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Americans, I see kind, unbelievably generous, giving people back in my home State who helped my family and my friends when they were in need. It is a different story when you know what you are seeing.

So I say to you tonight, should we change the law? You bet. Should we keep fighting discrimination? Absolutely. Is this Hate Crimes Conference important? It is terribly important. But we have to broaden the imagination of America. We are redefining, in practical terms, the immutable ideals that have guided us from the beginning. Again I say, we have to make sure that for every single person in our country, all Americans means all Americans.

After experiencing the horrors of the Civil War and witnessing the transformation of the previous century, Walt Whitman said that our greatest strength was that we are an embracing nation. In his words, a ''Union, holding all, fusing, absorbing, tolerating all.'' Let us move forward in the spirit of that one America. Let us realize that this is a good obligation that has been imposed upon our generation and a grand opportunity once again to lift America to a higher level of unity, once again to redefine and to strengthen and to ensure one America for a new century and a new generation of our precious children.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:52 p.m. in the Independence Ballroom at the Grand Hyatt Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Elizabeth Birch, executive director, Human Rights Campaign; Jesse L. White, Jr., Federal Cochair, Appalachian Regional Commission; and recent nominees, Fred P. Hochberg to be Deputy Administrator of the Small Business Administration, John Berry to be Assistant Secretary of the Interior, and James C. Hormel to be Ambassador to Luxembourg.

Interview With Tim Russert of ''Meet the Press''

November 9, 1997

Mr. Russert. Mr. President, welcome to ''Meet the Press,'' and thank you for helping us celebrate the 50th anniversary.

The President. Glad to be here, Tim.

Situation in Iraq

Mr. Russert. The situation in Iraq seems to grow more and more tense. As we sit here tonight and talk, the Deputy Prime Minister has said that if the United States resumes spy flights over Iraq, they will be shot down. If Saddam Hussein was sitting right here in this seat, you would look him in the eye and say what?

The President. Those flights are United Nations flights, even though they're American pilots in those planes, and you cannot dictate to the United Nations what we do. They will resume, and if you shoot at them, you'll be making a big mistake.

Mr. Russert. If a plane is shot down by the Iraqis, will that be considered an act of war by the United States?

The President. I believe that's how the Pentagon characterized it. I think the important thing is that Saddam Hussein needs to know it would be a big mistake. We will not tolerate his efforts to murder our pilots acting on behalf of the United Nations under United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Listen, all that man has to do is to let the monitors go back to doing their job. I think it's important that the American people understand what these monitors are doing. People read this word ''UNSCOM'' in the paper, and they don't know—you know, it sounds like a bad cold or something. These monitors have been there working since the end of the Gulf war to look for weapons of mass destruction or materials used to make weapons of mass destruction.

They have found and destroyed more weapons capacity, the monitors have, than were destroyed in the entire Gulf war, which shows you that Saddam Hussein has not stopped trying to develop this capacity. After all, keep in mind, this is a man who used chemical weapons on the Iranians; he used chemical weapons on his own people. And what they're doing there is terribly important. We do not want him to have chemical or biological weapons capacity. We believe he has the latent capacity to produce more Scud missiles. And we all remember how he aimed the Scuds at Israel during the Gulf war.

So what they're doing is terribly important. And he needs to let them go back and do

their job. None of us are going to be bullied by him.

Mr. Russert. Have you ever met him?

The President. Never.

Mr. Russert. Do you have any intentions of meeting him?

The President. No.

Mr. Russert. If, in fact, the Iraqis are able to keep the American inspectors away from their biological warfare, aren't they succeeding?

The President. Well, that's a different question. The group that we sent over there, the U.N. sent over there to talk to Saddam Hussein, is coming back. They're going to make their report. Then I expect the United Nations to take very strong and unambiguous action to make it perfectly clear that he has to comply.

Now, in the past, we've been able to work these things out. We've been up to this point before and been able to work them out. If he doesn't, then the world community will have to take some action.

Mr. Russert. Will the Russians and the French and the Arab nations support the United States?

The President. Well, what I would hope they would do is support the United Nations. The Russians and the French and the Arab States have a huge stake in not allowing him to develop and deploy weapons of mass destruction. What if he has a missile with the capacity to reach to Europe?

Mr. Russert. Many people are suggesting what he's really up to is to try to provoke an attack by the United States, a Tomahawk missile attack; then he would kick all the inspectors out and go right back to accelerating his campaign of building weapons of mass destruction.

The President. That may be. He may be trying to divide the coalition as well, with the promise that he'll sell oil at good prices and make money for other countries. But so far, I have to tell you, I've been impressed with the unity of the world community. I think that he picked a peculiar way to try to divide the coalition. He seems to be frustrated that the sanctions haven't been lifted. But all he has to do is to allow the inspectors to do their job and quit trying to stockpile the ability to make these weapons of mass destruction. That's all he's got to do.

