NOTE: The President spoke at 11:18 p.m. at Paramount Studios. In his remarks, he referred to reception host Gov. Gray Davis of California, who presented the President with an honorary Oscar statuette for "Best President." The President also referred to Governor Davis' wife, Sharon.

Interview With Ron Brownstein of the Los Angeles Times

August 11, 2000

Republican National Convention

Mr. Brownstein. One of the things that was a little surprising at the Republican Convention was the extent to which they tried to characterize the meaning of your 8 years. Bush said you had coasted through prosperity. Cheney said these have been years of prosperity in the Nation but little purpose in the White House.

What is your response to that? How do you feel hearing that?

The President. Well, first of all, it was, on the facts, absurd. So I think what they're trying to do, their strategy seems to be to hope people think it all happened by accident. You know, when they had the White House for 12 years, they took credit every time the Sun came up in the morning. And also I think they did it because they fought so much of what we did.

You remember what they all said when they opposed the economic plan in '93, they said it would bring on another recession. They practically said it was the end of civilization as we know it. Then they fought the crime bill. They were against the 100,000 police. They were against the Brady bill. On welfare reform, we agreed that work should be mandatory and that the States should be able to design their own programs, but we disagreed on the requirements for national standards for nutrition and medical care and transportation and all that. So we just differed on so many things.

I think they were just trying somehow to get the American people to discount what's happened.

Economic Decisionmaking

Mr. Brownstein. In your mind—this is a legitimate debate—how significant a role did your economic decisions, the '93, the '97 budget, the other things that you've done, how important has that been in the prosperity of the last 8 years?

The President. I think it was pivotal. Because if you remember when we just announced what we were going to do—we announced we would have a deficit reduction plan that would cut the deficit by at least $500 billion. After the election, but before we took office, there was this huge boom in the stock market and interest rates dropped. And then when we passed it, it happened all over again.

And if you look at what's happened, Alan Greenspan said many times our fiscal responsibility in bringing the deficit down is what kept inflation pressures down and enabled him to leave interest rates lower so this whole thing would unfold. Otherwise, we would have had what had happened so long in the past—the productive capacity of the American people would lift the economy, then it would sag again, lift and sag, which is just what had happened before.

Social Indicators

Mr. Brownstein. A little bit on social policy, on crime, other social trends. Do you think that Federal decisions have been significant——

The President. Yes.

Mr. Brownstein. ——in things we've seen on those areas?

The President. Yes. I think if you look at it, I saw a study the other day—and I'm sorry; I don't remember who did it—which said that about 30 percent of the drop in the crime rate could be clearly attributable to the improvement in the economy. But I think the rest is due to better policing strategies and to more sensible efforts to keep guns out of the wrong hands.

The crime bill that we passed in '94 basically was the product of law enforcement officers, community activists, prosecutors, who were beginning to do things that were working at the neighborhood level. But since 1965, between then and 1992, the violent crime rate had tripled and the police forces of the country had gone up only by 10 percent.

So I don't think there's any question that putting 100,000 police in the streets, supporting more community prevention efforts, and doing the Brady bill, the assault weapons ban made a significant contribution. They don't think—the law enforcement people agree. I was in a suburban Republican community yesterday, outside Chicago, and I did what I always do when I leave, line up the police officers—and they had police officers from three different jurisdictions there—and two of them mentioned how important the COPS program had been to them and how much better they were doing as a result of it.

On welfare reform, I think starting with all the waivers we gave to States to experiment with welfare-to-work projects, right through the passage of the bill, and then getting 12,000 companies in the Welfare to Work Partnership to commit to hire people off welfare, I don't think there is any question that we have maximized the efforts. There again, some of the welfare decline has to be attributed to the improving economy. But the rest of it has to be attributed to changes in the law and the policies.

Choices in 2000 Election

Mr. Brownstein. So when you look at all of that, the economy, the social trends, to what extent do you consider this election, the November election, a referendum on your two terms, the good and the bad?

The President. I think it depends entirely on whether people understand what the choices are. And first, even before that, whether they think it's a significant election. I mean, the most troubling thing to me is—at least before the two conventions—there are a lot of people that are saying, "Well, things are going along well. This probably doesn't make much difference, and I don't know what their differences are—economy, crime, whatever."

