

JOHN SHATTUCK: Good afternoon and welcome to the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library. I'm John Shattuck, the CEO of the Kennedy Library Foundation. And on behalf of the board of directors of the Kennedy Library, many of whom are here tonight, Ken Feinberg, our chair of our Profile in Courage Trust, and other board members, and Tom Putnam, the Director of the Kennedy Library, and Mary Reed, I see you over there too. I'm just thrilled. Jim Brett is there, and Jill Ker Conway. I'm sorry to do this in such an informal way. We're thrilled to have you all here. And I just want to say how honored we are to be celebrating the 50th anniversary of *Profiles in Courage*.

John F. Kennedy received the 1957 Pulitzer Prize for this remarkable book that became the inspiration of the Profile in Courage Award, established by the Kennedy Library Foundation in 1990 to honor public servants who risked their careers to benefit the public good. And one of those distinguished public servants who has received the Profile in Courage Award in 1997 is here with us today; Alabama Circuit Court Judge Charles Price. Could you rise so that we could recognize you?

[applause]

I'd like to offer special thanks to the institutions that make these forums possible. Let me first acknowledge Bank of America, the lead sponsor of all Kennedy Library Forums. We're also grateful to our other generous forum sponsors: Boston Capital, the Lowell Institute, the Corcoran Jennison Companies, and the Boston Foundation. Along with our media sponsors, *The Boston Globe*, NECN, and WBUR, which, you probably know, broadcasts all Kennedy Library Forums on Sunday evenings.

With a touch of irony, President Kennedy often referred to politics as a noble art. He also spoke about how practitioners of that art frequently behaved in ways neither artistic nor particularly noble. In the first chapter of *Profiles in Courage*, he quoted Walter Lipmann's notorious description of politicians as people who, with rare exception, "advance politically only as they placate, appease, bribe, seduce, bamboozle, or otherwise manage to manipulate the demanding and threatening elements in their constituencies."

No wonder, then, Kennedy observed, after serving in Congress for nine years, that mothers may still want their favorite sons to grow up to be president so long as they don't have to be politicians in the process.

Throughout his public life, John F. Kennedy was fascinated by the idea of political courage. He knew how rare a quality it was, and how easily political pressures could overwhelm those who might seek to demonstrate it. He wrote that, and I quote, "Once a politician begins to compromise away his principles on one issue after another for fear that to do otherwise would risk his career, then he is lost... But to decide at which point and on what issue he will risk his career is a difficult and soul-searching decision."

Profiles in Courage was a path-breaking study of this rare and elusive quality in politicians. It was a quality that Kennedy himself exhibited during his presidency. On two dramatic occasions, he risked his career by choosing unpopular courses of action. First, during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, when he resisted pressures from the military and from Congress for an immediate attack, and chose, instead, a process of diplomacy that ultimately saved the world from nuclear war. And second, during the Civil Rights Crisis of 1963, when he risked alienating the white, Southern base that had helped him be elected president by confronting George Wallace over the integration of the University of Alabama, and becoming the first president to tell the nation on national television that racial discrimination was a moral issue.

At President Kennedy's Library, we celebrate political courage as a rare but essential element of leadership in our democracy. Taking inspiration from a young Senator's study of eight courageous predecessors, the Kennedy Library Foundation 17 years ago established the Profile in Courage Award. And over the years, this award has become informally and widely known as the Nobel Prize in Politics. In 1956, a reviewer of Kennedy's book in the *Christian Science Monitor* wrote with foresight that, and I quote, "John F. Kennedy has nailed a splendid flag to his mast. May he keep it there." I think

it's fair to say that more than half a century later, that flag flies high over President Kennedy's legacy.

How presidents demonstrate courage is the theme of a new book by one of our nation's foremost presidential historians. Now one does not normally think of a presidential historian as a rock star, but in the case of Michael Beschloss, it's not hard to do so. *The New York Times* has called him, "the most widely recognized presidential historian in the nation," a status reinforced by *Newsweek*, which has named the nation's leading presidential historian. Michael's new book, *Presidential Courage*, has been on the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* bestseller lists, and it captures those rare moments in the flow of history when nine presidents, including John F. Kennedy, decided the time had come to risk their political careers by taking a stand on an issue of principle. *Presidential Courage* is on sale in our bookstore, and I know Michael will be pleased to sign copies after our forum.

Michael Beschloss is the author of nine bestselling books on American presidents. These include his highly acclaimed study of the Kennedy presidency, *The Crisis Years*, which the *New Yorker* called the definitive history of President Kennedy and the Cold War, and his riveting two volume work on President Johnson's secret tapes, which the *Times* called an important event, and the *Wall Street Journal* described as sheer, marvelous history. His fascinating work, *The Conquerors*, depicted the role of Presidents Roosevelt and Truman in the destruction of Nazi Germany. Michael's first book, I think I'm right about this, *Kennedy and Roosevelt, The Uneasy Alliance*, grew out of a college honors thesis, so all of you budding historians out there, take heart!

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: It reads like a college honors thesis too. Not to worry.

JOHN SHATTUCK: So still take heart. I'm sure you've moved up the ladder. Michael Beschloss's, and I have to say this again, rock star status is reinforced by his position as the NBC News Presidential Historian-- the only person ever to have been named as such

a position-- where he introduces millions of Americans to the lives of presidents. He also appears regularly on public television and writes a column for *Newsweek* called "Traveling Through History with Michael Beschloss." And here at the Kennedy Library, we're especially honored to have you serve, Michael, as a member of the John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award Committee.

To moderate this evening's program, we're pleased to have with us one of our nation's most distinguished journalists, Al Hunt. For more than three decades, Al was with the *Wall Street Journal*, working up from congressional and national political reporter to Washington bureau chief, and finally executive editor. He ran the *Journal's* political polling for 20 years, and for 11 he wrote the *Journal's* weekly column, "Politics and People," which I always considered required reading as a kind of inside-the-beltway bible for bureaucrats, such as myself, when I was serving in government.

Since 2005, Al has been executive editor of *Bloomberg News*, working 1700 reporters and editors in 104 bureaus around the world. We all know him as a regular commentator on "Washington Week in Review," NBC's "Meet the Press," and the CBS Morning News. And closer to home, I want to thank you, Al, for your distinguished service as the chair of our John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award Committee at the Kennedy Library Foundation. Please join me in welcoming Michael Beschloss and Al Hunt to the stage of the Kennedy Library.

