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AN INTERVIEW OF THE FIRST LADY
CONDUCTED BY CINDY ADAMS, NEW YORK POST,
THE WHITE HOUSE

MRS. CLINTON: I saw a Kings County hospital.

Q Hospital. That's pretty funny.

MRS. CLINTON: You know, I was pretty impressed, actually. I mean, it's got a huge set of problems, as you know, and you've got all of these gunshot wounds, and stab wounds flowing in this trauma unit all the time, and you've got tuberculosis patients, HIV patients. They have diseases there that -- because of the population they serve -- you know, we thought were just figments of the past, like scurvy, malaria, they've seen in the last couple of years.

So I was pretty impressed by the doctors and the nurses that I met who are struggling against some pretty tough problems.

Q You know, we were talking a few minutes ago about Jackie, with my neighbor Jackie (inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: I like her so much.

Q Have you been in touch?

MRS. CLINTON: I have. I talked to her (inaudible) and I was so pleased she sounded great. I mean, her voice was strong, and she was as interested in asking me what I was doing, and how Bill and Chelsea were, as I was in asking how she was doing. And I came away really upbeat. I called her -- I wanted to see if I could see her today, but our schedules just didn't work out.

Q She was asked -- the cardinal asked the bishops to tell the congregations (inaudible) pray for her. Has she been of any -- what's the word -- inspiration, something

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(inaudible) yourself to, how she's handled things?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes. Yes. In fact, one of the reasons that I wanted to meet her last year is because I really admire the way she raised her children under circumstances that I can only imagine. I mean, I think that I've got some challenges to deal with in, you know, protecting my daughter, but they are nothing compared to what she had to deal with.

I thought she had done such a good job, so I went and visited with her. I had two wonderful luncheons with her in her apartment, and the first one we just spent the whole time talking about our mutual interests. And I asked her lots of questions about, you know, how did you protect kids.

Q Like -- like how did she say?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I mean just the kind of things that I try to do where -- trying to maintain some normalcy, you know. You don't expose them all the time as objects. They're not dragged out for public viewing. They're allowed to have their own life, and they're also expected to take responsibility.

She told me this great story about how, you know, John, when he was much younger, you know, he had -- she wanted him to be out on his own, and she had to kind of argue with some of the security people that he needed to be able to ride his bike to the park, and kind of take care of himself, just like any young boy has to learn how to. And we talked about how we want -- you know, we expected our kids to do their homework, we expected our kids to, you know, have some responsibilities around the house.

And I -- and I've thought about it so often, because, you know, she has said many times that raising her children was her first and most important priority. And that's mine, and that's how I felt when I got into this. I didn't know what I was going to do, and so she was a big help to me. And then the whole way that she has conducted herself, and the kind of private life in the public spotlight that she's been able to carve out for herself.

When we went sailing with them at Martha's Vineyard this summer, we had so much fun. I mean, it was one of the best days. We all laughed ourselves silly. We went swimming

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together. My daughter and Caroline, before I knew what was happening, were on the top of the boat diving off together. So you know, we have the same sorts of ideas about grabbing life and making the most of it. And I just -- I like her enormously.

Q You know, subsequently, not while she was in the White House, but subsequently, she has had to deal with a lot of the same things that you've had to deal with. I don't know if there's any -- because you are obviously very able -- I mean, if there is any parallel to be gained, but she has been able to go through an awful lot of (inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, oh, yes, with her head up, with her disposition and her confidence untouched. I just -- I admire her enormously. You know, one of the best things about being in this position I find myself is that I get to meet a lot of people that I would have only otherwise read about.

Q Yes.

MRS. CLINTON: And you know, to sit across a table from them, to have a meal with them, to share ideas about how you navigate through what is a pretty tough time, if you're in the public eye, and getting more so -- I mean, the level of pressure and stress and all that, that people try to impose on you, seems to go up year by year. And you know, you meet somebody who is like her, who I think has done a superb job under the most difficult circumstances.

