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task of leading the university, its students, its faculty, and its alumni. I have no doubt she will be a real asset to the university and its community.

For almost 8 years, Secretary Shalala has led the Department of Health and Human Services with vigor and skill, always focused on meeting the needs of the American people. During her tenure as the longest serving Secretary in the history of the Department, she has directed the welfare reform process; made health insurance available to 2.5 million children through the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP); raised immunization rates to the highest levels in history; and led major reforms of FDA's drug approval process and food safety system.

As a Medicare trustee, she helped extend the solvency of the Medicare Trust Fund, directing management reforms and launching a campaign against waste, fraud, and abuse in the Medicare and Medicaid programs that has already paid enormous dividends. She has strengthened the scientific leadership and budget of the National Institutes of Health, and she has reinvigorated the Federal role in public health.

I am also pleased that Secretary Shalala intends to complete her term, staying through January 20 to finish the work we have to do for the American people. I look forward to working with her to protect the privacy of medical records and to win congressional approval of a budget that increases our investment in biomedical research and other critical public health priorities as well as health insurance coverage to the uninsured.

Interview With John King of CNN in Ho Chi Minh City

November 19, 2000

New Vietnam-U.S. Relationship

Mr. King. Thank you for joining us. We're here in Ho Chi Minh City with the President of the United States, Bill Clinton, this, the last day of his landmark trip here to Vietnam.

First, sir, thank you for joining us.

The facts speak for themselves. The first U.S. President to visit Vietnam since the end of the war, the first ever to set foot in Hanoi, the Capital.

Interested in your thoughts. You've called this a new chapter, turning the page in the relationship. What is it do you think it will mean, first for the people of Vietnam, and also for the people of the United States?

The President. Well, of course, I hope it means for the people of Vietnam continued openness and continued prosperity. This country has made a lot of progress in the last few years. The economy is diversifying. It's becoming more open to the rest of the world. Sixty percent of the people are under 30 years old. Most of them have no memory at all of the war, and they are very much oriented toward the future. They are asking themselves all kinds of fundamental questions about what the world is like now, how they're going to relate to it, what their country should be. So I hope that we have opened a new chapter, and I hope it will be good for them and good for us.

Mr. King. Now obviously, part of the new chapter is a widely expanded economic relationship. Do you have much confidence it will go beyond that, at least in the short term? After your meeting yesterday with the leader of the Communist Party here, he referred to the United States in a daily newspaper as imperialists, said that he hoped there would be respect for the different way of doing things here. You mentioned in your speech, nationally televised here to university students, the examples of the United States in the areas of individual freedom, religious freedom, political freedom.

Do you have much confidence that the Government here, as it accepts and embraces a wider economic relationship with the West will do anything to bring progress on those other fronts?

The President. Well, I think there will be more personal freedoms. You know, I had a roundtable this morning with a lot of young people, and they were asking themselves these same questions. And I believe that as we implement this trade agreement, and then Vietnam moves toward membership in the World Trade Organization, the rule of law will become more important; openness will become more important; there will be

a lot more access to the Internet and information of all kinds; and so there will be more freedom.

And the question then becomes, when does it become political freedom, or will the political system try to restrict them more, as has been the case in one or two other countries? The truthful answer is, we don't know where it's going. But I think that the trend toward freedom is virtually irreversible, and these folks are too young; they're too vigorous. And as you can see in the streets, there is a lot of good will toward America here. There's a lot of interest in our country and how we're dealing with a lot of the challenges of the new century. So I believe that the trend is positive.

Now, of course, the political leaders will have their debates, and I had a nice little debate with the General Secretary of the Communist Party here about our country, and I stoutly disputed that we were an imperialist country. We had never had any imperialist designs here. The conflict here was over what self-determination for the Vietnamese people really meant and what freedom and independence really meant.

But we have a chance to continue that debate now in a more peaceful and more constructive way. And I think the fact that they feel free to engage us in it and then have publicity about it—they did, after all, allow my speech to the country to be televised, which I think is a good sign. And the people came out in Hanoi and here in Ho Chi Minh City to see me. So—and it wasn't me; it was the United States. There's a lot of interest and support for the United States here. So I think we're on the right direction.

