

# Interview With Southeast Regional Editors on Foreign and Domestic Issues

## March 12, 1984

Presidential Campaign

Q. Do you want to venture a guess on who's going to come out on top tomorrow -- Democratic field?

The President. No. I'll let them have that all to themselves and decide.

Q. Want to tell us who you would prefer to face in November?

The President. No, no -- I'll offer no help in who they might want to select.

Q. Would you tell us if you've been at all surprised by Gary Hart's surge in the primaries so far?

The President. Well, maybe might not have picked that, and yet I think I can understand -- a kind of a new face. But I still think that it's too early to really be naming any frontrunners or anything in that race. Having gone through a series of primaries, there's a long way to go.

Q. Mr. President, a lot of us pundits have been predicting that this race would turn into a generational conflict. I recall you in the past talking about how -- finally how America needs to return to the stature and to the values of its past. Will you be adjusting that strategy if you are facing an opponent who talks about, compares himself -- backing the future, as opposed to the policies of the past?

The President. No, I have always felt and based any campaigning or anything that I do on what we do, not what the other fellow says he's going to do -- what we do and what we plan to do. And that's the way I would campaign. I don't see any need for any generational struggle in here, but if there is, maybe we can settle it with an arm wrestle. [Laughter]

Q. Is it true what Gary Hart says, that you and Walter Mondale represent the policies of the past?

The President. No. As a matter of fact -- it might be in the past in that, to the extent that some of the things were principles that this country was based on -- but I think that what we've done has been a departure, certainly from the past 40-odd years of Democratic domination in the country in which they have held both Houses of the Congress.

Federal Budget Deficits

Q. Mr. President, can you give us some idea about what you would do in the next term to control the deficits? Are we talking -- would you -- are you considering possibly another increase, or an increase in taxes by changing the system, say, or would you make any further cuts in entitlement programs?

The President. We are looking at -- and have been -- and this is nothing new -- --

Q. Right.

The President. -- -- what we think are so-called loopholes that offer not quite fair benefits to some and not to all. We have also discussed and I've asked the Treasury Department to look into something that can't happen in this coming year, it's going to take more study than this, and that is a simplification of our tax structure. We need to look at ways to get the billions and billions of dollars that are not being paid in taxes -- owed by people legitimately and not by way of loopholes; in this instance, just outright violations of the tax code. To that extent, yes, we're going to do that. But for the future, we have to bring down the percentage of the gross national product that government is taking in this country.

See, I have a degree in economics myself. Now, that doesn't make me an authority, because I don't think economists are authorities; it's an inexact science. But I do remember that when I was getting my degree, it was

more or less a standard acceptance in economics that the business cycle, so called, and the lean periods previous to that are -- what we now call recessions and depressions -- when they did occur, that usually it was when the government had gone beyond a certain point in the percentage of gross national product that it was taking. And that was just more or less accepted as standard.

Well, I think it is very true today. And I think that after we get what we've called a downpayment, which is about all we can get in this year, with the limited time that Congress is going to be here, then I think, in a bipartisan way, we're going to have to continue to look at government, as to how, structurally, we can reduce the share that government is taking.

Q. Can you give us an idea, though -- I mean, could you give us some specifics about what you might do? I mean, what -- --

The President. Well, let me give them to this extent. Some of them you could look at, and they could be contained in the Grace commission -- or committee reports. Here was a look at government by almost 2,000 top business leaders in the private sector -- not only from institutions and so forth but from the business and financial world -- that looked at government as they would look at a business if they were thinking of merging or taking it over -- as to things that are wrong or that could be changed. And we are really seriously looking at these recommendations, 2,478 -- or -28? -- but anyway, it's almost 2,500 recommendations that they have made. And many of them would require legislative action, because they would result in changes in procedure in the processes of government.

Q. In the negotiations that have been going on in the last few weeks on this downpayment that you referred to, what concessions have you expressed willingness to make? And what concessions might you be willing to make for your part in these negotiations?

The President. Well, frankly, I've lost a little faith in the bipartisan approach to this, because the other side seemed more interested, I think, in politics than they did in meeting us in any way on trying to achieve this downpayment. So, I am and have been meeting with the leadership of our own in the House and in the Senate on that very thing, and will be willing, once we all come to agreement and have settled on a plan -- and I can't go beyond that, because we haven't -- but I will be willing then to go forward with our own proposal and hope that we can, with the support of the people, that we can get bipartisan support for it.