I think if people understand with clarity what the choices are, they will clearly make a decision to keep changing in the right direction, because all the surveys show over 60 percent of the people approve of the economic policy, the crime policy, the welfare policy, the health care policy, the general direction of the country—the people support us.

Policy Differences

Mr. Brownstein. So you're saying in your mind you do view this as a choice between maintaining the direction you've set out and reverting back to the previous, or what?

The President. Well, it's different. I think in some ways you could argue that the Republican ticket this year is more conservative than President Bush in '92 or Senator Dole in '96. They've been quite adroit in the presentation of it and adopted a lot of our rhetoric and our positioning. And I suppose that's a step forward.

But the difference is, when we started in '92 we actually changed the policies of the Democratic Party, the economic policy, the trade policy, the welfare policy, the crime policy, the education policy, right across the board. And I think that's important to emphasize that distinction.

So again, from my point of view, for example, their tax policies, when you slice them up salami-like, like they're doing now, which is better politics for them, there's a compelling argument for each one of them individually. But when you add them all up, you're basically back in the deficit suit. And that's a big difference.

So in my view, that would be a reversion. It would take a while to have effect, because we've built in a strong base. But once it was clear that we were going to get rid of the surplus right off the bat and then stop paying down the debt, I think the pressures for—well, Greenspan has said if there's a big tax cut, he'll have to raise interest rates more. So most people would lose more money in the interest rate increase than they'll get in the tax cut.

Democratic National Convention

Mr. Brownstein. Is defining the stakes in the election one of the goals for your speech?

The President. Yes. But I think primarily that has to be done by Gore and Lieberman. Now, I do that when I'm out on the stump, you know, with our groups, because I want them to be able to go out and talk to other people and communicate that. But I think the American—I can say a few things about

what I think the choice should be. But this convention is very important that it belong to Al Gore and, to a lesser extent, to Joe Lieberman and that they define the choices.

I think that it should be the mission of this convention to have clarity of choice—first, to understand the importance of the election, then to have clarity of choice, then to make clear what our positions are. And that we're not—as I said, if somebody said, "Vote for me, I'll do just what President Clinton did," I would not vote for that person, because the times are very dynamic. There are still a lot of big challenges out there. But I think to keep changing in the direction we've taken is clearly what's best for America.

Choices in 2000 Election/Tone of Politics

Mr. Brownstein. In terms of defining the choices, when Bush and the Republicans define the choice, they put a lot of emphasis on changing the tone in Washington, changing the climate in Washington. When he talks about restoring honor and decency to the White House, do you feel as though he's talking about you, personally? Do you take that personally?

The President. Well, yes and no. Yes, he's talking about me personally; no, I don't take it personally. It's what they have to say. They're wrong on economics. They know the people don't agree with them on crime. They know the people don't agree with them on turning the environment back over to the polluters. They know the people don't agree with them on these issues. They know they can't make the case anymore that helping the environment hurts the economy. So they basically can't win any of the issues that affect the American people, so they have to divert the attention of the American people. So, no, I don't take it personally.

I think that what we have to do is talk about what we did for the people and the fact that we made specific commitments, and we honored them. Five years ago Thomas Patterson, the Presidential scholar, said I had already kept a higher percentage of my commitments to the American people than the previous five Presidents. And the number has gone up since then, and the ones that I haven't kept are ones that I tried and couldn't prevail on.

And the other thing I think is truly ironic, they're saying—they're responsible for the tone in Washington. I mean, I gave Bob Dole and Bob Michel the Medal of Freedom. I bent over backwards to work with Newt Gingrich and Dick Armey, and did, whenever I could. The truth is that the harsh tone in Washington, as the American people know, was set by the far right. They got rewarded for it in 1994, when there was a high level of frustration. They overread their mandate. And they basically turned up the volume on a strategy they had really been pursuing in the far right since 1980 or before. And then the people didn't like it.

So now they say they want to change it. What they're basically saying is, "It's Republicans that do this, so put us in. If you let us rule, we'll be nice, and the Democrats don't do this sort of thing, so you'll have a nicer tone. So reward us for our past misconduct, and then everything will be sweet."

What I'd like to see the American people do is to say, we want you to work together. If they ratify this choice—what we call the New Democratic choice—if they ratify the choice of the Republicans when they vote with us on balanced budget and welfare reform, and when we work together on trade and foreign policy, then that's the direction the country will take.