Mr. Russert. We will never have normal relations with Iraq as long as Saddam Hussein is there?

The President. We will never have normal relations with Iraq as long as Iraq is out of compliance with these basic resolutions of the United Nations. Now, it appears that Saddam Hussein has had several years since the Gulf war to put his country in compliance, and he has declined to do so.

Mr. Russert. Do you think there will be the need for military strike?

The President. I don't want to rule anything in or out. I think it's—at a moment like this it's very important that the President maintain all options and signal none. And that's where I want to be. But I think that Saddam Hussein needs to understand that this is a serious business. And this is not just the President of the United States; the American people feel this way. And it's not just the American people; it's the world community.

There is a United Nations resolution that says that he has to permit inspectors to look into what he's doing to make sure he doesn't again develop the capacity to make and deploy weapons of mass destruction. He's one of the few people who's done it and used it. And we all have an interest in stopping him.

Mr. Russert. And he will comply eventually?

The President. He will comply eventually or we'll have to see what happens then. It will not be without consequence if he does not comply.

China and Cuba

Mr. Russert. You met last week with the President of China, a country of 1.5 billion people, 7,000 miles away. Why is it that we meet with the President of China and trade with China but don't meet with the President of Cuba, 90 miles away, a country of 10 million people? Other than the size of the economic market, are there any differences between the two systems?

The President. Oh, yes, I think there are plainly some. For one thing, the Chinese have shown a willingness to not only engage

us but to open up and to work with us. Of course, we have differences with both China and Cuba on human rights and on their political system.

But if you just look at the—what happened in the last meeting with President Jiang and myself. We said, first of all, we're going to try to work together and establish cooperation, not conflict, as the model for U.S.-China relations in the 21st century. China agreed to cooperate with us in nuclear matters and to stop transfer of nuclear technologies to dangerous states. China agreed to work with us aggressively to try to solve the problem on the Korean Peninsula. China has agreed to an energy and environmental endeavor with us, which is very important in our effort to limit greenhouse gases globally. And for people who are concerned about human rights, China agreed to continue to work with us in developing rule of law systems, which eventually will clearly lead to the protection of individual rights, not just economic rights but other rights as well. So we've got this ongoing relationship.

That's what I wanted to do with Cuba. And when I became President, we had the Cuba Democracy Act, which passed before I took office, but I supported it. And it enabled the President not only to have a tougher economic embargo but also to open up with Cuba, to have a gradually evolving relationship. And I was working on that until they illegally shot those two planes down and basically murdered those people that were in those two planes, which led the Congress to pass the present law.

So we're at an impasse now. I still want that kind of relationship with Cuba. But we have to have some kind of indication that there will be an opening up, a movement toward democracy and openness and freedom if we're going to do that. And I don't have that indication today.

Mr. Russert. Do you expect to get anything like that from Fidel Castro as long as he's there?

The President. I'm not sure. We get mixed signals from time to time. And he's a highly intelligent man. And I know he spends a lot of time thinking about the future. So I wish it could be different than it is. But we have to have some basis for opening. It can't be a one-way street; there has to be some sense that there's an evolution going on in Cuba, and it can turn into a modern state.

Keep in mind, it is now the only country in our entire hemisphere that is not a democracy. And that is a very significant thing.

Fast-Track Trade Legislation

Mr. Russert. Let me turn to another issue confronting our hemisphere, fast-track trade authority. A critical vote tomorrow, Sunday, in the House of Representatives, whether or not the President of the United States should have the unilateral ability to negotiate trade deals throughout our hemisphere. Right now you have less than one out of three Democratic votes in the House. Are you going to win that vote?

The President. I'm not sure yet. It's close, and we're working very hard. I worked very late the last several nights. I've been working on this for weeks. I worked on it today. And I'll be working on it when we finish our interview, and I imagine right up to voting time. On the other side, the Speaker is working hard to try to get the requisite votes from the Republicans.

It's a difficult issue in the House. In the Senate, we had a bipartisan majority in both caucuses; both the Democrats and the Republicans voted for it. Among the Governors, virtually every Democratic Governor, virtually every Democratic mayor is for it. But the House Members, to be fair to them, they feel the pressure of a lot of the changes that are happening in this economy. And I think when plants close down, there's an automatic assumption sometimes that it's because of trade, whether it is or not. And I think that they feel the pressure, particularly, on both sides more than most. And it's tough for them.

But I think the right thing for America is to continue to tear down the trade barriers and sell more American products, to try to lift up labor and environmental standards abroad. And then, when people are dislocated here, if they lose their job from technology or people don't buy the products anymore or trade, whatever the reason is, we need to do more, more quickly for them. And I tried to put in place those kinds of systems.

