Following is the complete transcript of "A Conversation with Jimmy Carter," an interview with the Democratic Presidential candidate by Bill Moyers, which was broadcast on a special one-hour edition of USA: PEOPLE AND POLITICS, Thursday, May 6 at 10:00 PM, ET, on the Public-Broadcasting Service (PBS).

BILL HOYERS: When you were growing up in that wooden clapboard house on that dusty road, spearing fish in your spare time, or netting fish in your spare time, did you ever think about being President?

JIMMY CARTER: No. I didn't have but one desire, aspiration that I can remember, and that is going to the Naval Academy. Nobody in my father's family had ever finished high school before I did, and to actually go to college, in itself, was a notable goal to establish in our family.

And my father was in the World War I, in the Army -- I had a very favorite uncle who was in the Navy -- and we saw in those Depression years that the best opportunity for me to get a college education was to go to one of the service academies where the tuition would be free. And Annapolis was my goal all the time until I went off to it.
MOYERS: No other boyhood aspirations, fantasies?
CARTER: No, no. When I was five years old, if anyone had asked me—what are you going to do when you grow up? I would have said—I want to go to Annapolis.
MOYERS: Is that right?
CARTER: And it was a kind of all-obsessive thing.
MOYERS: I've been intrigued as to why you almost suddenly gave up a military career and went back to Plains. You make a gesture at telling why in there, but there's something missing to me. Your father died. And you thought about his life, and you went back—but was there something else? 00:03:12
CARTER: Well, up until that time, I guess I was a naval officer who enjoyed my work. I had the best jobs in the Navy. I put into commission, as a pre-commission crew chief, the first ship the Navy built after the Second War, and then I went in the first nuclear submarine program. You know, the choice jobs in the whole Navy.

And then my father had terminal cancer, and I had to go home to be with him about the last month of his life. I hadn't seen him since I was about 17 years old. This was ten, twelve years later.

And I had always wanted, I guess, ultimately to be the Chief of Naval Operations, which is, you know, it's top of the Navy. But when I went back home to where I had lived and saw what my father's life meant—In the view of those who knew him best—his service on the School Board, his working for
a new hospital, his dealing with the education of farmers who bought seed and sorghum from him, his life in the church and his life in politics. He'd just been elected to the Legislature and served one year when he died.

Well, I could see then a pull on me that was almost irresistible to go back and resubmit my ties to my birthplace. My family and my wife's family have both lived right there in Plains, Georgia. The members of our family who were born in the 1700s— we never had moved anywhere -- and I guess that was a strong pull, too, that I didn't detect at the time.

But I think I had a choice to make. Did I want to be the Chief of Naval Operations and devote my whole life to that one narrowly defined career, which was a good one, or did I want to go back and build a more diverse life with a lot of friends, permanence, stability, in a community, in a relationship, in the life of a whole group of people? And I chose the latter.

MOYERS: Did you regret that, those last eleven years of your father's life? You had really not been in close touch with him.

CARTER: Well, I would like, obviously, in retrospect, to have been more with my father. I never thought he would die so young. But I've never regretted a day that I served in the Navy. That was an opportunity for me that paid off. I had a chance to travel extensively. I read and studied everything from, you know, music, drama, art, classical music and so forth.
I stretched my mind and had a great challenge, and I never had any regret for a single day that I spent in the Navy. I never regretted getting out a single day after I left.

HOYERS: What do you think it did for you or to you? Did it stamp this discipline that everyone tells me about? This respect for authority?

CARTER: Yes, I think so. Obviously, the Naval Academy is quite heavily disciplined. And a life on a ship -- particularly as a Junior Officer -- is a heavy discipline; to move in the submarines is a heavier discipline. And then I met Rickover, who knew me as one of his maybe four young naval officers who had come in on the Seawolf and the Nautilus, which were the two submarines that were built with atomic power. And he demanded from me a standard of performance and a depth of commitment that I had never realized before that I could achieve. And I think second to my own father, Admiral Rickover had more effect on my life than any other man.

HOYERS: What did he say to you? What was it? You reminded me of something Robert Penn Warren said to me in a recent conversation like this -- he said, "I'm convinced now that the single most indispensable element in any human being's life is the touch of another individual who says, 'You matter. You make a difference.' And I was going to ask you, who's done that in your life, and you say it's your father and Rickover.

CARTER: I said "men." Yes. Well, there was no personal
Interrelationship between me and Rickover. It was an impersonal demand of a perfectionist.

HOYERS: Can you step back as the civilian Commander-In-Chief from this heavy influence of the military and of an Admiral in your life?

CARTER: I can.

HOYERS: Can you? 00:07:20

CARTER: Yes, yes. There's no aspect of a militaristic inclination now on my part. I feel free of that completely. But the self-discipline has stuck with me. I have a constant drive just to do the best I can, and sometimes it's disconcerting to other people, but it's not an unpleasant thing for me. I don't feel that I've got to win, or that I, you know, that I'll be terribly disappointed if I don't win. I feel a sense of equanimity about it. If I--if I do my best and lose, I don't have any regrets.

