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I am proud that the air is cleaner and the water is cleaner and there are fewer toxic waste dumps and the environment is making progress. And I am proud of the fact that the Democrats proved that you could grow the economy and improve the environment at the same time, something our friends in the other party always denied. That is not true. You can grow the economy and improve the environment at the same time. But we now have a $2 billion livability agenda before the Congress that's terribly important to me. Why? Because it will help communities deal with everything from traffic congestion to the need for more green space, it will help us to set aside precious lands in urban areas and remote wilderness, and we ought to do it to continue our work.

And let me just say one last thing that you, here in New Jersey, know is true. Not every neighborhood in every city or every small town or every rural area has participated in this recovery. And I have asked the Congress to pass a comprehensive plan to create new markets for American business and new jobs right here at home, by giving the same kind of incentives to people to invest and create private sector jobs in poor urban and rural and small town neighborhoods that we already give people to invest overseas. If it works there, it will work here, and we should support it.

Finally, let me make one other point. We've had a wonderful night, and I don't have to give my State of the Union Address to you again. But if you asked me today what is the distinguishing characteristic of what it is we have tried to do, Senator Torricelli and I and our allies over the last 6 years, and what is the difference between what you have tried to do and what those who have opposed you have tried to do, I would say it is this: Number one, we believe that we have an obligation to give every single American the ability to live out his or her dream. And number two, we believe that with all that divides us, by race, by region, by culture, by religion, by lifestyle, by whatever, we still have to make one family.

When some of you were going through the line tonight saying thank you for what you've done in the Middle East, thank you for what you've tried to do in Northern Ireland, what we're trying to do in Kosovo to head off another bloodshed, what I'd still like to do on the Indian subcontinent and other places in the world, what we've tried to do in helping to end tribal wars in Africa, you think about it. Here we are, on the verge of a new millennium in this high-tech age, and what are we worried about? We're worried about people getting hold of high-technology information and weapons to pursue ancient hatreds or age-old greed, whether they're organized criminals or drug traffickers or people fighting these awful religious and racial wars all across the world.

If you want America to do good in the 21st century, America first must be good at home. We must be a country of all Americans under the law. And I have said this before, but I have tried to make the Democratic Party and our administration faithful to the traditions not only of Jefferson and Jackson and Franklin Roosevelt but also to those of Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt. We have embraced the best of America's past, to prepare for America's best days in the 21st century. And I can't think of any Member of Congress who can do more to give us the kind of America that all our children deserve than Bob Torricelli.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:04 p.m. in Prudential Hall at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center. In his remarks, he referred to entertainers Cissy Houston, Kevin Spacey, and Gloria Gaynor; Hudson County Executive Bob Janiszewski; Mayor Sharpe James of Newark; event cochairs Charles Kushner and Steve Moses; and State Assembly Minority Leader Joseph V. Doria, Jr.

Interview With Janet Langhart Cohen of the Armed Forces Television Network

February 25, 1999

President's Impression of Personnel

Mrs. Cohen. Mr. President, thanks very much for this interview. I want to talk about your impressions of our military. You get a chance to travel all over the world and see our men and women in uniform. What is your impression of them?

The President. Well, first of all, I do have a unique opportunity to see them, in all kinds of settings—formal settings in my tour of Korea last December; going to the launching of the U.S.S. *Harry Truman*. But I have been, just in the last couple of years, in the last 2 years, on 30 different occasions with our men and women in uniform, and I see them doing national security work overseas; I see them in training operations here and overseas; I see them dealing with disaster situations. I will see some of them in Central America in the next few weeks when I go down there, dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch. And the overwhelming impression that you get is that they're not only superb at what they do but that they're really good people and good citizens. That kind of teamwork that is required to pull off a military mission is something that they bring to all their work in life.

I remember, I talked to a command sergeant major in Korea who can still run under a 6-minute mile; he's in his late forties. And he's been in the Army 29 years, and he's retiring. I said, ''What are you going to do when you get out?'' He said, ''I'm going home to Kentucky to teach school, because I think I can do some good for those young people.''

So I see this. And I always try, when I am with our men and women in uniform, not only to get briefed in a formal way on what their mission is on a particular day but also to find out a little bit about their lives, how their families are doing, how many times that they've been deployed, how are they dealing with that. And whenever possible, I always try to take a meal with them, so that enables me to connect with a lot of them individually and get a real feel for what's going on.

