

From: "Mamo, Jeanie S."
To: "Kavanaugh, Brett M."
Subject: FW: President's roundtable interview with texas print media
Sent: Tue, 2 Aug 2005 09:56:52 -0500
[0801bush.int.doc](#)

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From: Eckert, Ellen E.
Sent: Monday, August 01, 2005 4:32 PM
Subject: President's roundtable interview with texas print media

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

Internal Transcript

August 1, 2005

ROUNDTABLE INTERVIEW OF THE PRESIDENT
WITH TEXAS PRINT MEDIA

The Roosevelt Room

1:08 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thanks. It's about time you all gave me a chance to do the Texas press. (Laughter.) I'm looking forward to getting back down there. I just checked in with the house -- it's about 100 degrees. But no matter how hot it gets, I enjoy spending time in Texas.

And I have a busy couple of weeks down there, and I have a lot -- going to have meetings with people who come -- from my administration who come down, the economic people -- by the way, it's pretty good news today on industrial output, in case you're interested in writing some good news -- Rumsfeld and his team; Condi will come down.

I'll be doing some bill signings, go to New Mexico and sign the energy bill. Finally got an energy bill, after all these years the Congress got it -- and it's a good bill. It promotes our diversification away from hydrocarbons, helps improve the electricity infrastructure, begins us back on building some nuclear power plants, I hope. It really is the beginning stages of what will be a good start at diversification and less dependence on foreign sources of energy.

I'm going to sign the highway bill. Got a good highway bill, based on numbers, one that we came to Congress to agree on. They started much higher than I did, but in order to do my duty as the fiscal disciplinarian, we worked with Congress and got the bill down to a number I can live with. And I'll be signing that, as well.

Signing CAFTA tomorrow. We had a great legislative week. And, hopefully, when the Congress gets back, they'll reconcile their differences -- their narrow differences -- on the Patriot Act and get that bill to my desk early.

Oh, I remember how this town works. It wasn't all that long ago that some people were saying nothing was going to get done to the legislative session, and we got a lot done. And I want to thank the members of Congress for working hard. And one way to do it is to go to people's districts. That's what I did as governor, if you remember. That's what I'm going to do here; I'm going to take a couple of bill signings out of Texas.

And then I'm going to travel some out to the western states, out of Crawford. Anyway, I'm looking forward to getting down there and just kind of settling in. I'll be doing a lot of work; on the other hand, I'll also be kind of making sure my Texas roots run deep.

I'll be glad to answer a series of questions. Then I think we've got to go to work.

Q So who do you endorse in the governor's race?

THE PRESIDENT: That's your first question? (Laughter.) You can have two questions. Is that your first?

Q Well, actually, yes. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: Okay.

Q Strayhorn has been criticized by Rick Perry's supporters for taking --

THE PRESIDENT: You might leave. (Laughter.)

Q I'll step out.

THE PRESIDENT: Jackson asking the question. (Laughter.)

Q Yes --

THE PRESIDENT: Look, I held a high position in Texas at one time in my life, and I made it clear to all parties I'm not going to get involved in the race.

Q You know, because Perry, obviously, is vying for your support for putting out that story about Strayhorn's financial contributors --

THE PRESIDENT: Do what now?

Q Did you see that story about Strayhorn's financial contributors?

THE PRESIDENT: Jackson, I don't read every story you write. (Laughter.) Just the slain waiter story. (Laughter.)

No, I'm just not going to get involved in the race. They're both friends, they're people I've run with before, they're people I've worked with, and I'm just not going to -- and I've told both that we're not going to get involved.

We'll go this way. I was going to start with Hutch, but Jackson jumped the gun. Action Jackson. (Laughter.)

Q On NASA, given the problems with the shuttle this past week or so, do you think NASA should retire the shuttle program before 2010? And, also, do you still feel comfortable the agency can pull off your moon and Mars initiatives?

THE PRESIDENT: The NASA decision on the shuttle will be made by the experts there. I read very carefully their comments. Andy Card has been in touch with the administrator, who believes that -- the comments tell me, and the administrator says that -- that is, the comments in the press -- that they can clear this problem up. But that decision will be made by the experts at NASA as to whether or not the shuttle will be retired prior to 2010.

And, secondly, I am confident that NASA will be able to implement the vision I laid out, and that is to use the moon as an exploratory base to go further into space. I'm confident that we'll develop the engineering and the rocketry to do so. I'm confident the astronauts are fired up about the program. But, most importantly, I'm confident this will give the American people a reason to be engaged and rooting for NASA's success.