So I think we've had a balanced approach, and I hope we can persuade a majority of the House tomorrow that that's the right approach.

Mr. Russert. Many Democrats took umbrage when you said the vote was a no-brainer and that if it was a secret ballot, it would pass easily; that perhaps special interests like big labor were forcing them to vote publicly other than the way they felt privately.

The President. No, I didn't say the last. What I said was that I thought, in terms of pure economics, if you look at the last 5 years, where we've had 13½ million jobs, we've got the lowest unemployment rate in 24 years, we've negotiated over 200 trade agreements, and a third of our growth has come from tearing down barriers, I do think economically, for the country as a whole, it's a no-brainer. On the secret ballot issue, I'm simply repeating what several House Members said to me.

But to be fair, they feel—on every critical vote, Members of Congress feel political pressures that may or may not reflect the larger economic realities of the country. And I'm sure that that's no different than it was on a lot of the other tough votes we've had in the past. This is not a question of character; it's a question of judgment. And I think that the right judgment is to give the President the authority to continue to tear down those trade barriers.

Mr. Russert. Now, the leader of the Democrats in the House, Dick Gephardt, opposes you on this. He said yesterday, ''Please, Mr. President, don't trade Democratic values for Republican votes,'' specifically saying, ''Will you reduce or cut funding for family planning across the world in order to win votes.'' Will you?

The President. No.

Mr. Russert. Not at all?

The President. No. We're not going to trade a matter of principle on the Mexico City issue to carry fast track. If we can't get the votes without that, then we'll have to regroup and try to figure out some other way to go forward with fast track, either next week or when Congress resumes.

I have tried my best in working at this to build a bipartisan coalition on every major issue that did not ask either the Republicans or the Democrats to give up their principles. So we have kept separate our negotiations on the census, for example, and our negotiation on the so-called Mexico City language from the trade negotiations.

We have offered a number of compromises that we thought were principled, where the Democrats who disagree with the Republicans could save our principles, and they could save theirs, where we could both be moving forward. So far we haven't succeeded. We're still working at it.

Taxes

Mr. Russert. Let me turn to the issue of taxes. The Republicans say the solution is either a flat tax or a national sales tax. Are you prepared to embrace either of those ideas?

The President. Not tonight. And let me say why. On the flat tax, it has enormous appeal to average people, because they wouldn't have to—the idea is, even if they lost all—especially if they lost all their deductions but paid a lower rate, that they'd never have to have anybody help them fill out their taxes again, nor would they ever have to worry about whether they were in compliance with the Internal Revenue Service laws and regulations again.

The difficulty there is I have never seen a flat tax proposal that was revenue neutral, that is, that kept the balanced budget we've worked so hard for now, that didn't impose higher taxes on people with incomes below $100,000, and that's most Americans, and that's not fair.

With the national sales tax, my concern is that, if you shifted to a national sales tax, it would raise the price of all products dramatically. And we don't know what that would do to inflation in America. We don't know whether it could be done without any kind of destructive economic consequences. Also, we don't know whether that wouldn't be much more regressive for people in the middle and lower income working groups.

Gay Rights

Mr. Russert. Let me turn to a cultural issue. Tonight you will be attending a gay rights dinner, the first sitting President in the

history of the country to do so. What statement are you trying to make?

The President. Well, Tim, you know, I grew up in the segregated South in the forties and fifties. And all my life, from the time I was a child, I was taught and I have believed that every person in this country, no matter what their differences are, in their lifestyle or their race or their religion, if they obey the law, show up for work every day or show up for school, if they're good citizens, they ought to be treated with respect and dignity and equality. And they should be subject to no discrimination in the things that we all have to have access to, like education and a job and health care. What I'm trying to do is to continue to move that forward.

I know this is a difficult issue for a lot of Americans. I know that particularly for Americans who've never known anyone who was gay or lesbian personally, it's an issue that often arouses discomfort. But I think it's the right thing to do. I think we have to keep working until we say for everybody, the only test should be: Are you a law-abiding, hard-working citizen, do you do the things we require of all citizens. If you do, you should be subject to no discrimination, and you ought to be part of the family of America. That's what I believe. And if my presence there tonight advances that goal, then that's a good thing.

Mr. Russert. Do you believe that homosexuality should be taught in schools as an acceptable alternative lifestyle?

The President. No, I don't think it should be advocated. I don't think it should be part of the public school curriculum.

