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And one of the reasons they dislike me so intensely, that crowd, is they think I betrayed—they worked very hard, under the cover of Reagan, being quite nice, to basically have the old, conservative, white southern male culture dominate the political life of America. And they see me as an apostate, which I welcome. I mean, we have this—so when I take on the NRA or do something for gay rights, to them it's worse if I do it. It's like a Catholic being pro-choice. That's sort of that deal.

So when he said I was a scalawag, the guy knew exactly what he was saying, and he did—for anybody that read it, did a great service, because he was absolutely accurate. I have no quarrel with what he said. That's basically the great fault line we've been fighting through.

Mr. Wenner. Like Roosevelt, you're a traitor to your class?

The President. Yes.

Mr. Wenner. Like FDR?

The President. Yes. A traitor to my caste. [*Laughter*] But it's very interesting, when you see sometime—when an adversary of yours says something that you 100 percent agree with, the guy is absolutely right. That's why he's against me, and that's what I've tried to be in my whole life. I mean, I had a grandfather with a fourth grade education, fifth grade education, who was for integration of the schools. I mean, that's who we are.

And we were still having the Lincoln fight in the South, when I was a boy in school.

Mr. Wenner. They're trying to drag you out of here.

The President. I know. We'll finish.

Mr. Wenner. We've got two and a half pages done. [*Laughter*]

The President. It's good, though. Just set up another time. I owe it to him. We'll do one more. I just love Rolling Stone. They've been so good to me.

Mr. Wenner. I'd just like the long view and your philosophy about where we're going, what you've seen, and what you think about America. I want to ask you questions about, you know, what have you learned about the American people. You've had a unique exposure to them that nobody else has ever had.

The President. I'll tell you this. When I leave office, on January 20th, I will leave even more idealistic than I was the day I took the oath of office, 8 years earlier.

Mr. Wenner. Why?

The President. Because the American people almost—they are fundamentally good, and they almost always get it right if they have enough time and enough information. Now, they've got to have enough information. They've got to have enough time. They have to have a way to access it.

But the biggest problem we have in public discourse today is, there's plenty of information out there, but you don't know what's true and what's not, and it's hard to access it. It's all kind of flying at you at once. It's hard to have time to digest it. But if people have the information, they have time to digest it, they nearly always get it right. And if that weren't the case, we wouldn't be around here after 226 years.

I'm glad to see you.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 3:10 p.m. in the Solarium at the White House, and the transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 7. In his remarks, the President referred to Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel; United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; historian and author Gary Wills; and journalist Al Hunt. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With Jann Wenner of Rolling Stone Magazine

November 2, 2000

Mr. Wenner. Thank you for your time; I appreciate it. It takes time to do something like this.

The President. Good.

2000 Presidential Election

Mr. Wenner. Why do you think the race is so tight, given the economy, the issues, the incumbency? How could it get to be this close?

The President. Well, I think for one thing, things have been good for a long time, and I think a lot of people may take it for granted and may not have—they may not be as clear

as they should be, which I hope we can use the last week to do, on what specific policies contributed to it and what could undermine it. I think that's one issue.

I also think that, you know, there's not as much general awareness as there might be about the differences between the two parties on health care, education, the environment, and crime, where I believe that the things we've done over the last 8 years had a measurable impact on all those things going in the right direction.

And a lot of—most Presidential races are fairly close, you know, because a lot of Presidential voting is cultural.

Mr. Wenner. The way you were raised.

The President. Well, the way you were raised and sort of the neighborhood you live in, your socioeconomic and ethnic background. I mean, a lot of it's cultural. So I think there are a lot of reasons it's close.

Also, keep in mind, in the history of our Republic, only two Vice Presidents have ever been directly elected President. One of them—when Martin Van Buren succeeded Andrew Jackson, we were effectively a one-party country then. And the other, when George Bush defeated Michael Dukakis, the country was not in as good a shape as it is now, but it was in pretty good shape, and Bush basically destroyed Dukakis. It was a hugely negative campaign with a lot of charges that were never effectively rebutted.

So this has been a much more positive race. There have been differences on the issues, but neither one of them has called each other's patriotism into question or whether they're normal Americans. Basically, the rap that was put on Dukakis was like reverse plastic surgery. So I think that that explains it largely.

Demands of the Presidency

Mr. Wenner. At the end of the interview, I'm going to ask you to make a bet with me.

What physical change in you says that you've served 8 years and it's a job that really takes a toll?

The President. Well, I think I'm in better shape, better health than I was 8 years ago, in a lot of ways. My hair is gray. I think that's about it. I've got a few wrinkles I didn't have 8 years ago.

But I've held up pretty well. I've had a good time. I've enjoyed it. I couldn't help my hair going gray. It would probably have gone gray if I hadn't become President.

Oklahoma City and Columbine

Mr. Wenner. One of the most important jobs that you, as a President, have is to talk to the country in the wake of national tragedies, frame the issues for the American people. I'm going to ask you about two of the things that happened during your two terms: the Oklahoma City bombing and the Columbine shootings.

Where were you when you first heard about the Oklahoma City bombing, and what was your first reaction, personally? And then how did you think you should frame that to the American people, to help them understand what's really a national trauma? And where were you when you heard it?

The President. I was in the White House. I believe I was in the White House, because I remember making a statement at the beginning, right in the Rose Garden, saying what you would expect me to say, expressing the Nation's sympathy for the loss but also urging the American people not to jump to conclusions about who had done it.

Remember in the beginning, there were a lot of people saying it was obviously some sort of act of foreign terrorism. There was one man that was brought back on an airplane. He was flying out of the country through to London, and he was brought back, suspected of maybe being involved, and he wasn't. And of course, subsequently, it was a domestic terrorist act.

But then when I went to Oklahoma, at the memorial service, what I tried to do was to elevate what the people who had been working in that building were doing. They were all public servants, and it was at a time when it was quite fashionable to bash the Government. And I told myself, even, that I would never refer to people who worked for the Government—even in agencies I thought weren't performing well—as bureaucrats again, because this whole—we have gotten, for more than a dozen years, a sort of demeaning rhetoric about the nature of Government and the nature of public service. And I tried to point out that these people

were our friends and our neighbors and our relatives, and they were an important part of America's family and that their service ought to be honored in that way.

And also, obviously, I took a strong stand against terrorism. And I was able—later I went to Michigan State and gave a commencement speech and tried to amplify on that. But I really believe that was the turning of the tide in the venom of anti-Government feeling.

Mr. Wenner. Did you see—was it a conscience thought to you that this could be the turning of the tide, and if you focused it correctly, if you said, "You know, you can't love your country if you hate your Government," that this would crystallize that feeling?

The President. I think I felt that after I had some time to think about it. In the beginning I was just horrified about all those people dying, all those little kids killed and hurt.

Mr. Wenner. What I'm trying to get at is, once beyond that obvious first reaction——

The President. Yes. I mean, it occurred to me that, you know, the American people are fundamentally decent, and they've got a lot of sense. And I thought that this might break a fever that had been gripping us for too long. And I think it did.

Mr. Wenner. And you thought, if I can take advantage of this opportunity—I mean, to have this tragedy—in every tragedy comes an opportunity, so is this an opportunity where I can make people rethink that idea.

The President. I think in a way, at least at some—maybe not even at a conscious level, the American people were rethinking it. And I think maybe that's why what I said at the memorial service struck a responsive chord in the country.

Mr. Wenner. What I'm trying to get at is, was that a deliberate thought on your part? That I have an opportunity as President to——

The President. Well, I thought that—yes, I was conscious of what I was saying.