Q. So, you're saying you haven't even put forth a proposal yet?

The President. That what?

Q. You have not, even yet, put forth a proposal in these negotiations? I don't quite understand.

The President. Well, this is in our own discussions within, I might say, the family, meaning the Republican leadership, both the House and Senate and myself. We are discussing -- and there are a number of viewpoints on figures having to do with spending reductions -- and I think we're pretty much agreed on that tax revenues would be -- if there are any -- would be obtained from corrections in the tax program and not in any change in the rates.

### Support From Blacks

Q. Mr. President, not too long ago your finance chairman in Mississippi, William Munger, was reflecting back on the Republican's defeat in the gubernatorial race in that State last year, and he said that in order for Republicans to do well in Mississippi, they had to attract black votes, but if they did the things necessary to attract black votes, they'd be going against Republican philosophy. Do you agree with that?

The President. No, I don't. No, I think everything that we've done in our economic approach is of benefit to everyone. I know that there are charges being made -- I listened to the debate -- that somehow our attempts at economies and all have penalized people who were dependent on government aid. That is a falsehood. The simple fact of the matter is we're spending more on help for the people and for the needy than has ever been spent before in history. Our budget cuts have been reductions in the increase planned in spending. We haven't come to some place where we're spending less than had been spent.

Q. But, sir, blacks in Alabama say that they're not going to vote for you. They say they're going to vote for the Democrat, whoever he is. How are you going to counter what they perceive to be an administration that doesn't have their interest at heart?

The President. Well, you said the key word, that they "perceive" to be. And I'm just going to hope that in the campaign we can reveal to them that they have not been given the truth, that they are the victims of a lot of

demagoguery that has portrayed us as guilty of things we haven't done.

### Presidential Campaign

Q. Do you think that all the campaigning among eight contenders for the Democratic nomination has changed public perception of you along those lines or along other lines on -- --

The President. Well, even before a campaign started, this has been pretty much the theme of the other side. I have been held up as eating my young, that we have been hostile to the poor and our tax program benefits the rich. How can a program that cuts taxes evenly, percentagewise, across the board -- thus leaving the same rate of progression in our progressive tax system -- how can that be beneficial to the rich and detrimental to the others?

How can it be unfair to the people of lower income or the poor to reduce inflation from double digits -- 121/2 percent when we came here -- down to a third of that or less, less than a third of that. When the people with the least -- let's take someone with \$10,000 of income between -- through 2 years, 1979 and 1980 -- before we got here. By the end of 1980 that \$10,000 would only buy \$8,000 worth. He was getting \$5,000 a year. He got a \$1,000 cut in his ability to buy each year.

That was probably the worst tax on the elderly with fixed incomes, the worst tax on the poor who have to spend most of their earnings on subsistence, on the necessities. The person with luxury income who spends a minor portion of it on necessities and the rest on luxuries, they weren't really penalized as much by inflation.

So, I think everything we've done has been beneficial to everyone at every level.

### Entitlement Programs

Q. You mention the elderly. If I could ask about that. The large elderly population of Florida -- and they -- many voters seem to be convinced that you, more than the Democrats, have been trying to restrain the growth or cut back entitlement programs such as social security and medicare. First of all, is that a correct perception? And is it possible in a second term that you would be advocating further cutbacks?

The President. I have said repeatedly that programs like that -- there are things that need to be done, but we must never pull the rug out from those people presently receiving their payments from the program and dependent on it. You can't suddenly undermine them or break your contract with them. Reforms, if there are such to be made, must be made, looking toward the future, on people not yet dependent and who would have plenty of time and warning with regard to such changes.

Again, this was -- if you will remember, that was the issue of the 1982 campaign. And nothing had been done. We were guilty of trying to tell the Congress and our opponents that social security was facing financial disaster and it could hit it as early as July 1983. They denied that. I remember hearing the Speaker of the House, himself, deny that that was true. And then after the election was over, we all got together in a bipartisan group and without any animus, came up with a plan to save social security because it would be broke by July of 1983. And we came up with that program. It wasn't a permanent answer to some of the problems, but it did buy us a great many years down the road before we would again be in the fiscal spot of that kind.

Now, as to what we've done in social security since we've been here, the average married couple on social security has had a \$180-a-month increase. So, I, again, don't think that we were doublecrossing anyone.