But on the other hand, I don't believe that anyone should teach schoolchildren that they should hate or discriminate against or be afraid of people who are homosexuals. That is the real issue. The real issue is the one that we're going to take up next week at the White House with the Hate Crimes Conference. We're going to have the first Hate Crimes Conference ever at the White House next week. And we're going to deal with that, not only against homosexuals but against other groups of Americans.

I don't believe that we should be in the business of ratifying or validating or politicizing the issue. I think the real problem in America is still continuing discrimination and fear and downright misunderstanding.

Mr. Russert. Now, Vice President Gore caused a stir when he said that Ellen, the TV star who will be honored tonight at the dinner—he said, quote, ''millions of Americans were forced to look at sexual orientation in an open light.'' Was Vice President Gore correct?

The President. Well, I think when she did that on television, and you got to see the interplay with her family and her friends who were not homosexual, you got to see all that—I think for many Americans who themselves had never had a personal experience, never had a friend or a family member who's a homosexual, it did give them a chance to see it in a new light. So I think he was accurate about that.

My experience in life—all I can tell you is what my experience is—and I'm not talking about as President, I'm talking about as a citizen now, as a person—is that most people's attitudes about how homosexuals should be treated really are determined more than anything else based on whether they have ever known someone who is homosexual. Now, whether most people's attitudes about whether the lifestyle should be condoned or condemned is a function, perhaps, of their religious training. But we're not talking about people's religious convictions here. We're talking about how people in the public arena, as citizens, should be treated in terms of their right to education, to jobs, to housing, and to be treated free of discrimination. And that is the agenda that I want to further for all Americans. And that is what I think we ought to be focusing on.

Administration Accomplishments

Mr. Russert. In preparing for this interview, we went out and talked to thousands of American viewers, voters, with a poll, and we asked some interesting questions. The first was, what do you think the best accomplishments were of the Clinton administration.

And let me show it to you on the screen and—going to read from there: protecting Medicare and education, 30 percent; improving economy and creating jobs, 23; keeping

the U.S. at peace, 13; balancing the budget, 13.

Would you agree with that list?

The President. That's a pretty good list. I think the—what I've tried to do is to give the American people the confidence that if we follow the right policies and we all do the right things, we can make America work again, and we can actually prepare our country for the 21st century.

So I think the economy is an important accomplishment. I think the role we played in contributing to the declining crime rate, the role we played in moving people off welfare into work, and the role we played passionately in not only protecting Medicare and education but trying to reform Medicare and trying to improve the quality of education and the access of all Americans to college, I think those will be some enduring legacies of the administration.

Stock Market

Mr. Russert. Are you worried about the roller-coaster stock market?

The President. No. The market, by definition, goes up and down. And we've been very blessed in America to have strong financial markets and to have good, strong underlying institutions. And the market was, I think, 3,200 the day I took office. So I think most Americans are well pleased with where it is now compared to where it was 5 years ago.

Administration Failures

Mr. Russert. Let's look at the bad news, the failures of the Clinton administration, and put them up on the screen here for you: diminishing the Presidency because of ethical problems, 29 percent; not addressing Social Security and Medicare long term, 27 percent.

On the first one, Mr. President, as you know, many people concerned about campaign finance and how your campaign was funded and so forth, we have a situation now where 31 people have pleaded the fifth amendment, 11 people have fled the country. Are you at this point willing to acknowledge that there was at least too much excessiveness in the fundraising on behalf of your election?

The President. Well, what appears to have happened is that there were people who gave money to the Democratic Party who were not legally entitled to give money to the party. Now, as far as I know, when the leaders of the party found out about it, when I found out about, we spent several million dollars doing a review and gave back all the money that we knew of that was not properly accepted.

Mr. Russert. About $3 million.

The President. It was a mistake to accept it. And what we've been trying to determine is whether we could have known—whether the party people could have known, if they'd done the right reviews in the first place. And I think some of them, they could have been known. And I think that was a mistake. But I said that back in 1996, before the election, we have to take responsibility, all of us, including me, for not having in place the kind of reviews that would have protected against that kind of problem.

Now, however, I generally disagree with that. I think that this administration, when the history books are written and people look back at it, the public will have a very different opinion when they read the history about the ethical performance of this administration. In the moment, once you're accused and hearings are held, a certain percentage will think that you must have done something wrong personally or tolerated people doing something wrong, and I don't believe that's the case.

On the other issue, I agree with that. I think that one of our agenda is that we still have to address the long-term problems of Social Security and Medicare for when the baby boomers retire, so that the Social Security and Medicare will be there for them without overburdening their children who are attempting to raise their grandchildren. I think that's very important.

Campaign Financing

Mr. Russert. Let me get to Social Security in one second, but ask a followup on the campaign finance. People like Johnny Chung, Charlie Trie, John Huang have become household names in many ways. Do you think that they should come back to the United States and not take the fifth amendment and voluntarily tell you and the country everthing

they know so we can be certain, and particularly you as Commander in Chief, that our national security was not compromised?