Q On the campaign trail last year --

THE PRESIDENT: This worries me. (Laughter.)

Q No, no. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: This is a frightening moment. (Laughter.)
By the way, you're looking fit. [REDACTED] b(6)

Q [REDACTED] b(6)

THE PRESIDENT: [REDACTED] b(6)

Q [REDACTED] b(6) Last
year on the campaign trail --

THE PRESIDENT: [REDACTED] b(6) (Laughter.)

Q -- you said many times, at all times, "whether you agree with me or not, you know where I stand, what I believe and where I intend to lead." And we've seen that on most issues. On issues like stem cell, you've taken a firm position, which might or might not agree with the polls, but it's what you believe. On the war, you've done what you believe is right despite polls indicating some opposition to it.

THE PRESIDENT: This has got like a twist -- (laughter.)

Q On abortion, you go a different way. When asked about abortion, you talk about abstinence, culture of life and adoption. But when asked about Roe v. Wade, you never fully address it. You say the country isn't ready for it -- which, to me, sounds like a politician saying --

THE PRESIDENT: No, what I say when it comes to -- this is all in the context of the John Roberts nomination --

Q No, this is in the context of whether you believe Roe v. Wade should be overturned.

THE PRESIDENT: This is in the -- you're asking this question as my nominee for the Supreme Court goes up to the United States Senate. I have said there is no litmus test for my nominee, and that's the way -- and that's the case. And Mr. Roberts can answer questions thrown at him by the Senate, but I'm not going to get involved with the Roe v. Wade case in the midst of a judicial nomination.

Q So you won't tell the nation whether you believe Roe v. Wade --

THE PRESIDENT: I've told the nation I'm pro-life. I told the nation, as well, when it comes to judges and legal matters, I'll put somebody in the Court that will strictly interpret the Constitution. But this is your way, Herman, I know you well, of trying to weave in a story about John Roberts. You can play like it's not, but Roe v. Wade is a legal matter. John Roberts is going to be put on the Supreme Court, hopefully, in an expeditious manner, and he will answer the questions directed to him. But it is clear that if he were to answer those questions, he would have to recuse himself from future cases.

Q You've always avoided that question, even when you didn't have appointees. For 12 years, you've not -- why do you not want to say whether you favor overturning Roe v. Wade?

THE PRESIDENT: I am -- I told you I was pro-life. I've been very clear about my positions when it came to abortion. I have also made it clear the type of people I want to name to different courts.

Q Mr. President, do you plan to renew an effort to get immigration reform passed before this Congress? And there are a couple -- you've talked about a guest worker program, and there's two proposals in the Senate right now, both that are very different -- McCain, and then also Cornyn.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. Yes, I think we can get a -- we should work on one and I think we can get immigration reform done. It's very important for the American people to know that immigration reform will be done with a border security initiative that makes it clear to the people that we'll do everything we can to stop illegal people from coming into our country. I happen to see that -- which means better technology, border patrol agents, enforcement of law, returning people who get arrested to their -- detained to their country of origin, more holding facilities, to be able to do the border enforcement part.

I believe, and have made the case, that a good guest worker program is part of border security. In other words, people -- if there was a legal way for people to come here to do a certain job, which Americans could not be found to do the job, it would take pressure off the border.

And so we want to work with the -- you mentioned two groups in the Senate, and we're involved in discussions with them. This is a very complicated matter. There's a lot of moving parts to these pieces of legislation. Our first step was to find out exactly what was on the minds of the bill sponsors. We've got our own opinions on a variety of subjects, and we'll try to work it out this fall with members of the Senate.

Then, of course, you've got to deal with the House. But I think --

Q So is there going to be kind of like a renewed campaign to push it this fall?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, you saw the Speaker's comments -- I don't know if you saw the Speaker's comments. He said that -- oh, you don't read the newspapers, either. (Laughter.) The Speaker's comments said that he believes we can get an immigration bill done this fall. And that's good news because, obviously, you've got to have the Senate, in which there's a lot of action right now, and the House. And the Speaker opined that it's time to move on immigration legislation.