### Unemployment

Q. Mr. President, in 1980 West Virginia was one of, I think, half a dozen States that voted for Carter. And now, 4 years later unemployment is hovering around 15 percent, and the coal industry and the steel industry are ailing, and some Federal programs that West Virginians have depended on have been cut. What would you say to the guy in the street in West Virginia to convince him that he should vote for you in 1984?

The President. Well, first of all, we know that unemployment is never consistent with the national average. I described this to some of our own people a little while ago, that to think that it is like the man that drowned trying to wade across a river whose average depth was 3 feet. There are those pockets and certain areas that are going to be hit harder than others. But in the surge which -- in reducing unemployment -- which is greater than anything we've seen in the last 30 years -- even those hard-hit areas are being benefited.

More will have to be done. This is why we have for a couple of years now been trying to get the enterprise zone legislation through the Congress. And it's been blocked.

This is a program -- and I was amazed when one of the candidates in the debate last night started talking about we must look at tax incentives to help industry and so-forth put people back to work. Well, that's what the enterprise zones are all about, picking those hard-hit spots, both rural and urban, and generating employment through the use of tax incentives. And so far, a number of States have gotten tired of waiting for the Congress to act and do it at a national level, and have put in their own enterprise zone programs. And every one of them is proving tremendously successful.

But, knowing that you might get around to unemployment, I just decided some figures might be of interest to you. You represent two, four, six, eight States -- and all in the same region. In every one of them the figures for the peak of unemployment, and the figures for -- I can't give them to you except for one State now -- but in December, as of the December level of the comeback, were considerably down from the peak. And in the State that you just mentioned, your own, at the peak, unemployment in West Virginia was 21. By December it was down to 15.7.

Now, I don't know what it is today. We won't know for awhile, because when the Labor Department gives you the overall statistics, they don't break it down to States at the present figure. It takes them awhile to break it down as to States. So, all I have are the November figures, except for Florida, and that's because they do break it down for the 10 most populous States earlier than they do for the rest.

Florida was 8.6 at its peak -- or, wait a minute -- Florida was 10.4 at its peak, and in December was down to 7.5. But to give you an idea of what the rest of the figures may look like when we get them -- for the present, Florida is now down to 6.

Q. Ours was at 11.4 in December and in January was back up to 13.5. I mean, some of that has to do with seasonal -- --

The President. That's Arkansas?

Q. Alabama.

The President. Alabama. Alabama, yes.

Q. It's creeping back -- --

The President. Well, at the peak -- --

Q. It's creeping back up.

The President. Yes, but at the peak you were 16.7. In December you were 12.3. Now, I don't know what the present one is -- --

Q. Well, in January it was 13.5.

The President. 13.5. Well, I think there'll be these fluctuations. I'll be very interested in seeing what it comes out as from February.

Q. Is there anything else that you think that the States could do to help pull themselves up?

The President. Well, I think most States, as far as I can see, are doing all they can, just as we are. Maybe -- and, you know, all of your States, particularly there in the Sunbelt, you're going to have to recognize also that your reduction in unemployment may be a little slower because of the migration to the Sunbelt. And that means that newcomers coming in, without jobs and looking for jobs, are temporarily going to distort the figures.

#### Economic Recovery Program

Q. Back on the economic issue for just 1 minute, back to the budgetary thing -- when you campaigned for President, one of your promises, of course, was to balance the budget by 1984. Obviously, it's not balanced. I wonder what you look at as the main reason for that. What happened to Reaganomics that made it not work like you wanted it to?

The President. Nothing happened to Reaganomics. And I'm glad you asked this question.

Yes, I had the help of some of the finest economists in the country in working on the program that I call the economic recovery program. And toward the end of the summer, 1980, I announced that plan, and based our

projections -- that, yes, it could balance the budget by '83, based on all the projections that those economists at that time -- before the election. Between that announcement and November, that projection was no longer valid, because the economy in 1980 was deteriorating so fast, and had not been projected to do so by any of these notable economists. No one had. So, it continued to worsen, and by the time of the Inaugural -- then even a later time -- was beyond any prediction; it had continued to get worse. That was when interest rates were  $21\frac{1}{2}\%$ . Inflation, then, for '79 and '80 had been double digit both years.

Now, when I started -- you've got to remember that the President comes in not with his own budget. You are still bound until the following October by the budget of the previous administration. Nor was my program in effect. We were still trying to get it. And in July of 1981 was when the further big dip came.