The President. When I asked President Jiang about that, you know, the question about was the Chinese Government involved, which was a question that was raised, he emphatically denied to me personally that their government had tried to do anything to influence the outcome of this election. And he said that he would cooperate with that. Of course, I have encouraged everybody to cooperate with the investigators. I think everyone should. So that's my position for those gentlemen and for everybody else. I think we ought to get to the bottom of it.

But let met say, one thing that Senator Fred Thompson said that I really agree with, is that he said he hoped that his hearings, before he shut them down, would lead to reforming the system. And you know, before you had this job, you used to work for people who were elected officials, and I think that you will at least acknowledge there's something to the point that people don't go out and raise money because they want to, and then they find things to throw the money at. People raise money because they think they have to raise the money to buy access to communications with the public, and the cost of campaigns has been going up.

Now, what I favor is the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform bill, trying to control the amount of contributions and limit expenditures. And then I think we have to have access in the media to either free or reduced air time to people who observe these limits. I think we've got to have both if we're going to have real campaign finance reform.

Mr. Russert. The other complaint, raised by Common Cause, particularly, and others, is that you received $75 million in public funding for the Presidential race but then went out and raised $50 million in so-called soft money, largely corporate money, and bought TV ads all across the country, which brought your popularity ratings up considerably. And people said, that's inappropriate, you really did push through a huge loophole and use big corporate money to pay for TV ads designed and controlled by you, in effect, and that's what helped get you elected.

The President. But keep in mind what the money did at first. Those ads were designed to put forward the Democratic Party's position against the Republican majority, the new Republican majority in Congress and their attempt to implement the contract on America. They benefited me, and they benefited all Democrats because people agreed with what we wanted to do as compared with what was being done there. And they lifted the party as a whole.

The law basically says that you can't do anything that solely benefits you or any other particular candidate. I refused to let any ad run until it had advance clearance from the lawyer for the Democratic Party. And presumably Senator Dole did the same thing when the Republican Party did that. And presumably they got clearance even before they ran ads that affected only one congressional seat up in Staten Island, $800,000 of them.

Should we limit the soft money expenditures? Yes, we should. How can we do it? Only if we're prepared to change the law. Otherwise, there's too much experience where one candidate, who's a good candidate with no money, is blown away because the other candidate that has a lot of money has the only access to the voters. That's what this is about. If we get another kind of access to the voters—let me just ask you to do this some day. One of the things I'd like to see you do here one Sunday is analyze the last British election, for example, and look at the television time that was given to Tony Blair in Labour and John Major in the Conservatives. See how they used it. See whether or not it wasn't more enlightening for the voters. See, if we had the right kind of campaign finance reform, how we could cut the cost and elevate the level of the debate in a way that I think would increase voter turnout and confidence in the system.

I acknowledge that we all have played a role in bringing down voter confidence. But it's the only system that's out there, and if you don't try to get your communication out and the other side does, they will prevail nearly every time.

1996 Campaign

Mr. Russert. Would you acknowledge the ads were pro-Clinton and anti-Dole?

The President. Yes, because—but it was only because—first of all, they should have been pro-Clinton because the Democratic leaders in Congress and I were trying to put our position out against the Republican contract on America. And Senator Dole and Speaker Gingrich were the leaders of the contract side. But at least they furthered the debate on the great national issues before Congress at the time. The Republican ads were even more specific. I never ran an ad, for example, on my upbringing or anything like that.

But as I said, to the best of my knowledge, every ad the Republicans ran was approved by their lawyers. I know every ad we did was approved in advance. The answer is to change the system. We wouldn't have this sort of thing if there was ample access for honest, open debate and communication. Once you've talked to the voters, and they've heard your side, and they've heard the other side in a free and open way, then you don't have the incentive for all this.

Democratic Party

Mr. Russert. The state of the Democratic Party—as you mentioned, the open House seat in Staten Island, the Republicans won. The Republicans won the mayoralties in New York and Los Angeles, the two largest cities; the Governorships in New Jersey and Virginia. In the last 4 years, since you've been head of the Democratic Party, titular head of the Democratic Party, 20 percent of the Democratic Congressmen are gone, 20 percent of the Senators, 38 percent of the Democratic Governors have lost. What is wrong with the Democratic Party?

The President. Well, I think it's going through a period of transition, and I think it will come out stronger.

Now, you should say, to make full disclosure, that every one of those Republican election victories you just mentioned was in a seat already held by a Republican and, in every case but one, by the incumbent who won.

Mr. Russert. Fair enough.

The President. And that we nearly won a race in New Jersey which no one in the world thought we had a chance to win.

