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passing commonsense gun safety legislation should be the very first action of this Congress.

I will say again, to all the people who listen to these arguments, there has been no discernible increase in the burden on any law-abiding sportsperson in this entire country with the Brady bill and the assault weapons ban, but we've saved a lot of lives of kids, police officers, and citizens. And closing the gun show loophole, which is something I know something about because they're very popular in my part of the country, or the urban flea market loophole or banning the import of these large-capacity ammunition clips, which people can't manufacture and sell here at home anyway, or requiring these child safety locks for kids, is an important advance, and it ought to be done. It'll have the same impact that the Brady bill and the assault weapons ban did. It won't cause anybody who is law-abiding any hassle, but it'll save lives. It's important that we do this, too.

I also want to say I think it's important that the gun industry take more responsibility in changing the way it designs, markets, and distributes firearms. [*Applause*] And let me say to all of you who care about this—there was some spontaneous applause there—you should know this. There are responsible citizens in the gun industry who actually want to work with us to find new ways to make sure the guns they sell don't wind up in the wrong hands and that kids aren't killed accidentally with them. Part of the answer may be in new technologies that could reduce accidents.

I want all of you to listen to this. The law enforcement officers probably won't be surprised by this, but this is important that you know this. The accidental gun death rate of children under 15 in the United States is 9 times higher than that in the other 25 biggest industrial countries combined—combined. We don't have to put up with that either. Technologies now exist that could lead to guns that can only be fired by the adults who own them. My budget helps the gun industry accelerate the development of this technology. So we need to support that as well.

In his last campaign in 1968, Robert Kennedy said the fight against crime, and I quote, "is a fight to preserve that quality of community which is at the root of our greatness." We saw something about the root of America's greatness today here in Orchard Gardens: a community leader proud of her center; a police officer who grew up just a stone's throw from here; elected leaders who know the people who live in this area whom they represent; a mayor proud of the progress that people working together can do; all these people in uniform justifiably proud of what they have achieved. That's what this is all about, all of us working together and helping each other.

I say again, for all the progress we have made, we should never rest, not any of us, as long as there's one more child whose life needs to be saved, as long as there's one more kid that can be turned away from drugs and guns and violence and kept out of prison in the first place, as long as there's one more street to make safe. We shouldn't quit until your country, your State, and your community are the safest places in the world.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:20 p.m. in the Orchard Gardens Community Center. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Thomas M. Menino of Boston; Lisa Holmes, detective, and Paul F. Evans, commissioner, Boston Police Department; Gerald Flynn, alternate national vice president, International Brotherhood of Police Officers; Thomas J. Nee, executive vice president, National Association of Police Organizations; and Lynn Jackson, director, Orchard Gardens Community Center. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Interview With Francine Kiefer and Skip Thurman of the Christian Science Monitor in Boston

January 18, 2000

Elian Gonzalez

Q. Mr. President, I know your time is valuable. Let me start my recorder here. The first thing I wanted to ask you, there have only been a couple of times in this century that Congress has come together, got their heads together enough, both sides of the Congress, to come together and pass legislation to give somebody citizenship. It happened with Winston Churchill, a few other people. I

wanted to know if Congress does—it looks like the first thing they're going to do when they come back into town is work on the Elian Gonzalez case. If they did pass a private bill in both Houses and they feel like, politically, they've got enough backing to do that, what would you do with that bill if it got to your desk?

The President. I don't know. I haven't thought about it. I think it would be—this is not Winston Churchill, for one thing. You know, I don't think that Congress should put its—unless they know more about the facts than I do, I don't think they should put themselves in the position of making a decision that runs contrary to what the people who have had to do all the investigation have done.

I think that, obviously, if they believe the INS made a mistake, their decision is subject to challenge in Federal court. And the Congress—even Members of Congress can petition to be heard there. But I think that we're setting a—I think that it would irrevocably lead people to the conclusion that this was much more about politics than it was whether that little boy ought to be taken away from his father.