Now, some economists have said, well, we had a 1979, '80 recession, and then the thing that happened in July was another -- a different recession. Well, I don't think so. Things were -- it was a continuation. And the bottom fell out with the interest rates that stayed high, the automobile industry, the housing industry -- either one of which can start a recession by itself. So, nothing of what happened and the great surge to 10.8 percent in unemployment -- none of that could be attributed to our program, because our program hadn't started.

And then, as our program was implemented -- and remember, it was only implemented in stages. It took 3 years to get the 25-percent tax cut. Other things that were implemented -- and we never got all of the spending cuts. As a matter of fact, we got a little less than half of what we asked in spending cuts. And that's to this day.

Now, I could turn around and say that maybe the recovery might have been even better if we had gotten -- remember that one stage of our tax cut -- 10 percent of it -- was going to go into effect retroactively to January of 1981, and we didn't get it then. And when we did get it, after the drop had occurred, it was only 5 percent, and it didn't go into effect until October, which meant that it was about  $1\frac{1}{4}\%$  percent when it only went on for 3 years - or 3 months.

And so, I have to say that all of the recovery has taken place after our program went into effect, and none of our program was in effect when the bottom fell out.

#### Federal Budget Deficits

Q. Mr. President, I want to get clear on one thing. Are you -- your comments earlier about this bipartisan -- bipartisan meetings over the deficit -- when you said you're now pursuing your own plan with other Republican leaders. Are you saying that you've abandoned altogether any hope of reaching any kind of compromise with the Democrats? Are you through talking with them?

The President. Well, I -- no. I hope that maybe when we come forth with this plan and say, "Look, here's something now, we'll tell you, we're ready to go with; here is a plan" -- I would like to have, because we can't get such a plan unless we have bipartisan support. I would like to think that they would do it. But what I meant was that to sit down with them and start from scratch to negotiate, they were very unwilling. We had great difficulty getting them to even meet.

And, finally, one meeting they just simply walked away on one issue and refused to talk. Then they came back. And it wasn't very encouraging to us.

Q. Can you still -- you don't have any idea about how soon you might have a plan ready to put forward? Before, I mean --

The President. I'm hoping --

Q. -- before the elections, though.

The President. Oh, Lord, I'm hoping very soon, not the election. We've got to move on this deficit matter and move fast.

Q. Some of your economic advisers have been saying for some time now, and Wall Street analysts, that we've got to do something about the deficit. And you've just said it needs to be handled or taken by the horns as soon as possible. But you have been saying for some time that -- or painting the picture that things are going to be fine, things are going to be okay. And that's not exactly the picture that's come from some of your advisers, if we don't take control of the deficit immediately. And I'm wondering --

The President. Well --

Q. -- -- how -- --

The President. -- -- it isn't an exact science. And some of the economists -- and some of them, I think, are trying to scare the Congress into recognizing that we should be dealing with it. But let me just point some -- --

Q. Not scare you, but the Congress.

The President. Not scare me, no, because, look, I'm not one to underestimate the deficits. I've been talking about them for 30 years.

Is it impossible for us to -- well, no, you can't remember; all of you're too young, so it would have to be history for you -- but for almost half a century the other party has been in control, as I said earlier, of both Houses of the Congress. And Congress is the only one that can deal with these things. A President has a veto power, but a President cannot spend a single dime. There's nothing in the Constitution that gives the President the right to spend anything. But for almost this half-century we have every year run deficits. It was almost a trillion dollars by the time we came here. And there were many of us who opposed this. And we were told at the time that the national debt didn't matter because we owed it to ourselves. That was the explanation. We were told the deficit spending and a little inflation was necessary to maintain prosperity. Well, some of us didn't think that added up. And I can show you speeches I made 20, 25 years ago in which I said inflation cannot continue without going out of control eventually. You cannot go down this road. The deficit spending and the piling up of the debt that -- it has never worked in history; it never will.

Well, now, suddenly, with the big dip that came in July in that recession, with millions more people added -- the unemployed, who became wards of the government, which increased the spending, but who were no longer paying the taxes, which decreased that; the very fact that we improve the inflation figure also militated against government revenues, because inflation is a source of tax increase. And we didn't get -- we didn't think we could reduce inflation that fast. We thought that there would be higher revenues than there turned out to be because of licking inflation.