Mr. Russert. But the House and Senate and Governorships were all incumbent Democrats.

The President. No, some of them were—some of them quit and the open seats went to Republicans. I think the biggest problem we've had in the Senate is people leaving. If in the last 4 years four Senators had stayed, we'd have 49 Senators, and we'd be virtually even. Same thing in the House. A number of our House seats were people leaving.

But the House seats we lost in '94, I think, were because we were successfully attacked for the economic plan. The Republicans were able to convince people it was a big tax plan on them when it wasn't, and they haven't felt the benefits, and because we failed to reform health care, something I really regret. And that's partly my responsibility.

Entitlement Programs

Mr. Russert. Before we take a break—you mentioned Social Security and Medicare; Medicare goes broke in the year 2001, Social Security has a deficit 2012. Will President Bill Clinton, in the final 3 years of his Presidency, move to restructure Medicare and Social Security in a way that may in fact raise retirement age, increase premiums, perhaps even reduce benefits in order to make it safe for people in my generation?

The President. First, let's say—Medicare does not now go broke in 2001; it's got 12 years on the life of it now. We have more prevention, more choices, and more cost controls in the Medicare reform program that's part of the balanced budget. So it doesn't go broke now in 2001. Social Security is in better shape because of the declining inflation.

But do we have to have a longer term reform for Social Security and Medicare, and should it occur before I leave office? The answer to both those questions is yes.

Mr. Russert. Many believe that Richard Nixon went to China—he was the fervent anti-Communist who could make that deal. It's going to take Democrat Bill Clinton to really make tough decisions and say, "We have to raise retirement age. We have to raise

premiums. We have to reduce benefits for the next generation.'' Are you willing to do that?

The President. I'm willing to do what it takes to preserve and protect Social Security for the next generation and for the people who have to have it in this generation and also for Medicare. We've got a Medicare commission that's about to be appointed by the Congress and by the President, and I think together we're going to come up with a good bipartisan solution on that. And then we'll have to take on Social Security.

I think it is a mistake for me right now to advocate various specific reforms because if it prejudges the work of the commission, it will make it more difficult for them to do it and then for us to pass it in a bipartisan way. But I'm willing to take the hard decisions necessary to preserve both of these programs so they'll be available to people, and they'll work for people, and they'll keep America coming together. I think it's terribly important, a big part of the agenda for the next century.

Mr. Russert. We have to take a quick break. We'll be right back with more of our conversation from President Bill Clinton on the 50th anniversary of ''Meet the Press'' right after this.

[*At this point, the network took a commercial break.*]

Investigations

Mr. Russert. We're back, talking to President Clinton. All the allegations against you, the Whitewater, the lawsuit, Travelgate, coffees, sleepovers, on and on—your favorable rating is still near 60 percent. Are you, not Ronald Reagan, the true Teflon President?

The President. I think down deep inside people are fair-minded, first of all, and they know there is a difference in somebody making a charge against you and having it be true. Secondly, and more importantly, what I've tried to do as President is to cooperate with any investigation, answer any question, but save most of my time and energy, not for defending myself but for working for the American people.

My whole theory is, if the American people are doing better, then everything else is going to come out all right. And that's what we work on. That's sort of our credo at the White House. Don't think about ourselves; think about the American people. Try to move the ball forward every day. Try to make sure when we're done the American people are better off than they were when we started.

The President and the Press

Mr. Russert. Your attitudes towards the press. Your Press Secretary, Mike McCurry, said something interesting——

The President. I couldn't believe he said that.

Mr. Russert. I want to show it to you on the screen and get your reaction.

The President. I couldn't believe he said that.

Mr. Russert. The President, quote, ''refuses to believe the press does the things that they do only because of happenstance. He's just convinced there is some general global conspiracy out to ruin his life and make him miserable.''

The President. He must have been tongue in cheek when he said that. He couldn't have been serious when he said that.

Mr. Russert. Do you think we do a good job? Have we been fair to you?

The President. On balance, yes. I think—first of all, I don't think there has ever been a President of either party and any philosophy that didn't think that he should have gotten a better press. So that just goes with the territory. I think there have been rather dramatic changes in press coverage over the last 20 years, particularly in the Washington press, which bear some examination and evaluation by those of you who are in the press. But I don't think that the President gets anywhere by making any comments on the press.

I believe in the first amendment. When President Jiang of China was here, I was pushing freedom of the press with him. And I said that it would be hard to find anybody that had been beat up much more than I have in the press, but I still thought the country was stronger when we were free to speak. I raised the freedom of press issues when I was in Latin America recently.

I think it's one of the best things about this country. And how it should be done and

whether it's being done in the most responsible and effective way can only be determined by members of the press themselves in our system, because that's the only way you can keep it free.