They're basically taking a position that if you live in Cuba, if we can take you away from your father, you're better off—your parents. And I think that's—the INS reached a different decision, having exhaustively looked at what was best for that child.

As you all know, I have no sympathy for the Castro regime. I signed the present bill. I think it is tragic how they have blown every conceivable opportunity to get closer to the United States. Just as we were making progress, they murdered those pilots. So I'm not sympathetic there. But I think that we need to think long and hard whether we're going to take the position that any person who comes to our shores, who is a minor, any minor child who loses his or her parents should never be sent home to another parent, even if that parent is capable of doing a very good job, if we don't like the Government of the country where the people lived.

And again, I say I am not—I have no brief for the Castro government or for many of their policies. I think the way he has attempted to politicize this is also terrible. It's not just the Cuban-Americans that have attempted to politicize it. He has responded by attempting to politicize it. So this poor little boy is 6 years old. He has scars from his mother's death of which he can only be dimly aware, and making a judgment about what is in his best interest and what is most likely to give him a stable, healthy, whole childhood and allow him to grow into an adult as a solid person, I'm sure, may not be free of difficulty. And I just think that the decision ought to be made, insofar as possible, independent of countervailing political pressures.

State of the Union Address

Q. Mr. President, the State of the Union is right around the corner, so I guess is the State of the Union part of the interview. In the previews that you all have made available of what's coming up, it seems like most of it is beefing up programs that you already have, like today's announcement, and returning to——

The President. It's quite a beef up. This is the biggest thing ever done—yes——

Q. Quite a beef up—which is—or trying to get back to unfinished business. And I was wondering whether you were planning on trying to go for some new breakthrough issue this year, or whether that's not really possible in a last year.

The President. Oh, I think that when you see everything we recommend in the aggregate, you might think that in terms of specifics, it's the most ambitious set of proposals since my first year.

Last year was a very ambitious speech, but in terms of what I asked the Congress to do, it required some willingness on their part to meet with me and work through a joint position on Social Security, for example, or joint position on Medicare. I still think we may get a joint position on Medicare, and we may get part way there on Social Security. I'm still going to try to persuade them to take all the interest savings that we get from not spending the Social Security surplus and putting that in the Trust Fund; that will take Social Security out to 2050, beyond the life of the baby boom generation.

So I'm still not sure we won't make that, but if you just look at the specific policy proposals I will make, not just in the unfinished business area but in the new area—and the unfinished business is important. I mean, you've got the Patients' Bill of Rights, closing the gun show loophole, and banning the import of large ammunition clips. You've got the minimum wage. You've got the hate crimes legislation, the "Employment Non-Discrimination Act," the prescription drug for Medicare. So we've got a huge—even though we got a great deal done at the very end of the last Congress, there's a big unfinished business list. And then, as you know, I've been rolling out a lot of these new proposals.

And actually, there will be a couple of things that will be quite new that I'm not prepared to release yet. But I will have a couple of new proposals. But I think that the most important thing to me is to keep the country moving in this direction and aggressively embracing change, the right kind of change. That, I think, is critical to keep the recovery going, to keep bringing more people into the process of prosperity, and to keep bringing the country together. I think that's very important.

So a lot of what I will recommend that is new is certainly consistent with what I've been doing for 7 years. I came to office with a very clear idea of where I thought America was off base, what I thought we ought to do, what kind of governing strategy I would have. And I believe that it's working. And I think people—some people will say, "Well, he does things in increments." But if you walk down the road 7 years and you look back—I mean, if I told you 7 years ago, after 12 years of quadrupling the national debt, I'll give you in year 6 and 7 the first back-to-back balanced budget surpluses in 42 years, from a $300 billion debt, you'd say that's not an incremental change; that's a big change. But you do those things in small steps.

If you look at the millions of people—we've cut the welfare rolls about in half—it happened in incremental steps. But it's a huge thing in the aggregate. And all the economic changes—we've got the lowest African-American, Hispanic unemployment rate ever recorded, the lowest female unemployment rate in 40 years, lowest poverty rate in 20 years, lowest single parent household poverty rate in 46 years. So you take it in steps, but if you keep walking in the same direction, all of a sudden your steps constitute a giant leap forward.