[applause]

AL HUNT: John, thank you very much. It is always such a great feeling and thrill to be at this very special place. Michael and I are both just absolutely stunned at the size of the crowd here on a Sunday afternoon. I don't know if the rumor is true that the circular said it would be a conversation between Tom Brady and Bill Belichick.

JOHN SHATTUCK: You'll have to wait about an hour to find out.

AL HUNT: Right, exactly. This is a very special place. And Michael and I are so privileged to both serve on the Profile in Courage Committee. I know, as a journalist, and my dear friend in the front row and former colleague Ellen Hume, I think, could attest to this, that sometimes we journalists cross that line between healthy skepticism to an unhealthy cynicism. And every time that happens to me, I try to think of what we go through when we're up here picking people like the judge for the Profile in Courage Committee. It is so inspiring and it makes you feel so good about this country. It makes you feel so good about the people that really, really care. And the great link to President Kennedy and that extraordinary book that John referred to is just so inspiring. And I think the work that you do at the Library, the work that the Foundation does, is just so important and I would encourage all of you to follow it, support it, whatever you can.

I think it's also particularly nice today, and this year, that the closest thing that I can imagine to a sequel to *Profiles in Courage* has been written by Michael Beschloss, who really is America's historian. John Meacham, the editor of *Newsweek* and a quite distinguished author in his own right, has what he calls a Michael Beschloss six-month rule. And that is that every time he writes a book, or any of his friends write a book, they will not see Michael for six months, because they invariably find out that Michael knows more about the subject than they did as the author.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: You see why I'm so much fun to be around.

AL HUNT: He is, as my favorite columnist one time wrote, a national treasure. That was me that wrote that. It has the added virtue of being true. We want to talk a lot about presidential courage, and we hope you all will think of questions and send them up. After we've had a bit of a conversation, we would certainly love to hear your thoughts and questions. And I want to focus it a lot on courage. But Michael, let's first just put on your pure historian's hat, and just give us in contemporary terms the historic context for this current election for president.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: For choosing candidates?

AL HUNT: Any way you want.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: As I tell my wife, I've got no political opinions about living people, so this is going to be tough. But maybe one way to look at them, not the only way but maybe through the lens of political courage, is to say, is this someone who, in his or her earlier career, took a risk for a principle that cost them? Did they risk their popularity or maybe their re-election? President Kennedy, for instance, some will remember or at least remember studying, came out when he was Senator for Massachusetts for the Saint Lawrence Seaway. Knew that a lot of people in Massachusetts would lose jobs, at least during the short term, because of that, but he was willing to take the flack because it was in the national interest. So that's the question I would ask.

But the problem always is that for a historian, we always think that you have to wait about 30 years to have both hindsight and to get information that will give you more data on a candidate than you can have in real time. It's the advantage that we have over journalists and people who are casting votes. But maybe one JFK example is not a bad one. He was meeting, and John and Tom will correct me if I'm getting this wrong, but he was meeting with Harold MacMillan, I think the first time he went to England in 1961, during the same visit when he saw Nikita Khrushchev, went to London. And if you read the newspapers of the time, newspapers said the two men met, he and Prime Minister MacMillan, in private. They discussed these grave issues. And when I was writing about JFK and the Cold War years later, I got to actually see, I think, some notes that were taken by someone in the room. And they did discuss the Soviet Union and so on.

But JFK spent a considerable amount of time complaining to Harold MacMillan about bad press coverage. People were criticizing him. It was making him annoyed. And finally MacMillan, who was a generation older and wiser said, "Jack, what do you care? Just brush it off. It's just the press. You shouldn't get so exercised." And it made President

Kennedy, I think, even more irritated to hear that. So Kennedy said, “Well Harold, how would you like it if the press wrote that your wife, Lady Dorothy, was a drunk?” Which actually she was. And MacMillan, unruffled, said, “Well, if they did that, I would just issue a statement saying, ‘You should have seen her mother!’” It’s the kind of thing you get from the Kennedy Library, but in a larger sense, you do have to wait sometimes to see how things look on the inside, and get a better sense of these people.

AL HUNT: 30 years, actually, I think is relatively short for you, Michael. Remember the great story of Zhou Enlai, the fabled Chinese leader, when he was asked by an American his view of the French Revolution, said “It’s too soon to tell”?

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: Right. Or what Ghandi said about American civilization: “It would be a good idea.”

AL HUNT: Let’s start with President Kennedy here. President Kennedy and civil rights, which is one of the chapters in your book. Tell us a little bit about what it told us about President Kennedy, what it told us about courage and why?

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: Well, it shows a lot of the cross pressures. I was glad that John mentioned it. In the late 1950s, when Senator Kennedy was beginning to run for President, he wanted to get nominated. And he knew that a large part of the Democratic Party at that point was from the South, was against civil rights, and he began courting the support from some of those people, Southern governors, to the point that Martin Luther King and Jackie Robinson were very critical of him. He changed by 1960, ran on a very strong civil rights platform, promised to end discrimination with the stroke of a pen. But when he was elected that narrow margin over Richard Nixon, it wasn’t much larger in the electoral vote. And in the 50 states that voted-- anyone here with the exception of the professionals who would know this in the front row, anyone want to guess what state of the 50 states of 1960 voted for JFK by the biggest margin? By the biggest margin. The biggest percentage for Kennedy over Nixon.

No? It was not Rhode Island. It was Georgia. About 67%. And that was true of much of the South, which put him over in the electoral college. And needless to say, those were not African American voters, because most African Americans could not vote. Those, which he knew, were mainly white Southern voters who were expecting him to hold the line on civil rights. New president looked at Congress. A lot of white, Southern, anti-civil rights committee chairmen who were in a position to block most of his program on all sorts of issues. So for about two years, President Kennedy tried to act where he could. But not to the extent that I think his heart would have told him. I think what he mainly hoped was that he'd be re-elected safely by a landslide in '64, and then as a newly re-elected president in '65, could do the right thing on civil rights.

But one lesson from the experience, and he knew this from history, is that presidents can not always shape their timing, because in the spring of 1963, Martin Luther King and others were putting pressure on him. Came to a boil in Birmingham. So Attorney General Robert Kennedy came to JFK and said, "We can't wait anymore. If you don't do something strong about civil rights now, many people, both white and black in this country, are going to say, 'Why isn't the president doing something to move this out of the streets, into the courts?'" So President Kennedy sent this, as it was called at the time, "radical" civil rights legislation to Congress in June of '63. Made a lot of people angry.