I don't hate all the press and all that business. I think Mike was a little tongue in cheek there.

President's Place in History

Mr. Russert. George Washington, the American Revolution; Abraham Lincoln, the Civil War; Franklin Roosevelt, World War II; Ronald Reagan, the cold war: What will be Bill Clinton's legacy, absent a war? And, two, are Presidents as consequential now as they were before the end of the cold war?

The President. Oh, yes. I think they are but in different ways. First, I think a President's legacy is ultimately determined by—after he's gone from office, and maybe after he's gone from this Earth, when people can read all the records and see the real significance of what happened with the benefit of hindsight and without any prejudice for or against.

I can tell you, when I came to this office, I ran because I thought this was a profoundly important time in our history, moving into a new era and a new century, changes in the way we work and live and relate to each other, relate to the rest of the world. And I had a vision for what I wanted America to look like when I left office. I wanted this to be a country where there was opportunity for every person responsible enough to work for it, where our country was still the leading nation for peace and freedom and prosperity, and where, with all these differences we've got, we're still coming together as one America. That's my vision. I hope someday some scholar will say it was my legacy.

Mr. Russert. Kennedy had the Cuban Missile Crisis. LBJ had civil rights. Bill Clinton has what?

President's Future

The President. He had to make America work in a new world. We had to relate to a global economy, a global society. I think that's what I'll be judged on: Did I help America transform itself so that we would still be the greatest nation in the world in a global economy, a global society with the most diffuse and different population, diverse population in our history?

Mr. Russert. We asked our people across the country what you would do when you left office at the ripe old age of 54, and this is what they said. They volunteered—50 percent, you give speeches and work for causes, pretty much like former Presidents; 15 percent said go into private business; 14 percent said teach at a university; 13 percent said run for another office. Will Bill Clinton ever run for another office?

The President. I don't know. I might run for the school board someday.

Mr. Russert. But not the U.S. Senate?

The President. I don't think so.

Mr. Russert. How about the Supreme Court?

The President. I don't think so. I'm a little bit too much of an activist. I love studying the law, and I used to be a law professor, you know, and I taught constitutional law——

Mr. Russert. And William Howard Taft went from the Presidency——

The President. He did.

Mr. Russert. ——to chief judge of the Supreme Court.

The President. He did. But I think I'm a little too active for it. And I think the—I might like to do everything that was on that list in some form or fashion. What I want to do is to be useful to my country, to advance the causes of peace that I've worked for around the world, whether it's in Ireland or the Middle East or Bosnia. I want to help build these structures to deal with terrorism and environmental crises and all of that. I want to help children realize their potential if they're forgotten here at home or abroad.

But I don't want to be underfoot. I don't want to be under some President's foot. If I can help my country and if a President wants to ask me to help, I'll show up and do it.

Mr. Russert. But you might run for office?

The President. I might like to be on the school board someday——

Popular Perception of the President

Mr. Russert. Let me show one last graphic up here, and this is a fun one. We asked,

what is the image you have of Bill Clinton? Forty-two percent said playing the saxophone; 40 percent, running in jogging shorts; 7 percent, playing golf; 6 percent, eating at McDonald's.

The President. It's funny, I haven't eaten at McDonald's a single time since I've been President. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Russert. But playing golf. How many mulligans do you take in the average 18 holes?

The President. One now.

Mr. Russert. One mulligan?

The President. Yes.

Mr. Russert. And what's your handicap?

The President. Twelve, thirteen, something like that. I'm playing—it's better than it was when I became President, mostly because I've gotten to play with a lot of good golfers, and they've taught me a lot.

Mr. Russert. Mr. President, we have to take another quick break. We'll be right back with more of "Meet the Press" right after this.

[*The network took a commercial break.*]

Retrospective

Mr. Russert. Fifty years ago this week, November 6, 1947, NBC's "Meet the Press" first traveled the airwaves. For a half-century it has presented interviews with the top U.S. and international leaders, questioned by many of the Nation's best journalists. This morning we will salute all the outstanding individuals who have made "Meet the Press" the longest running television program in the world. And we offer this look back at 50 years of history in the making, just some of the more than 2,500 programs that offered viewers across America a weekly window to the world.

[*A videotape of highlights from the first 50 years of "Meet the Press" was shown.*]

Running for the Presidency

Mr. Russert. Mr. President, was it a dream for someone from Hope, Arkansas, to join that galaxy of international leaders?

The President. It was an amazing review of the last 50 years and it seems impossible sometimes that I was part of it, but I'm very grateful for the chance I've had to serve, and I'm grateful, frankly, for the program that you and your network have put on for 50 years. I relived a lot of my own life and the life of our Nation and the world looking at that. You should be very proud of that.