Mr. Wenner. Did you connect it in some way to a kind of metaphorical bomb-throwing of Newt Gingrich, of the real anti-Government stance that he was taking at the time?

The President. I was careful not to do that. I wanted it to change the American peoples' attitude toward public servants and their Government. But to do it, you had to focus on what happened.

One of the things that I didn't like about Newt—and he certainly wasn't responsible in any way for the Oklahoma City bombing—because one of the things I didn't like about him is, he was always blaming the 1960's or liberals for everything that went wrong. When that woman, Susan Smith, drove her kids into the lake in South Carolina, he blamed the 1960's, and it turned out that the poor woman had been sexually abused by her father, her stepfather, who was on the local board of the Christian Coalition or something.

And when that woman dropped her kid out of the window in Chicago, he blamed the welfare culture. He was always blaming. So I didn't want to get into where I was doing reverse blame. I just wanted to try to make it clear to the American people that we shouldn't have a presumption against Government in general or public servants in particular.

Mr. Wenner. What about Columbine? Where did you first hear the news about that? And again, what was your reaction to that?

The President. I believe I was in the White House when I heard that, but I'm not sure. But I know that I called the local officials and the school officials from the Oval Office. You know, that was only the most recent and the most grotesque of a whole series of highly visible school shootings that we've had—a number of them in the South, one of them in Jonesboro, Arkansas. That was in my home State, and I knew some of the people who were involved, who run the school and in the county and in the city.

There was one in Pearl, Mississippi, and there was——

Mr. Wenner. One in Oregon.

The President. The one in Springfield, Oregon. What I thought there was that—I thought a lot of things. I thought, number one, how did those kids get all those guns, and how could they have had that kind of arsenal without their parents knowing? And I thought, after I read a little about it, how did they get so lost without anybody finding them before they went over the edge?

We had a spate of—before all these killings associated with that kind of darkness on the net, network——

Mr. Wenner. What do you mean, darkness on the net?

The President. Well, those kids were apparently into some sort of a—weren't they into some sort of satanic-like thing?

Mr. Wenner. No, they had their websites and——

The President. Their websites, yes. There were, earlier, a number of kids who killed themselves who were into talking to each other about destruction, but they weren't killing other people. And I just kept—I worry that—I worried then; I worry now about the people in our society, particularly children, that just drift off, and no one knows, or people feel helpless to do anything about it.

You know, I couldn't help thinking, wondering whether those kids could have been saved if somebody got to them, and then whether all those other children would still be alive.

Gun Safety Legislation

Mr. Wenner. It seemed shocking to me and a lot of other people that after that there was no—we didn't get any new gun control legislation after an event like that.

The President. It's going to be interesting to see what the voters in Colorado do. They have a provision on the ballot now in Colorado to close the gun show loophole. And it's a heavily Republican State, and I think it's going to pass.

Mr. Wenner. Right.

The President. I think what happened is that—well, first of all, you can't say nothing came out of it, because there was an organization of young people in Colorado that then organized kids all over the country for commonsense gun legislation. They got about 10,000 kids involved. Now we have the Million Mom March, and they're very active.

But the truth is that when legislation time comes that a lot of the people in Congress are still frightened of the NRA, because even though there is broad public support for these measures, they are still not primary voting issues for a lot of the people who are for them. Whereas, the NRA can muster an enormous percentage of the vote—maybe 15 percent, maybe even 20 sometimes—for whom that's a primary voting issue.

So if you've got an issue where you're ahead 60–30 but in your 60 it's a primary voting issue for 10 percent of the people, and in their 30 it's a primary voting issue for 20 percent of the people, the truth is, you're a net loser by 10 percent. That's the way—that's what happens in Congress and State legislatures. They're genuinely afraid.

Mr. Wenner. They know they could lose their seats.

The President. You see the tirade that Charlton Heston has carried on against Al Gore and me, before—saying that I was glad some of these people were killed because it gave me an excuse to take people's guns away. We never proposed anything that would take anybody's guns away.

I saw a special—you may have seen it on television the other night on ABC. Peter Jennings actually went out and went to some of these gun shows. And he was talking to all these people who were absolutely convinced that we wanted to take their guns away. The NRA is great at raising money and building their organizational power by terrifying people with inflammatory rhetoric. I guess that's why, since LBJ passed the first law after Bobby Kennedy was killed, I was the first President to take him on.

Mr. Wenner. You got Brady and assault through, but why didn't you take the opportunity with this post-Columbine atmosphere? I mean, you called the White House Conference on Violence immediately——

The President. Well, I did. I tried——

Mr. Wenner. But it focused on, like, violence in the media——

The President. Yes, but we also did lots and lots and lots of events——

Mr. Wenner. ——and then you thought you could reason with the NRA.

The President. No, I didn't think I could reason with the NRA. I thought Congress would be so shocked and the public was so galvanized that we had a window of opportunity.

Mr. Wenner. Right. And what happened to that, is my question.

The President. The Republican leadership just delayed until the fever went down. That's what happened. They knew that they

couldn't afford to have their Members voting wrong on closing the gun show loophole or banning the importation of large-capacity ammunition clips, which allows people to get around the assault weapons ban.

Mr. Wenner. Were you powerless to do something about that?

The President. No, we had tons of events. And we got a vote—if you'll remember, we finally got a vote in the Senate, where you can bring things up, where we got a majority vote for it. Al Gore broke the tie—another reason he ought to be President, he broke the tie. But we couldn't get a bill out of a conference committee, that had it in there. If we could ever have gotten a clean vote——

Mr. Wenner. You would have won that vote.

The President. Oh, absolutely.

Mr. Wenner. And beat that——

The President. Absolutely. We could win the vote today if you could get a vote. But the leadership of the Republican Party, as long as they're in the majority in both Houses, they can control things, especially in the House. You can write the rules so that you can just keep stuff from coming up.

Mr. Wenner. So despite your power, despite that event——

The President. Yes. And we had lots and lots and lots of events at the White House, not just one. We had a ton of events. We brought people in. We talked about it. We pushed and pushed. We finally got the vote in the Senate. We got 50 votes. Then Al broke the tie. We got 51. And there's no question that we could pass it.

But I'll remind you that one of reasons that Democrats are in the minority today in the House is because of the Brady law and the assault weapons ban. And interestingly enough, we didn't—there is—not a single hunter has missed an hour; not a single sports shooter has missed an event—an hour hunting—I should have finished the sentence—or a single sports shooter has missed an event. But they acted like the end of the world, but a half million felons, fugitives, and stalkers haven't gotten handguns because of the Brady law.

The ironic thing is, there's no reason here—when we tried to pass the Brady law they said, "Well, this won't do any good because all these criminals get their guns either one-on-one or at gun shows or urban flea markets."

Mr. Wenner. Let me change the subject. This is absolutely amazing——

The President. I feel passionately about this, and I'm glad I took them on. I'm just sorry I couldn't win more. There are a lot of good people out there in America who work hard; their only recreation is hunting and fishing; they don't follow politics all that closely; they get these NRA mailings. They're good people, but they think they can believe these folks. And they know that if they can stir them up, they can raise more money and increase their membership. And they do it by basically terrifying Congress.

Race Relations

Mr. Wenner. How would you characterize race relations today, as compared to when you took office?

The President. I think they're considerably better.

Mr. Wenner. In what ways?