Mrs. Cohen. How do you feel they connect with you? What impression are you getting when they talk to you and answer your questions?

The President. Well, I find them very confident, self-confident, and very forthcoming, very candid.

Mrs. Cohen. Are they open with you?

The President. Yes, I think they are. I think they are, I guess as open as you could ever be with someone who is in my position. I ask direct questions, and I always feel I'm getting direct answers.

Rigors of Military Life

Mrs. Cohen. What do you think the American citizen should know and understand about the military? Because when you and I were coming up, there was always somebody in the family who was in the military, or somebody in the neighborhood. Nowadays, we don't see them on the street.

The President. Well, I think most Americans do know and admire the fact that we have the best military in the world. They know that we have the most high-tech equipment. They know that our people are well-trained. I think most Americans know they're good people, fine men and women. What I don't think most Americans know is how hard they work all the time. I don't think Americans who aren't involved in the military have any idea how rigorous most of the training schedules are and what is involved. That's the first thing.

The second thing is, I don't think most Americans know how diverse the operations are. And the third thing, maybe the most important thing in terms of this budget we're trying to push on Capitol Hill, I don't think most Americans know how tough it can be today on the families. I don't think they're aware of how—with a smaller military and fewer big engagements but a lot more small ones—how much deployment is involved. I don't think they understand how quickly these people have to come in from being overseas or come in from being on a ship or being in a foreign land and then turn around and go back again.

Mrs. Cohen. And the stress on their families.

The President. Yes. I don't think—the family stress thing bothers me as much as anything right now, about where we are with the military.

Military Budget Proposal

Mrs. Cohen. What are some of the things that you took into account, the factors, the decisions you made on pay raise, retirement——

The President. Well, they were sending us a signal. We've got a lot of people retiring,

and we're having trouble meeting some of our recruitment quotas. Now, part of that is a high-class problem; it's a result of the success of the American economy. And with the unemployment rate under 4.5 percent, wages rising at twice the rate of inflation now for the last couple of years, there are so many compelling opportunities for young people outside the military that it's harder to recruit and retain. We see it in Air Force pilots, but we also see it in enlistees in the Navy and the Army. We see it across the board. So it's obvious to me that we need to raise pay, and we needed to fix that so-called retirement redux problem, you know, that I believe the Congress will go along with fixing this year.

Mrs. Cohen. Sir, with all due respect, you offered the highest budget proposal in a long time—ever. But is it enough when you talk about the things we're asking of them to do? They're at the tip of the sword. I don't know how much money anybody could pay me to get me, at a moment's notice, to go to Bosnia and stay there and leave my family.

The President. Well, I think the real question is—this is what we're working out with the Congress now—there is sentiment in the Congress to have an entire pay increase, and I think that, from the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs to the White House, we would all support that. But we have to operate within a given budget ceiling, so we have to measure what we need to do for our troops and their families off against the absolute imperative of being able to pay for training, which is more and more expensive—the more sophisticated the equipment is, the more expensive it is to train on it, which is why we developed so many computer simulations and programs—and the need to continue to modernize the equipment. You don't want a bunch of equipment out there that you can't run because you don't have spare parts, you haven't kept upgraded to high safety conditions.

So in the best of all worlds, is it enough? No, I don't think so. I'd like to do more. But if we're going to do more, then we need to work it out with Congress so we're not robbing Peter to pay Paul. I mean, most of our men and women in uniform would like it if we invested more in them, in their families, in their quality of life, but they wouldn't like it if, in so doing, we made it impossible for them to fulfill the mission they joined the military to perform in the first place. So that's the real conflict.

Postsecondary Education

Mrs. Cohen. Sir, what I was thinking is the mid-life, the mid-career recruits that we have—they're thinking: Well, I've been in half my adult life; I have children; I may have to educate them in college. On their pay, they can't afford to educate their children. Can there be a GI bill for——

The President. One of the things we helped a little at—I should point that out, I haven't mentioned it—the Defense Department is also working on changing the pay scales, so that the rewards will ramp up more for people who stay in longer as they reach different levels of achievement and service.

And keep in mind now, the children of military personnel are eligible for all the financial benefits that we put out there for middle class families generally. I mean, now, for example, in the first 2 years of college, virtually all American families can get a $1,500 tax credit—and if you're in the 28 percent tax bracket, that's like $6,000 worth of tuition—plus a dramatic increase in the scholarships, and a lowering of the cost of the student loans, and tax credits for all other higher education.