I've got two boys who are 13 and 11. I try to talk to them sometimes about what I'm writing about. So I talked to them about this, and they said, "What was in the civil rights law? Why were some people so angry? What did it say?" And I said, "Well, the law said that you could use any hotel or restaurant, whether you were black or white." And my kids say, "Why did that make people angry? What was unusual about that?" I mean thank God we've come so far that someone that age would think that this wasn't much.

But it's our responsibility as historians to show how courageous he was in sending that bill to Congress, because overnight his poll ratings dropped. He basically lost the South

and he knew it. But in private he said to RFK just what you would hope that a president would say in a situation like this, which was, "I may lose re-election over this, but if I do, at least I will have lost it for something as important as civil rights." And I think he wouldn't have been so sensitive to all of this had he not written *Profiles in Courage*, and not known that that is such an important expectation of a president.

AL HUNT: And he did have that sense, remember. It was Johnson who said, after he signed one of the landmark civil rights bills, "We have delivered the South to the Republican Party for the next generation." President Kennedy had that same realization.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: But unlike Johnson, he knew that it had a big chance to cost him re-election. And does anyone know the candidate he most worried about in that respect in 1964 on the Republican side? Again, excluding the scholars on the front row? George Romney, whose son went on to other things. Because he was worried that Romney, as Governor of Michigan, would be a centrist Republican, and perhaps slightly to the right of JFK on civil rights and could pick up those Southern states that JFK thought that he would've lost because of the civil rights bill.

AL HUNT: Although Governor Romney really was quite good on that civil rights issue. He marched with Martin Luther King. If you recall back then, the whole fury over being a Mormon, which is not nearly as crazy as it is today, I suspect--

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: I only know what happened 30 years ago. What did his son wind up doing? Such a nice man.

AL HUNT: I think he went into the car business.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: And how are the ramblers doing?

AL HUNT: Obviously doing just fine. Lincoln. Tell us about Lincoln, speaking of bold, courageous decisions.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: Well, Lincoln is sort of the gold standard, because the story I tell, summer of 1864, he was running for re-election, was told by his political advisors, “You’re probably going to lose the fall election against General McClellan when you’re running for re-election,” and they told him the reason is that Northern voters had been patient on the Civil War. It’s taken three years, been very bloody. But they’re angry at you because you changed the signals. You began this involvement by saying we’re doing this to bring back the South, unite the country. But last year, 1863, you issued the Emancipation Proclamation, and now you’re saying the war will not end until the slaves are free. A lot of Northern voters are going to vote for McClellan unless you fix that.

Coming from Illinois, I would assume that Lincoln would’ve instantly said, “I would never go back on the Emancipation. I feel so strongly about it.” In fact I should probably say when I grew up in Illinois, when I was about eight years old, I was taken-- anyone here from Illinois? Or spent some time? Did you go over to the Lincoln sites when you were children? We sort of do that there. And I was taken when I was eight. Didn’t know anything about Lincoln. But I remember being taken by my parents to Lincoln’s home, which is still there. A historic site.

My little brother, I was eight and he was six, and I wish I could tell you I asked the guide, “What was Lincoln’s position on civil liberties?” or something, but I asked about something much more important to me at the time. I said to the guide, “When Lincoln’s sons were naughty, did he spank them?” And as I remember the guide said, he was disgusted, “No, Lincoln didn’t believe in discipline. He just let those brats run wild through this house.” And I heard that, and Lincoln was the man for me. I began reading everything I could find on Lincoln. And then other presidents. It had a lot to do with what I’m doing today. But at that age, Lincoln turning his back on the Emancipation.

But the point is, Lincoln wanted to get re-elected; he felt that McClellan would be a disaster. He was a lawyer, maybe there might be some language I can find where I could distance myself from this Emancipation. But the moral of the story is that Lincoln essentially said, after a few days of this, "I can't be really Abraham Lincoln and do something that's that cheap." And even at that point, he had an enormous sense of history, he felt even that early in time, he felt, "If I'm going to go down in history, it's going to be as the liberator of a race, and if I do this, I'll sacrifice that place." So he stuck to the Emancipation, and he won the election, mainly because General Sherman made it to Atlanta in September rather than December. But in the end he paid for his presidential courage really with his life, because why did John Wilkes Booth murder him? It was because he was angry at Lincoln over equality for African Americans.

But the point I'm making is that, at crucial moments, John mentioned civil rights, also the Cuban Missile Crisis, this is something you need in a president. And if you'll forgive my saying so, it does help if a president-- President Kennedy wrote history, but if the president also reads it. And one of the things I found very telling, this is not political folks, I don't even know who's president now. 30 years haven't passed. He draws the right lessons too. But right before the Cuban Missile Crisis, President Kennedy read Barbara Tuchman's *Guns of August*, and the big lesson of that book is that terrible wars can start by accident and escalate. If you needed a president to have read one book just before the experience he was going to have in October, 1962, he couldn't have done better than that.

AL HUNT: Michael, pick up on that for a moment. You talked about two presidents, Kennedy and Lincoln, who did have that great appreciation of history, and knew the lessons to draw from it. How important has that been in some of the other issues that you write about? Some of the other examples of courage? And how do we suffer sometimes-- If you can give an example or two, it doesn't have to be current but it can be on presidents who don't have as fine a sense of history.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: Trying to say this as mildly as I can. It sure can't hurt. And the best presidents really do, because they see what they do in a context. Harry Truman, great example of that. I mean I could've written about probably six different Truman decisions, like when he fired General MacArthur for instance, and really brought the hounds of Hell down on him by doing that. And when MacArthur went to Congress and spoke, and there was a great fear among Democrats that MacArthur would run against Truman for president in '52. And the best thing that was said, I remember reading, was that as MacArthur gave this moving speech, which the Democrats thought would win a lot of votes, it was said in the well of the House-- On the Republican side of the House, there was not a dry eye, and on the Democratic side of the House, there was not a dry seat. They were very worried that MacArthur was going to be trouble.