HOYERS: What drives you? ms JC, ws BM, ms JC

CARTER: [Long silence] I don't know. I--exactly how to express it. As I said, it's not an unpleasant sense of being driven. I feel like I have one life to live. I feel like that God wants me to do the best I can with it. And that's quite often my major prayer. Let me live my life so that it will be meaningful. And I enjoy attacking difficult problems and solving of solutions and answering the difficult questions and the meticulous organization of a complicated effort. It's a challenge -- possibly it's like a game. I don't know. I don't
want to lower it by saying it's just a "game," but it's an enjoyable thing for me. 00:08:47

MOYERS: How do you know -- this is a question I hear a lot of young people -- how do you know God's will? 00:09:52

CARTER: Well, I pray frequently. And not continually, but many times a day. When I have a sense of peace and just self-assurance -- I don't know where it comes from -- that what I'm doing is the right thing, I assume, maybe in an unwarranted way, that that's doing God's will. 00:09:19

MOYERS: Let's go back a minute to the people who touched you.

CARTER: Yes.

MOYERS: When you were young. Who else?

CARTER: Well, there were two women, in particular, when I was young. One, obviously, was my mother. I'm much more like my mother than I am my father. She read day and night, at the breakfast table, the lunch table, the supper table. I do, still. She was very compassionate.

MOYERS: You mean she read out loud?

CARTER: No, no. No, she just read books. And so did I, by the way. My father didn't. He read the newspaper and maybe News and World Report, and that was just about it. Mother always was a champion of disadvantaged people. In our area it was poor whites and all blacks. Later, when she was past retirement age, she, as you know, went to India for two years,
and she, I think, she came back when she was after 70.

HOYERS: The Peace Corps?

CARTER: In the Peace Corps, yes. In the Peace Corps.

But she's always been that way. Miss Julia Coleman was a superintendant of our school when I was growing up in Plains. Plains is a town of about 600 population. The schoolhouse is still there. And she saw something in me, I think, when I was a little child, a hunger to learn, and although I lived in a rural area, three or four miles, three miles from Plains. We didn't have electricity or running water. But we didn't suffer. But she made sure that I listened to classical music. She would make me do it. And she'd make sure that I learned the famous paintings, and the author, and the artists, and she gave me lists of books to read, and she was very strict with me.

HOYERS: Who were the villains in your life?

CARTER: Well, I never had any--really any traumatic experiences. I never had any overwhelming fears or deprivations. I lived a sheltered life. My mom and my daddy were always there. And we lived in an isolated area. There were about two white families and maybe 25 or 30 black families around. The dominant family in the community was a black family, an AHE bishop, Bishop John.

But when things went wrong, you know, in the field or in the woods or in school, home was always a haven. So I never did have any fears, I guess, no villains that I can think of.

HOYERS: You said once that you never really seriously considered disobeying your father. And I wonder if anyone who
never disobeyed his father can understand the rest of us.

CARTER: [Laughter] Well, as a matter of fact, I never disobeyed my father in that when he said, Jimmy, you do something I failed to do it. But on many occasions I did things that I knew my father didn't like, and I was punished very severely because of it.

In fact, my father very seldom gave me an order. If all the other field workers were off for the afternoon, and he wanted me to turn the potato vine so they could be plowed Monday morning daddy would say to me—he called me "Hot."

HOYERS: He called you what?

CARTER: "Hot"—"Hot Shot"—is what he called me. He says "Hot," would you like to turn the potato vines this afternoon? And I would much rather go to the movie or something. But I always said, "Yes, sir, daddy, I would." And I would do it. But he didn't have to give me many direct orders. But I never did disobey a direct order my father gave me.

HOYERS: You wanted to be a good boy?

CARTER: Well, it wasn't a namby-pamby sort of thing. My father was my friend. And I respected him. I never said "yes" or "no" to my father. I would say, "yes, sir," "no, sir," to my mother, too, still do, and to most people that I don't know well. But it was a matter of respect. It wasn't any sort of trying to bow-tow to him or...

HOYERS: Was it a stern life?
CARTER: I--I...

HOYERS: I grew up on the Heridian about five, oh, four hundred miles due west from you. We danced not at all. We never went to a movie on Sunday. One of the first spankings I got was when I went--slipped off and went to a movie on Sunday. We had to go to BTU, and if we violated it, we were in trouble.

It was a stern life. Was it in Plains?

CARTER: Yes, it was a stern life. But there wasn't much to do. [Laughter] If it hadn't been a stern life--we didn't have any movies in Plains, and I remember that when I was a small child, we had a very small bowling alley that was not nearly as long as a regular was, but it was an exciting thing for Plains when we had a bowling alley for a while, with the small balls.

But my life was spent in a fairly isolated way, out in the woods and in the streams and swamps and fields. My classmates/my playmates were black, were--my classmates were white. And my whole environment was completely rural. Plains was the nearest town, population of 600. And I only went there when I had to. I did attend school there, and it was a--it was a growing factor in my life, but my background is all in the woods.

HOYERS: What do you do now for fun?

