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ENLISTED MILITARY PERSONNEL
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MODERATOR: Let me go around the table and ask you to introduce yourself. Give me your name, your first name is fine. When we come to David, you better say you're Jon, just so we know that you're not only David, but you're Jon. And could you tell me what branch of the service you're with, the length of time you've been in, and if you've served abroad?

Has anyone served in Iraq? You have, Jon. So the rest have not. But let's go around and could you just give me your branch, the length of time, and, obviously, if you have a spouse, tell me what you do, and which branch of the service your spouse is in, and how long they've been in. Let me start with Mike. Welcome.

MIKE: Thank you. I'm Mike. My branch service is Navy. I've been in 16 years and three months.

JOHN: I'm John, J-o-h-n. I've been in the Navy 14 years.

MODERATOR: And that's your story. Okay.

JON: Jon, I'm in the Air Force. I've been in for over five, about five and a half.

CYNTHIA: Great. I'm Cynthia or Cindy. I'm ex-Navy, currently a college student at . . . my spouse, husband's in the Navy. Hopefully, he'll retire in a couple of years.

MODERATOR: Great. How long were you in?

CYNTHIA: I was in 13 years.

MODERATOR: And how long has he been in?

CYNTHIA: I think about 17 or 18.

DOROTHY: Hi, I'm Dorothy. I'm in the Air Force. I've been in for three years and five months.

GERTRUDE: Hi, I'm Gertrude. I am a teacher. My husband, Irvin, is in the Navy. He's been in there for 13 years.

MAUREEN: I'm Maureen, and I'm in the Army Reserves. I've been in for 20 years.

MODERATOR: Great.

MODERATOR: What do you do when you're not in the Army Reserves?

MAUREEN: I'm a deputy . . . for the Navy . . . and evaluation force.

MODERATOR: So you've got it coming and going.

MAUREEN: . . . to the Army, but the Navy pays me well.

MODERATOR: And who do we root for in the Army, Navy?

MAUREEN: Well, there is no question about that. Actually, it depends on if the admiral is in the room or not.

[Simultaneous discussion]

MAUREEN: You would think . . .

JOSEPH: Hi, how are you doing? My name is Joseph. I've had an interesting career, ten years in the Marine Corps. Four and a half to five years later on, I was in the Reserves, National Guard. Then I was activated in the Air Force.

WOMAN: Wow.

WOMAN: Oh, my God.

JOSEPH: . . . been almost two years now.

MODERATOR: But you haven't been to Iraq.

JOSEPH: No. Well, back in '91, I did go over.

MODERATOR: Okay. Great. Lisa, would you move your nametag up a little? Yeah, this way because otherwise, I'm going to call Joseph, Lisa.

JOSEPH: And also, I have 14 and a half years of service.

LISA: I'm Lisa. I was active duty for five years. I have about 14 years in the Reserves. I'm a Reservist now. I'm an adult probation parole officer. My ex-husband is also in the Navy Reserves. He got called to Kuwait during this war.

MODERATOR: I got it. What branch?

LISA: Navy. I'm sorry.

JAMES: Hi, I'm James. I typically go by John, but it's James for all practical purposes here. I'm in the Navy, and I've been in 19 and a half years.

MODERATOR: Great.

MICHAEL: Hi, I'm Michael. I go by Mike, but Mike has the nametag over there. Navy, I've been in 23 and a half years.

MODERATOR: That's great. Okay. That is marvelous. Let me start out with this very quickly. Give me a word or a phrase to describe sort of how things are going in this country today. What word or phrase would you use, Maureen, to say how things are going today? What is the word or phrase?

MAUREEN: A state of flux.

JOSEPH: It's like undecided.

JOHN: Turmoil.

MIKE: Turmoil.

MICHAEL: In the country?

MODERATOR: Yeah.

MICHAEL: Confusion.

JON: On an upward climb.

DOROTHY: Uncertainty.

CYNTHIA: Questionable.

LISA: Disturbing.

JAMES: I was going to say confusion, but Michael got to confusion on that one.

MODERATOR: Okay. Explain this to me, confusion, flux, uncertainty, etc, what are you trying to tell me? What is happening out there, Mike?