I mean, I can't imagine anybody who has had in modern times, more to have to deal with publicly, and who has carried it off with such grace.

Q Was there another first lady that (inaudible) you?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I like a lot of them for different reasons, like -- I've had wonderful conversations with both Lady Bird Johnson and Betty Ford. And I admire Lady Bird because she has been just resolute in her commitment to the causes she cared about, and has done it with a real style. I mean, there's something about the way she has conducted herself, which I think has shown a lot of strength and grace under pressure.

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I've always liked Betty Ford, because she has been willing to be outspoken and to take on issues that other people were afraid to talk about, starting with breast cancer back in the early '70s. I also, you know, have always enjoyed my social -- I don't know them very well -- my social contacts with both Nancy Reagan and Barbara Bush.

But of course, I really admire Eleanor Roosevelt. I mean, she's (inaudible) read everything I can. I have a little -- very minor collection of Eleanor Roosevelt memorabilia. I've tried to think about what she went through and the kinds of causes she cared about, and the role she played for her husband, and I find her to be a source of real inspiration.

Every day I find out something new, some new attack that was leveled against her, some new, terrible charge, and you know, she'd get up the next day and go out and fight for the right of, you know, minors to be able to breathe good air. I mean, you know, she just had a resilience of spirit. I think she was a very spiritual and faithful (inaudible) woman filled with faith. I think she had a real sense of the contributions she could make, and it kept her going.

Q What would be the biggest -- if you could speak to the American public, like, on a one-to-one, what would you say is the biggest misconception we have about Hillary?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I think that I am not anybody's stereotype, but people for all different kinds of reasons try to put me in one or another stereotype box. And I'm trying to do what I think most Americans are trying to do, particularly American women: trying to fulfill all my different roles.

I have a family that I care more about than anything. I try to support my husband. I try to raise my daughter. I try to take care of my parents and my siblings, and the people in my extended family, and I think about that, and spend a lot of time on it. I also worked and am still working, although not in a traditional job right now, but I know what it's like to balance all of that.

Q What's the box (inaudible)?

MRS. CLINTON: I think it depends upon their perspective. I mean, people either try to say, well, she's

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not at all like us. She's a -- fill in the blank -- whatever, whatever the blank happens to be. She doesn't share your values, she's not your kind of person.

That's usually for people who don't have any idea who I am, you know. They never talk to me, they don't know anything about me, but for their own reasons, whether it's political or whatever their agenda is, they have to paint me or caricaturize me in some way, which I guess happens any time you're in the public eye. It's sort of sad. I mean, I want -- I mean, I want people to get to know me as my friends know me, as I am. I mean --

Q Who are you? Tell me, what is a Hillary?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, that's a good question. I am someone who has a lot of joy in life. I love --

Q Do you have a sense of -- you have a great sense of humor.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I witness (inaudible). I like -- I like to laugh.

Q Yes. Yes.

A PARTICIPANT: You should have seen her in Lillehammer.

MRS. CLINTON: I like to be around -- I mean, I believe -- life is -- life is hard. For some of us, it's easier than for others, but you know, every person has challenges in their life. It's not what happens to you, it's what you do with what happens to you.

I'm somebody who was raised -- you get up every day and you do the best you can every day, and you try to find some joy in it, you try to have some fun in it. And you take on commitments, and you see them through, and you care about the people who are around you, and you try to make life a little better.

Q Go back to the things that your friends note, the sense of humor. Give us the things that we don't see (inaudible). We know about your commitment to social causes (inaudible) being are you?

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MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think I'm a good friend. I try to be a good friend.

Q Are you a loyal friend? Do you have time to listen to somebody who has a bitch about something?

MRS. CLINTON: Yes. Yep, and who is in trouble, or who needs somebody to lean on for a while, because I mean, I think that's what friends are for, and I try to -- I try to be there for my friends. And I have friends that I -- I mean, I'm still in regular touch with people that I went to kindergarten with.