But in Truman's case, the story I tell is Truman recognizing the state of Israel in the spring of '48. And that sort of shows all the cross pressures on a president. In Truman's case, just to run through them quickly: had a Secretary of State, George Marshall, who said, "I might resign if you do this." Truman's wife, Bess, it turns out, did not welcome Jewish visitors to her home in Missouri. Never had any before the presidency or afterwards. But on the other side, Truman had this business partner, Eddie Jacobson, with whom he ran this famous men's store in Kansas City that went bust. And Jacobson turns up at a crucial moment and says, "Harry," tears streaming down his face, "Never asked you for a favor, but my people need help. There might be another Hitler. Do something for my people." Which had a big influence.

But I think the biggest influence on Truman was he actually did read history, because this was a guy who, growing up in Missouri, was very nearsighted. Had these thick glasses. And his parents said, "Harry, we can't afford to replace these glasses if you break them." So he couldn't do sports, had to basically do other things. And so he really read, and read, and read. And Truman used to say, "I read every book in the Independence Public Library," which I always thought was an exaggeration until I went to Independence. It's

not that big of a library. So I'm assuming he probably did. But the one book that really influenced him, especially on a recognition of Israel, was--

His mother had bought a book, actually four volumes, it was quite expensive, from a traveling salesman with a totally politically-incorrect title of, it was called, *Great Men and Famous Women*. The idea that women could not be great, only famous. And the subtitle was *From Nebuchadnezzar to Sarah Bernhardt*. And what Truman remembered in the spring of '48 was not either of those, but he remembered the chapter on Cyrus the Great. And he remembered, he was a student of biblical history anyway, remembered that Cyrus had brought the Jewish people to Zion 2,000 years earlier, so he felt this could be his place in history. Helped to clarify the issues.

And just to finish it, just after Truman was president, he was introduced by his old friend, Eddie Jacobson, at, I think, the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. And Jacobson said, "We're introducing President Truman, who helped to create the state of Israel." And Truman felt so strongly, just about shoved Jacobson aside, said, "What do you mean helped to create? I am Cyrus," he said. "I am Cyrus." In his retirement, it meant a lot to him, and moved him almost to tears.

AL HUNT: I just want to tell one quick story, and then have you pick up on it, because I think the examples of courage you give are quite compelling. And in both instances, I think it's fair to say they were a bit devious in achieving their objectives.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: I think that would be a fair statement.

AL HUNT: The story I was going to tell was as a spouse, which is the way I travel most of the time these days. My wife is a television correspondent. And she was invited to Monticello for the Jefferson Foundation Dinner about three or four weeks ago. And we're sitting at dinner and one of the very well intended funders was there and said, "Why is it that we don't have politicians the way we used to have politicians? Why are they so petty

now when they used to be so wimpy?" And then the head of the Jefferson school there said, "Wait a minute. You want to hear petty? Let me tell you about Jefferson. I'll really tell you petty." We lose sight of that sometimes. But tell the story of both Teddy and Franklin Roosevelt and their great courage. And being a bit duplicitous probably, I hate to say as a journalist, but probably out of necessity.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: I would not nominate anyone in this book for sainthood. And as it was once said by an aide to Franklin Roosevelt, "A great leader cannot always be a good person 100% of the time." Especially given the system that he or she is operating in. And in TR's case, he became president abruptly after McKinley's assassination. I always remember his daughter, Alice, was once later on being interviewed by someone who said, "It must have been very upsetting to you when President McKinley died." She said, "Are you kidding?" She was delighted her father became president.

But in TR's case, he became the president suddenly of a party, the Republican Party, that was very closely allied with Wall Street and very suspicious of him. And he wanted to get re-nominated. And so the smart thing would have been for him, if he had sort of jaded consultants, they would have said, "Convince them that you've changed your ways and you're not against the trusts and JP Morgan," and so on. And instead he did exactly the opposite and sued to break up some of the biggest trusts in this country, and risked not getting re-nominated. And by a certain other course of events, might have lost the nomination. And that was because TR felt yes, it was good to be president in his own right, but it was more important to be a great leader. He had read a lot of history, and actually had written some too.

In FDR's case, 1940, running for a third term. A lot of his advisors said, "If you want to get re-elected, Mr. President, about 80% of this country is isolationist--" especially here in Boston "--and therefore if you want to get re-elected, stop talking about national defense and the conceivable possibility that Americans might have to fight Hitler." And

Roosevelt said with great principle, “If I don’t build up our defense and get people prepared, we may well lose a war with Hitler if we have to fight it.” Which he was absolutely right about. And so what it really gets down to is yes, politicians and presidents want to get re-elected. They want to be popular. They want to stay alive as Lincoln did. But in the end, the great ones are those who feel more strongly about a larger principle.

AL HUNT: And if Roosevelt had not engaged in those actions,-- and I guess it was basically '40 and '41-- then leased even some things that some people thought might have been--

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: Even something called warrantless wiretapping. I hope no later presidents have done that.

AL HUNT: And of course the draft passed by one vote. What do historians conjecture as to what effect that had?

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: It’s a real problem, because FDR, in '40 and '41, did things that came pretty close to breaking the law. And at least on one occasion probably did. In May of 1940, the Supreme Court said a president could not do something called warrantless wiretapping specifically. And FDR went to J. Edgar Hoover, who then was director of the FBI and said, “You can’t do this anymore because the Court has said that it’s illegal.” And Hoover said to FDR, “You’re going to completely break up our program for intercepting Nazi spies and saboteurs! We used this kind of stuff to catch some plotters who were trying to blow up the Queen Mary just this month.” And so Roosevelt reconsidered. And he said privately, “I can’t imagine that the Supreme Court really wanted to help the Nazis, so maybe on this one occasion, I’ll quietly defy what they have said.”

So you ask historians, what do we think of this? I think you can make a pretty good case that, to defend the nation against Hitler, 1940, it might have been justified, especially with a very isolationist Congress. But the problem always is that if a president does that, it's a slippery slope. A Richard Nixon will later on say, as he did, "I am a war president too. I'm just like FDR. I'm fighting a war and this is very tough, so I should be able to wiretap columnists who don't agree with me and use the IRS to audit the returns of people who are my political enemies." And so once it starts, it sometimes never stops.

AL HUNT: You've spoken several times of popular and public opinion here. Let's go back to the Founders here.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: As we always do.