So I think that we need to make sure our military families know about all these benefits and make sure they can take advantage of them, but I think on that score they'll be all right. I'm more worried about just whether the pay itself and the retirement are sufficient to allow good people to feel they can stay in, take care of their children, and know they'll be all right when they get out.

Recruitment

Mrs. Cohen. Do you think it's enough for recruitment? While it may be enough for retention because they're already invested, can we do more on recruitment?

The President. I don't know; we'll see. You and I were talking before we started the interview about this new innovative program the Navy is doing, and I hope that the higher pay, plus the better retirement benefits, will

make a difference in recruitment this year. We'll just have to see. But I think that we all have to be honest: On the recruitment side, the biggest problem is the rest of the economy is doing so well, and the young people we've been getting in the military—we've got fairly high standards for who can get in in the first place.

Benefits of a Military Career

Mrs. Cohen. If you were to do a pitch right now for those we already have, what would you say as to why they should stay? Because they're certainly not in it for the money.

The President. I would say, first of all, if you stay until you've got enough time in to retire, you'll still be young; you'll still have a whole other career you can work. We're going to do our best to get our budget on a plane where we'll be paying you better. We're going to accelerate the maintenance of quality of life, improvement of those benefits. We're going to improve the retirement system for those for whom it was a problem. And the work you're doing is profoundly important to the country. We need good people to do it. And the skills you acquire in doing it will make you even more marketable when you leave.

I see people all the time getting out of the service. Maybe it's just my perspective since I'm not young anymore, but you can do—a lot of these people doing 25, 26, 27 years, and they're still not 50 years old yet. So they've got another 20 years or more to do something else with their lives. So I would hope that if we can make the quality of their life situation better for them, that more will choose to stay.

Importance of the Mission

Mrs. Cohen. What would you say, sir, to the men and women serving in our hotspots, from Bosnia to the Persian Gulf to Korea, even those who are down in Central America helping with relief—what would you say to them, why their missions are important, why it is important to those of us here at home?

The President. Well, first I would say that they're really the first generation of American troops to serve a United States that is both the dominant military power in the world and without a dominant military opponent, like the Soviet Union; that for 10 years now, we've been trying to work out how we can fairly fulfill our responsibilities to promote peace and freedom and prosperity, consistent with our ability to afford it and the need for our allies to assume their fair share of responsibility.

And our military people have been on the cutting edge of this sea change. In the whole history of America, there has never been a period like this, ever. We've either gone into isolationism as soon as a war was over, or we got thrown into the cold war for the last 50 years, before the end of the cold war. And I would hope that they would be very proud of that, the idea that other nations would trust the United States, for example, to come into Bosnia, to deal with this crisis in Kosovo, to stand guard on the border with the U.N. troops in Macedonia, to stay in Korea decades after the end of the Korean war, because they know we have no territorial ambitions, because they know we don't seek to impose our will on other countries. They really know we're there for peace and security.

And it's sometimes dangerous, sometimes boring, sometimes disruptive because of the rapid number of deployments that we have. But all of them should understand that they're part of a profound historic transformation in the world. And if we do this right, when we get through, the United States will share responsibilities for security with other democracies in a balanced and fair way and will be doing it in a way that is quite effective.

I mean, one of the things that our people ought to be proud of is how effective they are in Bosnia, for example; how effective they are in the aftermath of the hurricane in Central America.

Mrs. Cohen. Give me some examples, human stories, in Bosnia and then Central America.

The President. Oh, I got lots of letters from Bosnia, people who—I got wonderful letters from service people in Bosnia, men and women who went over there having questions about why they were going, was it worth it, was it going to be dangerous. Then they got involved with people in the

communities nearby, with children. They understood—they saw the incredible tragedy of the carnage that existed before we went there. And these soldiers who write me these letters, or when I go over there—the second time I went over there, telling me how they—how proud they were; it was the right thing to do.

I never will forget one prominent officer who went to Haiti, who told me—he said, "You know, when you sent us down there, I just didn't know about that, but I'm glad we gave those people a chance to save their country."