CARTER: I read a lot, and I have a--about the only think that I do for fun now is to look forward to being home. I stay gone a lot, away from Plains, away from our house, away from
our little daughter; away from my wife, away from mother, away
from my mother-in-law, my brother and sister and my wife's kinfolks.
And when I get home, I change immediately into work clothes,
put on broughans and dungarces, and either go to the farm, walk
in the woods. My wife and I hunt arrowheads. We go out into
the fields after they've been plowed and rained on, and we walk
some times for hours, just talking to each other about different
things, sometimes politics, quite often about our family. We
have very few moments alone. And so the fun in my life now
is just reestablishing for a 24-hour period, or 32-hour period,
whatever it is, the structure of my family.

HOYERS: What do you think we're on earth for? 00:15:48

CARTER: I don't know. I could quote the Biblical references
to creation, that God created us in his own image, hoping that
we'd be perfect, and we turned out to be not perfect but very
sinful. And then when Christ was asked what are the two Great
Commandments from God which should direct our lives, he said,
"To love God with all your heart and soul and mind, and love
your neighbor as yourself." So I try to take that condensation
of the Christian theology and let it be something through which
I search for a meaningful existence. I don't worry about it
too much anymore. I used to when I was a college sophomore,
and we used to debate for hours and hours about why we're here,
who made us, where shall we go, what's our purpose.

But I don't feel frustrated about it. You know, I'm not
afraid to see my life ended. I feel like every day is meaningful. I don't have any fear at all of death. I feel like I'm doing the best I can, and if I get elected President, I'll have a chance to magnify my own influence, maybe for—in a meaningful way. If I don't get elected President, I'll go back to Plains. So I feel like a sense of equanimity about it. But what—why we're here on earth, I don't know. I'd like to hear your views on that subject. [Laughter]

MOYERS: Do you ever have any doubts? People say to me, "Jimmy Carter appears to be so full of certainty and conviction in a time when, as Gabriel said in Green Pastures, 'Everything that's loose is coming, everything that's tied together is turning loose, coming loose.'" Do you ever have any doubts? About yourself, about God, about life?

CARTER: I can't think of any, you know. Obviously I don't know all of the answers to the philosophical questions and theological questions that—you know, the questions that are contrived. But the things that I haven't been able to answer in a theory of supposition, I just accept them and go on. The things that I can't influence or change.

I do have, obviously, many doubts about the best way to answer a question or how to alleviate a concern or how to meet a need. Or to how—how to create in my own life a more meaningful purpose and to let my life be expanded in my heart and mind. So doubts about the best avenue to take among many options is a kind of doubt. That is a constant presence with me. But
doubt about my faith? No. Doubt about my purpose in life? I don't have any doubts about that.

HOYERS: I ran into a -- by accident -- into a friend of mine who's a lawyer in a large firm in New York, and this may have something to do with the origin of the question. He asked me where I was going when he saw me leaving, and I told him where I was coming down to, to do this conversation, and he said, "Could I ask you to ask Jimmy Carter something?" And I said, "Well, I'll try." And I wrote it down. He said, "What bothers me about Jimmy Carter, the human being, is that he strikes me as a decent but provincial and narrow-minded man from the South who's lived most of his life in that environment. And I'd like to know how a man like that expects to lead a pluralistic society, not to mention the Western world." And I said I would ask that.

[LAUGHTER]

CARTER: Okay, that's a good question. I'm not sure that you have to have lived in many different places to understand a pluralistic society. I've had a changing career myself. I started out as an isolated farmboy living in -- as a minority member -- in a predominately black neighborhood. I moved from that to a smaller town and then from there to a junior college, from there to Georgia Tech and then to the Naval Academy.

I've traveled extensively in foreign countries all my adult
life. In the last four or five years, I've moved in foreign affairs on the level with -- with Prime Ministers and Presidents, Foreign Ministers, Defense Chiefs and so forth, as a Governor.

For instance, when I've been to Israel, I've been with Mrs. Heir, Mr. Rabin and Mr. Alon -- and Mr. Rabin and others, and Mr. Eban. When I've been to Japan, I've been with Mr. Hiki and Mr. Tanaka and Mr. Yokura and Mr. Hohita. And I've been to Colombia; I've been with the President of Colombia. So I had a chance to learn in a very -- as a very eager student the possible ways to improve our interrelationships with those countries talking to their leaders.

I've read extensively in history of our country, the purpose of the President, the interrelationship between the President and the Congress, at every one of the 435 Congressional districts in this country, their demographic makeup, past voting records, primary interests of the people who live there. I've studied the campaign platform of every person who's ever run for President, whether they lost or won. And I've had a chance, as Governor, to deal with a multiplicity of problems from different kinds of people -- those who are mentally afflicted, those who are very rich and want favors, those who are corporate giants, they want to preserve a special privilege -- those who are consumers and are hungry for a chance at the marketplace, those who are poor and illiterate, who are looking and not finding, criminal justice. So I think the diversity of my experience helps alleviate
that, and in my own career—life, I've been a farmer at first, and still am now, a businessman in a business I built fairly much myself, an engineer, a scientist, a naval officer, local, state government official. So I've had a broad background, but that doesn't mean that I'm completely at home with all elements of a pluralistic society, but I think my background would be equivalent to many people who have become President, who have served successfully.

MOYERS: What do you think of the three or four lessons that we have to take away from this last decade, if we don't get into trouble again?

