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The President. I think the most important thing now is what I said at my press conference last week. The American people know if there's something going on and some tension that is not—doesn't have much to do with their interests. And I think that's what they have perceived here. And so what I have done, clearly, in the last couple of weeks, is to reach out a hand of understanding to the capital press corps here and to ask them not to stop criticizing me, because that's their job when they think I'm wrong or they think there's a story to be pursued, but to approach this whole work that we have to do together with an atmosphere of respect and greater trust. And I pledge to try to do the same thing.

I think the American people want to see the flaws in my proposal, want to see the contradictions if they are there, want to see me subject to honest scrutiny. But they don't like the feeling of feeding frenzy. They don't want that. And so, you know, I've done what I could, and I hope we'll have the kind of response that the American people plainly want.

Chelsea Clinton

Mr. King. Chelsea going to Japan?

The President. Well, I hope so. I think it would be educational for her, although some people have said that, you know, we ought to consider what kind of Asian press coverage she'll get and whether that would prohibit her from learning anything or doing anything there. But there is a lot of precedent for previous Presidents' families going on trade missions. And I'd like to see her do it. I think she'd learn a lot from it if in fact she'll be able to function when she's there. So we're going to try to figure that out in the next few days.

Mr. King. Thanks, Mr. President.

The President. Thanks, Larry.

NOTE: The interview began at 1 p.m. The President spoke from the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

Interview With Bob Levey of WMAL Radio, Washington, DC

June 21, 1993

Mr. Levey. I'm pleased to welcome you to Newstalk 630, WMAL. Thanks so much for joining us.

The President. Glad to do it, Bob.

Economic Program

Mr. Levey. Let's begin with a question about the deficit reduction bill. It passed the Senate Finance Committee last week. Does this now put you on the high road to passage of this bill, or are we still trundling along somewhere below the high road?

The President. Well, I think it is a high road in the sense that that probably was the most difficult committee in the Senate to get such a bill out of. And the fact that they did it and they did it in a timely fashion is encouraging. And I think what we just have to do now is to try to see that the bill—let the bill pass the Senate and send it over to conference, where the Senators and the House Members can discuss what each of them can live with as well as the principles that I have laid down. And I think we can come out of this with a bill which brings the deficit down, requires upper income people, who are in the best position to do so, to pay the lion's share of the taxes, has more cuts than taxes in it, protects the middle class and particularly gives an incentive to the working poor to work their way out of poverty, and has a lot of economic incentives to grow the economy, the kinds of things that have led so many big companies, labor unions, the homebuilders, the realtors, and others to endorse this plan. I think that it is a very good and balanced plan, and I think you'll see that coming out of the session between the Senate and the House, if the bill will be passed in the Senate this week, and of course I'm hoping it will be.

Mr. Levey. Sir, so you know, of course, that the Republicans, cheered up by the results in Texas, are now going around the country saying that you, President Clinton, are doing more for them than they can do for themselves. What's your reaction to that?

The President. Well, my reaction is that it is unfortunate that our side was not, in

effect, defended in Texas. Neither of the candidates in the Texas Senate race had voted for or supported my economic program. So the voters of Texas, unfortunately, were permitted to cast their ballots in an atmosphere of unreality, I mean, where one candidate is running saying the issue is spending stupid, and we'd cut $250 billion in spending programs. We'd cut veterans, Medicare, agriculture, foreign aid, defense, just about everything you can see. And it's going to be very interesting now, in light of what happened there, to see the debates that are coming up.

I have been a strong supporter, because I believe in it, of the space station and the super collider. We had a qualified panel of experts. Both those projects are in Texas, you know, super collider entirely in Texas, space station largely in Texas. I had a qualified panel of experts look at the space station. They recommended ways to redesign the project that would save $4 billion and to change the management of NASA in a way that would make the whole space program work better. And we also reduced some spending in the super collider. And I'm hoping I can save those projects now.

But there are strong opponents of those projects in the Congress, and they're saying, ''Well, the voters of Texas voted to kill them,'' because of the unrealistic atmosphere in which that whole election unfolded. And I wish that Lloyd Bentsen, who was Senator from there, had been able to spend full time down there telling the people of Texas he put the program together, and he would not have put a program together which was unfair to Texas, unfair to the middle class, and which didn't have spending cuts.

When you take tough stands and you want to make tough decisions, you have to expect to suffer some unpopularity in the short run as the rhetoric overtakes the reality. But every evidence we have is when the voters know the specifics of the program, that we prevail. In the race in California for Leon Panetta's House seat, where this whole program became the issue, the person who was elected to Congress defended the program, advertised it. Leon got on television and gave the specifics of the program. Our opponent attacked us and said how terrible it was. The voters gave the guy who took my position a 10-point margin. And I thought that in view of all the other problems out there, that was pretty impressive.