AL HUNT: It was that other son of Massachusetts, John Adams, I think, who you noted said that, "Popularity was never my mistress." And he demonstrated that through his acts of courage. Tell us a little bit about that.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: Well, in Adams's case, he became president after George Washington. And he was the president of a party that was desperate to go to war with the French for all sorts of reasons. They thought that the French were a real threat to American ships on the Atlantic. They were the Anti-French party anyway, the Federalists. And they also thought it would be good for business. You begin to have a war fever, and they become the national security party. And if you vote against us, you're unpatriotic. And they saw that there were political dividends. Trying to keep this out of politics and only historical.

And so Adams, for a while, was intoxicated by this. He had privately always been envious of George Washington's military reputation. And so as the war fever accelerated, Adams began wearing a military uniform, which he had never worn before, with a shining sword dangling at his side. And he'd give speeches and people would say,

“President Adams shines even more brightly than President Washington.” Well, he loved hearing that. And so it was almost like someone who was more and more intoxicated.

And then one night he sort of went to sleep and woke up and realized that the French were really not much of a threat at all, and plus, from the founding period, he realized that if a democracy fights a war without an imminent danger, it can be lethal to the democracy. And so he went to the Federalist leaders and said, “Great is the guilt of an unnecessary war.” And they were not convinced. They said, “You go on in this vein, trying to make peace with the French, we won’t support you in 1800.”

And that’s what happened. You needed the support of your party to get re-elected, which he wasn’t. And so Adams went back to Massachusetts a failure. Went back to Quincy. And he was not thought of as a great president. Certainly no where near the equal of Washington. And in many ways, he was miserable. He was a loser. And many historians at the time basically thought he had lost re-election. That’s about the worst judgment you can make on a president. The first one to lose, really. But you ask, “Why did Adams do this?” Well, one, he thought it was the right thing to do. It would show that he was a good man.

But number two, and I think this gets back to what you were saying about current times. If you want a leader to be able to be courageous, make sure that leader has other things in his or her life. In Adams’s case, he didn’t want to lose, he wanted to be president again, but he could come back to Massachusetts. He had his farm, he had that wonderful relationship with Abigail and his children and his friends and his books. And lived for 26 more years. So in making the courageous decision that cost him a second term, he didn’t have to feel that he was jumping off of a cliff.

AL HUNT: And Washington, who we were always taught never told a lie, was always 100% pure, of course would sneak slaves in and out of the White House.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: Only to cook.

AL HUNT: Right, only to cook. And yet, when it came to the Jay Treaty, which was really tough at the time, he really rose to the occasion. Not that he hasn't risen to the occasion before. But tell us a little bit about the partisan rancor which we forget began in the Washington term.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: Yeah, in Washington's case, he was nearing the end of his presidency. Two terms. And he had become convinced that the British were in great danger of invading once again. And he felt that was probably a war we couldn't win. And so if it happened, the US would be an interesting experiment that lasted about 15 years. And so to forestall this, he sent John Jay to London to do a treaty with the British, which he did. Jay came back with the treaty. And the second Washington saw it, he knew that Americans would be furious because it had all sorts of humiliating concessions. And he knew that Americans would say, "Why are we crawling to the British when we just won the Revolution?" But he knew it was necessary to save the country.

And he was absolutely right, because when he sent the treaty to the Senate, people wrote to Washington at Mount Vernon saying, "You should be impeached," "You should be assassinated." In Virginia in taverns, veterans who had served under Washington would lift their glasses and say, "We toast a speedy death to General Washington." He had never had the experience before. I mean Jay had it worse. He was burned in effigy all over the place. And Jay actually had more of a sense of humor. He said, "I can walk the length of the United States at night merely by the light of all my burning effigies," which is actually true.

But in Washington's case, he was really heartbroken, because Americans turned their back on him in big numbers for the first time. And Martha Washington actually said that she thought that his premature death two years after he left the presidency had a lot to do with his heartbreak over the searing experience of Jay's Treaty. So the point is, to put it

through a current political lens, his consultants nowadays would probably say, “You’ve got another year as president. Why not leave as popular as when you came in? Keep your donors happy for that presidential library. Make sure that your polls are up.” That’s the advice that he would probably get.

And in Washington’s case, it wouldn’t have occurred to him, because number one, he knew it was necessary to do this to save the country, and only he had the stature to get the Senate to accept this treaty, which it barely did. But the other thing is that Washington knew when he was serving as president that just about every move he made was setting a precedent for later people who would be president. So I think what he was essentially saying to later presidents was, “Just like me, you may be in a situation where supreme national need requires that you do something that could make you very unpopular. And this is part of the expectation of a president.”

AL HUNT: Now Jefferson, no doubt, would be displeased that he’s not included in your--
- Is that because there was--

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: One of the less enjoyable things of writing this book has been encountering family members of presidents who were not in it.

AL HUNT: You only have what, 35? Was that because there was no really sterling act of courage on the part of Jefferson? Some great acts, some great precedence, but there was never anything that-- Or was he among the first cut?

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: I’m a former trustee of Monticello, but a former trustee, so I can speak freely. Jefferson was a great man in all sorts of ways, but I don’t think there was an episode during those two terms that really showed this kind of political risk. Doesn’t mean he wasn’t a great president or great leader, but it just didn’t happen there. And what I really wanted to do was write about cases where presidents really did put it all on the line in a big way, and also for something that changed the country. And also

that historians later on think was a very good thing. And if you apply all those criteria, there's not a vast number of episodes you can write about.

AL HUNT: And yet in one of the examples that you do cite, and, as with all, quite persuasively, Andrew Jackson and the Bank of the United States. It was probably a good thing, but only on balance, because there were some bad, as your write-- Or not bad, undesirable.... It took us until what, 1913, to create a federal reserve.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: Alan Greenspan did not particularly enjoy what I wrote on Andrew Jackson, where he destroyed the National Bank and there wasn't another one for 80 more years. A time in which Greenspan would note, as I did, that there was big boom and bust, and people finally came to their senses and established the Federal Reserve in the second decade of the 20th century. But in Jackson's case, he became president in 1829. Very worried about something that most of us probably learned about in school. The Second Bank of the United States. Nicholas Biddle in Philadelphia. Enormous power that was only growing. Not all journalists in history have been entirely ethical, Al, you would be shocked to hear. He owned a lot of reporters and editors.

AL HUNT: Shocking.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: And often times for very low prices too. So here's a case in which the country has gotten better and not worse since then. Also, many members of Congress. He had enormous power.