Mr. Russert. In May of 1991 Bill Clinton was on "Meet the Press"—[*laughter*]—and asked about the '92 election. Let's take a look.

The President. What did I say?

[*A videotape excerpt of the May 1991 broadcast was shown.*]

"Q. Deep inside, do you think there is a good chance that a Democratic candidate could win the White House?

"Governor Clinton. No.

"Q. Not a chance but a good chance.

"Governor Clinton. Today? No. A year and a half from now? Maybe."

The President. That's a good brief answer.

Mr. Russert. You won.

The President. I did.

Mr. Russert. But back in May of '91 you weren't so sure.

The President. No, and I hadn't even decided to run then. And when I did decide to run, I think my mother was the only person who thought I had a chance to win. But that's the miracle of the American system. The thing that we have in Presidential campaigns, if you become the nominee, is that everybody hears your message.

Mr. Russert. When you first started running in '92, was it kind of a trial run for '96, and——

The President. Oh, no.

Mr. Russert. You really thought you could win?

The President Absolutely. I had—what I think is most important, if you run for President, is you have to know what you want to do if you win. You have to have a passionate desire to change the direction of the country, and I did. I had some very definite ideas, and so I thought, I'm going to do this because I think it's important. If I win, fine. If I don't, I'll be proud I tried.

Mr. Russert. Before you go, Mr. President, we have compiled a book, "Fifty Years of History in the Making: Meet the Press," in which you are prominently mentioned as

the third sitting President to join us on ''Meet the Press.''

The President. Great.

Mr. Russert. We thank you for celebrating our 50 years——

The President. Thank you.

Mr. Russert. ——and welcome you back anytime.

The President. I've got one for you, too.

Mr. Russert. Oh, no.

The President. The new book on the Buffalo Bills.

Mr. Russert. Oh, God, here it is.

The President. Signed by the author.

Mr. Russert. And I have promised I will remain moderator of ''Meet the Press'' until the Buffalo Bills win the Super Bowl, which means I'm going to be here a very long time.

The President. You'll still look very young.

Mr. Russert. President Bill Clinton, thank you very much for joining us.

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview was recorded at 7:30 p.m. on November 8 at the NBC Studios for broadcast at 10:30 a.m. on November 9. In his remarks, the President referred to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; President Jiang Zemin of China; President Fidel Castro of Cuba; and actress Ellen DeGeneres. The President also referred to the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM).

Letter to Congressional Leaders on Major Narcotics Producing and Transit Countries

November 9, 1997

Dear Mr. Chairman: (Dear Ranking Member:)

In accordance with the provisions of section 490(h) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (FAA), as amended, I have determined that the following countries are major illicit drug-producing or drug-transit countries: Afghanistan, Aruba, The Bahamas, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Burma, Cambodia, China, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Hong Kong, India, Iran, Jamaica, Laos, Malaysia, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Taiwan, Thailand, Venezuela, and Vietnam. These countries have been selected on the basis of information from the March 1, 1997, International Narcotics Control Strategy Report and from other U.S. Government sources.

This year, I have removed Lebanon and Syria from the list. Both countries were placed on the majors list ten years ago on the basis of important, illicit opium cultivation in Lebanon's Beka'a Valley, a region under the control of Syrian occupation forces. Evidence that Syrian troops at the time were protecting and facilitating drug cultivation, production, and transportation led to the inclusion of Syria on the list beginning in 1992, however, Lebanon and Syria jointly began a campaign to eradicate the more than 3,400 hectares of Beka'a Valley opium poppy cultivation.

This effort has been effective, since U.S. Government surveys have detected no current opium poppy cultivation. Though both countries are transit areas for South American cocaine, and small laboratories in Lebanon reportedly refine Southwest Asian opium into heroin destined for Europe and the West, there is no evidence that any of these drugs reach the United States in quantities that significantly affect the United States. I have removed both countries from the majors list this year and have placed them on the watch list, with the understanding that they will be once again listed as major illicit drug producers or transit countries, should the evidence warrant.

Netherlands Antilles. Analysis of the trafficking patterns in the region indicates that there is continuing drug activity taking place around the Netherlands Antilles, especially in the vicinity of St. Maarten. Although at present there is only anecdotal information, it is possible that significant quantities of U.S.-bound drugs are involved. If I determine that drugs entering the United States from the Netherlands Antilles do so in sufficient quantities as to affect the United States significantly, I will add the Netherlands Antilles to the list of major illicit drug-transit countries.

Turkey and other Balkan Route Countries. Although I remain concerned over the large volume of Southwest Asian heroin moving through Turkey and neighboring countries to Western Europe along the Balkan Route, there is no clear evidence that this heroin