There's a lot of -- again, I think there's broad agreement that the system is not working, and that if an employer cannot find a willing worker in the United States that there should be a legal means to fill that job with somebody who will be here on a temporary basis. Then as you start the implementation process, there's a variety of different issues you have to deal with. I've always believed, for example, on the citizenship issue; this should not be an amnesty program. And if a person wants to become a citizen, has to get in line. In other words, you can't leapfrog an already existing line. And then if Congress is interested in enhancing -- or making it easier for somebody to become a citizen, the way to do that is to increase the number of people under the particular country quota that can become a citizen on an annual basis.

There's a little difference of opinion on that subject, but we'll work it out. It's going to be -- it's a very important issue, and it's an issue that we've got to get right. But it's important that the first thing that comes out of the Congress' mouths are that we will enforce our border.

Q I wanted to ask you about the -- what seems to be a growing debate over evolution versus intelligent design. What are your personal views on that, and do you think both should be taught in public schools?

THE PRESIDENT: I think -- as I said, harking back to my days as my governor -- both you and Herman are doing a fine job of dragging me back to the past. (Laughter.) Then, I said that, first of all, that decision should be made to local school districts, but I felt like both sides ought to be properly taught.

Q Both sides should be properly taught?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, people -- so people can understand what the debate is about.

Q So the answer accepts the validity of intelligent design as an alternative to evolution?

THE PRESIDENT: I think that part of education is to expose people to different schools of thought, and I'm not suggesting -- you're asking me whether or not people ought to be exposed to different ideas, and the answer is yes.

Q So we've got to give these groups --

THE PRESIDENT: Very interesting question, Hutch. (Laughter.)

Q We've got these groups on the border called the Minutemen. They think you've called them vigilantes. Do you think they are vigilantes?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, this was -- I was in Waco when I decried potential vigilantism. I want to make it clear that this is before they even showed up, as I recall, and I wanted to make it clear that it was intolerable for people to take the law in their own hands, because we didn't want people showing up with guns.

Do you remember the incident when I was the governor of Texas and a shepherd kid got shot across the river? I remember that well. And I also remember what -- in Maverick County, when I was the governor, and the ranchers there got all riled up, and

we basically worked with the DPS to move a bunch of highway patrolmen down there? Again, this is a subject which I've had some familiarity, and I think it's very important that we send signals to people that people should not take the law in their own hands. We've got people whose job it is to do this.

And so the statement I made in Waco, Texas, was a clear signal to anybody that they shouldn't be taking up arms against -- on the border, for example.

Q There are people who are going down there with guns to stop you from crossing the border.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, well, that was my point -- I'm pretty clear about whether or not I thought they should or shouldn't.

Yes, Ms. Mason.

Q All right, on a different subject. After the energy bill, the country is still going to be dependent on oil for a while. How will the aging refineries cope with it? And, also, how are cities like Houston going to be able to deal with the toxic emissions in the long-term?

THE PRESIDENT: No, good question. First of all, it's very important for your readers to understand that throughout this debate I have never suggested that upon the signing of the energy bill, that we would be -- that the price of gasoline would drop, for example. I mean, the bill has authorized funding for the implementation of a strategy that over time will enable us to become less dependent. That means more renewables, nuclear power, clean coal technologies.

In the meantime, it recognizes that some of the infrastructure is aging, electricity infrastructure is aging, pipeline infrastructure is aging. So there's some incentives in the bill for that. And so it's the beginning of something that should have taken place 10 years ago, really. LNG terminal, you know, the ability to bring in more LNG. It is a bill that encourages, over time, the development of alternative sources of energy, ethanol and biodiesel, all of which will make us less dependent.

In terms of non-compliance or compliance with the EPA standards for Houston, this bill -- first of all, a lot of our

abilities to deal with environmental issues will be improved with new technologies. And this bill encourages new technologies. Again, I repeat to you that there is incentives, for example, for the gasification of coal plants. Now, Houston doesn't have a lot of coal plants. We got a lot of natural gas plants. But, nevertheless, my point is that technologies will help a town like Houston be able to deal with its -- to meet its pollution requirements. I wish they'd have got the clear skies bill out, which would have helped a town like Houston a lot, and helped other Texas towns, particularly in the Metroplex, meet the requirements of the EPA. But technology is going to be the answer, and this bill does a lot of technological -- authorizes a lot of technological expenditures.

Q And it's the same with the refineries?

