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Secretary General Solana. My answer is that if an agreement is not reached—if President Milosevic doesn't sign, the risk of a catastrophe will be very likely. And we have to prevent that from happening. And NATO will prevent that from happening.

President Clinton. Let me say, in sort of support of the other NATO allies as well, the reason we—you're absolutely right, there's not a lot of precedent for what we're trying to do here. But the reason that we worked so hard—that Secretary Albright, Secretary Cohen, the rest of us—the reason we worked so hard to get NATO to take this position is to avoid the level of atrocity and death that we saw in Bosnia. We didn't want to go down that road again. We wanted to try to dramatically shorten the timetable from aggression and the loss of innocent life and upheaval to action.

And so far I would say that it seems to have been a successful policy, in the sense that we at least have one side now signing on to this peace agreement. We just have to stay with it. We have to be firm about this.

Press Secretary Joe Lockhart. Thank you, pool.

Q. Thank you.

President Clinton. Thank you.

Q. Going to hold a news conference soon, right?

President Clinton. Good morning. That's what—I think so. I just miss you so terribly and not having any questions.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:08 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Interview With Michael Jackson on KRLA Radio

March 15, 1999

Mr. Jackson. Forgive me. There we had the Deputy Director of the Office of Management and the Budget with us, Sylvia Mathews. We are supposed to be at the end of the show, but I'm changing the rules. I'm going to carry my microphone and stand up for a moment. I'm truly honored to have the opportunity of saying good morning to the President of the United States.

The President. Good morning, Michael. Or good afternoon, here.

Mr. Jackson. It's good to see you again, sir.

I have had most of your Cabinet here this morning. The enthusiasm that they show for the jobs that they have—and they all come from different worlds. It's something uniquely and distinctly American. And I also said to, I think it was Donna Shalala—I said, when I see pictures of you with the leadership of Japan or the Central American countries most recently, you look America. And when I see you standing next to Al Gore, you look America. And when I see you standing with the First Lady and Al Gore's wife, Tipper, you look America.

What are you most proud of, sir?

President's Accomplishments

The President. You mean about what we've done here?

Mr. Jackson. Yes.

The President. I think I'm most proud that we've been able to pull the country together and give people a sense that we're going in the right direction again. I'm proud of the opportunities that millions of Americans have had to live out their dreams and shape their destinies and take care of their children. I'm proud of the fact that we have faced the tough challenges that our country has, instead of dodging them. I'm proud of the fact that—I think Americans have a lot of confidence now that we can deal with all the things that are before us and move into the future in a very good way.

I'm proud of all that. I'm just grateful that I have the chance to serve and that we've got almost a quarter of our time left to get some of the things done that I very much want to do before it's over.

Mr. Jackson. Isn't that expression ''lame duck'' a painful one? A quarter of your time still remains.

The President. Yes.

Mr. Jackson. Do you know a full agenda of what you would like to be able to accomplish in that time, sir?

The President. Well, sure. I mean, I talked about it at great length in the State of the Union Address, but I very much want to secure the long-term economic well-being of the country as much as I can, and to do that, we have to deal with the challenges of Social Security and Medicare and paying the debt down.

I very much want to make a lot more headway on bringing economic opportunity and a better quality of life to the urban and rural areas where there is still trouble. There are places within the sound of our voice now, in Los Angeles, where we still haven't seen the level of recovery I would like to see. And I've got a major initiative designed to leave no one behind as we go into this new century, and I'm hoping that we can pass that this year. And of course, around the world there are a lot of places that I'm still trying to build bridges to and bring peace to. That's what my trip to Central America was all about.

China

Mr. Jackson. Nothing is black and white, or simple, is it, in your position? I mean, China makes the news, but not all for the constructive things that are going on in our relationship with them.

The President. That's right. Well, one of my predecessors once said that he never got any easy decisions because all the easy ones were made before they got to the President's desk. So there are a lot of complex issues. You know, with China we have our differences. We differ with them on their human rights policy. We differ with them on their Tibet policy. We are struggling to establish an economic partnership that is fair and good and—good for them, good for us.