I think that of all ranks and all walks of life, our military people, they get caught up in actually seeing what they can do. The military is the most well-organized operation in our society, so you can only imagine the contrast between going into a war zone or a society that is totally dissolved over racial or ethnic or religious hatreds. To a little child who is used to living in chaos, seeing the United States as a symbol of both order and goodness, both things, is astonishing. And what I mostly hear back from the members of the Armed Services is when they see that and they see the human reaction it evokes and they see what it does for the image of the United States in those areas, most of them are very proud to have done what they have done.

Kosovo

Mrs. Cohen. You talked about Kosovo. It's very timely right now. What are we going to do? Are we going in on the ground? Are we going to be just that 10 percent of NATO, or are we going to be the dominant force? Who is going to command people who go in on the ground?

The President. Well, first of all, unless there is an agreement between both parties, we will not go in on the ground, because we didn't go in on the ground in Bosnia until we had an agreement—everybody had to agree—because we were a peacekeeping force, not a war force designed to win a victory and then enforce the peace.

Mrs. Cohen. But we will defend ourselves.

The President. Absolutely. We'll have vigorous rules of engagement if necessary to defend ourselves, just as we've had in Bosnia. And the more vigorous our right to defend ourselves, the less likely it is we'll ever have to do it.

But anyway, to go back to the first question, the difference in this and Bosnia is that this movement reflects the continued development within Europe of security capacity and the idea that the Europeans have that they should take the lead for their own security. So this time, all we have been asked to do within NATO is to put up 14 percent of the troops. But it's a critical 14 percent because it bolsters the confidence in our NATO allies that there really is a European alliance, number one; and number two, the Kosovar Albanians want us there, which is interesting. Most Americans didn't know a thing about Kosovo or Albania until this whole thing started. But those folks knew about America. They knew about the American military, and they trust them to keep their word and do what they say they're going to do. So that's an enormous thing.

So we'll go in there if, in fact, it happens—and I hope it does—with only 14 percent of the force in the NATO command, working with perhaps other countries as well, like we work alongside Russians in Bosnia. That's one of the reasons that the mission has been a success. But this one reflects the continuing maturity and strength of the European capacity for self-defense. And I think it's going about the way we want. We think that they should do more for themselves, but we also want to maintain our tie to the Europeans.

Accomplishments Past and Present

Mrs. Cohen. Sir, this is my last question. Everyone lately has been talking about "The Greatest Generation," from Tom Brokaw on down to "Saving Private Ryan." I think this is one of the greatest generations, the men and women serving now. What would you say to them? Because I remember the day that we went to Normandy in 1994, and that had to be—time for you. What would you say to the people serving now, if we look back 50 years from now, as to their contribution?

The President. Well, I would say that obviously what they're doing may not be as dramatic as landing on Omaha Beach, and I certainly hope it won't be as dangerous, ever.

But what we know about World War II, looking back, is that even though after World War II there was this long twilight struggle of the cold war, it may be that World War II was the last war of mass slaughter of nation-states, certainly in Europe, because we stood up against the totalitarian dictatorships of Nazi Germany and their allies.

So it was of historic significance because, in the aftermath of World War I, we hope at least that it nailed the coffin, at least in the West and other more well-developed countries, on mass warfare by nations. And huge—millions and millions and millions of people died.

Then the cold war, we hope, brought an end to the world being divided between communism and freedom. But what these people are doing, and what 50 years from now their children and their grandchildren will be able to look back and see, is that they are erecting a defense for the 21st century. They are dealing with a hundred little problems, each of which could become a big problem and could swallow the world up. They are making the world safe for genuine self-determination, for freedom, for free commerce, for free exchange of ideas, in a way that no generation has ever tried to do or had to do before, because the world is so interconnected and one of these little problems can become a forest fire and spread around.

So they really—I think 50 years from now, when they look back, they will see that they didn't bring an end to an era of slaughter the way the World War II generation did, with heroism and great sacrifice, but they did put America's military might to work in building a new world, which is something that I think their children and grandchildren will be very, very proud of. And there is no doubt that the United States could not have done it by economic power alone. Without our military alliances, without the expansion of NATO, without the deployment in Bosnia, without our ability to continue to try to stop bad things from happening and weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, without our willingness to stay on the Korean Peninsula to try to stabilize situations there and work through the other tensions in Asia, we would not have been able to do this.

And if people in my position, the decision-makers, if we don't mess it up, then the military will know that they were part of literally building the world different from any in all previous history. And that's—I think that's a legacy to be proud of.

Mrs. Cohen. It's one you should be proud of, too. Thank you very much for this interview. Thank you, sir.