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, I beg your pardon. On aging refineries -- well, that's -- as you know, one of the suggestions I had was that we reduce the regulatory burdens on our refineries, and at the same time keep our clean air standards. New source review, for example, is moving forward. And that's the way for aging refineries to modernize without going through enormous bureaucratic paperwork.

Secondly, there are some investment tax credit -- I think there are investment tax credit incentives for refinery expansion, existing refinery expansion.

Thirdly, I tried to get, you know, to get Congress to authorize the building of refineries on abandoned military bases. They didn't like that idea. I thought it was a good idea. It's not in the bill. But, nevertheless, there are two good ways right there to help aging refineries modernize. There's two issues: One, how do you help an aging refinery stay efficient, and whether or not we're able to permit new refineries. As you know, there have been no new refineries built in the United States since the mid '70s.

Now, there's one other thing that will help on -- and not so much in Texas, but they changed the blended gasoline rules. This is particularly -- harmonizing the rules, which will help some of the Midwestern states that are constantly -- there's a kind of mixed-match of supply through these different rules, and they've been harmonized, which will be easier on the refiners and on the consumers, because as you're constantly changing blends it causes

the price go up. It makes it harder to match blend to regulation. I'm getting a little technical here, but it's a part of the bill. Will you follow me here?

Q Will you check under the hood, too, Mr. President?
(Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: I would if you weren't taking any notes.
(Laughter.)

This is a good piece of legislation. And it was a long time in coming. And I'm very proud of the accomplishment of the administration and the Congress in working together to get it done.

Q On another Texas-related subject, when did you first know and how did you find out that Karl Rove had discussed Joseph Wilson's wife with a reporter?

THE PRESIDENT: We're in the midst of a serious investigation. There is a very fine lawyer looking into all this, all the allegations. I caution the media not to prejudge. I will be glad to comment on the particulars of this investigation once it's finished. Karl has got my complete confidence. He's a valuable member of my team. And Mr. Fitzgerald will complete his work, and when he does we will all know the facts.

Q You have said anyone violated the law, they would be out of your administration. Are there measures lower than the law that would force you to ask someone to leave your administration?

THE PRESIDENT: See, what's happened here in this case is that many have started to prejudge the outcome of Mr. Fitzgerald's investigation in the newspapers. And I've asked people to wait until he puts out his report. And I'll be more than happy to comment upon that when I find out the facts.

Q Without telling us the facts, which clearly you won't, do you at this point --

THE PRESIDENT: Well, how do -- I mean, how do you know --

Q -- do you feel like you know the facts about what happened involving your staff members?

THE PRESIDENT: We have been -- we have been cautioned about talking about this issue.

Q Even amongst yourselves and amongst the staff?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q Okay. So you don't know the facts on what Mr. Rove may or may not have said?

THE PRESIDENT: As you know, I occasionally read the newspapers. It depends on who the writer is, in your case --

Q Daily basis --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. (Laughter.)

Q The Morning News has a great sports page. (Laughter.)

Q Well, but --

THE PRESIDENT: I've said as clearly as I can. Why don't you wait and see what the true facts are. And Mr. Fitzgerald's job is to talk to a lot of people, and he has done so. And then we'll lay out his findings for us all to see.

Q But you know of nothing at this point that would lead you to ask someone to leave your staff?

THE PRESIDENT: I'm much more disciplined now than I used to be, Herman.

Q I hate when that happens. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: I've answered this question 17 different times.

Q Except when you shoot the thumb at us. (Laughter.)

Q Well, you can talk about what you told Mr. Fitzgerald?

THE PRESIDENT: It's a new gesture.

Q I pass. (Laughter.)

Q You can talk about what you told the special prosecutor.

Q Do you think the Pentagon went too far or not far enough in the base closure recommendations? And what would you like to see the BRAC commission change this month before they send it to you on September 8th?

THE PRESIDENT: Excellent question. I put good people in place to make good recommendations. And the United States military took a good hard look at assets needed and assets that perhaps aren't needed, and made a recommendation under the laws of the United States Congress. And I respect their judgments. There is a process. You might remember when I was the governor of Texas, I was out there leading the charge at Kelly and other places, and trying to influence the commission. The commission then, like it's doing now, is giving people ample time to discuss their concerns, to listen to the logic of the different communities and different leaders, and they will then come back with a recommendation. And I'm going to accept their recommendation as presented.