CARTER: One is to strip away secrecy of government in every possible way we can, to open up the deliberations of the Executive and Legislative branches of government.

MOYERS: Would you let the minutes of the Cabinet meeting be made public?

CARTER: There would have to be some exclusions. States have done this. I'll get back to your question specifically in a minute. Florida, Georgia, Arkansas, California, Massachusetts recently have done this. There have to be some exclusions.

When you have staff members advising a superior, that ought to be an area that would be kept private because you've got to have the freedom of debate and the chance for some inferior person in an organization to make a ridiculous suggestion and not be embarrassed later, from that same person a superior sugges
that might be put forward in a tentative way. It wouldn't be
if he knew all the rough data was going to be spread in the
public at a later time.

HOYERS: All right, strip away secrecy.

CARTER: Yes, strip away secrecy. The second thing is
to make sure that we have in our government an access of the
people in other ways. I would like to see, for instance, Cabinet
members go before joint sessions of Congress to be examined
and questioned about foreign affairs, defense, agriculture and
so forth.

HOYERS: Like the British system?

CARTER: Yes, I would like to see that.

HOYERS: You would send your Secretary of State up to a
joint session of Congress to actually answer questions from
the floor?

CARTER: Yes, I would. If the Congress would accept this,
I will be glad to have it done.

The President ought to tell the truth always. I see no
reason for the President to lie, and if any of my Cabinet members
ever lie, they'll be gone the next day.

HOYERS: Governor, when you say that, when you say, "I
will never lie, I will never mislead you," people have more
doubts about your perception of reality than they do about your
integrity.

CARTER: I understand.
HOYERS: Other people are not saying, "Jimmy Carter is trying to put one over on us. But Jimmy Carter just doesn't understand the way Washington international power works."

CARTER: I understand that. And I have thought about that a lot, because I've been in debate a lot, and one of the great surprises to me in the campaign was that when I made that simple statement 18 months ago -- not in a--not in a fervent way, not even in a way to surprise anybody -- that I, as a candidate and as a President, I'm not going to lie to you, that it became so controversial.

HOYERS: Why were you surprised?

CARTER: I was surprised that it was a controversy. I--the first time I ever voted was in 1948. I was in submarine school. All the other officers there voted for Dewey. I voted for Truman. He's still my favorite President. I don't believe that Truman ever ever told me a lie or told the American people a lie. May have. I don't believe he did. I think other Presidents since then have. I don't see any reason for it.

HOYERS: But doesn't this...

CARTER: To me that's important.

HOYERS: Yes, yes, I can see that. But doesn't this go back to what the lawyer was saying earlier? Jimmy Carter's a nice man, but he doesn't really know that the world isn't a Christian place, that the world isn't a good place. The world is full of power brokers and power seekers, and people want things.
CARTER: That may be true. But, as you know, Christians don't have a monopoly on the truth, and when I go out of office, if I'm elected, at the end of four years or eight years, I hope people will say, "You know, Jimmy Carter made a lot of mistakes, but he never told me a lie."

MOYERS: If anybody came forward with the evidence in this campaign that you had lied, would you quit?

CARTER: I think I would, because I haven't told a lie.

MOYERS: If anybody came forward with evidence that while you were in the White House that you had lied, would you resign?

CARTER: Well, I can't say that. But there will be times when I'm asked a question that I might refuse to answer. But if I give an answer, it will be the truth.

I think we ought to also have -- I've forgotten the original question...

MOYERS: The question was, what are the three or four lessons we mustn't forget from the last ten years if we don't make the same mistakes. You said strip away secrecy.

CARTER: I would never again...

MOYERS: Tell me the truth.

CARTER: ...get militarily involved in the internal affairs of another country. Unless our own security is directly threatened.

MOYERS: If North Korea invaded South Korea, would you get involved?

CARTER: Well, we're already involved there. And we have
a commitment made by the Congress, the President, the people and the United Nations in South Korea. I would prefer to withdraw all of our troops and land forces from South Korea over a period of years -- three, four years, whatever. But, obviously, we're already committed in Japan. We're committed in Germany.

MOYERS: Well, where then does the Carter Doctrine apply?

CARTER: Well, it would apply in retrospect to South Vietnam. It would apply in recent months to the attempt in Angola. It would apply possibly in the future in a place like Rhodesia. I just wouldn't do it. I don't think the American people need it. We don't have to show that we're strong. We are strong. And I wouldn't get involved militarily.

Another thing we must do in this country is to make the government mechanism work. It's an ineffective, bloated, confused, unmanageable bureaucracy there. And it-- and it hurts our people worse than anything I can think of almost -- even compared to integrity in government, the competence of government is missing.

MOYERS: Is that your vision? You open your autobiography by saying, "As we observe the 200th birthday of our nation, it's appropriate to ask ourselves two basic questions: One, can our government be honest, decent, open, fair and compassionate? Two, can our government be competent?"

CARTER: That's right.

MOYERS: Is that Jimmy Carter's vision for America -- efficient government? Good government?
CARTER: Good and efficient government. As far as the management of government, yes.