But because we have worked with them, instead of trying to isolate them, we've also made the world a safer place. They've helped us with the nuclear problem in Korea. They've helped us in refraining from giving dangerous technologies to other countries that we believe might misuse them or would aggravate tensions where they are. They've helped us to try to limit the Asian financial crisis.

So I believe that the best policy with China is an honest one: where it's in our interest and theirs, we should work together for world peace and for economic prosperity, and where we have honest differences, we ought to state them.

The American Century

Mr. Jackson. Mr. President, earlier this morning in a conversation with Bill Daley, your Secretary of Commerce, I said, only a short while ago people would say, "This is the American Century; the next one won't be." Now, everybody's convinced it will be. The 2000's will be ours as well. What is it we've got?

The President. I think an infinite capacity for renewal, for change, anchored in a magnificent set of common values in our Constitution.

Every year, in one way or the other, we see the wisdom of our framers ratified. We've got a Government that's a democracy but also has protections against abuse of power. We've got a Government that has some absolutely unbending rights for its citizens but is infinitely flexible. And I think that—what I hoped to do when I came to the Presidency, over 6 years ago, was to give people a sense of possibility again and to give our country a sense of community again.

You know, I was deeply moved by all the troubles in Los Angeles in the early nineties. And it became almost a metaphor for what was going on through the country. We had more and more diversity, more and more people whose family's first language was not English. I saw that as an enormous opportunity in the global society of our children's future. But I knew we had to find a way to come together as well as to move forward. I think we're doing that now, and I feel very good about it.

Central America

Mr. Jackson. How was the trip to Central America?

The President. Well, it was sobering but heartening. It was heartening in the sense that all those countries are democracies now. They've overcome bitter, bitter civil wars. People that were shooting each other a few years ago are now dressed in suits and ties and nice dresses, sitting in parliaments, you know, working with each other. And that's good.

It was sobering because the hurricane was the worst natural disaster, perhaps ever, in Central America, devastating to a lot of those countries. And I'm hoping the United States will do more to help.

I want the American people to know that Central America is one of the few regions of the world where we actually have a trade surplus. And if we want to reduce illegal immigration from Central America, the best way to do it is to strengthen their democracies and their economies, make them good business partners for us. They help us fight drugs; they help us promote democracy; and they'll help us grow our economies.

Immigration

Mr. Jackson. Interesting, sir, in a conversation earlier this morning with your Secretary of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala, she made a comment, just in passing, that most of the people that come here would rather—in the main—stay home in their own countries. It's opportunity here that brings them.

The President. I think that's right. Most of the people who wish to emigrate to America and stay sign up, get on the list, wait their turn, and do it in a legal way. Most of the illegal immigrants who come here come because they literally can't make a living at home, and many of them have children.

For example, the largest source of foreign exchange that El Salvador has is $1 billion a year that Salvadoran citizens working in the United States send home to their families. So if we could stabilize their economies, make it possible for them to make a living at home by doing business with us, instead of having to come here and try to sneak through the borders, the illegal immigration problem would go way, way down.

Mr. Jackson. Mr. President, I have been given the word. You have a very busy schedule. I am thrilled. This was very unexpected.

The President. Well, I just wanted to thank you, Michael, for what you do on your program, the people whose voices you give the opportunity to be heard, and for giving all of our people a chance to come by and talk.

I think it is true, we are still enthusiastic. We act like we got here last week, most days. But I think that's because we try to stay busy. We try to focus on not what we did yesterday or last year or 5 years ago but what we're going to do tomorrow.

Kosovo/2000 Democratic Convention

Mr. Jackson. Sir, last night I went to a restaurant, and there's your Secretary of State working over dinner. You're overworking her, sir.

The President. I am overworking her. She—we got some good news today there, you know. We had two announcements today of note. One is that the Kosovar Albanians said that they would sign the peace agreement——

Mr. Jackson. Congratulations.

The President. ——which means that now we just have to convince Mr. Milosevic and the Serbs to go along. If they do, we can avoid a major war there.

