

Interview With Pat Robertson of the Christian Broadcasting Network

September 19, 1985

Administration Accomplishments

Mr. Robertson. The 40th President of the United States. When historians write about the Reagan administration, what do you want them to say?

The President. You know, I've been asked that, and I guess I have to say, I've never thought that far ahead. I'm so busy thinking about what we want to accomplish. I guess maybe just that I helped perpetuate this great American dream.

Administration Goals

Mr. Robertson. What do you hope for in the next 3 years?

The President. There are so many things. I would like to get us definitely on the pattern of reducing the deficit so that the balanced budget is in view. I would like to have, then, going into effect at that time a balanced budget amendment so we could never again go a half a century, as we have, of regularly deficit spending each year. And I would like to see us also have some plan for beginning installments to start reducing the national debt, as we have done many times in the past. There are a number of things that I would like to see -- resolve the problem of prayer in schools and have us on the road, a good solid road that could make us optimistic about the chances for peace.

Budget Deficit and Tax Reform

Mr. Robertson. On the budget deficit, it seems as if members of your own party are not totally in accord with you. The Congress hasn't supported you. Are you optimistic? David Stockman said maybe this is the last chance, but you're optimistic about the future?

The President. Yes, I am. There's no way that anyone could ever balance the budget in 1 year. This budget, over the years, has been structurally built into our budgeting process. And the difficulty, of course, is getting agreement not on the need to reduce it -- everyone seems to agree on that -- but then trying to get them to agree on, well, where do you apply the tourniquet and shut off that hemorrhage of funds. But I think that we're on the beginning of a track where we can see a progression of reducing the deficit as a percentage of gross national product.

You know, if you just count the deficit in dollars -- and it looks so horrifying -- and you say, "How did this ever happen?" Well, if you look at it back over these 50 years of deficit spending on the basis of what it is as a percentage of gross national product, that, too, has been growing bigger. So, it isn't as far out of line with past deficits; some of them were just about as big as this one is in that percentage. But if we can get on a percentage to where, for these next 3 years -- what we have in mind is if we can get it next year down to 4 percent of the gross national product, 3 percent the following year, 2 percent the next year, we think that that progression will point us to, by 1990, a balanced budget and then you could have go into effect the balanced budget amendment.

Mr. Robertson. I spoke to an influential Republican Senator on Sunday who felt that, possibly, the tax reform measure might be diverting attention away from deficit reduction. Do you see that as a complement to it or possibly a stimulant for it?

The President. Actually, a stimulant for it in a way, because if you look back, not just in our administration and what we did in 1981 when we implemented -- or began implementing our tax cuts, but go back to President Kennedy's across-the-board tax cut, before that to President Coolidge and the tax cuts that he implemented -- in every instance the economic growth has resulted in the Government getting more revenues at the lower rates than it was getting at the higher rates. So, I think this tax reform very definitely would help. It isn't aimed at being a part of that, but it would help in that it would stimulate economic growth and I think would actually, thus, result in increased revenues.

Mr. Robertson. This has been spoken of as a profamily tax measure. How will that help the families in your estimate?

The President. Well, let's start right off with someone down there at the lower end of the earning scale. One of the features of this is that the personal exemption is increased to \$4,000 and then the deduction for dependents is almost doubled to \$2,000 apiece instead of the present 1,040. So, you take a family of four, you've got \$8,000 of nontaxable income to begin with right there. And that plus the reduced rates -- we believe that -- and first of all, so many of our people can't and don't take advantage of many of the loopholes that others have been able to use to reduce their fair share of the tax burden. So, it is very definitely aimed at families and that was sort of proven the other day when the Democratic majority in the House of Representatives -- so, I'm not just citing a Republican measure -- in the Committee on Children, Youth, and Family have made a study of this tax proposal plus all the others that are before the Congress and said flatly this one is the most profamily of all of the tax proposals.

Mr. Robertson. Is the \$2,000 personal exemption, dependent's exemption, is that a non-negotiable feature? Would you veto a bill if it didn't have that in it?

The President. I think it just has to have it, and let me give you my thinking on that. Some years ago, as you know, that deduction was \$600 and then inflation took hold and has kept coming on. And finally, someone got around to increasing the 600 to 1,040. But right now, actually, if we had kept up with inflation, the deduction should be \$2,700. Now, we couldn't remain revenue neutral and go that high, but going to \$2,000 is eminently justified simply on the matter of -- that actually, in purchasing power, that's smaller than the \$600 was back in 1948.

Mr. Robertson. There's no lobby for it, though; among the people, the vast numbers will help. So would you, in a sense, be their champion and go the mount on that issue?

The President. Yes, and I have to say, though, that I haven't heard here, from Democrats or Republicans, any objection to those figures. There have been some of the loopholes or deductions, other areas that people have thought should be retained, and there's been argument about that. But I haven't heard anyone raise a complaint about these personal exemptions.

Administration Accomplishments

Mr. Robertson. One oblique question. I read that the reason that you and Franklin Roosevelt were so tremendously popular is because you gave the American people hope. Looking down the road, what cause do you have for hope?

The President. Well, I'm an eternal optimist, I know; but I can't help but have hope. Just a few years ago, we were seeing our streets torn up with rioting and demonstrations of various kinds, but we also

were seeing a lack of hope. We were hearing talk that we were no longer a nation of growth and so forth; that we must begin to limit ourselves in our expectations, and our government itself was telling that to the people. And here, today, in these few short years, double-digit inflation is down to less than 4 percent and still on its way down; interest rates, the prime rate had reached 21\1/2\ percent, and it is down to far less than a half of that now, and still, I believe, they're going down. In the last 33 months, we have created more than 8 million new jobs. And today -- you know what is referred to as the employment pool is everyone in the United States -- male and female between the age of 16 and 65 are known as the potential labor pool -- that if all of them sought work -- they're all employable. The highest percentage of that labor pool is employed now than has ever been employed before in our history. And the growth in the recovery has been the greatest that we've known in any recovery from any previous recession or depression.