And Jackson came to power having been elected the president of the common people. He felt that this was a big threat to democracy, which it was. So when Jackson was running for re-election in 1832, he stood up against Biddle and the Bank. Said, "I think you're anti-democratic." And risked the danger that Biddle, with this enormous sub-terranean power, which extended who knew where, might be able to stop Jackson from getting re-elected and perhaps destroy him. As it happened, Jackson won, and it was a good thing.

And here's a case where Jackson's character also made a difference. This was a very tough guy. I mean if you were a senator, for instance, who went to see Jackson in the White House, he would sometimes have you come to see you in his bedroom and there would be a pistol on the wall. And Jackson would pointedly say, "You see that pistol?" And the visitor would say, "Yes." And Jackson would say, "I used that pistol to kill someone who insulted my wife." So that would sort of focus their mind that he was not an easy opponent.

AL HUNT: Gets your attention, doesn't it?

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: But that's a case in which Jackson did put it on the line. Good thing the Bank was destroyed, but as Al says, the shame of it was that, in destroying the Bank, he didn't then say, "We need something to moderate these ups and downs in the economic cycle." And as both Al and I and I think Alan Greenspan would say, a lot of people suffered for a long time.

AL HUNT: One of your selections, I suspect, and this is probably unfair to prejudge you, this audience, ahead of time, but one of your choices may not have been universally acclaimed here, and that was Ronald Reagan. Tell us about Ronald Reagan.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: Yeah. Many of my Democratic friends were wondering what had happened to my brain.

AL HUNT: Although I would quickly say, probably, there is a greater acceptance of Ronald Reagan today than there might have been before 2001. So current events have made-- they all say all things are comparative, but in any event.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: Live long enough, you get to see everything. What I write about with Reagan, as I quickly told my Democratic friends, is not his record on civil

rights or even economics, but what Reagan did in his second term on the Cold War. And sometimes people forget. But when Reagan came to power, he had done so after a campaign in 1980, in which he was very tough on the Soviets. "Elect me and I will increase the defense budget" --Al knows this very well-- "and try to challenge the Soviets and try to end the Cold War." But he also said, and most people dismiss this as rhetoric, he said, "If there ever becomes a Soviet leader who wants to really negotiate to end the Cold War," I won't do my bad my Reagan impersonation, "I will sit down with him as long as it takes to try to get an agreement."

And the thing is that Reagan's conservative, hard-line supporters figured that that was just rhetoric. It was never going to happen, and if it did, they would see that it was. But then in 1985 came Mikhail Gorbachev, who has been to this Library. And Reagan met with Gorbachev in Geneva, thought he was for real, and scheduled another meeting with him for Iceland. And actually we're talking about how presidents benefit from reading. I wouldn't nominate Reagan as the most enormous reader of history. Maybe Western history. Louis L'Amour, I guess, if you want to widen your scope. But when he was preparing to go to Iceland, briefers came in. Shows that breeding can help. And the briefers said, "You're going to Reykjavik, and this is what it's like." And Reagan stopped and said, "Oh, you don't have to tell me about Iceland, I just read Tom Clancy." So it helps in odd ways.

But the point is that Reagan met with Gorbachev, and they almost came close to a deal to abolish both sides' nuclear arsenals. Probably more radical than any other person who might've been president at that time would've supported. So he showed that he really meant it. But the political cost was, the following year, when he was reeling from Iran-Contra and needed his friends, his friends were saying, "Ronny, you've been taken in by Gorbachev, he's basically a new Brezhnev. You were sentimental. You're being manipulated by your wife, who's trying to help you politically in some way."

And we always hear about politicians needing their base, especially in tough times. This was a time that Reagan needed his base. And much of his base was telling him, "Don't do it. Don't take Gorbachev seriously." But what Reagan proved was that a leader recognizes that in the end, you can't be the captive of your base, you really have to be its leader. And sometimes in ways that make them angry. And he did. And one result of that was the movement towards the end of the Cold War.

AL HUNT: Michael, in doing your research--

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: My Democratic friends are talking to me once again.

AL HUNT: In doing your research on this, is there any correlation or any sense that acts of courage tend to occur in first or second terms? Adams of course never had a chance, and Lincoln, not much of one. But is there any sense of whether you're more apt to be courageous in a second term than you are in a first term?

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: Well you hear it a lot, Al. Presidents are encouraged to do it. If you have to do it, do it either at the beginning of your first term so that as much time can pass as possible before you have to get re-elected, or you wait until year five, when you don't have to run again, and let her rip. But I think what the JFK example shows is that presidents cannot really be the master of events. He tried to. He would've preferred to wait until 1965 with hopefully a stronger Democratic Congress that was more pro-civil rights. But the great thing about him was that he showed that he was not so inflexible as not to be able to see what had happened. The fact that this was his moment.

AL HUNT: I'm going to get to your questions in just a moment. Just a couple final things I'd like to ask you, because this is a wonderful opportunity for me. Tell me about the final cuts. Who didn't quite make the final cuts, and what were some of the considerations? I'll toss a couple out at you. See if they were even considered. One would

be Gerald Ford's pardon of Richard Nixon, which has been, I think, so rightfully recognized by the Profile in Courage Committee.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: Before us, but we're also glad to claim Judge Price. Can we claim that we were actually here then?

AL HUNT: And about Nixon's China opening?

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: In Nixon's case, I think it was a great decision to do the opening to China, but he didn't pay a big political price for it.

AL HUNT: He gained, actually.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: He didn't have Richard Nixon on the outside denouncing him as a Communist and an anti-patriot for doing that. If a Democrat had done it, he might have had to deal with that, and it probably would've been a tougher thing to do. And the other thing is that presidents can make decisions that have political risk, but in my view, I don't define them as presidential courage because they also have to be wise.

And maybe Nixon is a good example of that. Nixon in 1970, if you will remember, invaded Cambodia, and gave a speech, I think the end of April, beginning of May 1970, saying essentially, "I'm going to expand the war into Cambodia to try to end it sooner. And my advisors," I won't do my bad Nixon impersonation either, "have unanimously told me not to do this but I'm going to do the more difficult thing for the good of the country." And he was right. The campuses went up in flames and people were very angry, but by the hindsight of history, it was a somewhat risky decision but by my judgment a stupid decision, because widening the war probably prolonged it. Didn't work. Caused more casualties. So with hindsight, it certainly was politically risky, but not too wise and with 20/20 hindsight, I sure wouldn't want him to do it.