Opportunities for Women and Minorities

Mrs. Cohen. The recent mission that we had was Desert Fox. And we were fortunate at Christmas to be on the "Big E," on the U.S.S. *Enterprise*, and we met a lot of the Navy pilots, and some of them were women. Could you talk about that?

The President. Yes. You know, we've had now, for a few years, women in combat pilot roles, and they've performed very well. And I think, to me, the most important thing is that this was done in Desert Fox without a lot of fanfare. The military did it without a lot of fanfare, and the women pilots themselves did it without a lot of fanfare. They worked for a long time; they trained for a long time; they waited for a long time. And when their chance came to do their job, they did their job without making a big deal of it, and they did it very, very well.

So I like the fact that it was done and the way it was done. I think since I've been President we've opened something like 250,000 duty positions to women that were not open previously. And it's making a big difference. And there all these disputed areas of training, deployment areas, but I think that the disputes should not be allowed to obscure the underlying reality that the military has dealt with the gender difference in the same way it dealt over time with racial differences, to open up a maximum number of roles and give people the maximum opportunity to live up to their own ability.

We were talking before about the pardon I gave posthumously to Henry Flipper, who was the first African-American graduate of West Point, remarkable engineer, good soldier, unfairly discharged. He was cleared of his dishonorable discharge over 20 years ago but never given a pardon, I think because

we had never given a posthumous pardon before. But the Defense Department and I very much wanted to do it.

We gave the fourth star to Benjamin O. Davis not very long ago in tribute to the Tuskegee Airmen. I think that looking backward is really a way of—in this context—is a way of ensuring you'll continue to go forward. It's a way of reminding us how far we've come and what we missed when we deny any group of people who wanted to contribute to our military the chance to do so. And I hope that this forward movement will continue.

I mean, there will always be controversies around the edges, rules to be worked out, difficulties to be dealt with, but when you give patriotic Americans who want to serve and who can serve well, the chance to do it, you win.

Mrs. Cohen. Sir, if I may I ask you a personal question, you have been a champion of diversity, you have always defended and stood up for the underdog, whether it's gender, whether it's race, whether it's age, whether even it's orientation. Where does that come from?

The President. I think two things in my long-ago past. First of all, with regard to women, my mother was widowed when I was born, and she was off studying to be a nurse. My grandparents raised me until I was 4. My grandmother worked, as well as my grandfather; my grandmother was a nurse. So I had always been around women who had to work to make a contribution to their family's welfare. And so I think from early childhood I always was particularly sensitive to any kind of discrimination against women or just denial of opportunity. And I was always sort of rooting for them because of my mother and my grandmother.

And on the race thing, I think it was because of my grandfather and the fact that when I was a child he had a little grocery store in a predominantly black area of this little town we lived in. Most of the customers were black. And most of what I learned about people and human nature and treating everybody the same and also discrimination, I learned as a little boy just listening and watching and observing and being taught.

So, in a funny way, most southerners were at a—most white southerners were at a disadvantage in dealing with the civil rights revolution because they were raised with more explicit racial prejudice. But some of us were actually at an advantage because we had more human contact with African-Americans before others did, and if we were lucky enough to have parents or grandparents that taught us differently, I think it made a difference.

So I think those two things, you know, and just in my family—we always had sympathy for the underdog, too. We never believed it was right to keep anybody down. And we were all raised, all of us, never to build ourselves up because there was somebody else we could look down on.

And I think that's—if you think about it, if you generalize that, really that psychological problem is at the bottom of a lot of this racial and ethnic hatred around the world. A lot of these groups themselves are deprived of opportunity. They've had economic adversity, had all kinds of diversity, and a lot of them, frankly are taught as groups that what gives meaning to their lives is that they're not a member of this other group; at least they've got somebody to look down on. And I just thank the Lord nearly every day that I was—it didn't have anything to do with me—I was lucky enough to have grandparents and a mother, a family situation where I was taught differently.

Mrs. Cohen. Well, we're lucky that we have a President who feels that way.

The President. Thank you. Thank you, Janet.

NOTE: The interview began at 11:10 a.m. on February 25 aboard Air Force One en route to Tucson, AZ, but was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 4. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Remarks on the 150th Anniversary of the Department of the Interior

March 4, 1999

Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, it's wonderful to be here today. I want to thank the Great American Indian Dancers.