I think it's predictable that if they essentially reward them for first being mean and now being nice, that they will think that as long as they're nice they can then implement the policies that they were going to implement anyway. And I don't think the American people will like that, and I don't think it's good for the country.

Bipartisanship

Mr. Brownstein. Are you disappointed or frustrated at all, though, if you think back from when you first ran against brain-dead politics in both parties in '92, and you—with really the exception of the '96–'97 period of welfare reform, Kennedy-Kassebaum, and in the balanced budget deal—it's been very hard to get bipartisan, significant bipartisan agreement. And there have been significant

voices in the Democratic Party that have basically been cool to the idea, post the impeachment fight, very partisan atmosphere.

Is it tougher to bring the parties together than you would have thought?

The President. We got a lot done in '98. We got a lot done in '99—especially, mostly in the budget process; both times a lot of our education reforms went through. Even in 2000, we passed the Africa CBI bill with big bipartisan votes; we passed the China bill in the House; and the Senate, I think there will be probably more than half of both caucuses for the bill when they come back in September.

So I think it's important not to obscure the fact that things are still being done. And I wouldn't be surprised when they come back—if we do a good job at our convention, I wouldn't be surprised if we still don't get this year a Patients' Bill of Rights, a minimum wage increase, and maybe some of the other things we're working on.

So you know, it's harder, but I think we shouldn't obscure the fact that a lot of things still get done. I think we're going to pass a new markets initiative, thanks to the fact that the Speaker of the House has made it a priority in a bipartisan way. It got almost 400 votes in the House. It is a major, major piece of social legislation. It's basically the next big block on top of the empowerment zone program we adopted in '93.

So do I wish I could do everything? Yes. Do I wish it were less partisan? Yes. But that shouldn't obscure the fact that we're still getting quite a lot done.

Lieberman Selection/Tone of Politics

Mr. Brownstein. I asked you a moment ago if you thought that Bush was referring to you when he talks about honor and decency in the White House. The Lieberman selection as Vice President has been widely interpreted as signaling at once continuity with your policy, in terms of picking the chair of the DLC, but also an effort to separate from you, personally. Did you view it that way?

The President. Well, I think the far more important thing is the continuity of policy, because the thing that has always bothered me about these polls—until the last few days, where I think they are beginning to tighten up and firm up—is that the Vice President wasn't getting the credit he deserved for the role he played in the administration.

I never believed, not for a minute, that the American people were going to, in effect, vote against their own interests and their own values by holding Al Gore responsible for a personal mistake I made—for a second. The whole record here has been obscured. Joe Lieberman was the first Democrat to say it, but he didn't say anything different than Al Gore said. He certainly didn't say anything different than I said contemporaneously.

The issue is not—as a matter of fact, I think what he proposed was right. That doesn't mean that what they did was right. What they did was wrong. And what Lieberman said was right, and that's what Gore said. That's all Gore said.

So you know, sooner or—the American people would figure that out and they—people are so much more fair than politicians and, sometimes, press pundits.

Mr. Brownstein. Right.

The President. And they're also—you know, they don't cut off their nose to spite their face very long. All these tactics, even going back to the '92 campaign, the Republicans knew that what we were doing was best for the American people and that, if the American people understood that, we'd win.

So what have they done from '92 on? They've tried to divert the attention of the American people to make them vote against something, vote on the basis of something other than their families, their lives, their kids' future, and the need to change America in a constructive way. So this is just the latest and most subtle incarnation of what I see as a very constant strategy, going back until '92.

Impeachment Process

Mr. Brownstein. I want to ask you one last question in this area. That rather extraordinary session you had yesterday, talking with the ministers, and you talked at great length about your personal feelings, about the whole controversy. You didn't say much about looking back and how you felt about the impeachment process itself.

Do you feel now that it was only partisanship at work, or could there have been legitimate reasons for some Republicans to feel the way they did?

The President. Well, first of all, some of them—I think Peter King gave the best speech on that. I'll use his words. Peter King said, "I'm voting against this because if it was a Republican President you'd be against it, too." It's basically what I think. But you know, the American people can evaluate that. The most important thing was not what I say; it's what those 800 or 900 constitutional experts said. Way over 90 percent of the people with an informed opinion about the history and the law said it was wrong. Two-thirds of the American people thought it was wrong.

But that's all behind us. What the American people need to vote, in my judgment, the way they nearly always vote—they need to vote based on what kind of future they want. And if they believe that I have kept faith with the commitments I made and that we implemented those things and they had a good impact on the American way of life and our future and they understand what the choices are between the two candidates now and the two parties, I think we'll do fine.