MIKE: We have our hands in too many things, and we don't have one set goal as to what we're trying to accomplish.

MODERATOR: Okay.

MICHAEL: I agree with Mike on that. People don't know where the economy is going, for one. We don't know where the war overseas is going, for another. We don't know, as far as the next administration, which way we're going to as far as the war, as far as the economy. People kind of, you know, are uncertain about that.

MODERATOR: Okay. Joseph, what are you thinking?

JOSEPH: Well, there is so much indecision with leadership, everything going in so many different ways, so many different directions all at the same time.

MODERATOR: Maureen, you said in flux.

MAUREEN: I think the indecisiveness, the change, well, everybody was behind the Administration after 9/11. Now, things have kind of changed. It's like, okay, where are we headed? All the apprehension around the country is, should we be in this war or should we not be in this war? What is it costing? What is it doing to our economy? Where is the money going to come from to pay for it? I speak, you know, from a comptroller perspective. What is that going to do to our Department of Defense, in general?

MODERATOR: . . . you're a little more upbeat. What was your . . . getting better or optimistic?

JON: Right. I think, I mean, from an economic perspective, all signs say go. Everything in the economy looks pretty strong, robust. We saw the highest quarter growth in 20 years last quarter. We just gave over transitional power in Iraq yesterday or this morning. I think that's a great thing, even if it's just a symbolic thing. I think it's a good thing.

Now, it's Iraqi as opposed to Iraq versus the U.S. I think that does great things for that region as well. I mean, politics is politics. You're always going to have that. I mean, 24 hours is a lifetime in politics. You could have total support in an administration one day, and then next day, you get a lot of discontent. That's what our country is about. That's the form of government we've chosen. That's what makes the country great, as far as I'm concerned.

MODERATOR: That's great. Cynthia, what are you thinking?

CYNTHIA: I was thinking about, not just this Administration, but it seems like all of the administrations or a majority of them, I mean, all the way back to Nixon when I didn't give a shoot about politics, there's a lot of distrust.

MODERATOR: Uh-huh.

CYNTHIA: The Iran Contra affair, the whole Clinton Whitewater affair, this, now, they're saying that George Bush, you know, the weapons were there, and now, they're not there. So it's hard to trust anybody these days. I don't mean to generalize.

JON: She's from D.C.

CYNTHIA: And the press, no offense to you guys behind the mirror or gals.

JON: That's the problem, the press.

WOMAN: Yeah.

MODERATOR: Sherry, welcome. I have a couple quick things. Are you a spouse or are you in the service?

SHERRY: I'm military.

MODERATOR: And which branch?

SHERRY: Air Force.

MODERATOR: And how long have you been in?

SHERRY: Twelve years.

MODERATOR: And about the derisive remark you were hearing out of David and Cynthia, we have behind here a few members of the press, plus a few members of my staff who are involved in this project. So that's where the little bite played. We're delighted to have you. If somebody were to say to you, compare this to another period that you think of, what period would it be, James? Is there another period that you think of that you can say, yeah, this reminds me of it?

JAMES: The Vietnam War.

MODERATOR: Really? Why?

JAMES: Because there's a war or a conflict that is occurring that a lot of people don't believe that we should be in.

MODERATOR: Okay. And, Lisa, you're nodding.

LISA: Oh, I agree. With Vietnam, we reluctantly went into that war, and we only went into that war because of the ship situation where we did not want to go into that war. This is another war, well, I don't feel that we reluctantly went into this war. I think that we went headstrong into this war.

We had all intentions of going into Iraq prior to 9/11, so I don't think it was reluctant. I think we find ourselves in a situation that has grown out of control. That, we didn't anticipate it. Vietnam, we didn't anticipate that it would be out of control like that.

MODERATOR: And, John, compare it to another period.

JOHN: I was right on with James, Vietnam. The turmoil, that is just what I was talking about earlier. There is the uncertainty of where we're going, why we're doing it. We had good intentions initially.

WOMAN: Yeah.

JOHN: And I think we lost sight of that a little bit. Being in the military, you know, I support the things we're doing. At the same time, you know, are the costs going to outweigh the advantages?

MODERATOR: Okay. And what about you, Mike, is there a period that this is similar to?

