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preserve the Medicare program and to meet these other challenges. So my first answer is that we have a lot to do.

The second thing I would say is that if everybody stays home and we have people in here who will be irresponsible and squander the surplus and risk our economic program and its stability as they did for the last 8 months here, if they tried to do that, then things could get worse in a hurry. So I believe that it would be a great mistake for anybody to stay home because times are good and to assume, ''Well, the President is dealing with all these guys all right, and things are fine, and I don't really have to show up.'' That's a big risk that's not worth taking. We have too much to do.

Mr. Joyner. Well, that seems to be the mood.

The President. I don't know. I think a lot of people know this is a big election. I think they know what their priorities are, and you mentioned them. And I think they know what our priorities are. And I think they know that the Democrats are focused on the people out there in the country and not on some sort of a partisan power game here in Washington. That's what I want to get out there to the people, and if they understand that, I think they'll go. I certainly hope they will.

The American people, given enough time, virtually always make the right decision. But we need people to go, because otherwise this huge, vast amount of money that's been spent in this campaign is going to beat a lot of very, very worthy people who would be very good in the Congress and the Senate.

Mr. Joyner. All right. Thank you, sir, for coming on the air and talking to us.

The President. Thank you.

Mr. Joyner. And we look for results tomorrow and a better day on Wednesday.

Ms. Wilkes. Are you going home to Little Rock to vote?

The President. No, I'm not. I voted absentee already. I've already cast my ballot.

Mr. Joyner. All right, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you. Goodbye.

NOTE: The interview began at 9:05 a.m. in Room 415 of the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, the President referred to Bill Gates, president, Microsoft; and Dr. John Hope Franklin, Chairman, President's Advisory Board on Race. Myra J. is the on-air name used by Myra Hughes.

Interview With Hispanic Journalists

November 2, 1998

Q. We will begin with a statement by President Bill Clinton.

The President. *Buenos dias.* Good morning, everyone. And thank you for giving me this opportunity to address so many Hispanic-Americans and Latino media markets all across the United States, Puerto Rico, and in 18 other Latin American countries.

I'm glad to have the opportunity to discuss important issues with esteemed journalists from four major Latino radio networks: Radio Bilingue, MetroSource Network, CNN Radio Noticias, and Radio Unica.

Tomorrow is election day in America. It is no ordinary election. It is, instead, an election that will determine whether we as a nation focus on progress or partisanship for the next 2 years. It will determine which direction we take into the new millennium. It will be determined by who comes out to vote.

Our country is doing well now. I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to serve these last 6 years and grateful that we have the lowest unemployment rate in 28 years, the smallest percentage of people on welfare in 29 years, the first surplus in 29 years. I'm grateful that poverty rates are dropping among all Americans and minority Americans. I'm very grateful that we have record numbers of new Hispanic-owned businesses, for example. But I think we all understand that a great deal of work still needs to be done in education, in health care, in child care.

We Democrats, we're running on an agenda of a Patients' Bill of Rights for all our Americans in health management organizations so they can have their health care decisions made by doctors, not accountants. We're running on an increase in the minimum wage. We're running on an aggressive program to improve our schools, with 100,000 more teachers and 5,000 new and rebuilt schools that are modern and good. We're running on a reform of the Social Security system so we can save it for the new

century, and so much more. We also have run forthrightly on an open immigration policy and one America. And we have fought the Republicans on all these issues.

I hope very much that we'll have a good turnout on Tuesday. I'm looking forward to this interview. But I will say again, these races are very, very close. There are almost three dozen close House races that could go one way or the other. There are seven close Senate races that could go one way or the other. And we need a strong turnout.

Now, before I turn it over to the journalists to ask questions, I'd also like to say just one other word. Our prayers here at the White House go out to the citizens of Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala, who have suffered so much as a result of Hurricane Mitch and are trying to put their lives back together. The United States is determined to help. We have provided over $2 million in funding for food, medicine, water, and other supplies. Two airlifts already have arrived with sheeting for shelter and food. Another airlift will take off today.