Direction of Democratic Party

Mr. Brownstein. So it is the public record, in effect, the outward-looking record on which you think the judgment should be rendered and the vote should be based?

The President. Because that's the only thing that matters to them in their lives. And because, you know, if I were running again, they could evaluate me in whole, all my strengths and all my weaknesses. But I'm not running.

However, the things that we stood for—the reason I was thrilled about Lieberman's selection is that we've been working together in the DLC for years. It was a clear statement from Al Gore that he's going to continue this New Democratic course. It should be encouraging to independents and moderate Republicans that there will be a basis for bipartisan cooperation and that we're going to continue the kinds of change that have wrought so much good in this country in the last 8 years.

One of the things that will happen—as I said, I think Lieberman's selection will help the Vice President to get more of the credit he deserves for the good things that have happened the last 8 years.

Mr. Brownstein. You know, I wasn't planning to ask you this, but since you brought it up, one thing that's interesting about that, what you just said, though, is that the policy direction of the Vice President is quite similar to yours, overwhelmingly extending the kinds of things the administration has done, in some cases, literally, like CHIPS for adults or class size reductions through 12th grade or more police officers. But the music is a little different. He talks in a more traditionally Democratic language. He talks about big oil, big tobacco, whose side are you on. And some people feel that he's a more partisan—more comfortable in the Democratic Party, less comfortable reaching out across party lines.

Do you think there is a difference between the two of you and the extent to which you are comfortable challenging the party base and/or working with Republicans?

The President. Not really. I think that we're living in a time when the issues at hand and our frustration at not being able to pass the Patients' Bill of Rights, for example, not being able to close the gun show loophole, having the NRA say they'll have an office in the White House if the Republicans are elected, have highlighted the differences between the special interests that dominate policy in their party and what we believe is in the public interest. And I think that accounts for some of the rhetoric.

I also believe, you know, when you're—if you go back to '92, the two New Democrats in the race were Tsongas and me, and Kerrey was, to some extent a New Democrat, we all had some pretty populist rhetoric. And there was reason for it then because people were suffering, really suffering. The reason for it now is that specific interest groups are holding up progress on issues even that a majority of the Republicans in the country favor.

For example, I think a majority of the Republicans clearly favor the Patients' Bill of Rights we're supporting. That's just one example. That's why I'm saying I think Lieberman coming on ticket sends a clear

signal. I also think he—Joe and I spent more years and just had the opportunity, for different reasons, to spend more time in the DLC than the Vice President did. If he hadn't become Vice President, I think one of these last 8 years he would have been chairman of the DLC. You think, if you have a chance to think about all this in a different way.

But I don't see it as a big substantive problem. I know how important it is to him, personally, to try to get bipartisan support for the work of a country. I know how important it is to try to get bipartisan support out in the country. I know how profoundly troubled he was in the last 2 or 3 years that even foreign policy began to get more partisan—the most amazing expression was the defeat of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the first time in 80 years the Congress had defeated a major treaty like this.

Electoral Fortunes of the Democratic Party

Mr. Brownstein. Let me ask you to sort of take a step back and think about the political ledger for a minute. You've become the first Democrat to be reelected since Roosevelt. The party was averaging about 50 electoral votes an election in the three elections before you. So clearly, there has been a restoration of the capacity to compete at the Presidential level.

On the other hand, you've lost Congress, fewer Governors, and Gore is in this ambiguous position here as the campaign begins—or in the middle of the campaign. Do you feel that you are leaving the Democratic Party in a stronger position than, in effect, when you found it in the fall of '91?

The President. Oh, yes, I do. Because a lot of those congressional seats we held because we had a guy who had been there for a long, long time, while the districts had been changing, more Republican. I feel terrible about what I did to weaken our position in Congress and, by extension, probably in the governorships in '94, because we got all the downside of voting for the crime bill. That is, the NRA was out there telling all those people we're going to take their guns away, and they hadn't seen it work, and they hadn't seen that the fear tactics were wrong.

We got the downside of voting for the economic plan because people didn't feel the economy going better, and the Republicans were out there telling everybody we raised their taxes. In fact, you know, for most people, the vast majority, they didn't get their taxes raised. We had more tax cuts than tax increases. But there was this general sense of, well, nothing is really all that much better yet. And I felt terrible because—you know, I got the benefit in '96, and we began to win seats back.