MIA's/POW's

Mr. King. I want to ask you about some of the remarkable moments on this trip. If you're sitting back in the United States watching this, we see this only by the numbers: nearly 300 sets of remains returned to the United States during your Presidency; the money put into the excavation efforts. But it is numbers until you have the opportunity to see what you did yesterday, to actually go out into the field.

The President. It was overwhelming. It's very important for the American people to understand that what has made the progress in our relationship with Vietnam possible over these last 8 years has been their cooperation in our efforts to identify and recover and return home our MIA's and to resolve the POW and MIA cases. And we have resolved hundreds of them. And in the cases where we think someone's remains are located, like the site we visited—we believe a plane crashed there 33 years ago; we believe a pilot's remains are there. His two sons came with me over here. And we watched all those Vietnamese people working with the American people, up to their hips in mud, digging in the ground and taking these big chunks of mud over to sifters, and watching other Vietnamese sift through the mud for any kind of metal object or any cloth object, anything that would give us a clue to whether this was, in fact, a crash site, and whether there's something more down there.

It was profoundly moving to me. And it is that good-faith effort that they have made with us—and by the way, we've made with them. They have 300,000 cases still unresolved. And I brought over about 350,000 pages of documents. We have another million pages of documents we can give them so they can do their own resolution of these cases. That's what's made possible this whole focus on the future and the commercial relations and the educational and health care efforts, all the other things we're doing.

Visit to the Joint Task Force-Full Accounting Excavation Site

Mr. King. What were your personal thoughts? You're standing there holding pieces of the aircraft, a label from a part of the aircraft, your daughter standing next to you, crying. It didn't look like you were terribly far from that yourself. And you're with these two big, grown men who last saw their father when I believe they were 6 and 8. What goes through your mind at a moment like that?

The President. Well, first, I was glad we were doing it. I think it made me very proud to be an American and proud that we had made these efforts and made this progress. I was very grateful for the cooperation we've received from the Vietnamese Government and the individual villages. You know, there

were just people out there, stomping around in the mud, trying to find some trace of those boys' father. And I think, for me, it symbolized what was best about our country and what was possible in terms of the reconciliation of people who have been so bitterly divided such a long time ago.

It's not done yet, you know. We still have a lot of work to do to work through all these cases. I still hope and believe that there should be more freedom within Vietnam and recognition of the courage of the people who fought in the South Vietnamese Army, as well as for the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese. And I hope and believe that the American Vietnamese community, over a million strong, can make an even greater contribution.

Now, today we were at that port, and we talked about a big pharmaceutical facility owned by two Vietnamese-American women, sisters, and their presence here in the country. But there are a lot more things that the Vietnamese have to give.

But again, to go back to your question, everything begins with what we saw yesterday, the attempt to identify and bring home the remains of everybody who's still here. It was an overwhelming moment. But it should make every American proud.

Mr. King. Thank you. We need to take a quick break. But we'll be back in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, in just a moment to continue our interview with the President of the United States.

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

Veterans, the President, and Vietnam

Mr. King. I want to ask you a little bit about your personal thoughts and how—your personal journey here—and your thoughts on it. As a young man, you opposed the war, once wrote that you despised it. Yet as President, with the support of Vietnam veterans, you have led the effort, first to lift the trade embargo, then to normalize relations.

As you come here, how do you think this visit will be viewed back in the United States, not just among the veterans' community but especially among the Vietnam veterans' community, and your own personal thoughts on sort of bridging your youth with your role now in trying to create this new relationship?

The President. Well, let me answer the two questions separately. First of all, I hope the veterans' community will view it with pride, because nothing that we have done in the last 8 years would have been possible without the support of the Vietnam veterans in the Congress and in the various veterans' organizations: Senator John Kerry; Senator Bob Kerrey; Senator John McCain; Senator Chuck Robb; Pete Peterson, our Ambassador, who was a POW for 6½ years. The first 3 years, his wife didn't even know he was alive. He never saw his third child until the boy was 6 years old. Pete was in Congress for a lot of this period before I named him to be the Ambassador. So I would think that the veterans' community would be very proud of this.