HOYERS: I read your proposals and the record of your administration in Georgia on that -- and I've read a lot of your speeches and analyses -- the effect of which, it seems to me, is to centralize the Executive branch of the government. It's to bring the power of the Executive branch of government to bear through the White House. Don't you find people wary of centralized authority after the Lyndon Johnson administration and the war in Vietnam and Richard Nixon and Watergate?

CARTER: No.

HOYERS: You don't find people wary?

CARTER: No, not of what you just described. When you say -- when you throw Johnson, Watergate, Vietnam in the question, obviously, people are very wary about that.

HOYERS: Right.

CARTER: [Laughs] But I was trying to separate the subject and the predicate from all the other clauses that you added on to. They're all wary about what occurred with Watergate, with Vietnam, with the CIA, with Johnson, with Nixon -- of course they are. But it's not the fact that the government is well organized, managed, a clear delineation of authorities and responsibilities. I did it in Georgia, and not only did we save a lot of money and make it more economical and efficient -- that was to some degree important -- but the main thing is we opened up government so the people could understand it and control it.
It needs to be so that people who do jobs in the Federal government -- at all levels, from the bottom all the way up to the top -- know what they're supposed to do. A clear delineation of authority; a chance for civil service employees to use whatever talent or ability or profession they have in a more productive way. To give service to our people; to minimize red-tape, to minimize confusion, to minimize paperwork -- just to let the government work.

MOYERS: You're saying, in effect, "Trust me. I will do those things."

CARTER: Yes.

MOYERS: Is that right?

CARTER: Yes.

MOYERS: And there's no question but that you have tapped a feeling in the country that wants to trust.

CARTER: Yes.

MOYERS: Yet, in 1964 and '65 and '66, Lyndon Johnson said, "I have the facts. Trust me." In 1968, Richard Nixon said, "I have a secret plan to end the war in Vietnam. Trust me."

Now, why, after two times burned, should the American people take from another politician the admonition, trust me?

CARTER: Well, you know, I can't answer that question. There's a matter that I've already discussed -- the absence of secrecy and truth. The only way I know to restore the trust of the American people in the government is for the government
to be trustworthy.

HOYERS: Well, what does that mean? What would you--openness
and, ah...?

CARTER: I think openness and honesty. And truthfulness.

HOYERS: Are you aware that once you become President,
you will be making decisions that will immediately make some
people unhappy who thought they saw in you a "champion? Isn't
that inevitable?

CARTER: Yes.

HOYERS: Well, what do you do about that disillusionment?
And don't they then say, "Well, Jimmy Carter's not trustworthy?"

CARTER: I can't answer that question. I think that we
obviously went through this in Georgia. I laid down a whole
thing, a series of things, that I promised to people. I campaigned
four years. I wanted to be Governor, didn't intend to lose.
My wife and I shook hands with over 600,000 people. When I
was elected, I very carefully had kept a list of everything
I had promised. I was quite reticent -- I carried all the promises.
The Legislature was not for me to begin with. They had thought
my opponent was going to win. I won. And I cooperated with
them. We did what I promised. I don't think I disillusioned
the people of Georgia. I don't think Georgia is a disillusioned
state now.

The ones who cling to me as a friend are the ones who throughout
their whole lives have been deprived of an opportunity to make
decisions about their own lives. I saw clearly as Governor
of Georgia, I see clearly now as a prospective, possible President,
that in almost every instance, people who make decisions in government that affect human beings very seldom suffer when their decisions are wrong. The people who carved out a disgraceful, wasteful, confused, overlapping welfare system, their families never draw welfare. The people who carved out a disgraceful tax system, they don't ever get hurt because they're cared for when the tax laws are written.

The criminal justice system -- I'm not a lawyer. We pride ourselves in having a good, fair criminal justice system. It's not fair. Now, wealth is a major factor in whether or not you get justice or not.

HOYERS: That brings up the quote that you use in the beginning of your autobiography from someone we both admire -- Reinhold Niebuhr -- "The sad duty of politics is to establish justice in a sinful world." Do you think this is a just society?

CARTER: Ho, no, I don't. I think one of the major responsibilities I have as a leader and as a potential leader is to try to establish justice. And that applies to a broad gamut of things -- international affairs, peace, equality, elimination of injustice in racial discrimination, elimination of injustice in tax programs, elimination of injustice in our criminal justice system and so forth. And it's not a crusade. It's just common sense.

HOYERS: You're going to be an activist government?

CARTER: I am.
HOYERS: ...President?

CARTER: That's right.

HOYERS: The profile that emerges is of a man who's into everything and pushing and pressing. How does that square with the reports we're getting of an anti-government, anti-Washington mood in the country which you seem to represent?

CARTER: I've never expressed deliberately any anti-Washington feeling or any anti-government feeling. When, as Truman said, you know, people say I'm giving them hell, but when I tell the truth, they think truth is hell. You know. I'm not going to disrupt anything when I get here to Washington, if I'm elected. I'm not anti-Washington at all. There's no one that I can think of that I would admit that cares more about my government than I do and who's thought about it more, studied it more and wants to see it run well more, wants to see it returned to the control of the people more. And when I come here, I think I'll get along fine. But I would be a very activist President. I never have said I wanted a small government. I want one that, when it performs a function, does it well and performs a function in the ways that alleviate the problems of those who have not had an adequate voice in the past.