My high school friends I've had up to the White House. We've spent the night together and stayed up and laughed and watched terrible trashy movies together. We are in close touch. I am in close touch with my friends from college who saw me through the campaign. They were there for me, they helped me out, friends from law school, I mean, literally kindergarten through law school, through my work life.

I really believe in friends. I believe in relationships. I mean, that is to me the most important thing, and that's why I don't -- I'm not bothered by a lot of what people say or speculate about me, because they don't know me. What really matters to me is what my family and my friends think about me.

Q Temper. Do you have a temper?

MRS. CLINTON: Sometimes, yes. I'm pretty, you know, calm most of the time, but I can get mad, you know. There are things that make me mad. I hate injustice or unfairness. I don't like it. I don't like it when people lord it over other people. I don't like it when people try to act better than somebody else. Oh, yes, I can get a little (inaudible).

Q (Inaudible) dirty words (inaudible)?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, I've been known to occasionally, I suppose. I try not to. That's one of my, you know, real resolutions, not to.

Q New Year's resolution? Really?

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MRS. CLINTON: It's one I've tried to stick with because I don't think it -- I mean it -- I don't like to do it. (Inaudible) don't care if other people want to, so when I -- if I do it, I don't like it, so I try not to.

Q Can you fight with a husband once he becomes President of the United States of America?

MRS. CLINTON: Sure. My husband you can, because he's the most secure and terrific person to be married to, because he is so supportive, and he doesn't want to be surrounded by people who, you know, are "yes" people. Well, Ann went to college with him. She's known him longer than I have, and so she knows that he likes people to disagree if they are --

Q Hard though, when somebody is supposed to be the chief of -- you know, of everything, to say, for Christ's sake, you don't know what the hell you're talking about.

A PARTICIPANT: Well, you don't tell him that way, exactly.

A PARTICIPANT: (Inaudible) my husband, you know what I mean?

MRS. CLINTON: But you do -- you know, but he --

A PARTICIPANT: You do (inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: But I think a lot of people, when they first saw the way that Bill, you know, related to his friends and to me, and to the people around him, were really surprised, because I mean he elicits that. I mean, you know, lots of people just --

Q What do you mean?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I mean, he wants people to say, I think that's a really dumb idea. I mean, I don't like that. I mean, obviously he wants the conversation to stay on a level where it doesn't deteriorate into, you know, name calling and irrational talk, but he wants people to be honest around him. I mean, he seeks that out. He really enjoys it.

And so for -- you know, for both of us, we've just always been like that, all the years we've known each other.

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We're very up front and straightforward about what we're thinking. You know, we are each other's best friends as well as husband and wife, which, you know, we just share everything. And -- I don't -- I can't imagine doing it any other way.

Q Well, one time I was talking to, pardon the expression, the empress (inaudible) hard to get that in a conversation. That way you can go a whole day (inaudible). And they had people -- doors -- doors in that god damned palace from the ceiling to the floor, and the people would open them, so they would walk through, you know.

So I said, I mean, can you really have a fight with an emperor, a shah -- a shah? And she said to me very quietly, she says, damn right you can. He's my husband first and the shah second. Oh, that's great.

A PARTICIPANT: That's a good line. I like that.

Q Yeah.

A PARTICIPANT: That's a good line.

MRS. CLINTON: Can you fight with an emperor.

Q Yes, I didn't know how you'd do it. I would -- I would think it would be -- I know it sounds nonsensical (inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: No. I mean, we've grown up together. I mean, we've -- you know, I mean, we have talked about everything from the -- we started a conversation 23 years ago, and we just never have stopped, and so we sort of insert as we go along. I mean, you know, these guys know, because they're around us all the time. I mean, we just have this ongoing conversation. It's like we pick up thoughts that we dropped three years ago because something pops in our mind.