And also, I will reiterate, none of this would have happened if it hadn't been for the cooperation of the Vietnamese with our attempts to resolve our outstanding POW and MIA cases. There's never been anything like it in the entire history of warfare, where two countries worked this hard, this long, invested this kind of money and effort to resolve the POW/MIA issues. So I would think, for most of our people who understand that, the central role of the American veterans in the Congress and the country had, this would be a source of great pride.

For me, personally, it was interesting—my overwhelming feeling when I first got here was thinking about the boys I grew up with who died in Vietnam, four of my high school classmates. And I asked Pete Peterson, when he came back, how long it took him to get beyond thinking about how it was before. And he said, "Well, about an hour," he said. Then he had to deal with the challenges of being Ambassador, and he went on with life.

And that's kind of what happened to me. I was the—I had a few moments there where I felt—I was thinking about the personal tragedies that I had been in contact with when I was a boy. And then the moment intervened, and we went on with the future.

Closure on the Vietnam War

Mr. King. Do you think the country is at peace with this now? Even some Democrats

late in the Presidential campaign this past year tried to raise questions about Governor Bush's service. Do you think the country is ready, and should this trip maybe be the final impetus for the country to move on?

The President. I hope it will be. I hope it will be. Because the war divided the Vietnamese from the Americans, but it also divided the Vietnamese one from another—and still does—which is why, as I said, I went out of my way to praise the heroism of the South Vietnamese soldiers, too, and the importance of the Vietnamese-Americans who supported the position we had in Vietnam so long ago and have done so well because of freedom.

So we need to heal the rift within the Vietnamese community, and it divided Americans one from another. And I hope that the last 8 years and the journey we've made together in moving forward with Vietnam has helped to put an end to that. My sense is that it did, that we're—that at least the rifts are nowhere near what they were 8 years ago, not to mention 10 or 20 years ago.

North Korea

Mr. King. Let's move around the world quickly. In a matter of weeks, you will hand off to the man who will succeed you, a man as yet unknown—and we'll get to that—the portfolio on some of the most important strategic relationships in the world. I want to start first with North Korea. You had, at one point, hoped perhaps to follow Secretary Albright and visit North Korea as part of this trip, then decided in the end not enough progress was being made to justify that.

Can you be as specific as possible in saying what it is you're looking for from the North Koreans in terms of the missile program and any other steps, and whether you believe it is conceivable that you still might get there before you leave office?

The President. Well, I haven't made a decision about whether to go, so I'll answer that first. Specifically what we seek with the missile program is an end to the long-range missile program and an end to the exports of missiles. North Korea needs the foreign exchange money. I understand that they need the funds, and they're very good at making missiles. But the people who are most likely to buy them are those that are most likely to misuse them down the road. So that's what we're trying to do.

We also want to ensure the continued vitality of this North-South dialog for which President Kim of South Korea won the Nobel Prize, the Nobel Peace Prize, and he certainly deserved it. We want that to go on. And we want to have a sense about what the way forward is with regard to North Korea's relations with us, as well as the South Koreans and the Japanese.

So it's conceivable that there could still be a trip, but I just haven't made a decision. The main thing is, I will hand off to my successor a much better situation than I found, because we, first of all, had to end North Korea's nuclear program, and that's what we did and worked on in '93 and '94. And we've been implementing the agreement we made with them then for the last 6 years. Now we're working on the missile program. And it appears that North Korea has made a decision that—Kim Chong-il has made a decision to have a more positive and open relationship with the rest of the world. And I think that's a very good thing. I think the reconciliation and the family reunifications between North and South Korea are profoundly important.

Russia

Mr. King. Russia. You met with President Putin during the APEC meeting in Brunei. Your successor, I assume, relatively shortly after he takes office, will receive a proposal from the Russians to go even beyond anything you and the Russians have discussed. Mr. Putin, because of the obvious budget constraints in his country, wants to go to roughly 1,000 strategic warheads. Is that in the interests of the United States national security? And do you see any potential to get to that level, and also, perhaps as part of that deal, get a compromise on the ABM Treaty that would allow the missile defense program to go forward?