The President. Well, I think, first of all, the country is changing. It's growing ever more diverse and, therefore, more and more people are having more contacts across racial, ethnic, and religious lines. And I think that, ultimately, the more people relate to each other, the more they come to not just tolerate—I don't like the word "tolerance" in this context because it implies that one group is superior, putting up with an inferior group and tolerating them.

I think the more they come to genuinely appreciate each other's heritage, find it interesting, and find a fundamental common humanity—I think a lot of it is just systematic human contact. And beyond the human contact, I think that the race initiative we started led to hundreds of efforts all over the country to have honest conversations. You know, sometimes people work around each other for years and they don't know the first thing about one another. Forget about race. I mean, there are people who probably work in the White House who see each other every day that don't know the first thing about one another.

So I think that the one thing we did was to spark all these conversations and also to

highlight systematic efforts that were working in local communities and try to get them replicated around the country in communities, in workplaces, in schools. I think that there was a genuine effort to deal with that.

I think the third thing is that we may have had some impact on it, I and my administration, because we were so much more diverse than any other administration in history. And I think people felt, who had never felt that way before, that the White House was their house, too; the Government was their Government, too. So I think the climate in the country was positive for that.

Mr. Wenner. And you sense that change in climate from those factors in——

The President. Absolutely. Look at the difference——

Mr. Wenner. Because this is one of your main priorities.

The President. Yes. And look at the difference in the rhetoric in the Presidential campaign this year. All the rhetoric is about racial inclusion. Now you know, we could argue about the policies. I think that the Republican policies are still divisive, but the rhetoric is about inclusion. And even they—a number of their members have taken a different tack on immigration.

Advice for Youth

Mr. Wenner. Do you have any special message to young people, any sort of valedictorian thoughts to the kids in school right now, as you leave office?

The President. Yes, I do. First of all, I think that they should realize that they're very fortunate to be living in this country at this time, fortunate because of our economic prosperity, fortunate because of our enormous diversity, and fortunate because of the permeation of technology in our society, all of which enables us to relate to the rest of the world and to one another in different and better ways.

Secondly, I think they should understand that our future success is not guaranteed and depends upon their interest in public affairs, as well as their private lives and their participation. One of the things that's really concerned me about this election is all these articles that say that young people think there is not much in it for them. I think maybe that's because there has been a lot of debate about Social Security and Medicare in the debate. They think that's an old folks' issue.

But it's actually not just an old folks' issue, because when all of us baby boomers retire—and I'm the oldest of the baby boomers; the baby boomers are people that are between the ages now of 54 and 36. So when we retire, unless everybody starts having babies at a much more rapid rate, or we have hugely greater immigration, there will only be two people working for every one person drawing Social Security. Now, more of us are going to have to work into our later years. And more of us have a choice now because—one of the good things that Congress did unanimously was to lift the earnings limit on Social Security.

But anyway, even the Social Security issue is a youth issue. Why? Because the baby boomers, most of them, I know, are obsessed with our retirement not imposing an undue burden on our children and our grandchildren. But there are all these other issues.

We have to build a clean energy future to avoid global warming. Two stunning studies have come out in the last month, and because of the Presidential campaign, they've not been much noticed. One analysis of a polar icecap says that the 1990's were the warmest decade in a thousand years. The other projecting study estimates that if we don't change our greenhouse gas emissions, the climate could warm between 2.4 and 10 degrees over the next century; 2.4 is too much. Ten degrees would literally flood a lot of Louisiana and Florida. This is a very serious thing.

Then you've got this incredible scientific and technological revolution that will lead to, among other things—if you just take the human genome alone, a lot of the young people in America today, when they have their children, they'll get a little gene card to take home with them from the hospital, and their children will be born with a life expectancy of 90 years, because they'll be able to avoid so many of the illnesses and problems that they have a biological propensity to.

So this is a fascinating time to be alive, but it's not free of challenges. So I would say to the young people, you ought to be

grateful you're alive at this time. You'll probably live in the most prosperous, interesting time in human history, but there are a lot of big challenges out there, and you have to be public citizens as well as private people.

Drugs and the Legal System

Mr. Wenner. Do you think that people should go to jail for possessing or using or even selling small amounts of marijuana?

The President. I think, first of all——

Mr. Wenner. This is after—we're not publishing until after the election.

The President. I think that most small amounts of marijuana have been decriminalized in most places and should be. I think that what we really need—one of the things that I ran out of time before I could do is a reexamination of our entire policy on imprisonment.

Some people deliberately hurt other people. And if they get out of prison—if they get in prison and they get out, they'll hurt them again. And they ought to be in jail because they can't be trusted to be on the streets. Some people do things that are so serious, they have to be put in jail to discourage other people from doing similar things. But a lot of people are in prison today because they, themselves, have drug problems or alcohol problems. And too many of them are getting out—particularly out of the State systems—without treatment, without education, without skills, without serious effort at job placement.

Mr. Wenner. You're talking about any offender?

The President. Yes. But there are tons of people in prison who are nonviolent offenders, who have drug-related charges that are directly related to their own drug problems.

Mr. Wenner. Don't you think those people—should we be putting nonviolent drug offenders in jail at all, or should we put them in treatment programs that are more fitting and not——

The President. I think it depends on what they did. You know, I have some experience with this. Let me just say——

Mr. Wenner. Well, I remember your experience is based on your brother's——

The President. Well, let me just say about my brother—whom I love and am immensely proud of, because he kicked a big cocaine habit—I mean, his habit got up to 4 grams a day. He had a serious, serious habit. He was lucky to live through that. But if he hadn't had the constitution of an ox, he might not have.

I think if he hadn't gone to prison, actually been put away forcibly somewhere, I think his problem was so serious, it is doubtful that he would have come to grips with it. I mean, he was still denying that he was addicted right up until the time that he was sentenced. So I'm not so sure that incarceration is all bad, even for drug offenders, depending on the facts. I think there are some——

Mr. Wenner. I meant——

The President. Let me finish. I think the sentences in many cases are too long for nonviolent offenders. I think the sentences are too long, and the facilities are not structured to maximize success when the people get out. Keep in mind, 90 percent of the people that are in the penitentiary are going to get out. So society's real interest is seeing that we maximize the chance that when they get out, that they can go back to being productive citizens, that they'll get jobs, they'll pay taxes, they'll be good fathers and mothers, that they'll do good things.

I think this whole thing needs to be reexamined. Even in the Federal system, these sentencing guidelines——

Mr. Wenner. You've got mandatory minimums. Would you do away with those?

The President. Well, most judges think we should. I certainly think they should be reexamined—and the disparities are unconscionable between crack and powdered cocaine. I tried to change the disparities, and the Republican Congress was willing to narrow, but not eliminate, them on the theory that people who use crack are more violent than people who use cocaine. Well, what they really meant was that people who use crack are more likely to be poor and, coincidentally, black or brown and, therefore, not have money. Whereas, people who use cocaine were more likely to be rich, pay for it, and therefore be peaceable.

But my own view is, if you do something violent, it's appropriate to have an incarceration. But I think we need a serious re-examination in the view toward what would make

us a more peaceful, more productive society. I think some of this, our imprisonment policies, are counterproductive. And now, you know, you have in a lot of places where, before the economy picked up, prison-building was a main source of economic activity, and prison employment was one of the big areas of job growth.

Mr. Wenner. Do you think people should lose access to college loans because they've been convicted of smoking pot—which is now law?

The President. No. I think that, first of all——

Mr. Wenner. I mean, those are people that seem to need a loan the most.