Federal Budget

Q. In that larger mosaic, how do you—of your record and your legacy in what you've done incrementally—down the road, how important will it be if, 15 years from now, we haven't made significant advances on the debt? I mean, already your budget soon will break the '97 Balanced Budget Act. And certainly the surpluses are far greater than was predicted at that time. But how will history judge this generation of leadership if significant——

The President. I think we should pay the debt off. And I think we should do it in 15 years. And the proposals that I will make are consistent with that, based on our latest numbers.

Now, I have two things to say about the '97 budget caps. They were very severe, and they were thoroughly shredded by the Republican majority last year by turning everything into an emergency. I mean, the census was an emergency; Head Start was an emergency; continuing defense expenditures were emergencies. So the caps are not disappearing this year; the caps were shredded last year.

So the real question is—the question I asked our people to look at, and we spent lots of time on it the end of last year—is whether we could present to the Congress a budget that was not full of gimmicks, that reflected what the Congress spent last year, inflation in areas where with—had that—for example, in the defense area where we know they intended—and still could we do that based on what we now believe the figures are and what our costs are in health care programs and other things and still get this country out of debt in 15 years and still not spend the Social Security surplus.

And the answer, we believe, is yes, that you can avoid spending the Social Security surplus, continue to get the country out of

debt in 15 years, and have a spending program for the next 5 years that reflects the decisions made by the Congress in the last year, without all those gimmicks. And you could still have a modest tax cut, nothing anywhere near the high end of what people had talked about in the campaign and what the Congress tried to do last year, but you could still have a modest one.

So I think this is an honest budget that is fiscally responsible and still gets us out of debt. And I believe that we ought to embrace these big challenges, and I think that our children will judge us very well if we do and somewhat harshly if we don't. Because in my lifetime—you've heard me say this over and over again, but I'm not young any more. I'm 53 years old. In my lifetime we've never had this combination of economic prosperity, social progress, national self-confidence, with the absence of internal crisis or external threat. Not that we have no problems at home or no threats abroad, but none of it is sufficient to derail us from trying to imagine the future and then go after it.

And it seems the one—that one of the elements of that future ought to be a commitment to take America out of debt. Another element of the future ought to be a commitment from going to—what I said today—trying to make our country the safest big country in the world. Another element of that future ought to be trying to prove that we can grow the economy and dramatically reduce the global warming by maximizing technology. We ought to be able to prove that we can equalize the economic opportunity, that we can—without holding anybody back, that we ought to be able to bring economic opportunity to these poor people in poor places that haven't had it.

And I think in all those areas, in the education area, in the health care area, I think we will be judged by whether we made the most of what is truly a magic moment. The last time we had this sustained rate of economic growth with low inflation was in the early sixties, about 40 years ago. And if you look at the indicators now, compared to then in the aggregate, I think you would say our economy is stronger today, but there were a couple of years there where unemployment averaged under 4 percent and without much inflation.

And it all came apart, first trying to come to grips with the civil rights crisis at home and then trying to pay for the war on poverty and the war for equal opportunity and civil rights and the war in Vietnam abroad. So that, basically, we had a moment there that we lost, not only because we became divided as a people politically but because our system simply could not accommodate building the America of our dreams.

Q. So what do you see as a threat to that? I mean, if the Vietnam period and all of that was a threat, what's the threat to that now?

The President. I don't think there is one. That's why I think we have no excuse not to really—this should be a truly historic moment in America. I can't think of any time in our history when we've had this sort of opportunity. You might argue that it was similar, that the times which produced Theodore Roosevelt's administration, and then Woodrow Wilson's, were similar, where we were an emerging global power, we were basically at peace, where the world was becoming more integrated.

You go back and read McKinley's speeches around the turn of the century—he was the first President of the last century—he said a lot of this. It's quite interesting. And so you might argue that that was a time like this. But I think that—and I think it is a time in our history that most closely parallels this.