The President. Well, first of all, I don't want to say anything that will compromise my successor's options. I think that's important. Now, I think it is quite possible that we could agree to go down to fewer missiles in our nuclear arsenal and theirs. I think that

it's important that there also be fewer warheads. That is, there's a difference between missiles and warheads. I don't think we ought to go back to highly dangerous, richly armed MIRV missiles, multiple warhead missiles.

But what we have to do is to have a target design that we believe is adequate to protect the United States and that our missile component will serve. And if we do that, then we could agree with them to reduce the number of missiles. And I'd hoped that we could get that done even beforehand. So I'm encouraged by that.

Now, on the missile defense, I think the trick there will be somehow having the Russians and others with equity interests here believe that we all have a vested interest in trying to develop enough missile defense to stop the rogue states and terrorists from piercing the barriers not only of the United States but of Russia, China, of any other country that might want to participate. And there is a way, I think, to get this done, but it will require a lot of joint research and a lot of trust and a lot of understanding about what the problem is and how we're going to develop it.

If the technology existed which would give us high levels of confidence that one or 2 or 5 or 10 missiles could be stopped from coming into the country, it would be hard to justify not putting it up. On the other hand, the reason I didn't go forward is, I think it's very hard to justify wrecking the existing treaty system which has served us so well for so long, in effect, gambling that somehow, some day, some way, the technology will be there. We don't want to do that.

The best way to proceed is to do the research and try to find a way to bring these other countries into this. Because, really, if you think about it, everyone should have an interest in the capacity of a country to resist the errant missile or the missile that would be fired by a rogue state or a terrorist. And they can do this together.

What I tried to do was to buy some time so my successor could sit down with the Russians, with the Chinese, with any others who are parties and interests—and our European allies, of course—and try to plot out a future that would leave us safer than we are today. The whole point is to keep getting safer, not to do different things but to have a system which leads to a safer world.

And we have to consider what the impact of all these things are on the Indian subcontinent, where there are nuclear missiles; on the Chinese who might decide to build—acquire a lot more missiles or develop them or not. And so my successor will have time to do all that. And I hope we've given the next President and our partners the maximum number of options.

Mr. King. We need to take another short break, but when we come back, we'll ask the President about his thoughts on the crisis in the Middle East, as well as the contested Presidential election back home in the United States.

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

Situation in the Middle East

Mr. King. I want to ask you, lastly, before asking you about the domestic political situation, I want to ask you lastly about the Middle East. You met separately with Mr. Arafat and Prime Minister Barak before you came on this trip. It has to be a source of enormous personal frustration to you, because of all the time you have put into this. Do you have any reasonable hopes that you can bring the two of them together anytime soon and that we will get anywhere beyond perhaps even just calming the violence before you leave office, and anywhere back toward formal peace negotiations? Is that completely unrealistic at this time?

The President. The honest answer is, I don't know, for this reason: I don't think they can start negotiating again until we can dramatically reduce the level of violence. It's not clear to me that that's going to happen right now, although I'm working very hard on it, and we've been working hard on it since I've been here. And I wouldn't rule it out.

But the tragic thing is that they're not all that far apart on a lot of these big issues and that what we have seen is a sober reminder that the old status quo was not an option. You either have to keep making things better in the Middle East, or eventually they'll get worse.

Mr. King. Is the burden on one side or the other? You came away from Sharm al-Sheikh cautiously optimistic you would stop the violence, have a cooling-off period, and then bring them back together. Obviously, they have not even been able to stop the violence.

The President. Well, believe it or not, I still think Sharm al-Sheikh was very much worth doing, because, first of all, the agreement that we reached there is pretty much what they'd have to do to get the violence back and set in motion conditions which would lead to a resumption of the peace talks. And I felt before Sharm al-Sheikh that we were slipping into a very dangerous situation regionally. And now I think that a lot of the really responsible actors in the region are also trying to get this thing shut down.

But I can't really say more than that it's a troubling, difficult, and painful situation, and we've got to find a way to end the violence. You don't have to end every single instance of it, but there has to be a dramatic reduction in the violence before the parties can talk again and make commitments again that could constitute a peace agreement.

Is it possible? Yes, it's possible. It's possible because they're not that far apart. But they might as well be on the other side of the globe, as long as all the shooting is going on. So that's what we're working on, and I hope that a way can be found to bring it to an end.