The President. First of all, I don't believe, by and large, in permanent lifetime penalties. There is a bill in Congress today that has bipartisan support that I was hoping would pass before I left office, but I feel confident it will in the next year or 2—which would restore voting rights to people after their full sentences have been discharged, and they wouldn't have to apply for a Federal pardon to get it.

I changed the law in Arkansas. When I was attorney general I changed the voting rights law in 1977, to restore voting rights to people when they had discharged their sentence. And my State is one of the relatively few States in the country where you do not have to get a pardon from the Governor to register to vote again—or from the Federal Government, for that matter.

Look, it depends on what your theory is. But I don't believe in making people wear a chain for life. If they get a sentence from a jury, if they serve it under the law, if they discharge their sentence, the rest of us have an interest in a safe society, in a successful society, and seeing that these folks go back to productive lives. You know, keeping them with a scarlet letter on their forehead for the rest of their lives and a chain around their neck is not very productive.

Mr. Wenner. Just to wrap this up, do you think that we need a major rethink of what these drug sentencing laws are?

The President. Not just drugs. I think we need to look at who's in prison, what are the facts——

Mr. Wenner. Well, they're filled with drug prisoners, these jails.

The President. ——most of them are related to drug or alcohol abuse, but there are some non-violent offenders unrelated to drug or alcohol abuse, which is not to say that I don't think white-collar criminals should ever go to jail. But I think we need to examine—the natural tendency of the American people, because most of us are law-abiding, is to think when somebody does something bad, we ought to put them in jail and throw the key away.

And what I think is, we need a discriminating view. There are some people who should be put in jail and throw the key away, because they can't help hurting other people. And I believe that one of the reasons for the declining crime rate is that we have a higher percentage of the people in jail who commit a lot of the crimes; a very small percentage of the people are multiple, habitual criminals. And if you could get a significant percentage of them in jail, the crime rate goes way down.

Now, on the other hand, there are a whole lot of other people in jail who will never commit another crime, particularly if they have—if they get free of drugs or free of their alcohol abuse and if they get education and training and if somebody will give them a job and give them another chance.

And what I think we need is a serious reexamination of what we've done, because we've done a lot of good in identifying people who are habitual criminals and keeping them in prison longer, and that's one of the reasons that the crime rate has gone down, along with community policing and improving the economy. But we also have just captured a whole lot of people who are in jail, I think, longer than they need to be in prison and then get out without adequate drug treatment, job training, or job placement.

But the society is moving on this. I notice now back in Washington, there is a really good program where—maybe two, that I know—where they try to keep people who go to prison in touch with their children, and they use the Internet so they can E-mail back and forth. They try to, in other words, not cut people off so completely that they lose

all hope and all incentive of returning to normal life, and they try not to damage these kids so badly, to reduce the chances that the kids will follow in their parents' footsteps.

Mr. Wenner. Let me change the subject.

The President. I think we need a whole new look at that. The sentencing guidelines, the disparities, are only a part of it. We have to look at how long should certain people go to prison from the point of view of what's good for society. We need to completely rethink it, because criminal laws and sentencing tend to be passed sort of seriatim in response to social problems at the moment.

Mr. Wenner. You, in general, restored judicial discretion and replace the kind of panic legislation that was passed about crack or——

The President. The reasons for the sentencing guidelines in the first place was to try to reduce the arbitrary harshness. It wasn't because they wanted to make sure everybody went to jail for a while; it was because the citizen guidelines tended to be abusive on the other end of the spectrum.

I think we may need some sentencing guidelines, but I think the impact, the practical impact of the ones we have has led to some people going to prison for longer than they should and longer than they would have under the old system. So there should be some more flexibility than there is.

Military Action in the Balkans

Mr. Wenner. I'm going to change the subject. The Balkans was your only major military engagement. What was it like to run a war night after night? I mean, was it your mentality in feeling that as all of that was going on as you go to sleep every night?

The President. Well, I went to sleep every night praying that it would end that night and that Milosevic would give in, praying that no other——

Mr. Wenner. You were literally praying?

The President. Yes. Praying that nobody would die, no American would die, and hoping that no innocent civilians would die but knowing that they would.

You know, it's easy for people to talk about war when it's appropriate to use military force, but you have to know that once human beings start using big, powerful weapons, there will be unintended consequences. We wound up bombing the Chinese Embassy. Innocent people died. We hit a schoolbus. And we have the most skilled Air Force and the most sophisticated weapons in all human history.

In the Gulf war, which is normally thought of as a 100-hour war and a model of sort of technical proficiency, we had 4½ months to settle in and prepare there, and still a lot of the American casualties were from friendly fire. The same thing happened even in the small engagement in Grenada, and President Reagan. These things happen. There are—once you start killing people, there will be unintended consequences.

Mr. Wenner. How do you get yourself personally comfortable—I mean, how do you get yourself, as a person and as a politician, ready to make that decision with a level of comfort you're now going to go ahead and do this?

The President. You have to be convinced that the consequences of inaction would be more damaging to more people and to your country. And in the case of Kosovo, I didn't think it was a close case. They had already killed several thousand Kosovars, and they were running a million of them out of their homes, 800,000. It was a clean case of ethnic cleansing.

And I thought the United States and our European Allies had to stand up against it. We couldn't let it happen in the heart of Europe. If we did that, we would lose the ability to stop it anywhere else.

Mr. Wenner. And wouldn't it be on your conscience in some way, for having failed to stop it?

The President. Absolutely. Look, it took us—one of the things that just tore at me—and in the end it didn't require much military engagement, although it required some—was how long it took me to build a consensus. It took me 2 years to build a consensus among our Allies for military action in Bosnia. And you know, what happened there was, after the slaughter at Srbenica we finally got—you know, everybody said, "Okay, let's go"—we did a few air strikes, and all of a sudden we were at Dayton and the peace talks. And for all the raggedness of it, the

Bosnian peace has held, and it's better now because we turned back the tide of ethnic cleansing.

But over 200,000 people died there. And I just knew, you know, there is no point in letting it happen again in Kosovo.

Rwanda

Mr. Wenner. How do you feel, then, about Rwanda? I mean, clearly it's a difference. You didn't have the allies; you didn't have intelligence, all kinds of things. Is there anything that we could have done to prevent it? And whether there was or not, it happened while you were President. Do you feel any responsibility in that, personally?

The President. I feel terrible about it. One of the reasons that I went to Tanzania to be with Mandela and try to talk to the Burundians into the peace agreement—because before my time, over 200,000 people were killed in Burundi. Same deal—the Hutus and the Tutsis, same tribes, fighting the same battles.

In Rwanda—the thing that was shocking about Rwanda was that it happened so fast, and it happened with almost no guns. The idea that 700,000 people could be killed in 100 days, mostly with machetes, is hard to believe. It was an alien territory; we weren't familiar. After that, we began working very earnestly in Africa to train troops to be able to go in and prevent such things. We worked very hard with something called the Africa Crisis Response Initiative.

And when I was in Senegal, I actually went out of Dakar to another city to watch a training exercise—at least a parade exercise—and talk to the troops from Senegal that our American soldiers were working with. We are now working with the Ghanian forces and Nigerian forces to give them the training and the capacity to prevent the resumption of the slaughter of Sierra Leone.

So I think that—I hope the United States will be much, much more involved in Africa from now on, and everywhere. In economic development, we passed the Africa trade bill this year; in fighting AIDS, TB, malaria in Africa; in debt relief, we passed a big debt relief legislation this year; and in helping them to develop the mechanisms to do this.