Well, all of this, for them now to suddenly become aware of deficits -- and yet, when you try to talk to them, what is the only answer that they have for curbing the deficit? Increase taxes. Well -- and they'll also agree to cut defense spending. Well, defense spending right now is down to a little more than a fourth of the budget. Defense spending, historically, the days of Jack Kennedy, was virtually a half of the budget. Under Jack Kennedy, it was 47.8 percent. So, the -- and the increase in taxes -- they doubled taxes in the 5 years before we got here. And the deficits increased, because when you increase taxes, they increase spending.

And may I point to the 1983 budget resolution passed by the Democratic majority in the House. And they really didn't think that it would ever amount to anything or be passed by anyone else. But, if you'll remember, they described it as a reaffirmation of Democratic principles. And it did call for somewhere around \$70 billion in increased taxes. But it also called for that much increased spending for new programs, social programs.

So, this was where we philosophically just were in complete disagreement -- that they think you can solve the budget deficit by increasing taxes. They don't even pay attention to the fact that this could subvert the recovery that we're now having and put us back where we were. But beyond that, they've made it plain, and, indeed, their own candidates talk of new spending programs.

#### School Prayer Amendment

Q. When you're on the campaign trail, how much of an issue are you going to make of the school prayer issue and the abortion?

The President. Well, I'm hoping that before I get out there that we'll have the school prayer amendment passed in the Congress. And here again, the effort that is being made to portray that as somehow, somehow we're talking compulsory prayer; we're going to compel the schools. I'm sure there would be some schools -- all we're asking is that they have the right to if they want to. Now, there may be some schools that'll decide not to. There may be some that'll decide they will. But I think it's a right that we had for the bulk of our entire history in this country. And it didn't destroy the country at all. As a matter of fact, crime rates were lower, and we didn't have drug epidemics, and all sorts of things.

#### Illegal Drugs

Q. Let me ask a question about drugs. There's a lot of reports, including administration reports, that there are more illegal drugs coming into this country than ever, especially cocaine -- much of it coming through Florida --



despite intensified enforcement in Florida and elsewhere. Would you say that that represents a failure of that drug strategy? And what would you want to do to -- would you be advocating anything -- --

The President. Well now, wait a minute -- I'm going to have to ask, but -- you know, I have to tell you something about this room. I don't know whether you've noticed it or not -- out there in that center of the room under the dome, you kind of disappear a little on me.

Q. A mild-mannered reporter, I'd say. [Laughter]

Mr. Speakes. [Larry M. Speakes, Principal Deputy Press Secretary to the President.] [Inaudible] -- last question -- [inaudible].

The President. Oh, dear. I'm having so much fun. [Laughter]

Q. I was asking about the illegal drug shipments into the country.

The President. Oh.

Q. And the evidence is that there's more illegal drugs coming in than ever before -- at least in recent years and despite intensified enforcement in Florida and other places. And what I'm wondering is whether you think that because of that that there's going to be a need to change the drug enforcement strategy, and whether the drug enforcement strategy that you've employed has been a success?

The President. Oh, well, wait a minute. Then this -- if this is a new figure that I haven't obtained -- our task force in Florida, which is the first time that we have ever put the Federal Government, the State government, and the local authorities, the drug enforcement authorities, and the military involved in trying to head this off -- this shipment from out of the country coming in -- was so successful in Florida that this is where, why we went to 12 such task forces all around the country on our borders to try and have the same success. Of course, there's no question: When you've got the coastlines that we've got and the borders that we have, I don't think you will ever solve the problem totally by intercepting the drugs.

The answer is going to be the kind that has Nancy down in Houston. To really be successful, you're going to have to take the customer away from the pusher. The customer's going to have to start saying no. And this we're embarked on also, as you know, with great efforts all through the country.

But the figures that we have is that -- and the reason for the rest of the other 11 task forces were -- that we so slowed it down in Florida and reduced it in Florida, that they began seeking new entry points around the country. But we're the owner now of a fleet of cabin cruisers and yachts and airplanes and helicopters and trucks and cars. And down there, the last time I was in Florida I remember being taken into a big building there at the airport and shown what we had intercepted, but also on a table that was about the size of that desk, the first time in my life I saw \$20 million in cash stacked up there in bills that had been taken away from the drugdealers. That had to hurt.

But, no, I think the program is being very successful. But we know that it's a wholesale business. It isn't just a fellow on a corner with something in his pocket to sell. It is coming in in freighters. It's coming in in airplanes and everything else. But we've stepped up our efforts and have been tremendously successful.