I was sitting there the other day with some -- he said, Do you remember that book we read together about Napoleon in 1972? Well, just think about that. You know (inaudible) I can't remember that book. He can remember everything. I mean, that's the -- the only thing that really does, you know, I mean, because he is so smart, and he remembers everything in his head that he's read.

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Q Do you?

MRS. CLINTON: No, but both of us -- we can't remember things --

A PARTICIPANT: Pretty good, though.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I'm pretty good, but you know what we can't remember anymore?

A PARTICIPANT: More neurons gone.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, see, that's what's happened. We can remember things that are irrelevant to our lives.

Q Yeah.

MRS. CLINTON: But I sat down with him the other day and I said, you know somebody asked me a question the other day about did we ever go on a vacation with -- you know these friends of ours, in 1974 (inaudible). I said, can you remember that? And he said no. We sat there trying to figure out where we spent -- we couldn't remember any of that. It's like the personal side, the things we spend our time on, that's -- the neurons have snapped.

Q Can't remember that.

MRS. CLINTON: But obscure stuff, like what Napoleon said to Josephine in 1808 --

Q This you remember?

MRS. CLINTON: This, he remembers, you know. He can't remember stuff that I'd like him to remember, but he can remember --

Q I wonder if Josephine ever had a fight with Napoleon. Too late to ask.

MRS. CLINTON: She had fights with little emperors. She had fights with little emperors.

Q Emperor (inaudible) emperor (inaudible). Okay. What did you get Chelsea for the 14th?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, the -- for Valentine's Day or

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for her birthday?

Q (Inaudible) birthday.

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, yesterday, her birthday. Well, we got her -- we got her two things. I bought her the official Olympic ski sweater from Lillehammer, but I didn't let her know about it until her birthday. She really wanted it, and I said, Oh, honey, I mean, you know, we've spent a lot of money, we can't do that -- you know, the usual stuff. So I gave her that.

And then her father, who is sort of the clean freak in our family -- and we've been working very hard to sort of keep his clean freak tendencies at bay until she sort of adopted them on her own -- she's beginning to be more organized, keeping her room clean, all that stuff -- he gave her these beautiful, like, pen and pencil set and stuff like that for her desk. And she was thrilled by that, because it was, like, a real grown-up thing to do. And then we gave her a great birthday party.

Q What does this mean, clean freak?

MRS. CLINTON: It means that he's the perfect man to be married to, because if he were here, and we were at home, and you and I -- he -- you would be he, and I would be me, and I'd be having a conversation about something, he'd be over there saying -- straightening up -- okay, yeah, I agree with you about that. I mean, he -- I agree, I agree.

I mean, you know, he was the perfect person for me to marry, because I am -- you know, I am neat, but I'm not a clean freak. He is great. I mean, we used to have conversations in our kitchen, even at the governor's mansion. Because we didn't have anybody around on the weekend, we'd cook ourselves, and stuff. I mean, I'd go in and we'd start a conversation, and I'd just sit down. And he'd clean while he was talking. He'd clean, he'd load the dishwasher, you know.

A PARTICIPANT: Well, he always does six things at once, anyway.

MRS. CLINTON: (Inaudible) six things at once, and one of them is cleaning. He loves to clean.

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Q He loves to clean? In the White House, does he clean, also?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, he organizes stuff. I mean, you know, he doesn't have -- I mean, there's a lot of people wafting through, cleaning up all the time, so he doesn't have as many opportunities as he did in our lives before, but enough so that, yeah, I mean --

A PARTICIPANT: Real straightener-upper.

MRS. CLINTON: He's a straightener-upper. That's a better phrase.

Q He doesn't really clean.

MRS. CLINTON: Yeah, he doesn't really clean. He likes to make things neat.

A PARTICIPANT: He used to organize, in the campaign, all of his things that he would get. You know, his hat -- he got a lot of hats. He used to go down in the basement. He used to -- he wanted to go through all of his things and organize them.