The African countries have leaders who are willing to go in and take their responsibility in these areas if we'll give them the logistical and other support necessary to do it, if they're trained to do it. That's what happened in East Timor, where we didn't have to put troops on the ground, but we sent 500 people over there and provided vital airlift and logistical and other support, so that the Australians and New Zealanders and the other troops that came in could bring an end to the slaughter there.

So I think that there is—there is sort of a sliding scale here. In Europe it had to be done by NATO, and the scale of it and the power of the Serbian Government was such that if we hadn't been directly involved with our NATO Allies, we never could have turned it back and Milosevic never would have fallen. If we hadn't stopped him in Bosnia and Kosovo and kept the sanctions on, the people would never have had the chance to vote him out.

So I feel good about that. I wish we had been—Rwanda, if we had done all the things we've done since Rwanda and Africa—training the troops, supporting them, working with them—what I think would have happened is, the African troops would have moved in; they would have stopped it; and we could have given them the logistical support they needed to stop it.

Now, there are other problems that may develop——

Mr. Wenner. Another reason to vote for Gore.

The President. Another huge reason to vote for Gore, because, you know, Governor Bush has said that he doesn't think that's the business of the American military. We're only supposed to fight and win wars and let everybody else do this. He kept talking about Kosovo, I noticed, in a way as if we were the only forces in Kosovo. We were only 15 percent of the soldiers in Kosovo.

Presidential Politics

Mr. Wenner. Let me change the subject, back to Washington. Why do you think you were such a lightning rod for partisanship and bitterness and so much hatred during your term now?

The President. I think there were a lot of reasons. I think mostly it's just because I won. The Republicans really didn't—they believe the only reason they lost in '76 to Jimmy Carter was because of Watergate. They believe that, from the time Mr. Nixon won in '68, they had found a fool-proof formula to hold the White House forever, until some third party came on. That's what they believe.

Mr. Wenner. Did you ever hear anybody articulate that, the Republicans——

The President. Well, in so many words. I had a very candid relationship with a lot of those guys. They would tell me what was going on. I think they really believed that America saw Republicans as the guarantor of the country's security and values and prudence in financial matters, and that they could always turn Democrats into cardboard cutouts of what they really were; they could sort of caricature them as almost un-American; and that basically the Congress might be Democratic most of the time because the Congress would give things to the American people. But the Republicans embodied the values, the strength, the heritage of the country, and they could always sort of do, as I said about Dukakis, reverse plastic surgery any Democrat.

So I came along, and I had ideas on crime and welfare and economic management and foreign policy that were difficult for them to characterize in that way. And we won. And they were really mad. I think I was the first President in a long time that never got a day's honeymoon. I mean, they started on me the next day. I think that was one thing.

I think, secondly, I was the first baby boomer President, not a perfect person, never planned to be—I mean, never claimed to be—and had opposed the Vietnam war. So I think that made them doubly angry because they thought I was a cultural alien, and I made it anyway.

Mr. Wenner. Do you think that the cultural——

The President. ——Southern Baptist, because the dominant culture of the Republican Party—President Reagan put a nicer image on it. But the dominant culture were basically white southern Protestant men who led the surge of the new Republican Party, first under President Nixon and the silent majority and, you know, blue-collar people, and then it came to an apotheosis under President Reagan.

So I think that, you know, they didn't like losing the White House, and they didn't like me, and they didn't like what they thought I represented. And that all happened at the time you had this huge growth in conservative talk shows and these—you know, sort of associated think tanks and groups and networks that grew up in Washington from the time of Nixon through the time of Bush.

And I think they had sort of a permanent alternative Government set up by that time. And they went to war the first day of my Presidency.

Mr. Wenner. Because you were the most threatening politically, and they despised what you represented culturally, age-wise and——

The President. ——think they honestly disagreed with me on a lot of the issues as well, but a lot of it was, they were mad they weren't in, which is one of the reasons they're working so hard now. And one of the big challenges that we face in the closing days of this election is to motivate the people that agree with us to the level that they're motivated. Just because they've been out a long time, they want back in really badly.

Early Democratic Policy Differences

Mr. Wenner. Were you surprised about the difficulties you had in your own party with Sam Nunn on the gays thing and Moynihan on health care and Kerrey on the economic plan?

The President. Not particularly, because—I'll come back to the gays in the military.

Mr. Wenner. Don't, because we've run through that. But just insofar as Nunn?

The President. No. And the answer to that is, no, because a lot of the Democrats who were culturally conservative and pro-military thought that gays in the military coming up so early was inconsistent with the whole new Democratic approach we were taking. Plus which, they thought I was wrong. But as I explained to you, I think when we talked last, I didn't bring it up first. Bob Dole did.

Now, on the other issues, the fundamental problems there was that there were no easy answers. I mean, Bob Kerrey comes from Nebraska. He and Jim Exon were Democrats, but Nebraska is one of the most Republican States in the country, and I think, you know, he thought we should have maybe cut spending a little more or raised taxes a little less, or cut taxes a little less on lower income working people so we wouldn't have to raise it as much, you know. And I think—and we'd been through that tough Presidential campaign.

Mr. Wenner. These guys were like, you know, the party elders.

The President. Well, Moynihan believed——

Mr. Wenner. Generally, they should like say, "Well, he's our new President." That's——

The President. But I didn't take offense to that. Moynihan believed, first of all, with some justification, that he knew more about most areas of social policy than anybody else did. I think he thought we were making a political mistake not to do welfare reform first, which turned out to be right. We did make a political mistake not to do welfare reform first.

And secondly, I think he felt that the system in Washington could not absorb in a 2-year period the economic plan which he strongly supported. He was terrific. The NAFTA trade agreement, which he strongly supported, which was controversial within our party, and then this major health care thing. He really didn't believe and he's told me that, you know, he said, you know, "We just don't have time to do these." He said, "The system cannot absorb this much change in this short a time."

And you know, that was a mistake I made. Hillary gets a bum rap for that. That was basically my fault, because I knew that basically there's only two ways to get to universal coverage. You either have to have a taxpayer subsidy, which is what we've done now with the Children's Health Insurance Program, because now we've got the number of uninsured people going down in America for the first time in a dozen years, primarily because in the Balanced Budget Act, we insisted—the Democrats did—on getting the Children's Health Insurance Program, which is the biggest expansion of Government-financed health care since Medicaid. You either have to do it that way or you have to have an employer mandate where the employers have to provide the health insurance, and then you exempt smaller businesses and subsidize that somewhat.

Mr. Wenner. You——

The President. I didn't take offense at it. You know, they thought I was being bullheaded, and I think, in retrospect, they were probably right.

Newt Gingrich

Mr. Wenner. What was your relationship with Newt like?

The President. I had an unusual relationship with him. First of all——

Mr. Wenner. Was it——

The President. It depended on which Newt showed up. But I thought the good Newt, I found engaging, intelligent, and that we were surprisingly in agreement in the way we viewed the world.

Mr. Wenner. ——similar——

The President. Partly. But you know, Newt supported me in virtually all of my foreign policy initiatives. And after he got his Congress, he realized that a hundred of them had never had a passport.

I remember him calling me once, wanting me to get them to go on foreign missions. He said, "If you ask them, then they can't be attacked back home for boondoggle trips." So we actually had a very cordial relationship.

He was also very candid with me about his political objectives. And he, in turn, from time to time, would get in trouble with the rightwing of his own caucus because they said I could talk him into too much. We had a pretty good relationship.