If you go back to the early 19th century, you can find historical parallels in the exploration of Lewis and Clark and the acquisition of the Louisiana Territory. But the world was so different then, it's hard to do.

So I just don't think we ever have had a time like this. It's not to say we have no foreign crises or security threats. We do. But they can all be managed. And the cost of managing them now is not inconsistent with what our obligations are in science and technology, in education, in economic opportunity, across the range of other areas.

President's Agenda on Race

Q. Mr. President, you spoke a while ago about how you wanted to keep pushing for change. And I was thinking what's happened to minorities under your administration, that

they have seen a pretty drastic improvement in their standard of living because of the strong economy. But one could also say that attitudes toward race maybe haven't changed that much. And I was wondering whether there was something that you thought you could still do about attitudes towards race in your last year.

The President. Well, I think they have—first of all, I dispute the premise. I think they have changed. I think that we continue to see evidence that it's still a real problem. I mean, the unfortunate comments that the Atlanta baseball player made, that's really troubling. On the other hand, the fact that Hank Aaron and Andy Young met with him is encouraging. I mean, you know, 30 years ago that wouldn't have happened.

I think—last night I watched—I was working on the State of the Union last night, and I had basketball on, on TV, muted. And I was watching the Minnesota Timberwolves play the Indiana Pacers. And they beat them on a buzzer-beater shot. And then they interviewed Kevin Garnett, who is a very young man. I think he's the highest paid player in basketball, but he's very young, didn't finish college. And they asked him what Dr. King meant to him, and how his life had changed, and you could just see—of course, 30 years ago no young African-American would be making that kind of money and would have the kind of slant he had.

So I think things are changing. But I think what I have to do—I think there are three things generally I should be doing.

Number one, I think we have to continue to try to close the differential in education and economic advancement. For example, the African-American high school graduation rate right now is about equal to the white, non-Hispanic high school rate, which is quite extraordinary. But the college-going rate is different. And the Hispanic dropout rate is still quite a bit higher, largely because of the immigrants, first—immigrants. So I think that this economic empowerment agenda I have, and the education agenda, the Hispanic education initiative, all those things, closing those gaps, that's important.

Number two, I think we need to continue to have a vigorous enforcement of the law and highlighting those things we do not agree with.

And number three, I think we have to continue the activities of the President's Office on One America. I think we need to continue to appoint more people from different backgrounds. We need to continue to have more meetings. We need to continue to highlight the problems. And I need to continue to speak out and work on this in America.

I said three, but I like to say the fourth thing is I think that when our country continues its mission to try to end racial and ethnic and tribal and religious conflicts around the world, I think that has a reverberating effect here at home. I can give you just one, very concrete example.

Chelsea and I went to Kosovo together, and we went to the military camp. And you have this highly racial and ethnically diverse American military, very conscious of what they were doing in Kosovo and trying to end ethnic cleansing. And also very aware that insofar as they work together and live together and create a genuine community where everybody was treated equally, the power of their example could have as big an impact on the people of Kosovo as the force of their arms.

So I don't think this—this is the sort of work that may never be done, since in all of human history we haven't succeeded in rooting out people's fear or suspicion of those who are different. And there always will be those radicals which seek to advance themselves by demonizing groups of others. But I think we're doing better there. I think we're doing—and I think there is a lot more we can do.

Cyberspace War and Cyberterrorism

Q. The Chinese Army's daily newspaper has signaled its willingness to aggressively use the Internet as a venue for warfare, to attack our military websites and our military—attack us through on-line methods. You in your critical infrastructure report recently sort of achieved parity with that and—with your ROTC Corps idea and that sort of thing. But I'm wondering what precedents that sets. Even what we did in the conflict with Serbia, the precedents that that sets is sort of like fighting each other, attacking each other's

satellites. Are you concerned about the precedent that using on-line warfare in any form will have for future generations, since we are the most vulnerable set on the planet from E-commerce to a lot of our Government installations?