But what I think now is, the '98 election I think was a true watershed election, because the President's party won seats in the House for the first time since 1822, in the sixth year of a Presidency. That was a long time ago. And even though we only won 5, they thought they were going to win 20 or 30, and they spent $100 million more than we did. They thought they were going to win four to six Senate seats, and they didn't win any.

This year we're well positioned to pick up seats in the House and the Senate. In '98 Senator Hollings was reelected; we got a Democratic Governor in South Carolina; we got a Democratic Governor in Alabama; we got a Democratic Governor in Georgia; we got two African-American State-elected officials in Georgia. I think Zell Miller will be elected in Georgia in November.

So I think that the Democratic Party is coming back, and I think that it is a party reborn in the direction that we have taken in the last 8 years.

Status of Democratic Party Changes

Mr. Brownstein. Do you think Gore has to win in 2000 to institutionalize that in the party? Or do you think it is cemented now, the big things that you have changed—on crime, welfare, the budget—are they—free trade—are these cemented, regardless? Or if Gore loses, or do we reopen the debates?

The President. First of all, I've always thought he would win, and I still believe he's going to win. I thought he would win when he was down 18 points. Vice Presidents have always had a difficult time winning, but I believe he'll win. And I believe he'll win in a positive way.

President Bush won, basically, by demolishing Mike Dukakis. I think Al Gore will win for the right reasons, because the country is better off than it was 8 years ago, and it's a stronger country. It's also a more just country. And I think when people understand where we were, where we are now, where he wants to lead us, I think after they see Al and Joe and Tipper and Hadassah and their families and they hear him talk, I think the comfort level will go way up. And I think they'll have what I believe this election is about. I think they have four fine people running for President and Vice President with very different levels of experience and very different positions on the issues about the future. And I think they'll choose him. That's what I think will happen. I've always thought that would happen.

Republican Strategy

Mr. Brownstein. And that question of experience—your comments the other night in Rhode Island, sort of the humorous comments about Bush that sort of sparked a little—let me just ask you, so we can interpret those correctly. In your mind, does he have sufficient experience and those personal qualities it takes to be President?

The President. First, let me say I was surprised by the reaction. It isn't true that I was trying to get him. And I think it came probably because sometimes when I'm talking without notes I lapse into southern talk. We don't mean anything disparaging by "daddy." I talk about my daddy all the time. I think if I had said "father," it would have had a different resonance with them. And I didn't mean to do that.

But the point I'm making is, Bush has been a Governor for, what, 5 years. And I was a Governor for 11 years when I took office, and had been involved in a lot of these things. The point I was trying to make was a different one. It's not that being Governor of a State, big State, for 5 years is not enough to be President. It is that the argument that they're making is based far more on atmospherics and the rhetorical positioning of the candidate than on specific positions on the issues. That was the argument I'm making.

In other words, you didn't hear anybody up there talking about, here's how I'm going to change the environmental policy; here's how I'm going to change the way I appoint judges to the Supreme Court; here's how I'm going to change the tax policy.

Oh, they talked about particular popular tax cuts, but they didn't say, here's the difference in my approach than theirs. That's the argument I was making. Their argument is: This economy is on automatic; nobody can mess it up; nobody was responsible for it; the Government doesn't have anything to do with it; we're going to give you the money back; let us govern. That's what I was trying to say.

It wasn't meant to be a personal barb in any way. I was actually complimenting their strategy, because it's the only way they can win. That is, the only way they can win is to take all the guys that really run the Republican Party—in other words, Mr. Armey and Mr. DeLay and all those guys, they still have their positions—if they took everybody that's really in control and they didn't show them to the American people, then they took their policies on—whether it was guns or the environment or health care or hate crimes or choice—and they put them in a closet for the convention, and they showed a whole different face to America to try to make people say, "Well, I feel okay about these guys. I'm going to give them job. You know, the other guy has had it for 8 years. Maybe we'll give it to them." That is their strategy. That's plainly their strategy and I——

Mr. Brownstein. Is it meant to deceive the American people about what they really intend?