You know, on the other hand, as I told you, when he did things like blaming every bad thing that happened in America on Democrats in the 1960's and all that, I thought it was highly destructive.

Mr. Wenner. How did he make you feel, personally?

The President. At some point, probably around 1996, I got to the point where I no longer had personal feelings about those

things. But you know, things like the Whitewater investigation and the Travel Office investigation—he was smart. He knew there was nothing in that stuff. It was all politics to him. It was about power.

But he really did believe that the object of politics was to destroy your opponent. And you know, he ran Jim Wright out of the Congress on account of that. That's what he thought he was doing. And he had an enormous amount of success in the beginning, and he won the Congress basically by having that take-no-prisoners, be-against-everything approach.

Mr. Wenner. Didn't he tell you once on the phone that he was planning to lead a revolution against you?

The President. Well, he thought he was leading a revolution, and I was in the way. And I think he really believed, after '94——

Mr. Wenner. What did you think when he says this to you? "I'm out there to destroy—I'm going to take you on. You're through."

The President. I thought he was a worthy adversary, and I thought I would defeat him, because I thought the American people would stick with me. But I thought he was a very worthy adversary.

I think he thought that he could create, for the rest of my Presidency, a sort of an almost a parliamentary system where he would be the prime minister and make the policy, and I'd be in charge of foreign policy, and he'd help me.

Mr. Wenner. I mean, historically, the Newt versus Bill, I was just trying to think back, there hasn't been as powerful—I mean, powerful and as antagonistic a Speaker to the President, not in modern times. You had an actual enemy. You had somebody actually out there daily fighting you, not a—not a Lyndon, not a McCormack. Everybody went with Reagan and gave him what he wanted.

The President. That's what they decided to do. And you know, now I have a Speaker in Hastert I can really work with. We've got a lot done. But he still has—the dominant power in the caucus is Tom DeLay and Dick Armey. And if they had their druthers, you know, they'd still follow that approach. But the balance of authority is so—power is so close in the House that more often than not, we work things out.

But in the Senate, you've got the same thing with Lott. You know, Lott I have a very cordial personal relationship with. I have a lot in common with Lott in terms of our background and childhood and, you know, that whole thing. His daddy was a laboring person. He could have well been a Democrat.

Mr. Wenner. How did you develop your strategy in sort of dealing with Newt and outflanking him? Just wait him out? Give him enough rope?

The President. Well, that's part of it. You know, I felt after they won that when the people actually saw the fine print on their contract, they would think that there was a contract on America instead of a contract with America. And then I felt that I had to oppose them when I thought they were wrong. But I couldn't let them push me back into the old confrontation where they could say, "Clinton's an old Democrat. He's defending everything, even the indefensible, so you may think we're going too far, but America has to change," because this is a country in constant change. So that was—for example, instead of just fighting them on the budget, I offered my own balanced budget.

Mr. Wenner. I mean, everybody—I think Democrats really wanted to attack him back as quickly as possible, and you took a much more conciliatory——

The President. That's because I felt they had to have a chance to run their—and then when we got to the Government shutdown, I wasn't just against what they were doing; I had an alternative. See, I believe—and I think it's more important, I think it's easier for Republicans to be against everything than Democrats because people view us as the party of affirmative Government. And since I believed in balancing the budget, I just didn't want to do it the way they wanted to.

Mr. Wenner. What's your bottom line on Newt, historically? I mean, what's your—if you were an historian, what would you say about Gingrich?

The President. That he was immensely successful in, first of all, consolidating the power of the Republican Party and its right

wing and then in winning the Congress, winning the historic struggle for Congress in '94 by opposing me right down the line. And in '94, the people—the economy was getting better, but people didn't feel it yet. The budget we passed did not impose great tax burdens on ordinary Americans, but they didn't know it yet. And the crime bill we passed was going to help bring the crime rate down without interfering with people's gun rights, but they didn't know it yet.

So you had the best of all times to run through a gaping hole. And then I had made the mistake of trying to do both, trying to do the economic plan and NAFTA, which dispirited some of our base supporters. And then I tried to do health care under circumstances that were literally impossible. You could not get a universal coverage plan passed through Congress.

So I made a lot of errors, and he ran through them, and he therefore changed the Congress. Then I think people will say that we had one of these historic battles that periodically happens in America about the role of the National Government and, indeed, what the meaning of the Nation is.

And I think he thought he could actually carry out the revolution that President Reagan talked about, you know, drastically shrinking the Federal Government, drastically limiting its ability to act in the social sphere and moving it to the right.

And to me, we had a series of battles that were really the latest incarnation of this age-old battle of what does it mean to be an American, what is the idea of America, what is the purpose of a nation? And there was a Government shutdown. There was an impeachment. There was my veto of the Newt tax bill after Newt was gone. All these were ongoing battles.

The battle over—the same thing is now happening, shaping up over the courts. The most important issue in this election may well be what happens to the courts. Because there is now already—we are one vote away from having enough votes that would repeal *Roe* v.*Wade.*

But there is this other issue in the courts which I think is quite profound, which is, there are five votes right now to restrict the ability of Congress to require the States to participate in protecting the American people in a lot of fundamental ways. So I think this is an ongoing battle.

But it's the same battle that we had between George Washington and John Adams and Alexander Hamilton and John Marshall on the one side and Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Payne, and a lot of other people on the other in the beginning; the same battle Abraham Lincoln had around the time of the Civil War. Could the States secede? Did the Federal Government have the power to enslave them? The same battle we had at the dawn of the industrial revolution when Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson asserted the authority of the Nation to proscribe basic conditions in the workplace and protection. And it was the same battle that Franklin Roosevelt fought. That was the fourth time it was fought. Now we're in the fifth battle over how to define America. And in the first three skirmishes, we won. But I see that as a big issue in this election, a huge issue.

Impeachment

Mr. Wenner. Let's talk about impeachment a little. You're going to—in the history books, it's going to say, of course, that you were the second President ever to be impeached. How does that make you feel? Do you feel that that will cloud your real accomplishments?

The President. Well, that's for the historians to determine. The history books will also record, I think, that both impeachments were wrong, and that's when they failed. And I'm just grateful that, unlike Andrew Johnson, I was less embittered by it and I had more support from the public and in the Congress, so I was able to resume my duties and actually get a lot done for the American people in the aftermath.

Mr. Wenner. Was there ever a point where you wanted to give up or it just became too hard?

The President. Never.

Mr. Wenner. Did you ever get so angry during it that you think it clouded your judgment?

The President. I got angry, but I always was alone or with friends who would deflate

me, so I don't think it ever clouded my judgment on any official thing I took.

You know, I realized that when it was all over, I would have the responsibility to work with the Republicans, as well as the Democrats. One of the things I had to learn—as I said, it took me almost my whole first term to learn it—is that at some point Presidents are not permitted to have personal feelings. When you manifest your anger in public, it should be on behalf of the American people and the values that they believe and the things they do.

You just can't—a lot of this stuff you can't take personally—and especially when I realized that for the people that were directing it, it was just politics. You know, it was about power and politics. So I was largely able to purge myself of it. And I had very strong personal feelings about it, but I tried never to talk about it. I tried to get up every day and just do my job and let others defend me publicly and go on with the work of the country, because——

Mr. Wenner. ——in private?

The President. Yes, because Presidents will always be under siege in some way or another. And if you don't want the job and the attendant heat, you shouldn't ask for it.

Mr. Wenner. Does it make you uncomfortable to talk about this episode now?