MRS. CLINTON: Yeah, and he thinks, when he does that. I mean, it's not wasted time for him. I mean, he'll be pondering some problem. Like, you know, he'll say, well -- he said, I think I'm going to take an hour off and go clean -- or go -- you know, go count my hats, or something. And then he'll come back and make the phone call he's been thinking about.

Q So we started that funny word in the lunch that day. He's the opposite of you. Remember we used the word, shlump (phonetic), and I remember that. It struck me so funny (inaudible). Are you the opposite way? I mean, are you disorganized?

MRS. CLINTON: We're both mensches. We're both mensches.

Q Where did you get that phrase?

MRS. CLINTON: I've been working on it. I didn't want to come empty handed to New York.

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Q (Inaudible) Arkansas they taught you a word like mensch?

MRS. CLINTON: That's why I tried to say it with a southern accent.

Q I think you did very well, both mentions. I don't even know how you spell it, but for Christ's sake --

MRS. CLINTON: Yeah, what's the plural of mensch?

A PARTICIPANT: Mensches. Must be mensches.

A PARTICIPANT: With an "e"? Is it an "es"? I wonder.

Q Yes, but does it have a "c"?

A PARTICIPANT: M-e-n-s-c-h-e-s.

MRS. CLINTON: Yes, of course. Of course.

Q M-e-n-s-c-h-e -- okay. What's a mensch? Explain a mensch to me.

MRS. CLINTON: Just a really good guy. Just a great human being.

Q Okay. Tell me about the rigors of moving, in the White House. We started to say that at the lunch that day, and I wasn't allowed to write about it. We were talking about shlumping, and stuff. How do you shlump around in the White House? How do you get to be a real person -- a mensch in the (inaudible)?

MRS. CLINTON: We -- well, you know once you get to the second and third floor of the White House, unless there is some kind of an event going on, that's where we live. And so -- it's a great (inaudible) --

Q Yes, I need to know (inaudible).

A PARTICIPANT: She was the only one who found out.

Q Yes, I (inaudible) it's like -- it's like Christmas (inaudible).

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MRS. CLINTON: Did you find out (inaudible)? I love it.

Q Christmas.

MRS. CLINTON: He picked it out himself. I mean, he had people send him things (inaudible).

Q Do you know, that's a very good stone. I mean, God knows, I'm not the type to look at the jewelry. I saw it, I've been looking at it.

MRS. CLINTON: I just -- you know, I just love it. I just love it. Where were we? Shlumping -- oh, and so when we get to the second and third floors we are really on our own. And I mean -- we put on sweats. Like, take yesterday. Yesterday was my daughter's real birthday.

You know, the birthday party was Saturday night. We had 25 girls spend the night and it was -- it was great fun, because my husband and I were sort of, like, persona non gratis, I mean. You know, we could be around, but not too close, but I have all these neat young women that work for me, so they were sort of infiltrating to make sure everything went all right.

So the next morning after, you know, Bill went to church, and we got everybody fed, and we got -- the parents picked up, and all that. Chelsea was still in her pajamas. I mean, we had all just shlumped around, all day. So Bill was really tired. I mean, he's been working so hard, I mean, you know, foreign policy, domestic policy, everything going on. So after we got the girls all off, he said, you know, I just want to rest; he said, I can't think of anything to do.

So Chelsea comes in. So we sat on our bed and played cards for a couple of hours. I said to Chelsea, how do you -- I said, you can do anything you want to do today. What do you want to do, Honey? She said, I just want to spend the day with you and Dad. I don't want to have to get dressed until I'm ready. And I had -- I exercised that morning, and I had my sweats on, you know, and stuff. We sat there and played cards, and --

Q What game?

MRS. CLINTON: Oh, we played Hungarian rummy, which

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is one of our all-time favorites. We played pinochle (inaudible).

Q (Inaudible) look that one up (inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: You know --

A PARTICIPANT: Don't look at me.

MRS. CLINTON: I have to have some secrets.

A PARTICIPANT: They shlump around. I don't do that.