2000 Presidential Election

Mr. King. Let me bring your thoughts back home, to the United States. When you left on this trip, there was a dispute about who the next President would be. When you made your courtesy call on the Vietnamese President last night, you had to joke that you were hurrying home to see if the country had a President-elect. The recount continues, and along with it, the partisan rhetoric escalates. You have people on the Republican side speaking for Governor Bush saying the Democrats are trying to steal the election; Democrats on the other hand, saying that the Republicans are trying to deny the people a fair count of the vote and shut down democracy. Is this helpful, in your view? The process is obviously not pretty. Is it helpful what we're hearing from both sides?

The President. Well, first of all, I don't know that that's a particularly useful question, with all respect. You can't, as close as this is—now it appears that, when all the votes are counted, that Vice President Gore will have won a plurality of the popular vote. It appears that unless he wins Florida, he'll be three votes short in the electoral college. Therefore, everything is on Florida. And Mr. Bush has the narrowest of leads out of 6 million votes, far less than a tenth of a percent, one-sixth of one-tenth of one percent, or something like that.

Now, in an environment like that, you have to assume that either side will try to make the best argument they can, because you only have a whisker of difference. I think the important thing is that there is a process underway, and it is being shepherded by the parties—they're both very well represented by articulate, able people—and they have recourse to the courts in Florida and the Supreme Court seems to have been willing to be prompt in its decisionmaking.

So I think the American people should just let it play out, and they should understand that, with so much at stake, both sides are going to make the strongest case they can. And the only thing that I hope that all of us will keep in mind here is that we don't know who won, but we do know that when people vote, they deserve to have their votes counted, if they can be. So we ought to just respect the process and respect the fact that the advocacy will take place, and it should take place. You can't blame either one of them for making the strongest case they can.

This is not a crisis in the American system of government, because it will come to an end. It will come to an end in plenty of time for the new President to take the oath of office. There is a way of resolving these things. All these cases are in the courts, and as I said, it appears to me that they're being handled in a fairly prompt way. Some of the decisions have gone one way, some have gone another way. And we'll just have to see what happens.

But I think the American people ought to let this—it seems to me the American people

are letting this play out in an appropriate way, and that's what I think should be done.

Election's Impact on Next President's Effectiveness

Mr. King. Look around the corner, though. You have considerable experience in your own right trying to govern in a very difficult environment, relations with the Republican Congress not terribly good during most of the latter half of your administrations. And now you have research being done on both sides about, well, maybe this will get thrown to the Congress, and can we disqualify electors. Do you see, A, with the election being so close, and then, B, with the very difficult fight over who wins, can whoever gets this job reasonably govern, in your view?

The President. Well, I would make two points. First of all, it is true that I faced an unusually partisan group of Republicans. But it's also true that we got a lot done. I mean, I've noticed with some pleasure, I confess, that students of American history, several of them have come out in the last few weeks saying that I had kept a higher percentage of my campaign promises than any President in modern history. And we've gotten a lot done with this Republican Congress, in spite of all the partisanship in the last 6 years.

We got a balanced budget agreement. We got welfare reform. We got just this year a sweeping measure on debt relief for the world's poorest nations and any number of other things. I don't want to go through all that, but the point I want to make is that even in a difficult atmosphere, where the Congress is closely divided, and the President is elected by a narrow margin, we should not assume that they won't be able to get something done. If they're willing to work hard, fight for their positions, and then in the end, make principled compromises, quite a lot can be done. That's the first thing I want to say.

The second thing is, if you look at American history, it is not inevitable that the person who wins the White House under these circumstances will have a deeply divided country. Now, in 1876, when President Hayes won, he promised to only serve one term. So we don't know whether he could have been reelected or not, when he lost the popular vote and won the electoral college.

In 1824 John Quincy Adams won in the House of Representatives when he lost the popular vote, and he was voted out, although he came back and had a wonderful career opposing slavery. But when Thomas Jefferson was forced to go for many, many ballots into the House of Representatives, he came out of it as a more unifying figure, with a commitment to be more unifying. And in effect, he was so successful that he got two terms, and the opposition party, the Federalist Party, disappeared. And then two members of his party, James Madison and James Monroe, succeeded him, and they both had two terms. And arguably, that 24-year period was the biggest period of political stability in the whole history of the republic, until you had the dominance of the Republicans after the Civil War, and then Roosevelt-Truman years and the Depression and World War II.