The President. I just think the less I say about it right now, the better. I think the more time passes, the more people will see what happens, and the more it will come out. There have been some pretty good books written about it.

Mr. Wenner. What do you think of Ken Starr now?

The President. I think he did what he was hired to do.

Mr. Wenner. You told me you never really met him and had no ill feelings.

The President. I met him. You know, I met him once when he interviewed me. He was hired to keep the impeachment thing—I mean, to keep the inquiry going past the '96 election and to do whatever damage he could. That's why he was put in, and he did what they asked him to do.

Mr. Wenner. What's your take on Henry Hyde, who was supposedly "Mr. Reasonable," and then he seemed to defy the will of the people after the '98 elections, where he kind of got repudiated?

The President. Well, he did what he was hired to do, too. I mean, the rightwing was in control of the Congress, and they thought they had paid in '98, and they thought they would never have to pay again. They thought it was a free shot to put a hit on me, and so they did. I don't think it's complicated.

Mr. Wenner. Once the elections were done, I remember seeing you a week before, and clearly Democrats were going to take the House in a way they had never taken it before in an off election. And it was a referendum on this issue, and then they went ahead—him and the Republican leadership went ahead despite that. What does that tell you about them?

The President. That they wanted to—they stayed with their rightwing, and they thought they would pay no price in 2000 because they thought, whatever happened, it would all be over by now. And they thought they could put a black mark on me in history, and that was really important to them. They were really angry. They got beat. They were just angry, and they thought they had paid once, and they wouldn't have to pay this time because the American people would move on to other things as they always do. And so they did it.

Mr. Wenner. It's not an issue now in this election, really.

The President. It is in three or four House seats, but not many.

Mr. Wenner. It's an issue to me.

The President. But it shouldn't be. I've tried—the only way it should be an issue in the election is that it indicates how important it is, if they should maintain their majority, they have somebody in the White House that can restrain them. Because it's just an example of other things they were doing to the environmental laws of the country, to the education laws, to the health care system. That's the only way it should be an issue. It's over. The American people shouldn't be expected to dwell on it. They shouldn't have to deal with it.

Mr. Wenner. Who do you think really came through for you and got up and defended you?

The President. Oh, tons of people. The House judiciary committee Democrats were really good. There were 800 people, including a lot of Republicans who didn't even like me, who filed testimony talking about how inappropriate it was. Then there was that bipartisan panel of career prosecutors who said that no one would bring any criminal charges on this. So a lot of people who—came forward who had no particular reason to do it but who cared about their country and were offended by what was going on.

Mr. Wenner. Do you think in some way this is sort of a referendum on sort of the nature of morality or the character of America in some way?

The President. Not really. No, I think people strongly disagree with what I did. I did, too. I think the—I don't think the—I think that they just were able to discriminate between a bad personal mistake and the justification for a Constitutional crisis. I think—I don't think that it—I think it said more about their ability to discriminate between two different kinds of problems than any changed moral standards.

Mr. Wenner. In the sixties we always talked—still they talk about karma, you know, your karma? Did you ever look at it in terms of what's in my karma that I got this shit-hammer dropped on me?

The President. No. Like I said—no, I don't. If I hadn't made a personal mistake, they wouldn't have the pretext to do what they did, even though what they did was wrong. So no, I don't.

Mr. Wenner. Do you think it benefited us, that process, that we learned from all that, from the impeachment process?

The President. Well, the one thing it did was it pointed out all the other excesses. You know that there was a bogus Whitewater investigation. It was totally bogus and wasted money and——

Mr. Wenner. What was that?

The President. The Whitewater investigation. That civil lawsuit against me was bogus. Even the judge who was famous for disliking me personally threw it out as having no merit. So I think that what it did was, at least for the time being, it took a lot of the venom out of our public life. You know, even as hard as George Bush and Al Gore are hitting each other now in this election, they are by and large hitting at each other over the issues. I mean, Bush has got some ad up now questioning Gore's integrity, which is amazing that Bush would question Gore's integrity, but anyway. But he knows that there's a certain number of voters who vote for Republicans because they're convinced that they're morally superior to Democrats, not withstanding the fact that we're awash in evidence now that they're not. And so he's doing that, but there has been very little of that, even from him. They're basically—the level of venom is lower than it was. And maybe I absorbed enough for several years.

And if so, then that alone might make it worth doing. Because I think it's just crazy for America with all these fabulous opportunities and some pretty stiff challenges out there to waste our elections and our public officials' time with things that we know are bogus or trivial and cost the taxpayers a fortune, for no other purpose than for one side to pursue political advantage over another. There will always be some of that, but my instinct is that in the next 4 years, we'll have a lot less of it.

Relations With the Media

Mr. Wenner. The press—as President, you have a relationship with the press that is unique to anybody in the world. You, as an individual, there's certainly more scrutiny or criticism or attention, more everything. What's your take on the press in America?

The President. Well, I think that, first of all, it's very difficult to generalize. I think that on the balance, it's a great advantage for the President to have a bully pulpit that can reach everyone in America and everyone in the world instantaneously. And any criticisms that a President has about negative press or incessant carping or whatever—you've got to temper that with the fact that they make it possible for you to do your job in a communications age.

And they work—especially the working press, I have an enormous amount of respect for them. I mean these people that are on this airplane, because I've worked hard and I keep long hours, it's a hard job for them, because they have to—they go around in the vans, not in Air Force One or the helicopters.

They have a lot of hard work to do, and I think by and large, most of them do it as well as they can and as honestly as they can. I have an enormous amount of respect for them.

Now, there's another part of the press that are kind of part of almost a celebrity political press that are—that go all the way from the columnists to the people that are on all these talk shows all the time. And they have—in order for them to be successful, their comments have to have edge. They tend to be more negative and more dogmatic in their attempts to be—and sometimes there is more heat than light in a lot of what's said in a lot of those forums—formats. But that's part of the new age we're living in.

And also they're sort of on the cutting edge between the serious press, the tabloid press, and pure political advocacy and entertainment. You've got all these segments now that are kind of blurred together, compounded by a 24-hour news cycle, and the fact that there are umpty-dump channels people can watch, some of which are news channels that know they have to go after narrowly segmented markets, and they're targeting certain audiences.

So it's a very different press environment, and if you took it all seriously, it would run you nuts. But you can't—once you realize kind of what the environment is, you just learn to deal with it. I think the important thing is to—for Presidents, especially—to try to hear the criticism, because it's not always wrong. Sometimes it's right. I find it easier, really, when it comes from thoughtful columnists who are really trying to make a serious contribution to the national debate. Even in some other forums it's important.

Mr. Wenner. Which columnists or reporters do you think have been particularly good or particularly smart in their coverage of you in the last 8 years?

The President. Well, I think just in terms of columnists, I think Tom Friedman is the best foreign policy writer we have today, by a long stretch. I think he understands the world we're living in and the one toward which we're moving. Therefore, whether he's criticizing me or analyzing an issue or whatever he's doing, he's trying to do it from a completely honest point of view of trying to say, here's where the world is; here's where we're going.

I think Ron Brownstein is one of the best political columnists in America today, one of the two or three best. He's truly extraordinary. And you know, he understands this whole New Democrat movement that I have been a part of. He understood the ideas that underlay the '92 campaign and the whole Democratic Leadership Council effort. Everything we're trying to do. And he made it his business to study that. I think he's very good.

I think E.J. Dionne is good. I regret that his other responsibilities at the Post don't give him time to write more columns, because I think he's very good.

Mr. Wenner. [*Inaudible*]—towards the Times for their role in Whitewater?