In addition, foreign disaster assistance teams have been deployed to all the affected countries to coordinate our aid relief efforts, and we'll be looking at what else we can do. This is a terrible tragedy for the people of Central America, and we will do what we can to help them to recover.

Now I'd be happy to take your questions.

Q. Good morning, Mr. President.

The President. Good morning.

1998 Elections

Q. At least 30 million Hispanics in the United States are anxious to know if their hopes will be supported by the Government. When there is an election, we are accustomed to hear all kinds of promises, and the election passes, and we are already accustomed to all kinds of frustrations. Will there be any difference this time, Mr. President?

The President. Well, first of all, let me say that you have some evidence here. If you look at my record as compared with the record of the Republican Congress, you know what the issues are. We passed this year in our budget—because we refused to go home without it—a Hispanic education action plan to put more money into schools with high Latino populations, to reduce the dropout rate. There's a big difference in the dropout rate of Hispanic children in America as compared with all other groups. It was a huge victory for us.

We have continually fought for improved citizenship and naturalization activities to reduce the naturalization backlog. The Republicans have fought to delay naturalization and to complicate it. We have fought hard for a more accurate census, because millions of Latinos were not counted in 1990. The Republicans have fought for a system that will ensure that millions of Latinos will not be counted in 2000.

We have appointed a record number of Hispanic-Americans to positions in the Cabinet, in judgeships, in other places throughout the administration. We have fought to establish the North American Development Bank to help to deal with the economic and environmental challenges along our border with Mexico. We have fought to put more money into education to open the doors of college wider than ever before, to put police on our streets, where we have the lowest crime rate now in 25 years, to help our children deal with the challenges of crime and drugs, and to give them strong programs after school so that they can stay off the street and in school and learning.

So if you look at what we've done, if you just take this Hispanic education action plan, we have an increase of nearly $500 million targeted to help our Latino children stay in school, learn their lessons, and then go on to college. We have over $170 million committed to reducing the naturalization backlog.

So these are not just idle campaign promises. In the closing days of this last session of Congress, on October the 21st we confirmed a Hispanic-American to be United States Attorney for the District of Arizona, to be the Deputy Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, to be the Commissioner on Children and Youth in Families in the Department of Health and Human Services, to be on the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, many other jobs, including a couple of ambassadorships.

So I'm not just talking something for the election here. There is a huge, huge difference in the positions of the Democratic and Republican Parties in the Congress on issues that are vital to Hispanics in America.

Q. Good morning, Mr. President.

The President. Good morning.

Republican Campaign Ads

Q. First of all, I was born in Honduras. I want to thank you very much for your words of encouragement to my Central American brothers. This is the worst tragedy in this century, and we're looking forward, all of you, to your support and your leadership in helping our countries build back. Thank you so much.

Now, sir, tomorrow, November 3d, is the sixth anniversary of your first election as President of the United States. According to the latest polls, there are some very closely contested elections tomorrow, as you said, especially in key States such as California, New York, Illinois, Florida, and Maryland—States which have large Hispanic populations.

The Hispanics backed you strongly in the Presidential elections of '92 and '96, and also in the midterm elections of '94. The Republicans have been running ads attacking you on the Monica Lewinsky issue. Do you feel these attacks on your personal conduct will cut down the attendance of Hispanic voters tomorrow or diminish their normal strong support for you and your party?

The President. I think it depends overwhelmingly on how people react to them. But just consider what the argument of those ads is. The argument of those ads is that voters, Hispanic voters and others, should punish completely innocent Democrats. In other words, they're saying punish someone else for this.

And ultimately, the argument is, they're telling the voters they should punish themselves. They should say: Vote for us, even though everything we're doing is not good for you, and don't vote for them, even though they will vote for modernized schools and 100,000 teachers; they—the Democrats—they will vote for a Patients' Bill of Rights; they will vote to raise the minimum wage; they will vote to save Social Security; they will vote for a fair, complete, and accurate census.