Of course, the other big announcement today is the Democrats are going to have their convention in Los Angeles.

Mr. Jackson. In our town.

The President. That's right.

Mr. Jackson. I'm going to be there every day doing my show.

The President. Well, we're all very excited about it. You know, bringing back California became an obsession around here in my first term. And we know now that in the State, and even, indeed, within the confines of Los Angeles County, there is an example of virtually every good thing that this administration has tried to do over the last 6 years. So we're excited about going there, and we think America will like it, seeing it on television. They'll see, I think, a very good picture of America's future, and that's what we'll hope to provide.

Gov. Gray Davis of California

Mr. Jackson. If I can just throw one more quick one. Rodney Slater, your Secretary of Transportation, was on this morning, sir. And we were talking about the impact that you've had on our new Governor, the fact that he did what Pete Wilson never did in 8 years. He went to Central America—he went to Mexico, I beg your pardon——

The President. Yes.

Mr. Jackson.——and built a bridge there. And our State's almost a nation.

The President. Well, I think, first of all, I think Governor Davis is doing a terrific job. And I suppose I've learned as much from him as he's learned from me. But I think the thing that Californians can be proud of is that he will, in my view, he will keep the State focused on the future. He'll keep working on the big issues, and he'll get results. He will stay at something until he gets results.

And I personally thought his decision to go to Mexico and establish a relationship with the President there, who is a progressive, able person and an honest person, was a very smart decision for the people of California. But it's one of many smart decisions he's made. And I think that when we come there for the convention, it will give America a chance to see a lot of the good things that are going on in California.

Mr. Jackson. Mr. President, thank you very much indeed for your time, sir.

The President. Thank you. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview began at 3 p.m. in Room 415 of the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, the President referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks to the Legislative Conference of the International Association of Fire Fighters

March 15, 1999

Thank you. That's a true story. [*Laughter*] But the truth is that Al didn't need to have any fear because by the time I called him, Harold had gone over the whole list, and I had written it down. Do you remember that? I mean, he had been very tough, very specific, very firm. And I actually wrote it down. And I think if I hadn't written it down, he would never have let me off the hook. [*Laughter*] I just called Al because sometimes people get better care in the hospital after I call them. [*Laughter*]

I was with a guy over the weekend—I went home to Arkansas over the weekend—I was with a guy over the weekend who is about 83 years old. And he literally was at death's door. And I called him in the hospital, and I don't—this sounds more insensitive than it is, but this guy is like a brother to me, and we've been friends for 30 years. And I call him up, and I say, ''You old coot. You can't die. I'm not done with you yet.'' [*Laughter*] And all of a sudden, everybody rushed into his room. The next thing I know, 2 weeks later he's at a Democratic event, last weekend. So if you get in the hospital and you don't think they're doing right by you, let us know, and I'll see what I can do. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank Al and Harold and Vince and all the officers of the IAFF for working with us. I want to thank my good friend James Lee Witt, and Kay Goss, who has now worked with me as my liaison to firefighters as Governor and as President. Thank you very much. I want to thank Congressmen Neil Abercrombie and Bill Pascrell, both of whom are here and are good friends of the firefighters and good friends of mine.

You know, I was thinking about how much we have in common on the way over here. When I was a boy, like most kids I used to love to go to the fire station, slide down the pole, crawl on the truck, do all that. I never became a firefighter, but I believe I've learned about as much as you have about putting out fires in the last few years. [*Laughter*]

I'm working on about 20 years now, of working with firefighters, working with the IAFF. When I was Governor, I worked with our local IAFF members to create a statewide fire and police pension system and to establish death benefits for firefighters killed in the line of duty. And I asked Al where Pete Reagan was standing over there because he's the president of the Arkansas Professional Fire Fighters, and whenever I go back to northwest Arkansas, he still leads the motorcade.

I haven't been asked to pick up a hose or anything on any of these trips, but a few years ago when we were in Fayetteville, where I used to teach and where Hillary and I were married, I asked him if we could go by and see the home where we first lived in and where we were married. Pete redirected the entire motorcade to go past the