The President. No, I think that—it was sort of like this Wen Ho Lee deal in a way. I mean, the same guy got a story and it was kind of overwritten and dire things were predicted. But I think whatever I feel about that, it has to be tempered by the fact that the Times has a serious conscience when it comes to the national issues. I don't think the—I think they had a—they really have tried consistently to think—on the public issues, I think they really have done an excellent job of analysis and are trying to come out in the right place in the right way. So whatever I feel about that is tempered by that.

Mr. Wenner. Do you think institutionally it's working right, the press as a whole, the major newspapers, the networks, and so forth?

The President. I think they're doing the best they can in a very new and different environment. I have a lot of sympathy with them.

Mr. Wenner. So you don't have resentment towards them? Like, a lot of Presidents just hated—once done, they just hated them.

The President. No. Absolutely not. You know, how can Presidents hate the press? I mean, they give you—you can gripe all you want about all the negative coverage you get on the evening news or on these talk shows or being blasted in the newspaper or having to get on something where they're dead wrong—like on Whitewater, whatever it is—

dead wrong, but still, every day they're right in all kinds of other things about all the things that affect the American people and their lives. And anytime you want a microphone to have your say, you've got it. So I think to be obsessively negative is a mistake.

The White House

Mr. Wenner. What creature comforts are you going to miss the most about leaving the White House, not living there?

The President. The movie theater, the swimming pool, Camp David. Everybody says I'll miss Air Force One the most once I have to return to commercial travel. But what I will miss the most is not the creature comforts; it's the honor of living in the White House, which I have loved. I've loved living there, because I love my country; I love the history of my country. I know—I was a pretty good American historian before I got there, and I know a lot more than I did then, and I've read a lot about Presidents that most people don't know much about, including me before I got there.

And even more than that, I'll miss the work. It's the job I'll miss the most. I love the work. I actually have loved doing this job.

Mr. Wenner. Do you just get off every single day when you get up, just—I am so lucky?

The President. Even the worst day. Even in the worst times—the whole impeachment thing—I just thank God every day I can go to work. I love the job. I've always loved it.

Mr. Wenner. Looking at the other side of the coin, what—is there anything that seems attractive to you about not living there anymore?

The President. Well, I look forward to kind of having—being a citizen again. It will be the first time in 20 years—you know, I've been—I was Governor for 12 years, and 10 years, the last 10 years in a row—so it will be the first time in 18 years that I've really had a private home that was my primary residence, and where I'll get up every day, feeling a responsibility to be of public service, but knowing that I'm basically in control of my life again. And it will be an interesting challenge for me. Eighteen years is a long time to be a chief executive, living in public housing, with every day scripted out—you know, hours and hours a day, particularly if you work like I do.

It's a challenge, and I'm going to be interested to see whether I can meet it and what it means, you know, to go into this next chapter of my life. I'm actually excited about it.

Advice for the Next President

Mr. Wenner. What's the one thing about being—what's the one thing that would surprise either Bush or Gore about being President that they just can't know now? What was the greatest surprise to you? What advice would you give the next President?

The President. I think they will be surprised how many different things happen at once. Now, Al won't be as surprised by that, because he's been there 8 years. It's another good argument for voting for him, because he's experienced and he makes good decisions. He'll be a very good President if he wins. He'll be quite good. He makes good decisions, and he's had experience. And the environment, I think, will be less hostile for either one of them than it was for me, and they will have more of an opportunity to craft cooperative solutions, because almost under any conceivable scenario, the Congress will be even more closely divided than it is now.

You know, the Democrats are going to pick up some seats in the Senate. They might even be in control. But if they are, they will just have a one-seat majority here, too, and I think the Democrats will win the House. But if they do, they won't have any bigger majority than the Republicans do now, maybe a little more, but not much. So you will have a very closely divided Government which will require them to all work together.

So I think they may have a less hostile environment than I did, and I hope they do, but I think they'll still be surprised at how many different things they'll have crash in on them at once.

Mr. Wenner. What would you tell them to do? You say, look, here's what you've got to do as the next President. Here's what I would like you to do.

The President. Well, first of all, I think after the election, they ought to get more rest than I did. You know, I didn't really take a vacation. I think they ought to clear their heads. I would advise them to work as hard

as they can to get a good Cabinet and a good staff, and then really emphasize teamwork, and when you come to the tough decisions, do what you think is right.

A lot of these decisions, you know, that were unpopular that I made—Bosnia, Haiti, debt relief in Mexico, taking on the NRA, doing the debt thing—reducing the deficit, I mean, right now, it's like smooth sailing. But it's just not in the nature of human existence to be free of difficulty. And I think when you come down to those tough decisions, you just have to do what you think is right, tell the American people why you did it, and hope they'll go along with you.

2000 Presidential Election

Mr. Wenner. So this comes out after the election. So do you want to—give me a prediction.

The President. I've always believed Gore will win, and I still do. And I think if he doesn't, the only reason that I think that he might not win is if they vote—a higher percentage of the people that want Bush to be President vote than the percentage of people that want Gore to be President. But I believe if we get an even turnout, I think in the closing days of this election, people will begin to think about whether they really want to risk this prosperity by adopting an economic plan that has a huge tax cut, a huge Social Security privatization program, and a bunch of spending that will put us back into deficit.

I think that people have to think about whether they want to risk having nobody to restrain a Republican Congress if they should stay in the majority, and I think they will think about what will happen to the courts.

And so I think that those things will be enough to put Al Gore over, and I think he'll be elected.

Mr. Wenner. What do you think the margin is going to be—the popular vote?

The President. I have no idea. I think it will be—it will definitely be close in the popular vote. Whether it's close in the electoral vote depends on what happens—there's a dozen States it could go either way. So either one of—there could be a sizable electoral victory; it could be——

Mr. Wenner. Predict Florida for me. Predict Missouri, Pennsylvania, Michigan.

The President. I think Gore will win Florida, Pennsylvania, and Michigan. I've always thought Gore would win Florida. We've worked like crazy there for 8 years, and we've done a lot for Florida and a lot with Florida, and Joe Lieberman has helped a lot in Florida. So I think Gore will win Florida. I think he will win Pennsylvania. I think he will win Michigan, and I think he will win Missouri if Mrs. Carnahan is the choice of the Missouri people for Senator.

Mr. Wenner. And Washington State?

The President. I think we'll win in Washington.

Mr. Wenner. I don't want to take any of your money on that. Did you see the cover on Al that—the Rolling Stone that's gotten so much talk?

The President. Yes.

Mr. Wenner. It took hours to do that interview. I just used—eat up hours of his time. I appreciate your time very much.

The President. Thanks.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 2:45 p.m. aboard Air Force One en route to Los Angeles, CA, and the transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 7. In his remarks, the President referred to actor Charlton Heston, president, National Rifle Association; ABC News anchor Peter Jennings; former President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro); former President Nelson Mandela of South Africa; Republican Presidential candidate Gov. George W. Bush; former Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr; Thomas L. Friedman, columnists, New York Times; Ron Brownstein, columnist, Los Angeles Times; E.J. Dionne, columnist, Washington Post; former Los Alamos National Laboratory scientist Wen Ho Lee; and Jean Carnahan, widow of the late Gov. Mel Carnahan of Missouri. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Remarks Announcing the Establishment of the Federal Aviation Administration's Air Traffic Organization

December 7, 2000

Well, Keith, thank you for telling everybody why I'm trying so hard to get something done about this. [*Laughter*] Thank you very