Q Sorry about that. You're so elegant -- shlump, mensch.

MRS. CLINTON: So then -- yes, so later in the afternoon --

Q Who won?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I lost. They both did much better than I did. I don't know how that happened, too. I felt very -- I was getting a little irritated, but -- so, anyway, we watched sports on TV, switched back and forth between the Olympic coverage, basketball coverage. And then we had dinner. We had an early dinner.

Q What did you have?

MRS. CLINTON: Chelsea had a lot of homework. We had chicken, and vegetables, and soup, and (inaudible).

Q Upstairs?

MRS. CLINTON: Upstairs in our little second-floor kitchen.

Q But you didn't make it? You're not saying you make it?

MRS. CLINTON: No, no, I didn't make the food. No. So then after dinner, Chelsea went to do her homework, and Bill and I went bowling. (Inaudible) bowled, and I ripped off my fingernails in the --

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Q In the White House?

A PARTICIPANT: There is a single lane.

MRS. CLINTON: There is a single lane. Nixon had it put in.

Q I hope (inaudible).

MRS. CLINTON: So we went bowling. He has tried to teach me how to bowl. He loved to bowl when he was a kid. And so the single lane bowling alley was there. So we didn't use it very much last year, but for some reason in the last couple of -- in the last month or two, we've kind of gotten into it. He's a really good bowler, so he's trying to teach me how to bowl, and it's such a humbling experience. It really is humbling.

Q So you lost at cards and you lost at bowling (inaudible) bowling, too?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, yeah. Well, I don't -- I mean, I am a good card player. It was just a bad day for me. I'm a terrible bowler, but I broke 100 in one game. Now that was, for me, excellent. So I broke 100.

Q In what, bowling?

MRS. CLINTON: In bowling, yes. And then we went back upstairs and checked on Chelse (phonetic) and --

Q And you were still wearing your sweats?

MRS. CLINTON: No, darling, I'd taken a hot shower (inaudible).

Q What were you in now? I want a picture.

MRS. CLINTON: Okay, I was in a -- bowler -- I was in a pair of black stretch pants and a sweatshirt, and that's what I was bowling in. Then we watched the rest of the Olympics last night. It was kind of -- it was a pretty sort of ordinary deal.

Q Is it okay for me to get one more question? Because the others are here.

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A PARTICIPANT: They are?

MRS. CLINTON: Then we have to make like this didn't happen.

Q Yes, I understand. I mean, I absolutely -- I absolutely understand.

A PARTICIPANT: (Inaudible) guess this has -- this has gone a half-hour, so you can have one more question.

Q Okay. Tell me what you didn't expect about the White House. Now, I know the air conditioning stinks, and I know the phone system is, like, from Alexander Graham Bell.

MRS. CLINTON: Right.

Q So you tell me what was a surprise misconception about the White House.

MRS. CLINTON: The phone system was one of the biggest. I mean, I would have thought there would have been an absolute state of the art phone system.

A PARTICIPANT: (Inaudible) glued to the phones.

MRS. CLINTON: I mean, you know, because when -- we have, you know, push-button phones, now, in much of America, and you can conference people in, and you can transfer calls, and all that. But our phone system was not of that generation, yet. So getting the phone system to work -- and it still is not where it should be. We have the most wonderful telephone operators in the world. They are the nicest women, and they will do anything for you, but the demand on the phone system --

Q You don't tell me you have a rotary dial?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, when we came in, we didn't even have a dial. Every phone in the White House was -- you picked it up and waited for the operator to come on the line. You didn't dial. You couldn't dial yourself anywhere. If you wanted to call your mother, you couldn't do it, you know.

So we now have some of those phones left, but we also have some push-button dial phones that we can use, and -- but that was a big surprise. I would have thought

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you'd have state of the art phone equipment in the White House.

Q Yes, I would have thought so, too. Okay. I'm now being politely thrown out, and I have to come in the same door --

(End of interview.)

* * * * *

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