HOYERS: What do you think the purpose of government is?

CARTER: To provide legitimate services to our people; to help preserve peace; to provide a mechanism by which the people's character can be expressed in international affairs.
I think the purpose of government is to alleviate inequities.
I think the purpose of government is to provide for things that we can't provide ourselves.

HOYERS: How do you see the Presidency, for example? What's the purpose of the President?

CARTER: Well, of course, a President has a many-faceted character. As does an individual. And does a nation.

I think the major thing that I study about is the relationship between the President and the Congress and the function of a President as he relates to the people. And maybe that's the question that you're asking. And the kind of President that we need.

I think the President ought to be—I think the nation's best served by a President who is strong and aggressive and innovative and sensitive. Working with the Congress. Is strong, independent, in harmony for a change, with mutual respect for a change. In the open, and with a minimum of secrecy for a change. I don't think the Congress is capable of leadership. That's no reflection on the Congress, but you can't have 535 people leading the nation. I don't think the Founding Fathers ever thought that Congress would lead this country.

There's only one person in this nation that can speak with a clear voice to the American people. There's only one person that can set a standard of ethics and morality and excellence and greatness or call on the American people to make a sacrifice and explain the purpose of the sacrifice, or answer difficult
questions or propose and carry out bold programs, or to provide for defense posture that would make us feel secure, a foreign policy that would make us proud once again, and that's the Preside In the absence of that leadership, there is no leadership, and the country drifts.

So strong President, yes. But an autocratic President, an imperial Presidency, no.

HOYERS: You think that day is over?

CARTER: Yes, it's over. But I think the only way to guarant It--against it is to remove the tight secrecy that binds around someone once they've started making a serious mistake. We've had some Presidents that were incapable of admitting, "Look, I've made a mistake." And that's been the cause of a great deal of our woe in this country in the last number of years, as you know. Other Presidents said, "Look, I messed up on that one. This is what happened. I was at fault. This is -- the people who were culpable. We've corrected it. It won't happen again."

But that freedom with the people, and the absence of the need to constantly prove oneself as being superior, is an important personal characteristic in a President. I think it would prevent another Vietnam or another Watergate.

HOYERS: Let me go back to some personal questions as we close here. You said once that you were strongly influenced by a sermon whose title was -- "If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"
What is the evidence that the rest of us can see of a Christian?

CARTER: [Sigh] I don't know. That's a hard question to answer, because I don't think I'm better than anyone else. I reckon there's my own shortcomings and sinfulness and need to improve, and need for forgiveness among the people around me, and God.

I was going through a state in my life then that was a very difficult one. I had run for Governor and lost. Everything I did was not gratifying. When I succeeded in something, it was a horrible experience for me. And I thought I was a good Christian. I was the Chairman of the Board of Deacons. I was the head of the Brotherhood in all the 34 churches in my district, and head of the Finance Committee, and Sunday School teacher just about all my life. I thought I really was a great Christian.

And one day the preacher gave this sermon -- I don't remember a thing he said -- I just remember the title which you described -- "If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be any evidence to convict you?"

And my answer by the time that sermon was over was "No." I never had really committed myself totally to God -- my Christian beliefs were superficial. Based primarily on pride, and -- I'd never done much for other people. I was always thinking about myself, and I changed somewhat for the better. I formed a much more intimate relationship with Christ. And since then, I've had just about like a new life. As far as hatreds, frustration...
I feel at ease with myself. And it doesn't mean that I'm better, but I'm better off myself.

HOYERS: Do you remember writing that -- you were on a submarine, I believe, a submarine in the North Atlantic -- when you heard that President Truman had dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, is that correct? You were -- you were at sea?

CARTER: I was at sea.

HOYERS: Do you remember what you thought? And I'll come to the point in a minute. Do you remember what you thought when you heard that?

CARTER: We were informed -- I was at sea -- the whole crew was informed that the President, President Truman, had a momentous announcement to make. We didn't know what it was going to be. The captain of the ship -- maybe with orders over the radio -- instructed all of us to gather before the loudspeaker systems on the ship. We thought that we had invaded Japan, and a lot of us young naval strategists had estimated how many people would be killed in this country. The generally accepted figure among us was a half million Americans would die as we captured Japan and ended the war.

Truman announced not that we had invaded Japan, but that a bomb of unprecedented power had been dropped on Japan. We had never heard of anything like this. It was a mystery to us. I didn't know obviously -- have any concept of what was going on.
But I felt at that time a tremendous sense of relief that we had not, indeed, begun an invasion of Japan, and I can't remember now that long ago...

MOYERS: Are you...

CARTER: ...other thoughts.

MOYERS: Do you have the capacity to make that decision?

CARTER: Yes, I believe so. I would use every resource in my life to prevent it. But I think I would have the capacity to make the choice between the lesser of two evils -- and in my opinion, that was the kind of choice that Truman had to make. So, in a similar circumstance, the answer would be "yes."

MOYERS: Tom Ottenad, who's a very well-known writer for The St. Louis Post Dispatch-- I see you know him --

CARTER: Yes, I know him.