AL HUNT: And how about Gerald Ford?

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: Gerald Ford pardoning Nixon, I think, was courageous, and in retrospect, wise. And one of the things that I think is actually quite lovely is that Gerald Ford said, before he died, that one of the things that emotionally meant the most to him was getting the Profile In Courage Award, because it made him feel that, despite the fact that he had gone through all that flack and people denouncing him, saying, “Did you make a secret deal with Nixon to get the presidency in exchange for a pardon?” he felt that in the end, he had been vindicated. And one thing that’s sort of pointed about history is that oftentimes people are not with honor in their time. And the nice thing with Ford is that he lived to see it. And Alan and I, I think you were not on the Committee, we were not here then.

AL HUNT: But we take credit for that.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: Yeah we take credit for that one too. That we personally helped to bring it about.

AL HUNT: We would’ve if we’d been here. I would just add to that that one of our closest friends, a wonderful man, is the mayor of Vail, Colorado. And he was very, very close to Gerald Ford. And he said, “You just cannot imagine how touched that Gerald Ford was by that. He would talk about it at dinner.” And really did view it as a vindication of his presidency, because he was incredibly reviled at the time. One final question I’d like to ask before I get to some of the very good questions here. You’ve talked about an appreciation of history as being one of the commonalities in most of these acts of courage. Are there other qualities that come to mind that are common?

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: I think, more than anything else, judgment, because we historians, I was joking about it, but Eisenhower, and I think he was right in this, said that any high school student with 20/20 hindsight can make a better decision than a president

can operating with partial information under pressure. Sometimes tired at the time. And that's absolutely right. So what you've got to do, and we're in a system that really requires us to do it because we're choosing candidates next year, is take a look at their records and see what kind of human beings they are. And see what kind of judgment that they have had in moments like this. And it's hard to do and you can never do it perfectly, but in my line of work, all I'm going to tell you is that it does have some predictive ability, and there's not much else to go on.

AL HUNT: Before we get to these questions, I will quickly tell those of you who thought that this was going to feature Tom Brady that the first quarter is ending, the score is Pittsburgh 3 and the Patriots 7.

[applause]

AL HUNT: Update, Pats 14, Pittsburgh 3.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: And if you stick with us, Tom will be arriving just in a few minutes.

AL HUNT: As a matter of fact, he's going to be chapter 10 in the book. Michael, this is a great question. How important were independent or key advisors in courageous presidential decisions? You mentioned Robert F. Kennedy earlier, but mention some of the others.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: Almost always. They almost always leaned on someone who was willing to tell the president often times what he did not want to hear. RFK was a good example of that. In the case of Adams, for instance, he had an advisor, Elbridge Gerry. But he was an old friend.

AL HUNT: The patron saint of every incumbent politician.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: There are all sorts of politicians these days who are grateful to him who have never heard of him. Probably thought he was a brilliant man just for that. But the thing was that he had gone to Paris, and he came back and told Adams, “I’ve seen the French leaders and they do not intend to go to war with the United States.” And he had such influence with Adams that Adams said, “All right, based on your assurance, I’m going to go against my Federalist leaders and stop this war.” If he had not been there, I think history probably would’ve been different.

AL HUNT: This is an interesting sequel to that. How do you answer someone who might argue our current president taking an unpopular stand in Iraq as showing courage?

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: Well, I’d say wait 30 years. But I’d also say that it’s not only courage but also wisdom. And so you really need hindsight to be able to do that. And to be fair and to sort of talk about this as history, you can create a scenario by which what George Bush did in Iraq and the war on terrorism that could look good with history’s hindsight. I’m not predicting this. But just to give you both scenarios. If the Iraq war in the end turns out well and seems the right thing to do, and democracy spreads through the Middle East and other dictators were deterred, and the war on terrorism seems to have been well thought and the right thing, hindsight will help him. If it’s the opposite, he’s going to be seen through a very critical lens. But sometimes presidents are looked at differently. As I said, I’m not predicting it with George Bush at all.

But Truman’s case. Anyone here know what Truman’s approval rating was when he left the presidency? It was about 25. Some had him at 22. I looked at the data. What were people upset about? Unpopular war, for sure. There was some corruption in the outer circles of his entourage. An amazing number of people mentioned that he sometimes didn’t talk like a president. They thought he was sort of not like FDR, the story is told. This also has added advantage of being true. He was asked by a reporter, Truman was, “What do you think of Richard Nixon?” And he said, “I think Nixon is full of manure.” And so some of Truman’s aides went to his wife, said, “Couldn’t you get the boss to

speak more like a president?" She said, "You have no idea how long it took for me to get him to use the word 'manure.'" That's what she was dealing with.

But the point is, at '53, that kind of stuff seemed important, but with half a century hindsight, more important is the fact that this is a person of great judgment who devised the way of winning the Cold War, which was won all those years later. We know that now.

AL HUNT: Well, I think one thing, and Michael is obviously right, history will tell us whether decisions that have been made in the last couple of years are wise ones, and perhaps even as judged by history, courageous ones. But one of the things that was missing, I think this is almost undeniable in reading the many accounts, is that in most, not all, of the examples you gave, these issues were really drawn. There was great debate. You mentioned Robert Kennedy and Gerry earlier. But it really was. And presidents showed a certain sense of great security in being able to have, Roosevelt was wonderful at this, at being able to have people with quite divergent views come in and argue it. And that was, I think, a casualty in this. In reading these books. I mean at one point, he said he did not consult his father, because he consulted a different father.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: And that's the lesson I take from all of this is that the system works best when everyone dukes it out over an issue. Not over personality, as necessary, but I think if I were a historian in the future writing about 2002, I would say whatever criticism you might have of George Bush on Iraq, and I think that historian might have plenty, you also have to say that there were too many Democrats who privately were against the war but were nervous that, if they voted that way, it would hurt them politically, and so in some cases cast votes that they didn't really believe in. And the point is that democracy works best when that doesn't happen.

And you mentioned 1940. It's a perfect example. This country was so isolationist that in, I think, 1937, there was a Constitutional Amendment that almost passed the House called

the Ludlow Amendment, after India, and a Congressman who proposed it, saying that if a president wanted to go to war, there would have to be a national referendum for 30 days, he'd have to campaign, get the American people to support a war, and then vote. And the House, as I said, almost passed it. And they didn't because they knew that this would shackle a president, make it very hard to go to war.

