

President Bush gets personal about his views on education, abortion, the economy and addresses the concerns of an 'important audience.'

President George Bush talked Sept. 8 with three editors from U. The National College Magazine — Mark Charnock, Kristi McDowell and Jackie Spinner. In a 20-minute telephone interview from the White House, Bush addressed the concerns of what he calls "a very important audience." The following are excerpts from that conversation:

Q: College students now more than ever are concerned about getting a job when they graduate. What, during your second term, do you plan to do to improve students' chances of getting a job when they graduate and make sure their college investment will pay off?

A: Well, in the first place, the economy has been miserable, but in my view it's poised for a strong recovery. Let me just tick off a couple of things that I talk about. The Misery Index is down to 10.8 percent — used to be 21 — let's see about 19.6. That's inflation and unemployment, so they're relatively good compared to what it's been. Inflation is down to about 3 percent — the lowest in ages. Interest rates are down and unemployment is still far too high. But the share of working age population with jobs during my administration is literally average, 62.2 [percent], which is the highest in U.S. history, and I cite this because all we hear about is how bad the economy is.

And in my view — with interest rates down, inflation down, the fluff and the fat worked out of the corporations — now I think we're poised for a very strong recovery, which offers a lot of hope, particularly to college grads. And the reason I say 'particularly' is most are being educated for the future. Most understand that the courses should prepare us to be the most competitive nation in the world. We are already the largest exporter... therein lies the big success and the big growth opportunity. So, one, things have been too slow, but I would say that this global economy, which has been in recession, is changing. We've had five consecutive quarters of growth and as that growth becomes more vigorous the job market will be much more robust. So tell 'em not to despair and the education, of course, is the key to one's economic future.

Q: So if I was to tell them not to despair Mr. President, I mean I know you don't have a crystal ball for predicting those types of things, but if based on these indicators and based on rising growth, that kind of thing, when do you think we're gonna make the turn?

A: Well, I think we've already started. We've had five consecutive quarters of growth — anemic growth at best — but nevertheless there are five consecutive quarters... But nationally... we're in a slow, anemic growth. I've got to be very careful on predictions — but I believe that certainly next calendar year is gonna be much more robust on its economic growth....



SUSAN BIDDLE, THE WHITE HOUSE

"I'm not saying everything is perfect. I am saying that we should be getting credit instead of criticism for education funding being substantially higher."

Q: What specific plans or proposals do you have for higher education and its funding during your second term?

A: Well, let me say I take great pride in the fact that our funding under, for example, the Pell grants is substantially up. Now most people say, 'Why have you cut funding to higher education?' And the answer is that we have gotten it at the highest level it's been at. I don't have the exact figures, but the increases in the maximum Pell grant awards for low and middle income students went from \$2,400 to \$3,700 — the largest one-year increase in history. I don't think the American people know that. It's true. We've expanded the eligibility for Pell grants to less than half-time students — for promoting life-long learning. It's my view that someone who is in the work place oughtta have access to these kinds of grants. And we're allowing almost all families and students to qualify for a student loan. So I'm not saying everything is perfect. I am saying that

we should be getting credit instead of criticism for education funding being substantially higher. Having said that, in the long run the answer is going to be literally revolutionizing our K to 12 education system — not our college system, which is unique and the best, I think, in the entire world. People still come flocking to the United States for graduate degrees, but I think we've got to do more in K through 12 and that's why we have this program America 2000.

Q: Speaking of the K through 12 program, should government fund public colleges and universities in the same ways as K through 12... to put them on a level playing field?

A: No.

Q: Why not?

A: We do have a high level of people attending college — perhaps the highest in our history — but I don't believe that the government has the resources to pay for everybody's education at the high level. And I think there ought to be competition in education just like there is in private sector work, and I, therefore, think that private colleges have a place, public universities have a place, but I don't believe that the government has enough resources to guarantee everybody will have [a college] education paid. What we are doing is doing far better in terms of Pell grants and

scholarships.

Q: Mr. President, the environment is a key concern among college students.

A: Oh, heck yes.

Q: What specific proposals again and changes do you plan on making in terms of environmental policy to your second term and how does that relate to, let's say, the New World Order that you've outlined as well?

A: Well, in the first place we are the global leader on the environment. It is the United States to whom everybody looks for the science that is absolutely essential for sound environmental policy. Very candidly, we have done far more than any administration on wilderness, for example. We have done more on the EPA enforcing existing environmental law. We've revolutionized the Clean Air Act... and we're doing well on emissions. We're trying to

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Q&A

GEORGE BUSH