swift action—and that's what we've been trying to do in moving this package forward.

And nobody understands this better than Governors and mayors and county officials who are seeing the devastating effects on the ground of this contraction in the economy. People are being laid off, and that means that Governors like Jim are having to not only deal with declining revenue, but increased social services to provide support for people who are unemployed as they're seeking work.

And the recovery package that we are moving forward is designed to provide States relief, to make sure that people who are laid off from their jobs are still able to get unemployment insurance, are still able to get health care, and that we are putting in place the infrastructure of rebuilding roads, bridges, waterways, other projects at the State levels that allow us to put people back to work. And we want to create or save 3 million jobs, and we want to put the investments in place that are going to ensure long-term economic growth.

So as Jim indicated, there are still some differences between Democrats and Republicans on the Hill, between the White House and some of the products that's been discussed on the Hill. But what we can't do is let very modest differences get in the way of the overall package moving forward swiftly.

And so I'm very gratified that Governor Douglas, along with many Governors from