But even more than that, there is something out there -- you get out on the road and talk to the people. There is a spirit. Our young people, who once were, as you know, totally disillusioned with government and so forth over the Vietnam war -- the resurgence of patriotism among them. And now with our volunteer military -- no longer having to have a draft -- I don't know of anything I am more proud of than our young men and women in uniform and their spirit.

Nancy Reagan

Mr. Robertson. I ask you a question for the women viewers in our audience. You've just gone through a very critical medical problem, and we know how close you and your wife Nancy are. It is almost a fabled love affair -- better than Hollywood could do it. What was her reaction? How did she handle this crisis?

The President. Well, she is very courageous, and once upon a time when she was younger she was one of those -- what did they call them -- those nurses aides that -- during war time and all. So, that part, she was on the job. But she also is a very great worrier, and let me put it this way: I've recovered quicker than she did.

Mr. Robertson. It was a terrible crisis. This is the second one. Some of your very close friends from California have gone back into private enterprise or gone back home. Are you turning more to your wife for counsel? She's a very wise lady.

The President. Oh, listen, we have always talked over everything together. I couldn't imagine it being otherwise. But as to the people leaving the administration, I've expected that. I had 8 years experience in California. And I made it plain from the beginning that these people -- I would take them even if it was only for a year or 2 years and then find someone else if and when they had to return to their own careers. And I think it should be that way if you're going to get -- well, I always put it this way. I wanted people in government that really didn't want a job in government, but that were willing to come and serve rather than those that were seeking government jobs. And the result is, you know that they will have to go back to their own careers sooner or later.

But, no, Nancy and I -- we don't have any secrets from each other.

American Hostages in Lebanon

Mr. Robertson. We were very heartened to learn that Reverend Weir had been released from Lebanon, and word reached us that a member of the White House staff was dispatched on Sunday, I believe, to Iran to seek the release of the remaining six -- and actually it was seven at that time. Is there any word on that that might give hope to us?

Source: University of Texas

The President. Well, I can't really talk about what we are doing, because I don't want to do anything that will endanger the prospects of the others being freed. I can only say that we have explored every avenue. We've been working for this for all the time since the first one, Mr. Buckley, was kidnaped. And I know that some of the families have grown impatient, because if they don't see things in the paper, they don't think we're doing anything. But going public and being in the paper is not the way to get a Reverend Weir back or any of the others.

Mr. Robertson. Could we say cautiously optimistic, or is there anything that we can say to characterize it?

The President. I have to remain cautiously optimistic. And we are continuing the efforts that -- and we've explored and been trying in every avenue that is open to us. But, again, it's something I can't talk about because, as I say, there is a risk in all of this for them.

Soviet Propoganda

Mr. Robertson. You're getting ready for the summit. Is the American press -- and a free press is so important in our nation -- but is it from time to time being manipulated by the Soviet Union to sort of stack the deck against you in this summit meeting?

The President. Well, I did begin to feel there for a while that when the summit started they'd be rooting for the other side; that he was wearing the white hat, and I was wearing the black hat. You know, that's an old Hollywood expression, that you identify the villain as -- --

Mr. Robertson. I know.

The President. -- -- by the color of the hat. I think what should be better understood by our people -- and this isn't any criticism of our press -- the Soviet Union has a worldwide disinformation network, and it's very effective. And they can get many things published and broadcast and so forth to suit their ends and in their drives, for example, to try to create some friction among us and our allies. And I don't think we have anything comparable to that.

Free and Fair Trade

Mr. Robertson. One last question. I see that our time has run out. If the Congress gives you a trade protectionist bill having either a tariff or a surcharge or some other name, will you veto it?

The President. I'll have to. That's one of the advantages of being my age. I was looking for work in the Great Depression, and I know what the Smoot-Hawley bill did, the world trade war that it created. There is no way that that can win -- protectionism for, say, a particular industry -- no one ever looks over their shoulder to see how many people in other industries lost their jobs -- because it's a two-way street, and retaliation sets in. We are still the greatest exporter in the world. And even though there is a great trade imbalance right now, that we're importing far more than we're exporting, that is not because we have reduced our exports, as big as they ever were. We have increased our imports because of the value of our dollar and the fact that our trading partners have not had the economic recovery we've had, so their prices are low. And you can't blame people for picking up a bargain.

Mr. Robertson. What they need is a dose of Reaganomics in Europe, is that what you say?

The President. Exactly. As a matter of fact, they themselves admit that in their systems there are so many rigidities in labor laws and everything else that have been built in that they have not had the recovery. Indeed, when I was at the recent economic summit, the last summit in May, they called to

my face, they called what we have is the miracle of America. So, we've tried to pass on to them information that we think would help them have some miracles.

Mr. Robertson. Mr. President, thank you so much. This has been wonderful.

The President. Well -- --

Mr. Robertson. God bless you.

The President. Well, thank you very much, and, in saying that, let me tell you, when you asked about the future and why I was optimistic and all, I am convinced this is a nation under God and as long as we recognize that, believe that, I think he'll help us.

Mr. Robertson. There's no question about it. That's the greatest cause for optimism I know of. Thank you very much, sir.

The President. Thank you.

Note: The interview began at 4:44 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House.

University of Texas: Ronald Reagan Presidential Library

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/91985c.htm>