The President. Well, that's your word, not mine. I just think that they would prefer not to talk about the issue differences. I don't think they think of it as deceit, because if you talk to any of them, they basically think they should always rule. They thought I was an historical accident. They thought they'd never lose the White House again. They thought they had sort of a proven strategy for beating all Democrats, which is, basically, if you listen to all their campaigns from the beginning, that we're not like normal folks, and they are, so we ought to vote for them.

And I think they obviously have two candidates of enormous skill, enormous political skill, running. And I don't think they think

of it as deceit. I think they think, if they get elected, they'll do the best job they can. But they ought to tell the American people what they're going to do in all these areas, and we ought to tell the American people what we're going to do. And that's what the debates ought to be about.

Qualifications of the Candidates

Mr. Brownstein. Let me go back to my question, though, from a moment ago. Even if you didn't intend anything to that effect in Rhode Island—let me ask you directly—do you think Governor Bush is sufficiently experienced to serve as President?

The President. Well, that's always a relative question. The point I've made about Al Gore is that he had a distinguished record in Congress, a distinguished record in the Senate. And he had the most extraordinary record of achievement in his present job than anyone in history. So he is much better qualified. He's also shown a peculiar qualification for this moment in history. That is, he's one of the most future-oriented people in American public life in the last 25 years. And he always has been.

Contrary to Governor Bush's jab at him, he never claimed to have invented the Internet. He did sponsor legislation which transformed what was called something else into the Internet, a public access means of communication that's the fastest growing one in history. And that's just one example. He understood all this genetic business before everybody else did. He was talking about climate change when they were still making fun of him in '92. Now the oil companies say it's real. So I think that he has had more relevant experience.

So compared to the Vice President, he's not experienced enough. If you think experience is important, the Vice President has much more than he does. So that's not an objective statement; it's a relevant statement. No disrespect to his service as Governor, but look at Al Gore's experience and look at the results of that experience. I think he wins on that experience hands down.

Post-Presidential Plans

Mr. Brownstein. Would you accept any kind of position—special ambassadorship—in a Gore administration? Do you have any interest in the Supreme Court?

The President. Well, I can't imagine that that would happen. I told Al once that if he got elected President my main goal would be to stay out of his way—because America can only have one President at a time. But if he ever wanted to talk to me, I'd be glad to talk to him. If he ever wanted me to do anything, I'd be glad to do it. If he just wanted me to go to funerals for him, I'd be glad to go. I will do whatever I can to be helpful to him, because I know what it's like to have that job and have to make the calls.

So my main concern as I look ahead is to try to find ways that I can use all the experience and the knowledge that I've acquired to be an effective citizen of America and to do some positive things around the world in ways that absolutely do not interfere in any way, shape, or form with his performance of his responsibilities, which are unique.

So if I ever did anything, it would be strictly within the confines of what I was asked to do. And I would guess if it ever amounted to anything, it would be one specific something that might come up in some area where I had a lot of involvement. But my main focus is on—I'm going to be a private citizen again, and I just want to be a good one, and that's what I expect to be.

Defining the Vice President's Role

Mr. Brownstein. In the last few minutes I have, I was asked by colleague Ed Chen to ask you a couple of questions for a profile of the Vice President that will be running during convention week. And I'm wondering if—this goes back to '92—but the first question he wanted me to ask was, when you talked with then-Senator Gore about the Vice Presidency, did he have any specific ideas of what he wanted the job to be? And how did they jibe with your view of what the Vice President—did you negotiate in advance about what the Vice Presidency would be?

The President. I don't know if I would say "negotiate." But yes, he did, particularly after we talked a second time. He knew that basically—that Vice President Mondale and

Vice President Bush had had more institutional—had a more institutionalized partnership than any Vice Presidents before them. So he said, "You know, if I do this I want to know that we'll have lunch once a week," and we have, faithfully, until he got involved in more important things. "I want to know that I can be a part of any meeting and a part of all important decisions." And I said he would.

And then he said, "What do you have in mind? What do you want me to do?" And I said, "Well, I'm asking you to do this because I think you'd be a good President. I think you'd be a good partner, and because you know things I don't know—arms control, defense, the environment, technology, principally." And I said, "As we unfold this administration, I will want you to do specific things. I want you to have adequate staff to do it. I want you to have adequate support to do it, and I don't want you to have some separate satellite operation. I want us to have an integrated White House operation—you, the Cabinet, the staff—I want us all working as a team."

And I rather suspect that the model that we have established operationally will be followed by subsequent administrations, Republican and Democrat, because it's just crazy that other people haven't used the Vice President more. I mean, I think it doesn't make any sense.