Q. Do you think the military can be used to stop, like, particularly some of the drug smuggling that's coming in on that Mobile corridor? It's being flown inland.

The President. What we used was we used their radar facilities; also their air surveillance for information that we needed. I don't think they actually participated in any of the arrests, but they provided the surveillance and the information for us. If they can see an enemy coming in, I can see that.

## Chemical Weapons

Q. I had just one final question for you related to defense. This year for the third year now you're requesting in your defense budget funds for chemical weapons production. And of course, Congress has narrowly defeated these proposals for the last 2 years. There's been a suggestion made in the last week by some Democratic House Members that any proposal for funding for chemical weapons should be tied to legislation requiring the administration to make a new initiative on talks with the Soviets on chemical weapons control. So, my question is, first, do you think that the United States is doing all it can in this area? Would you agree to a proposal like that? And also, do you see any reasons now why Congress might be willing to pass the chemical weapons appropriation when they haven't been?

The President. If they were responsible, they would, because the very thing that they're talking about we are going to be ready very shortly to table a treaty for discussion of banning chemical weapons. We know that's the way to go. But the reason why they would be more of help if they would okay the spending is, how better to get the other side, then, to agree to a treaty with us banning this; how much better able we'll be if they know that if they don't do that, they will have to face the fact that we have chemical weapons that we can use against them.

In other words, it's the same as in the nuclear field. It's a deterrent. So, this is exactly our own plan. Yes, we want to get them into a verifiable treaty banning chemical weapons.

Q. Mr. President -- --

Q. Would you agree to having it written into the legislation?

The President. What?

Q. Would you agree, then, to have it written into the authorizing legislation that the U.S. would have to do this?

The President. I don't know whether that would -- I don't know whether that would help or not. There wouldn't be any reason why we shouldn't be willing since we, ourselves, are working on such a treaty.

Mr. Speakes. You've got a whole batch of Congressmen this afternoon, so we'd better break off.

The President. It serves them right. [Laughter]

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

Charles Z. Wick

Q. Have you talked to Mr. Wick just lately about the possibility of his resigning? Has he sent you a letter of resignation or anything?

The President. No, not a kind -- there's never been a hint of it. I don't know where that rumor came from. Not a word of it.

Q. So, he's not spoken to you -- --

The President. No.

Q. -- -- and you still think that he's -- you still want him to stay on.

The President. I sure do. Yes, he's done a great job.

Unemployment Figures

Would you like to hear about your own States, since I talked about a few of them? Alabama: 16.7 down to 12.3. Arkansas: 11.3 -- and remember, these are December figures -- down to 9.4. You know about Florida. You know about Georgia. Mississippi: 13.8 is down to 10. South Carolina: 11.6 is down to 7.9 -- only two-tenths of a point above the norm, or the average. 13.7 for Tennessee, down to 10.3. And 21 down to 15.7 -- and that was December. And we've done even better in January and February.

Edwin Meese III

Q. Are you going to continue to insist on Mr. Meese as your nominee for the Attorney General's spot?

The President. Heavens yes. Yes.

Q. Questions being raised now about the Carter papers and about his loans?

The President. All of that -- we happen to know that they sent for those when they couldn't get him on anything else. They sent for those from the Albosta committee. Those are part of the record that the FBI said, as far as they're concerned, there was no criminal action, there was no misdeeds, and closed the investigation.

Q. But you don't believe any ethical questions have been raised at all?



The President. I don't think he violated them. I have every trust in his ethics, and have known him for a great many years. And I think he'd make a fine Attorney General.

Q. Do you think the American people would -- --

The President. What?

Q. Do you think the American people would be able to trust him as Attorney General?

The President. Yes. I trust him more than some of the Senators that have been raising these issues.

Editor. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

*Note: The interview began at 3:30 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. Participating in the interview were Carol Matlack of the Arkansas Gazette, Greg McDonald of the Atlanta Constitution/Journal, Olivia Barton of the Birmingham News, Mary Glass of the Charleston (South Carolina) News & Courier, David Greenfield of the Charleston (West Virginia) Daily Mail, William E. Gibson of the Fort Lauderdale News and Sun Sentinel, and Tom Opell of the Jackson (Mississippi) Clarion-Ledger.*

*The transcript of the interview was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 13.*