MOYERS: ...said recently, "In a ruthless business, Jimmy Carter is a ruthless operator. Even as he wears his broad smile and displays his Southern charm." And the question that arises, and I've been inside the White House -- I know some of the influence that work on a man trying to do the right thing -- can you be ruthless in the way I think he means it here? And a Christian?

CARTER: I presume -- well, I'm a Christian, no matter what.

MOYERS: But how do you reconcile?

CARTER: Okay, he was talking about the campaign. And I don't know what he meant by ruthless. I don't think I've
ever deliberately hurt one of my opponents to gain an advantage. I try not to. I don't remember when I have. There may have been something that I've said in the heat of competition that made them feel discomforted. I can't deny that. But -- Most people when they get to know me think that, finally decided that I'm much tougher than is originally apparent. So the word "ruthless" to me has connotations of cruelty. And I'm not sure I could be cruel.

HOYERS: Let me ask it to you this way...

CARTER: I think I can be tough in making decisions that were difficult. And I can be tenacious under difficult circumstances.

I have temptations to which I yield often. You know, to make compromises. One of the major criticisms of me by my opponent in the Legislature, who've never yet been assuaged, is that I can't compromise. And that, that's a common criticism. I often had to compromise, but I didn't compromise in a back room. And didn't compromise to begin with. My preference was to spell out my position openly -- this is what I propose; this is the reason for it; this is the mess we have now; this is what we can accomplish - try to work harmoniously with the Legislature; try to give them all the credit they could, and then fight to the last vote. And I never was much able to get in a back room and compromise away the things I believed in.

And that's a very legitimate source of criticism for me. I'm not a good compromiser.
But I'll--I didn't suffer. I don't think Georgia suffered under my administration because of that attitude.

HOYERS: I think what some people in this town are talking about is the unwillingness of Woodrow Wilson to compromise on the League of Nations.

CARTER: Sure.

HOYERS: The unwillingness of Lyndon Johnson to compromise on the war, or Richard Nixon on the opposition of the war, and a feeling that a disciplined, principled man, convicted of his own righteousness, or having a private pipeline to God, in a sense, is going to say, "I'm right." And the town won't function because of his inability to compromise. Is that a legitimate danger?

CARTER: I don't believe so. I can see that would be a legitimate concern, but I think the concern will be proven unjustified. They have a right to be concerned, but I don't think they need to be.

I'd like to quote one other thing -- you've gotten into theology -- Tillich said, "That religion is a search for the relationship between us and God and us and our fellow human beings." And he went on to say, "That when we quit searching, in effect, we've lost our religion." When we become self-satisfied proud, sure, at that point we lose the self-searching, the humility the subservience to God's will, the more intimate understanding of other people's needs, the more inclination to be accommodating, and in that instant, we lose our religion.

So, the fact that a person has deep religious convictions doesn't necessarily mean that that person always thinks that
he's right, that God's ordained him to take a dominant position. Although I have prayed a good bit, and do, I've never asked God to let me be President.

HOYERS: Just to win the nomination?

CARTER: I never -- [Laughter]. I never asked God to let me win a single nomination. Never.

HOYERS: What do you pray then?

CARTER: I ask God to let me do what's right. And to let me do what's best -- that my life be meaningful -- in an optimum way, and, if I win or lose, I believe I can accept the decision with composure, and without regrets, or without animosities or hatreds, or deep disappointment even.

HOYERS: In your own search for what Tillich said is the truth about man's relationship to man and to God?

CARTER: Yes.

HOYERS: What's the most significant discovery Jimmy Carter has made?

CARTER: Well, I think I described it superficially a while ago. I think it affected my life more than anything else. This is embarrassing a little bit for me to talk about it, because it's personal, but in my relationship with Christ and with God, I became able in the process to look at it in practical terms, to accept defeat, to get pleasure out of successes, to be at peace with a world, and when I -- For instance, one of the things that I derived from it in a -- again in a kind of embarra
way -- is that when I stand on a factory shift line, like I did this morning in Erie, Pennsylvania, the General Electric plant, ever\body that comes through there -- when I shake hands with them, for that instance, for that instant, I really care about them, in a genuine way. And I believe they know it. A lot of times.

Quite often I will shake hands with a woman who works in a plant, say, an older woman, and I'll just touch her hand, and quite frequently, they'll put their arms around my neck and say, you know, "God bless you, son." "Or good luck. I'll help you. Good luck." But it's kind of a relationship with people around me, but I don't want to insinuate that I'm better than other people. I've still got a long way to go, but you asked me a difficult question. What was the major discovery of my life? That's, that's a hard thing to answer.

HOYERS: But you care, though. You do...

CARTER: I care.

HOYERS: ...you have found that you care about people.

CARTER: I do.

HOYERS: Why not be a pastor or a bishop and not a President?

[Laughter]

CARTER: You've read my book. [Laughter] But this came up early in my life. You know, I got home from the Navy, and I was thinking about running for the Georgia Senate - since some of you viewers haven't watched this, read the book -- and we had a visiting pastor, and he was giving me a hard time about going into politics. He said it's a disgraceful profession,
stay out of it. And, I got angry, and I turned to him and kind of lashed back. I said, how would you like to be a pastor of a church with some 80,000 members? Because there were 80,000 people in this state Senate district. I don't look on the President as a pastorate.