The President. Because we're more open, you mean?

Q. Yes sir, because we're more open.

The President. And more Internet——

Q. So we bring down—in a hypothetical conflict, we bring down the PLA's air defense system, and they just take out our 911 systems and all that—turn out all the lights at every 7-Eleven in the country.

The President. Well, I think, first of all, it is unrealistic to think that such systems would not be the targets of our adversaries. I think they're far more likely to be the targets of terrorists, organized criminals, narcotraffickers, than other countries.

I believe that the answer is that we have got to be as strong as we possibly can be in the whole area of cyberspace safety. We've got to be as resistant to cyberterrorism and assault as we possibly can.

And interestingly enough, this is something we get to practice on every day a lot, because every day there are always people trying to break into our computers, break into the Defense Department computers, break into various security computers. And so we get to work at it every day. And we've given a lot of thought to how you protect power systems, how you protect telephone systems, how you protect financial records.

And so all I can say is that the question you asked confirms what I said at the National Academy of Sciences, I guess over a year ago. I think that's when I spoke there. We have got to be prepared to deal with the explosion of technology in ways that could threaten our security, not only on data systems themselves, another thing you're going to see—everything involving technology is getting smaller, the miniaturization of everybody. Everybody's got their little notepads now.

Q. I just got the Palm Pilot.

Q. He's way ahead.

The President. You ought to see old Kris's Palm Pilot. It's got everything from his great grandfather's birthplace—I just saw the newest AT&T and Nokia telephone that fits right inside the palm of the hand. Now, that same miniaturization process is bound to go on with weapons. So you're not only going to have the attempt that you mentioned to invade, to invade telecommunication systems and computer systems, but you're also going to have a miniaturization system that will affect chemical and biological weapons and other sophisticated traditional weapons, which will make them harder to detect, easier to use, easier to comport. You may have composite materials that don't show up on airport scanners. All these things are going to happen.

That's why we're going to make cars out of different materials, make weapons out of different materials. And in the whole history of combat among nation-states and before that, feudal groups or tribal groups, the normal thing that happens is a weapons system will be developed, and it will enjoy a period of success, and then a defense will be developed to it, and then there will be equilibrium until a new weapons system is developed that will give some dominance, and then you'll have some equilibrium. What we're trying to do with this massive investment we're making against bioterrorism, chemical terrorism, nuclear terrorism, cyberterrorism, is to collapse the timespan between offense and defense.

One of the things, for example, that we really hope that will come out of the human genome is that we'll be able to develop software programs that will immediately adjust the antidote for certain viruses. If there's a biological warfare attack and you've got a mad scientist somewhere who changes the—I'm just making this up—but who changes the anthrax virus, for example, in some way it's never before been changed, and so then this person—and then they spread it over 400 people in some town, and they begin to come around—what we're attempting to do with the human genome project, what I think one of the corollary benefits will be is that you'll have software packages developed so that you will be able to immediately analyze that, and someone will tell you exactly how you would have to modify the antidote to anthrax to meet the new strain that is resistant to all known antidotes.

So this whole struggle as things change faster and faster and faster, and you have the miniaturization of weapons systems to parallel with the miniaturization of other communication systems, will be to keep closing the gap between offense and defense, until there is close to no difference as possible.

That is the struggle for security in the 21st century. And I have tried to put America on that path. Without frightening the American people, without raising alarm bells, I've tried to make sure that when I left office we would have in place a properly funded, properly staffed system to prepare for the security threats of the 21st century. All the press goes to the high-dollar hardware systems—should we have a strategic defense initiative, a missile defense.

Q. Mr. President, we're running out of time here, so do you mind if we move on to some other topic?

The President. This is a big issue. All I'm saying is—I'm not—missile defense is important if we can do it. And missile threat is important. But you should know that I consider both the cyber threats and the miniaturization of these other threats very significant. But I do believe when I leave office we'll have for my successor and for our country a system that will enable us to deal with it.