And so in 1940, when Roosevelt was dealing with World War II, there were a lot of isolationists in Congress who were against that, and then they were essentially willing to say, "If it goes the other way, and history judges it was important for us to fight Hitler, we're content that we're going to be defeated for being wrong and go back to our states and do something else." That's the way the system works. And if you've got people in public life who are so desperate to stay on and on and on, and get re-elected one term after another, they basically do things that they don't necessarily believe in and cast votes in a way-- it's not a great thing for them, but it also begins to warp the system, and bad things can happen.

AL HUNT: Michael, I'd hoped that I would be able to avoid this one, but I guess I can't. This is a very good question.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: Nothing about a family member of mine.

AL HUNT: No, it's not. How has the infiltration of media bias regarding presidential coverage and offices changed in the past century, and how does a historian account for this change in their own reporting?

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: Well let me ask you first. Do you think that there is a fair charge in media bias nowadays?

AL HUNT: Just, very quickly, I think there are so many very valid and worrisome critiques about the media, I would rank this about 17 on the list.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: No, but I think people would love to hear.

AL HUNT: So I think there are things that we-- I think it is there in some issues, it tends to be exaggerated. I think many of us, if you're in the national media and you're covering foreign affairs and national security, what is the liberal and what is the conservative position? We're not quite sure of that. I think it probably takes its toll only in social issues. I think in matters like gay rights, and abortion rights, there is probably not a dramatic but a clear media bias. Otherwise, I think it's exaggerated, but you may have a different view. But in any event, has it changed? I think we can broaden the question. Has the media coverage in general changed over the course of the last century, and what impact does that have on the ability to make courageous decisions?

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: Yeah, I think in one respect. And that is one of the things that John Kennedy wrote about in *Profiles In Courage* that really hit home with me. And I should say I first read that book when I was a kid, and it made a big impression on me, as you might expect, given the fact that I've written this one. But he writes, and I'm not going to get the language exactly right, but he writes-- And he was writing in 1954 and 1955, he's saying in those times, we're in trouble because in the old days, this is my language, not his, but basically his thought, the time of George Washington, if he was criticized, it would take a few weeks for a letter to arrive or he would get a *Gazette*, and so people had the leisure of thinking about a tough decision, having some time, and not having the media impact public opinion if they make people angry.

And John Kennedy was writing in the mid-1950s, nowadays it's different because there's radio, and there are telephones and lobbyists and all these people who can be very critical of you. And it makes some political leaders more inhibited about doing courageous. He was saying that in 1954. Can you imagine what he would say a half a century later with immediate e-mail? The president does something that makes people angry, you find out instantly your polls have dropped, your donors will call up and say, "We never want to

hear from you ever again.” The consultants will be on the TV saying, “Why did you do something that was so stupid?”

So I guess the point I’m making is that more even than in the mid 1950s, there are great pressures on a leader or president, people at lower levels, to do something that’s politically popular. I think I can speak for Al but correct me if this doesn’t sound right to you. We live in Washington, DC. We’re in the middle of a political culture where an awful lot of people, consultants, some journalists, pundits and so on, they think sort of the best thing to do in political life is to do something that keeps your poll ratings up. You do something that makes you grossly unpopular, why was he or she so stupid? Why are they not a more accomplished politician?

And sometimes they don’t step back and say, “Yes, most times it’s a good thing to maintain your support, but occasionally there comes a moment where you may have to do something that does drop your polls, or even, God forbid, cause you to cease from being re-elected.” So I think the problem more is that the political culture has grown, and also the backwash against a president who does something that’s unpopular is so immediate, it will inhibit those presidents and leaders of lower levels from making the kind of decisions that we’ve been talking about that I think have been so essential through American history at times.

AL HUNT: Someone once wrote, if there had been 24/7 cable television in 1940, you could imagine Hitler on the Larry King show and Larry saying, “So tell me, Adolf, how did you make the trains run with such great efficiency?”

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: Exactly, and then, “What did you think of Britney Spears?”

AL HUNT: Right. This is the final question. Gosh it’s a good one. Was dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki an act of courage or not?

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: I think it was the right thing to do, personally. I don't think it was necessarily an act of courage because Americans supported it and were delighted to have the war. And I think if Truman had not done that, I think people would have said, "Why on earth did you not use this new weapon that could shorten the war, spare maybe a million American lives, forestall an invasion of Japan?" And he might even have been impeached.

So there's an example of what I was saying before. That you can have great presidential decisions that are good for all sorts of reasons that may not necessarily involve courage. And you were talking about Thomas Jefferson. The Louisiana Purchase. Great decision, but most people realize that it was, so he didn't have to pay a big price. Doesn't mean it was any less of a decision.

AL HUNT: John, before we go, I want to take a moderator's privilege if I may. And I just want to ask you all, having heard Michael for this fascinating hour plus, and I hope all of you have read book-- if you haven't please go get it-- as you think about this very important election we're having now, I just want to ask you by show of hands to tell me who you feel, at this stage, who your instinct tells you would be capable of making these really big courageous decisions? Let me just go through some. How about Governor Romney? Okay. How about Barack Obama? How about John McCain? Hillary Clinton? And Rudy Guiliani? Well that's fascinating. I would say Obama, McCain, and Clinton in that order probably. But it's not scientific!

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: I come from Chicago, so I'm glad some people voted more than once. Could I say one more word?

AL HUNT: Yes, please do.

MICHAEL BESCHLOSS: I'm not supposed to have any opinions until 30 years after an event, but one thing I could be absolutely certain of is that, when some future historian

looks back on these times, one of the great journalists of our age is Al Hunt, and I'm just so grateful.

AL HUNT: Thank you Michael. Well I want to just thank Michael-- You see how prescient that columnist was in calling him a national treasure? And I want to thank John Shattuck, because, as I say, it's always a gift to be able to come back here. And most of all I want to thank you all for coming out.

JOHN SHATTUCK: Well I want to say that I know President Kennedy would have been thrilled by this forum, and that's not something that we say very often from this podium. And I think he would have been particularly pleased to, in a sense, stand corrected. That in fact mothers now, after hearing you, Michael and reading your book, might well want their sons and daughters to become politicians and go on to be presidents, rather than simply think, "Maybe they don't have to be politicians, even if they're presidents." Thank you so much, Michael Beschloss, Al Hunt. Thank you both.
[applause]

END