So I think you—I wouldn't—I don't think we should have all these hand-wringing, dire predictions. We've got a system. It's underway, and yes, these guys are—the advocates for either side are under enormous pressure. And of course, they're being pretty snippy with each other from time to time. But look, you'd expect it. I mean, 100 million people voted, and there's 1,000 votes, more or less, at stake in Florida.

So everybody ought to just relax, let the process play out. But don't assume that no matter who wins and no matter what happens, it's going to be bad for America. It might be quite good, because it might be sobering for the country to realize we're in a completely new era. Nobody's got a lock on the truth. We're all trying to understand the future. It's still clear that about two-thirds of the American people want a dynamic center that pulls the people together and moves us forward. And I think we still have a fair chance to achieve that.

Perspective on the Presidency

Mr. King. We're short on time, indeed, out of time, but just in a sentence or two, you've been at this 8 years, and I think you have 8 weeks. What runs through your head

when you get up to go to the office every day?

The President. I want to get everything done I can possibly do while I'm here. And for the rest, I just feel grateful. America is in much better shape then it was 8 years ago. We got to implement the ideas and the policies that I ran on in '92 and '96. I didn't do everything I wanted to do, but the overwhelming majority of things I wanted to do I was able to accomplish, and I'm grateful that it worked out for the country.

And then a lot of other things came up along the way which were good for the country. So I'm happy now, and I'm grateful. And of course, I'm thrilled about Hillary's election to the Senate. And I just feel enormous gratitude. But there's still a lot of things I'd like to do, and so I'll work right up to the end.

Mr. King. Mr. President, we thank you very much for your time.

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview began at 4:30 p.m. at the Caravelle Hotel and was taped for later broadcast, and the transcript was embargoed by the Office of the Press Secretary until 6 p.m. In his remarks, the President referred to President Kim Dae-jung of South Korea; General Secretary Kim Chong-il of North Korea; President Vladimir Putin of Russia; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; and Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With Nguyen Bich and Dan Sutherland of Radio Free Asia International

November 19, 2000

The President. Hello?

Q. Yes. Good evening, Mr. President.

The President. Yes. Good evening.

President's Visit to Vietnam

Q. You must be very exhausted by now. [*Laughter*] That is why we are so grateful for you to grant RFA your very first post-Vietnam interview.

My name is Nguyen Bich, or you can call me just Bich for short. And I am the director of the Vietnamese service at Radio Free Asia. And sitting by me in our studio is Dan Sutherland, who is vice president for programming.

So, Mr. President, my first question to you is, how do you feel? Do you feel you have accomplished your goal by this first trip ever made by a President of the United States to a reunified Vietnam?

The President. Yes, I think it was a very successful trip; first, because we were able to see and support the attempts that are being made there to recover the missing in action from the Vietnam conflict and to continue our cooperation with the Vietnamese Government in that regard.

We also gave them several hundred thousand pages of documents to help them identify the—some 300,000 people still missing who are Vietnamese.

Then, I think it was important because we contributed, I believe, to the continuing economic progress of the country which I think will lead to more openness.

And thirdly, I think it was important because I was able to speak on television to the country about the kind of future I hope we will share with Vietnam and the fact that I hope there will be more openness and more freedom in it. And I also had, finally, some very good discussions and some constructive disagreements with the leadership of Vietnam.

President's Impressions of Vietnam

Q. Your speech at Hanoi University certainly was very impressive. And so I think that made a really big impression on the country. As this was your first trip to Vietnam, could you give us a general impression of the country, at least what you saw of it, and of the people? Were they warm and welcoming?

The President. They were very warm and very welcoming and clearly interested in the trip. And the young people with whom I talked were clearly interested in having closer ties with America. So I felt very good about that.

I also was interested in all the changes that are occurring in the northern part of the country. I think there's clearly a lot of new investment going on in Hanoi, a lot of new businesses coming out, a lot of changes there that I think will tend to make the south and