Mr. Levey. Mr. President, I thought you got off a good line last week. You said that Washington has become the home of gridlock and greed. Are we really that bad, or is this just political language?

The President. No, I think we're breaking that. I think if this economic program passes, it is fair, it is balanced, and it will bring an end to gridlock. But what I'm saying is it's been more than a decade since a President's budget was even taken seriously by Congress. Nobody ever wanted to talk truth about economics to the American people because the truth is that back in 1981 we cut taxes a bunch, and we increased spending a lot, and we went from a $1 trillion to a $4 trillion debt, and we permitted health care costs to soar out of control. We haven't done anything long-term about our economic health, and now we don't have the money we actually need to be spending on defense conversion, on education and training, on Head Start, on giving people incentives to revitalize our cities.

But if you want to change, it's tough because it means we all have to give up a little something now to get something tomorrow. What we're getting is lower interest rates, more investment, and an economy that will really produce jobs. But to do it we've got to break a mentality of ''what's in it for me today.'' But I think we're on the way to doing that. I think the era of gridlock and greed is fading into the distance, and I'll be surprised if we don't adopt the economic program and a lot of other things that need to be done around this town like political reform, lobbying reform, campaign finance reform, national service. I think we'll get health care reform. I'm hopeful. I'm very optimistic. But I want the people to understand clearly that these things don't happen overnight.

Statehood for the District of Columbia

Mr. Levey. Sir, speaking of things that need to get done, let's talk for a minute about statehood in the District of Columbia, which you greatly favored and strongly swore that you would lobby for once you got into office.

And I have not heard word one from you or from your office about that since you took over. Is this still on your list? And, if so, how high?

The President. Absolutely. I strongly favor it. I think it ought to be done. Nothing is clearer to me than when you see the Congress still trying to make up their mind what the domestic policy of the citizens of the District of Columbia in non-Federal matters ought to be. I think that the District of Columbia should chart its own course. And I still believe all the concerns are very compelling.

I have to tell you that there has always been substantial opposition in the Congress. And a lot of Members who might ordinarily be strongly for statehood are nervous about whether their own citizens are going to be taxed by the District of Columbia if it becomes a State. I think the question now is, since this is going to be a major debate that will require an awful lot of concentration on the part of the Senators and a lot of focus to work through the issues, when is the appropriate time for it to be brought up to guarantee that it will be seriously considered? Because unless you get serious consideration, it won't pass. That is, the easy thing for a lot of the Members of Congress will be is just to vote no. The only way it can win is if we can bring it up in a relatively calm atmosphere where people can really focus on the practical problems the people living in the District of Columbia face and on the contribution the District of Columbia makes to the country in terms of taxes, people in military service, and in many other ways.

So I still very much believe that this ought to be done. But we have to bring it up at a time when we've got a fair shot to prevail. I mean, I could bring it up and make a speech for it and let it go down. If we want it to pass, we have to bring it up at the right time where people can really focus on it.

President's Priorities

Mr. Levey. Sir, you said the night before you took over, that you did not want to be allowed to become a captive of the White House. You wanted to be the kind of President who got out. Do you think you've succeeded in that?

The President. To some extent. You know, early on here, I have to stay here a lot and just do the work. There's just so much work to be done.

Mr. Levey. I guess so.

The President. If you're trying to change things as much as we are, if you want to put on the Nation's agenda a new economic plan and a new health care plan and then follow that with a plan to open the doors of college education to all, the plan to reform campaign finance and lobbying, a plan for moving people from welfare to work, that requires an immense amount of effort. And then, of course, every President has to spend a significant amount of time on national security and foreign policy issues.

But I have traveled some. I expect to do it more, and I also try to get out and around in DC a lot. You know, one of the reasons I try to jog downtown is just so I can stop and talk to citizens and let them visit with me and kind of make sure I don't lose touch with the real world. I wish I could go——

Mr. Levey. Well, don't jog when it gets humid out there.

The President. It's pretty hot out there.

Mr. Levey. Yes, it is.

The President. But I'm straight. I expect it to be a never-ending struggle, but I hope it's one I can prevail in.

Mr. Levey. Mr. President, we thank you so much for joining us on Newstalk 630 WMAL.

The President. Thank you. I enjoyed it.

NOTE: The interview began at 1:12 p.m. The President spoke from the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

Remarks to the United States-Mexico Binational Commission and an Exchange With Reporters

June 21, 1993

The President. Please sit down, ladies and gentlemen. I want to welcome all of you here to the Roosevelt Room at the White House and say a special word of welcome to our distinguished guests from Mexico.