President's Spiritual Growth

Q. Since you are talking to the Christian Science Monitor, we are interested in your spiritual journey which you've mentioned a couple times. And you've talked about how amazed you've been by the power of forgiveness, especially in the last 18 months. And I was wondering if you could share with us what your own spiritual growth has been. Have you found any Bible passages particularly dear? Have you found any concepts that you've held on to that have helped promote your own spiritual growth? Could you just describe what's been happening with your own growth in the last 18 months?

The President. Well, this is a subject I think people in public life should address with some amount of humility and reluctance, not because people shouldn't be willing to affirm their faith but because we should remember the story that Christ told, in effect, bragging about the people that prayed in their closets instead of on the street corner. So I say that with all—but having said that, I think the thing that has struck me is that in this journey I have made to try to—that really has been a lifetime journey for me, and it's certainly something that's deepened since I've been President, and something that I had to really focus on the last 2 years, I think the thing that I have really had to work on is trying to gain some spiritual anchor that will enable me to give up resentments and disappointment and anger and to understand that in seeking forgiveness I had to learn to forgive.

It's easy to ask for forgiveness. A lot of people think it's hard, but I think it's—when you plainly need it, it's easy enough to ask for. But we're taught over and over again that we can't get it unless we give it. And I think what is—you know, there's the wonderful Scripture where people are admonished to forgive those not just in the same measure that they're forgiven but 70 times 7.

I think that what I have gained more than anything else is a certain humility in recognizing how important forgiveness is, but how it doesn't count, and it can't count unless you can give it as well as ask for it. And that basically—I used to see life as a struggle for always learning more things, cramming more things in my head, anywhere I could do more things, you know. Now I see the search for wisdom and strength is also a process of letting go. A lot of things you have to let go of.

And I've been helped a lot by a lot of these ministers that have met with me and the Scriptures they've given me to read; by a lot of Christians and even sects of Christians have written me around the country with tracts on forgiveness, how you merit it in what you do and how you have to give it in turn; and also a number of people with whom I have worked as President.

I learned a lot—I've had on more than one occasion the opportunity to talk to Mr. Mandela about how he came to forgive those who were his oppressors, you know, and how he felt about it, and how he—what kind of forgiveness he ever sought for himself. I've really tried to deal with this in a very serious way, and I think I've learned quite a lot about

myself in the process. And it's an ongoing effort. But I have to remember every day that human nature is so prone to find self-respect in some element of one's character that you think is superior to someone else, and a lot of this is a matter of letting go. You just have to learn to let that go, just get up every day, try to do the best you can, be the best person you can be, and continue that individual journey of growth.

And I work on it—hard. And it's been a very humbling experience, but I think very much worthwhile for me, personally.

Chelsea Clinton

Q. Mr. Lockhart is giving me the one-more-question signal, so I thought what I might do is use an old Wolf Blitzer trick which is——

The President. Which is what—ask three questions?

Q. Ask a question with the second question. [*Laughter*] Well, briefly, you mentioned Chelsea just a moment ago. And as you know, the White House can be a pretty tough place on first kids. But the thing you always hear everybody talk about is the poise and the grace that she has now as a young woman. I'm wondering basically what you attribute that to, and how you feel the press has been on her—if they've kind of been giving her a fair shake as the kind of parameters were laid out from the very beginning?

And secondly, not at all related to that, is you were heavily criticized for the FALN commutations, and there's a lot of irony in that in that you're the least pardoning President in the modern history. You've issued fewer pardons that any President in the modern era. I'm wondering why you haven't availed yourself of that Presidential power more, since aside from the FALN thing, there's typically very little fallout for that, using that power.

The President. Well, let me say first, I think—let me answer the first question first. Say exactly what you asked me about Chelsea again.

Q. The thing you hear everybody talking——

The President. Oh, how the press treated her.