Mr. Brownstein. It very well leads into question two, which was—the question is, how aware were you in the early days of the administration to resistance within the Presidential staff to the Vice President having an active role? And what did you do to let people—and here it says, like George or Harold Ickes—know that Gore had to be a central part of decisionmaking? Was there resistance, in your mind, originally, among some of the White House staff to this—what you describe as a kind of unique, new, and different integrated role.

The President. Well, I don't know if I would—let me just say this. I don't know if I would describe it in that way. But when we got started, we had to create a culture, and we had thousands and thousands of decisions to make. And the deal I made with him, which I initiated, I said, "Look, if you think we're not doing something right or if you feel you should be involved in something you're not, the one thing I cannot tolerate, we'll never survive around here if this happens, is if you or anyone else sits around and fumes about something instead of bringing it out." I said, "If you think that we've messed up, you come and tell me, personally. And if I agree with you, we'll fix it."

So over the last 8 years maybe—maybe once a year something would come up where he'd say, "Look, this is how I think it should be, and we'd like to be more involved, and we're not," or, "This is something I think I should run myself." But it hasn't happened a lot. But in the beginning, you know, it took us a while to get this up and going. It's not easy. If you read these accounts of previous White Houses and how they operated, I mean, you would see—you've got a thousand different external pressures operating on you; you feel like you're in the fourth quarter of a game every day with the time running out. So it took us a while to work it out, but we did work it out, and I think on balance it's worked quite well.

Unfinished Agenda

Mr. Brownstein. My last question, so I'm going back to one of my own questions, instead of the Gore questions, which is: In the last few years, despite what we've talked about before, a lot of what you have proposed has been blocked. I mean, there has been, sort of, gridlock on a lot of things in Washington.

If you were going to look at one or two things, try to narrow it down, of the unfinished business of your Presidency that you think should be the top priority for the next President, areas or even specific proposals that you think are really right at the top of the agenda for a new Congress and a new President should focus, what would those be?

The President. Well, before they spend the whole surplus, in my judgment, they need to do the following things. There needs to be a long-term plan for what we're going to do on Social Security and Medicare that will require some more money and some substantive reform. I really regret—basically, neither party wanted to tackle Social Security

this year, because we could have done it. So they need to think about that.

Then I think they need a longer term strategy—I would advise the Vice President when he becomes President to think about this—really longer term strategy for education, because we're really beginning to see some improvement in these schools now. And we need to accelerate the pace of it, because now we know what works. And we're going to hit a roadblock when you have 2 million teachers retire over the next few years, really over the service of the next President, if the President is a two-termer.

Then I think—the third thing I think that really needs to be thought through is this whole complex of health care issues. I would recommend that we block out everything. For example, we could take a lot of the—the most vulnerable people without health insurance, we could take care of if we let all the parents of the CHIP kids buy into CHIP, if we let everybody over 55 who lost their health insurance at work buy into Medicare and give them a little tax credit to do it. And if then we let all young single people have access at least to some sort of catastrophic plan, along the lines of the slimmest plan offered by the Federal employees plan. And then we should beef up the public health network in America. I think that's important.

So those three areas, domestically.

Now, in foreign policy, I think that there are two things that need to be more work done. The one area, as you know, that I have failed to get a majority consensus in my party on is for the imperative of continuing world trade networks and to continue to have America benefit from the increasing interdependence of the global economic system. And I failed to get the Republicans to agree that you can't have an economic system that is interdependent without more of an interdependent social system. That's what the labor and environmental standards are all about. I think there ought to be a serious effort on that.

And then one other thing on foreign policy that I think is important. I've talked a lot about this, but we don't have the institutionalized commitment that I think we need to deal with the new security threats and the new opportunities in the 21st century. The Republicans made fun of me when we said AIDS was a security threat, but it is. The breakdown of public health networks all over the world and the rise of AIDS, TB, and malaria, but also just a breakdown of health care systems—in Russia, not just in Africa, in Russia and lots of other countries in the former Soviet Union and other places—it's a serious problem. And I think there should be much more money spent in nonmilitary massive security, foreign policy areas.