MOYERS: I was going to ask you if the President -- a pastor of 230 million.

CARTER: No. Although Teddy Roosevelt said that it's a bully-pulpit, but, no ... (Laughter) ... I don't look on it with religious connotations. But it gives me a chance to serve, and it also gives me a chance to magnify whatever influence I have -- either for good or bad, and I hope it will be for the good.

MOYERS: Gives you power, too.

CARTER: And power...

MOYERS: You have been searching for power for the last ten years.

CARTER: I can't deny it.

MOYERS: You did Georgia State Senate, and then you...

CARTER: Sure.

MOYERS: ...ran four years for the Governorship, and been running two years for the Presidency. Do you need power?

CARTER: Well, I think so. That is an unfulfilled, all-obsessive hunger -- no. I feel powerful enough now. And secure enough now. Wealthy enough now. I have a good family life now. I've got a lot of blessings that would give me a good life for the rest of my days. But I like to have a chance to
change things that I don't like, and to correct the inequities as I discern them, and to be a strong spokesman for those that are not strong. And I guess that's power. So, I can't deny that one of the purposes that I want to be President is to have power, yes.

HOYERS: One final question. If we learned anything the last few years, it has been that good intentions in the use of great power are no guarantee that that power will be used wisely.

CARTER: That's right.

HOYERS: That the character of the man is less important to the safeguards against the abuse of power than the checks and balances on the office and on the power.

CARTER: I understand that.

HOYERS: And here Jimmy Carter is coming along saying, "I want to do all these things because I believe they're right. I want more power because I want to do good things. And trust me, I won't abuse the power."

Now, after the last ten years, why should someone believe you? They may trust you. They may know that you are sincere and well intentioned, and yet they know it is power that often changes the man, and not the man who changes power.

CARTER: I know. I can see that. That's why I go back to what I said originally. You need to have an open government. You need to tell the truth. A minimum of secrecy. Let the people have a maximum part of play in the evolution and consumption
of our domestic and foreign policies. That gives you a safety net under an incompetent or distorted President -- the people themselves. And I think had we told the people the truth about Vietnam, we would have been out very early. Had the people had the truth about Watergate, it would never have happened.

MOYERS: So you're saying Jimmy Carter's character is not enough.

CARTER: That's right.


CARTER: I don't object to those. I don't object to a strong, aggressive Congress. A strong, aggressive Supreme Court. And a strong, aggressive President -- if what goes on in our government is known by, debated by, questioned by, controlled by the people of this country.

Now, I can see that there are times when an inspirational leader can actually elevate the people. That may happen on rare occasions. I think for a while, at least, John Kennedy did it. Roosevelt did it. This is a part of the Presidency. There are times when the Presidency, perhaps the government itself, might tend to sink below the standards, accumulatively speaking, of the people of this country -- in which case, people support or boost that official or those officials in a weak moment. But to exclude the people completely, as we have tended to do in recent years, removes that common sense judgment, character safety that can preserve our country.
And it also destroys the concept of our government which
did say that the government ought to be controlled by the people—and not by a powerful, secret, hidden, isolated, mistaken President.
I don't want to see that ever happen again in this country.
And I'd like to set the kind of tone, and perhaps the kind of
laws, that would prevent a recurrence of these things, if that's
humanly possible.

MOYERS: What do you want for your children that you didn't
have?

CARTER: Well, I have to say that I had almost everything
that I would have needed. I worked hard when I was a little
child, but I'm proud of it. I lived in an isolated area when
I was a little child, but I don't regret it now. I think those
travels through the fields and swamps were, in retrospect, very
precious days for me. So I would like to have to see what they
already have -- a much greater awareness of the world structure.

My 8-year-old daughter now knows more about biology and
science and history and politics and foreign affairs than I
did when I went off to college. And it's because she has television.
She reads constantly. And because we educate her well, and,
you know, we focus into her what we've learned. So each generation
has a chance to be better. As far as knowledge is concerned.
But also, they've lost something.

MOYERS: Lost something?

CARTER: Yes. Did I mention earlier, I think, in our conversa-
tion? I had a stability there, you know. When things started
going wrong in my own life, my father and mother were there, and my sisters and brothers were there. And my church was there. And my community was there -- that never did change. Never has changed yet. [Laughs] But there was something there around which I built my life.

In the modern day world, you don't have that. It's a mobile world, and things to cling to are kind of scarce and few and far between. And which one of those advantages and disadvantages is the greater? I don't know. I wouldn't swap the life I had for the new, modern, fast-moving, open, non-structured, minimal family life. But there are advantages now: knowing more earlier, traveling more, having a tighter inter-relationship with your own peer group than I had. But which is best, I don't know. But maybe we could go back to some of those old principles which we knew when we went to BYPU on Sunday afternoon -- [Laughter] -- and at the same time keep the advantages of a modern world.

I'm sure we can keep the advantages of the modern world, but going back to those principles that give stability -- of things that we're still searching for. We haven't found them yet.

HOYERS: I better explain to people that BYPU means Baptist Young People's Union.

CARTER: Exactly.

HOYERS: What was your favorite Baptist hymn?


HOYERS: Thank you, Governor Carter.

CARTER: Thank you.