Now, the argument of the Republican ads is you should forget about all that, all those things that are about you and play our partisan political game here in Washington. And that's basically been what the Republicans are saying. I don't think the American people will buy that.

But what Hispanic voters need to understand is that the stakes are high here: the Senate seats in California and New York, any number of House seats in California; there are House seats up in Colorado, in New Mexico, a Senate seat and House seat up in Nevada, and the enormously important Senate race in Illinois, where Senator Carol Moseley-Braun has made a remarkable comeback in the last week, the elections in Florida, the elections in Maryland. And I could go on and on.

There are about three dozen House of Representatives seats at issue here. Many, many of them have substantial Hispanic populations. There are seven or eight Senate seats at stake here, and several of them have substantial Hispanic populations—and then, of course, all these Governorships.

So I would say, this election ought to be about the American people and their children and their future and whether or not we have done a good job for them and whether or not our ideas are best for the future. They would like it, the Republicans, to use their $100 million financial advantage in contributions to get everyone to forget that they have killed the Patients' Bill of Rights, killed the minimum wage increase, that they have killed legislation to protect our children from the dangers of tobacco, that they killed the campaign finance reform, that they killed the school modernization initiative, and get people to buy into their Washington power games.

I think the American people know that my administration has been about people, not politics, about progress, not partisanship. And I think this election is very much worth voting in. But a decision not to vote is also a decision about what will go on here in Washington, DC, just as a decision to vote is.

California Proposition 10

Q. Good morning, Mr. President. It's quite an honor for me to take part in this conversation this morning. My question is as follows. The California children and families initiatives, which is known as Proposition 10, is to create programs for pregnant women and very young children, will be funded by cigarette smokers by paying a 50-cent tax per pack of cigarettes. Many in Los Angeles view this as another way to ''attack'' minorities as a proportion of people who smoke tend to be greater among minority groups.

In your view, what are the long-term benefits of passing this proposition, and how would you convince the Latino community that this measure will actually be working in their favor?

The President. Well, I think there are two things I would say about that. The only argument against raising the cigarette tax ever is that it disproportionately affects low-income people, because if all kinds of lower income people, working people, smoke, it will take a higher percentage of their income to pay a 50-cent-a-pack tax.

But consider the benefits. First of all, it will reduce smoking among young people, which will prevent more people starting. And we know now 3,000 young people a day start to smoke, even though it's illegal for them to do so, and 1,000 will have their lives shortened as a result of it.

Secondly, because the people are voting directly on this initiative in California, they are deciding, as they vote, how that money must be spent. So it would be illegal to divert the money to any other purpose. Therefore, you know that the health care of the people of California—and disproportionately the Hispanic population of California needs more money invested in health and education activities—you know that's where the money will go because that's what the initiative says. And under our law, if the people vote for it, they have a guarantee of how it will be spent. So you don't have to worry about what the legislature does, what the Governor does, what anybody does. You get to decide, okay, if I'm going to pay this, this is how I want it spent. And your vote will do that.

So those are the two arguments I think in favor of that initiative. I know that both my wife and I have worked with the people who put that initiative on the ballot and we trust them. We think that they're good people, and they certainly are trying to do something that will improve the health care and the future of the Hispanic children of California.

Immigration

Q. Mr. President, in this campaign, we haven't listened to any immigration agenda talks too much. Politicians don't talk too much about immigration. Is there any reason for that, or is there something going on that we don't know?

The President. Well, I'm very happy to talk about it. As you know, I have worked very hard to reverse anti-immigrant provisions of the law. We now have reversed almost all the anti-immigrant provisions of the welfare reform law, just as I said I would do. We have beat back anti-immigrant legislation in other areas here. And I am working very, very hard to reduce the backlog that we have in the naturalization and immigration process, which I think is very, very important. So from my point of view, the whole issue of how to deal with immigration is very important.