We do real well on an ad-hoc basis, like we've got a great bipartisan commitment on Plan Colombia. I know it's controversial, but I think it's right. I think we're going to do it right, and I think my successors will do it right. But we're spending much less in nonmilitary foreign policy expenditures than we were at the end of the cold war. That budget has been cut in real dollar terms even more than the defense budget. The difference is that we could cut the defense budget because we didn't need 200,000 troops in Europe. We can cut back some other places and still have the dominant military in the world. And even now we're starting to replenish, rebuild the defense budget, which we have to, because we need more investment and readiness and weapons modernization and things like that. We have got to invest more money in development.

If we get a Middle East peace, the Congress, I'm sure, will do what we should do.

If time permitted, I could give you a dozen examples where the direct, long-term interests of the United States are adversely affected by our inability to invest nonmilitary money in certain areas. And I'm not talking about just writing people a blank check and throwing the money away. But those are the areas, if I were in charge of a transition planning team for the new administration, those are the things that I would urge them to be looking at.

NOTE: The interview began at 4:43 p.m. aboard Air Force One en route to Los Angeles, CA. In his remarks, the President referred to former Senator Bob Dole; former Representative Robert H. Michel; 1988 Democratic Presidential candidate former Gov. Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts; Democratic Vice Presidential candidate Senator Joseph I. Lieberman and his wife, Hadassah;

newly appointed Senator Zell Miller, who filled the seat of the late Senator Paul Coverdell from Georgia; and former Assistant to the President and Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy and Political Affairs Harold Ickes. This interview was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 15. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Remarks to the Community in Monroe, Michigan

August 15, 2000

Thank you. Are you ready to win this election for Al Gore and Joe Lieberman? [*Applause*] Let me begin by thanking Mayor Cappuccilli and his whole family for meeting me and Hillary and Al and Tipper. I thank you for coming out here today.

When we were riding in here, Hillary and Chelsea and I came in in a separate car from Al and Tipper, but we were looking at all the fields along the way, and then we looked at this really beautiful community that you live in. And it reminded us so much of all the places we visited on our bus tour in 1992, when we all got on the bus together and rode across America. The people who live here are the kind of people we ran to change the future for, the kind of people that work in our auto plants—and I thank Steve Yokich and the UAW for being here—the kind of people represented in Congress by John Dingell, who is recovering from surgery, but his wife, Debbie, is here—and Marcy Kaptur over in Ohio.

And miraculously for us, the people of Michigan and the people of Ohio twice gave us a chance to serve. Al Gore and I have worked for nearly 8 years now to put you first, never to forget about you, to get the economy going again, and to get our society moving in the right direction, to make us a more united nation, a stronger, a better nation.

I got to talk about that a little last night, and say—I imagine there were some people out there in the country that didn't like it, because when they met a couple of weeks before, they didn't follow that old Joe Friday maxim. I just gave you the facts last night. And one of the facts that I want to reiterate is that every good thing that has happened, that came out of our administration in the last 8 years, Al Gore was at the heart of it. He has been a leader for the new economy, a leader for welfare reform, a leader for education, a leader for lowering the crime rates.

The mayor talked about the brownfield program. That's a program that Al Gore took the lead in initiating that helped this community. You've got a community college here. We have 10 million Americans taking advantage of the HOPE scholarship tax credit, which makes community college virtually free in every State in the country. You got it, right? He got it right there, exhibit A.

When we took office in January of 1993, the unemployment in this community was 8.8 percent. Today, it is 2.2 percent, one-quarter of what it was before.

Now, I want to make just a couple of points and bring on the Vice President. Number one, this wasn't a matter of chance; it was a matter of choice. Not just us—nothing we did in Washington would have amounted to anything if you weren't doing your part out here, the working people, the business people, the local leaders of all kinds. I know that. But our job was to create the conditions and give you the tools to live your own dreams and make your own future. And I think the record is clear. This country is better off than it was 8 years ago.

Here's the second thing, and I hope you'll take my word for this because I spent most of my adult life studying economics and the development of our country. The things that have happened in the last 8 years, the good things, are nothing compared to the good things that can happen in the next 8 years—nothing.

But we've got to make the right choice. And you, all of you who came out here today, what you owe yourselves and your family and your future is to make sure that every single citizen you know in this country, all your friends and neighbors here, understand exactly what the choice is, what are the differences in the leaders and the parties, on the economy, on crime, on welfare, on civil rights, on choice, on all the issues that will shape our future.

I can tell you that as we move into the future, the nominee of the Democratic Party, my partner and friend for the last 8 years,