Q. How the press treated her, but how she, under the hothouse environment that the White House can be with all the looking in——

The President. I feel, first of all, very grateful that even though I don't agree with everything—first of all, I think it's impossible to generalize about "the press," and it will become harder and harder to refer to something called "the press." Where is the press in the publications in the merger of America Online and Time Warner, right? So I'm always reluctant—I sort of knew what that was, I thought, when I got elected. I'm not sure I know what that is anymore.

But I think that, by and large, all elements of the press, with some very few exceptions, have been willing to let my daughter have her life and try to grow up and deal with all the challenges that entails and the extra burdens of her parents being in public life and all the controversies and ups and downs we've exhibited, without trying to shine the glare on her. And I am profoundly grateful for that, because I think every young person needs the chance to find his or her own way to maturity. And it's very difficult when your parents are as publicly exposed and prominent in daily life as her parents are.

And it's made more difficult if you are prematurely turned into a public figure. I think to some extent she is one anyway, whether she's in the press or not. But I think basically the press has been sensitive to that. And I am profoundly grateful for that.

And I hope that the life that her parents have lived in public life has been—has offered more good than bad for her, as a child growing up. And she's a young woman now, and I hope that, on balance, it's been a positive thing. We love her very much, and we hope that it's—and believe that on balance it's been good.

Now——

Presidential Pardons

Q. On the related question of the pardons—[*laughter*].

The President. Let me say about——

Press Secretary Joe Lockhart. She's going to get a pardon. [*Laughter*]

The President. I want to say something here that nobody has ever given me a chance

to say in public before. This is important to me. And I've been working on this hard. I did not know until—ironically, until the controversy over the FALN thing that I had, apparently, both commuted fewer sentences and issued fewer pardons than my predecessors. I did not know that, but you should know what my generic attitude is.

Generically, I believe a President should rarely commute sentences and should have good reasons for doing so if he does, knowing that that will always be somewhat controversial—that is, if you attenuate a jury or a judge's sentence. That's what I did in the FALN case. I did it after Chuck Ruff, my lawyer, did an extensive survey. I thought it might be controversial. I regret it became as controversial as it was. I still think, based on the facts of those cases, I did the right thing. I still believe strongly that I did the right thing.

And I can tell you categorically there was no politics in it, that Chuck Ruff handled this, and everything he says about it is true. I think everyone knows him as being an extremely truthful person. He handled it entirely, and only he handled it. And then he dealt with me on it.

Now should we do some more commutations? Perhaps we should. But I think I would probably always be on the low side of that. On the other hand, I tend to have a much more generous attitude on pardons, particularly because under the Federal system—I think people ought to get their voting rights back; I don't think they ought to be discriminated about in getting jobs or keeping jobs or getting contracts if they have discharged their sentence and they've been out in law-abiding society.

Now over time, before I ever got there, there developed a whole apparatus in the Justice Department which is its own independent bureaucracy for evaluating these things. And the tradition is that the President doesn't rule on them, one way or the other, until you get all these recommendations sent to you. And I think what I believe is that—although this operation has a life of its own, I've asked—I've tried to review it now because my instinct is that we should be granting more pardons. I don't mean we should just be cavalier. I mean if you still think somebody might be involved in something wrong—not so much to wipe away the past as to free people up to live in the present and future.

There are all kinds of—suppose when you're 18 you commit some offense which gets you a 5-year sentence. And suppose—and let's suppose under the sentencing guidelines then applicable, you served 2 years of the sentence. Well, my view is if you served the 2 years, then you get out, and you've got 3 years on parole. So the 5 years is discharged. Then you have to serve—then you live a couple more years, and you have a totally exemplary life. I don't think that your past mistake should unduly cramp your present and future life.

If you do something really terrible, you're going to be in prison for a long time. But I mean, people are just getting out all the time—90 percent of the people who go to jail get out. When they get out, we do not have a vested interest in seeing them continue to be punished. Our interest as citizens, after they pay their debt to society, is to see them be successful. I mean, when somebody pays—then when they get out, surely we don't want them to keep on paying. If they have to keep on paying, that's why you end up with more crime and a less successful, less healthy society.