I have also tried to get changes in our law or changes in Justice Department policy to let immigrants stay here who came here under difficult circumstances many years ago and would otherwise have to now turn around and go back. So I want to see America continuing to have an open and fair and welcoming process for legal immigrants, and I believe that that's an important issue.

I also think that's an important issue that all the voters should consider in this election, because it would be hard to find an issue on which the parties have differed more than the Democrats and the Republicans on the issue of immigration for the last 4 years. And I would hope that everyone who cares about this issue would think that that issue alone is a justification to go out and support our Democratic candidates.

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Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Some closing thoughts about the importance of tomorrow's election?

The President. Well, again, let me just say that tomorrow the American people will decide on the Congress that will take us into the 21st century. They will decide whether it's a Congress that wants to represent all the American people and work for one America or a Congress that will continue to try to divide the American people in ways that undermine our ability to unite and to go forward. They will decide on whether they want a Congress that supports a Patients' Bill of Rights, that supports 100,000 teachers and smaller classes and modern schools or a Congress that opposes those things; a Congress that supports an increase in the minimum wage or one that opposes it; a Congress that supports protecting our surplus until we have saved Social Security for all the seniors in this country in the 21st century or one that is still committed to squandering the surplus and endangering our economic strength in the long run so that we can't do what we should do on Social Security.

Now, these are big decisions. For Hispanic-Americans, you also have clear choices in terms of our commitment to a decent, fair, equitable, and accelerated process of immigration and naturalization, and their policy, which is to slow it down, make it more difficult, and do things which, in my view, are unfair to immigrants coming to this country.

So there are clear choices here, and I say again, a choice not to vote is just like a vote for someone you don't agree with. This is a very, very important election, and I would just urge all of you to talk about it today and to go and vote tomorrow. Your vote is your voice.

NOTE: The interview began at 9:40 a.m. in Room 415 of the Old Executive Office Building. Journalists participating in the interview were: Eduardo Carrasco, MetroSource Network; Jacobo Goldstein, CNN Radio Noticias; and William Restrepo, Radio Unica. A Radio Bilingue journalist did not participate but had an interview on the evening of November 2.

Interview With Tavis Smiley of Black Entertainment Television

November 2, 1998

Mr. Smiley. Mr. President, it's nice to see you. Thanks again for sitting down, talking to us.

The President. Glad to be here.

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Mr. Smiley. Glad to have you. I have had the pleasure, as you know, to sit down with you one-on-one a few times in the past, and so I know that asking you to make a prediction is like wasting my time. So I'm not going to ask you to predict anything about tomorrow's elections, but let me ask you, on a scale of 1 to 10, if I can, 10 being confident, 1 being apprehensive, how do you feel about tomorrow on this election eve?

The President. I feel both confident and apprehensive. And I'll tell you why. If you look at it, first of all, in the House of Representatives, there are probably 36 elections that could go either way. And in my opinion, it will depend overwhelmingly on the turnout. Then there are in the Senate seven, perhaps eight, elections that could go either way, depending on the turnout. Then in the Governorships, there are a huge number of Governorships—there are 36 up, but there are probably 10 of them still very much in play. So I think that it is really impossible to know.

It's clear to me that our message has resonated with the American people, though we have been at an enormous, enormous financial disadvantage, the largest in my lifetime. The Republican committees—the Senate committee, the House committee, and the national committee raised over $100 million more than their Democratic counterparts in these last 2 years. And there's been a breathtaking amount of money spent against some of our congressional candidates. So I just don't know. I feel good about it, but it depends upon who votes.

Mr. Smiley. You mentioned just a moment ago that this may be the election where the imbalance has been greatest with regard to fundraising in your lifetime, Republican and Democrat, that you've been involved in. Speaking of your lifetime, let me ask you whether or not it would be fair for me or