Q I wanted to ask you, not --

THE PRESIDENT: And by the way, one of the things that I think the interesting lesson of Kelly is that for some communities that have a base that is closed, there is a great economic opportunity -- maybe for all communities, but some communities are better at seizing it than others. And as you recall, there was relocation money, retraining money, and then Boeing immediately came in and -- I presume that facility -- I know the facility was doing great a couple of years. I presume it still is.

My only point is, is that it's important for a community that make its case and its leaders to stand up and make their cases as to why the military should not have put that particular facility on the list, and at the same time, you know, be looking at opportunities should that base close -- opportunities to take advantage of the different government programs that are available and helping to ease of transition.

Q So you're just saying you'll accept whatever the commission --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I think it's very important -- in order for the process to be nonpolitical, it's very important for -- to make it clear that the decision of the BRAC will stand, as far as I'm concerned -- and the Congress. The Congress votes it up or down.

Q Do you have any idea how Roberts would vote on a direct challenge to Roe v. Wade?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I don't.

Q I don't understand. If you're giving him the job, and it's a matter of some import, why should that --

THE PRESIDENT: Because the minute -- first of all, I said there's no litmus test, and I meant it. And, secondly, that a discussion of specific cases will lead to recusal if such a case were to come up while he's on the Court.

Q Even if he were just to talk about it with you and not --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, yes, because he is going to be asked, did you talk -- just like I'm being asked. And as part of the hearing, he will be asked that question. All right?

Q We've got to get one for -- and Mason is dying to know this. The presidential library?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q -- Tarrant County and Arlington --

Q University of Houston?

Q Come on, Jack.

Q Rafael Palmeiro got busted for --

Q Wait, wait, the library.

Q Library vote.

Q SMU, yes?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, Rafael Palmeiro is a friend. He's testified in public, and I believe him. He's the kind of person that's going to stand up in front of the klieg lights and say he didn't use steroids, and I believe him. Still do.

Now, in terms of library -- I haven't seen the full case. Scott whispered in my ear that you might ask that question being a fine baseball fan.

Q Oh, yes.

THE PRESIDENT: The library, yes. It's going to be in Texas. (Laughter.) And we've got a deliberative process that starts with kind of thinking through the vision about what the library ought to do, and then conveying -- and then listening to different universities and/or communities about their concept, and then beginning to work to make sure the two mesh. And we're in the process now of collecting data from potential sites to get their points of view.

Q Is that one of those spousal decisions, or is that --

MR. McCLELLAN: No. She's definitely going to be a part of it.

Q That's why SMU is the favorite, isn't it?

THE PRESIDENT: Who do you write for now? (Laughter.)

Q In a semi-related question, where are you going to live when this gig is over here?

THE PRESIDENT: Crawford plus -- I suspect close to the library, wherever it might be. Now, that shouldn't -- if the library is in Waco, then obviously, Crawford is close to the library.

Q There are some parts of Austin that may not want the library if you're going to live real close to there. There are some precincts you weren't overly popular in --

Q Wait a minute. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: I managed to survive six years there. Yes, there are probably a couple of tough precincts there in Travis County, wasn't it?

Q But that will dictate where you're -- will Crawford be your full-time residence?

THE PRESIDENT: I haven't worked that out yet. Listen, the thinking about the library is interesting, and I've got a good -- you know, got a good team inside here working on it. Donnie Evans and my brother, Marvin, are working on it. I've got a lot on my mind. We've got a lot going on.

Q -- at politically? I mean, you've still got Iraq holding over your head and Social Security. You've got a lot of tough things that are going --

THE PRESIDENT: Well, it took -- it took the -- I don't know how many times I have to tell people that polls go up and polls go down. If you made decisions based upon polls, you would be a miserable leader.

Q But power is perception.

THE PRESIDENT: Power is being the President. And we saw what we can do when we work with Congress. It took a long time to get the energy bill out. Social Security is a difficult issue, too. But we're making progress. It wasn't all that long ago, like six months ago that folks such as yourself were saying a lot of people don't even think there's a problem. And now people know there's a problem, which is an important first step. It's going to take awhile to get Social Security reform, but it has to happen. It's really important.

Q Did the Bolton decision, you think, have any affect on your relations with the Senate, or will they understand?

THE PRESIDENT: First of all, the majority of senators would have voted for his affirmation -- or his confirmation. Secondly, Bolton's standing in the world depends upon my confidence in Bolton, and I've got a lot of confidence in Bolton.

I've enjoyed this as much as you have.

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1:38 P.M. EDT