So my instinct is that—again, I speak for myself; each President will be different on this—is that the President should be pretty reluctant to shorten sentences but should be willing to do so in appropriate cases but that the President should be more forthcoming in being willing to grant pardons when it's not really for the purpose of pretending that it didn't happen but of liberating people to make the most of their todays and tomorrows, because every single American has a big stake in people who actually do get punished later going on and living their lives in a straight and effective way. So that's my take on this. And we're looking to see whether there are any kind of changes we can make to be more effective in that regard.

Q. Thanks.

The President. I'm glad you asked me. You're the only person who ever asked me that.

NOTE: The interview began at 5:13 p.m. in the 15th Floor Lounge at the Park Plaza Hotel. In his remarks, the President referred to John Rocker, relief pitcher, MLB Atlanta Braves; Hank Aaron, member, Baseball Hall of Fame; Andrew Young, former U.S. Ambassador to the U.N.; Kevin Garnett, power forward, NBA Minnesota Timberwolves; and former President Nelson Mandela of South Africa. An interviewer referred to Wolf Blitzer, correspondent, Cable News Network. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Boston

January 18, 2000

Thank you so much. Let me say, I am delighted, first of all, to be back here in the Solomonts' home. I love this place, and it's obviously a place with a loving family, and I feel very good that they let us come in. I thank Steve and Barbara Grossman for their work for our party, and for their help in this event tonight, and all of you for being here.

I want to join Mayor Rendell in thanking you, Mayor Menino. We had a great day in Boston today, had a great anti-crime event. And Senator Menard, thank you. And I'd like to also thank our DNC treasurer, Andy Tobias, my longtime friend, for being here. And thank you, Brian Hardwick, and thank you, Fran Katz.

We're going to have a chance to visit later on. I just want to make a few points. First of all, the kids were fabulous, the singers. I loved that. I'm something of a music lover, and they sang that wonderful old Jim Croce song—those of you who are about my age, maybe a little younger—it's all the more wistful because he did die young. And there's that great line in that song: "there never seems to be enough time to do the things you want to do once you find them." It's something that the older you get the more sober it makes you to hear that line.

And I guess if I could say anything to you tonight that you haven't heard, is that we do have time to do what we want to do, as a country and as a people, to a degree virtually unheard of in our history. And we need, in this election and in this year, to continue to find the right things and to find the strength and the vision and the will to do them.

I am profoundly grateful to the people of Boston and the people of Massachusetts. They have been very good to me and to Hillary and to Al and Tipper Gore. And indeed, all of New England has been very good to—we have carried all the States in New England in both elections. And that is something for which I am very grateful. And I am quite mindful of the fact that the energy and the drive for that came in no small measure out of Massachusetts and out of the uncommon kindness of the Democrats in New Hampshire and staying with me against all the odds on more than one occasion.

But what I want you to think about is this. A lot of you mentioned to me the wonderful 100-year-old woman who came to the White House on Saturday to the radio address. I love that lady because she was on television. She continually referred to me as a young man. [*Laughter*] And I just love that. [*Laughter*] And we got in a great discussion about older people, and Willard Scott asked me if I had anybody in my family who lived to be 100. I said, no, but I had a very close uncle who died at 91 a couple years ago, who helped to raise me.

And I told the story about how, when he was 86 he used to, once a week, take a 92-year-old woman for a drive and once a week take a 95-year-old woman for a drive. He was describing this to me, and I said, "Well, Uncle Buddy, you like those older women, don't you?" He said, "Yeah, I do. Seems like they're a little more settled." [*Laughter*]

So anyway, it's all a matter of your perspective whether you're young or not. And as I've gotten older, I've learned that the definition of young is anybody that's a day younger than I am. But I've lived a fair number of years now, and there has never been a time in my lifetime when our country has had at once this level of economic prosperity, social progress, self-confidence, without overwhelming internal crisis or external threat. Therefore, I would argue to you that we have an unparalleled opportunity to do the things we want to do and that every year, it's about defining them, finding them, and dreaming them.