MIKE: Yes, it's Vietnam. We're all stuck there.

MODERATOR: Why is it so much like Vietnam? Is it exactly what John and James are saying?

MIKE: Well, the bad thing, it just seems like we're over there, and our rules of engagement are such, the way we are as Americans toward other people, is we want to be the helping hand. So when you're trying to be the helping hand, and somebody is cutting off your hand, you don't know what's going on. You don't know what to do. So in the circle of that, you look like the bad guy trying to fix the problem.

MODERATOR: Michael, do you agree with Mike?

MICHAEL: Yeah. I agree with that. Also, you're dealing with, like you said, you don't know who is really our friend over there. As in Vietnam, you didn't know who was really the enemy. I have to look at our allies also in that region, we don't really know who we can trust in that whole section.

MODERATOR: Gertrude, what are you thinking?

GERTRUDE: Well, I agree in this instance. I believe, because of the choices that have been made . . . many different avenues all heading back to the fact that the situation at hand, here and now, whatever we have to do to try to make it right is where our government is . . . from right now.

If you had asked me what my word was going to be, I was going to say, don't be discouraged. Because of the choices that have been made, we're all here now, and we all have our mixed skills and our mixed emotions. We have to deal with the impact of it all. On a silent note, you know, there's not much we can really say or do about it, but we have to wait and see.

MODERATOR: Sherry, what are your thoughts, is this the Vietnam era or do you see it as a different era or do you have any thoughts?

SHERRY: It's similar to, I wouldn't say it's just like it, but it's similar to it. It has the same concept behind it. Like, okay, we're over here, and we're fighting, but why? At first, we knew why, but now, we don't know why.

It's just so much different. It's like we went over there, we did what we had to do, we fought. Okay. Then we dealt with whatever came afterwards, but now, this is like we're constantly having to look over our shoulders. We don't know what we're doing. Are we the good guys or are we the bad guys? What is really going on? So that is where it's similar, but different.

MODERATOR: David, what are you thinking?

JON: I don't think it's similar era, respectively. You have a totally different situation, I think, in respect to Vietnam and in respect to loss of life. Now . . . minimal loss of life. If you lose one, that's tragic enough. In comparison to the Vietnam era, we're not losing nearly as many lives, just for comparison sake.

Then you have a situation where the UN was the driving force in the Iraq conflict. We had UN stipulations and regulations and . . . going back ten years, last one being 10.41(?). The UN may not have enforced it or we may have seen other routes, but the bottom line is like it's . . . we're there now. Truthfully, the only thing that needs to remain tough is our will. We have the military capability, obviously.

Now, I agree about the handcuffs on us. I think that has to do with the cameras everywhere and the fact that we have guys getting shot at from mosques. Then if you have cameras on our guys, saying, for example, for a Marine or an Army troop or whoever, if we were to fire back at mosques, then it would make headlines. Now, that does put a handcuff on our own troops, but I think . . . as long as our country, our people stay strong with the will to win.

Obviously, Saddam Hussein, nobody can argue that he wasn't a bad person. He's out of power. There are 25 million people free now. They are responsible for their own government. We're going to be there until we can somewhat stabilize the area because it's the largest oil reserve in the world. That's necessary for the whole word economic stability.

I choose to look on a positive note. I don't think there's as much dissention here nearly as it was in Vietnam. I'm glad about that. I know there is some confusion. I've noticed that. I think we can remain strong, pull through it.

MODERATOR: Good. Joseph, is there anything you want to add here?

JOSEPH: Yeah. One thing that really comes to mind is the duration. Initially, it was something just like in Vietnam. It was supposed to be short and sweet, and then it got extended.

WOMAN: Uh-huh.

JOSEPH: And that's what lingers on in the minds, not only of troops and whatnot that are there, but also the families that it impacts.

MAN: Good point.

MODERATOR: Okay. Let me do this just quickly. What I did is I grabbed everything that I saw that was a big deal in the headlines in the last six weeks. I sort of did it indiscriminately. I'm not trying to choose from one point or another. I just said, okay, I've seen that in the headlines, that in the headlines.

Would you write down the two letters of the issues that have affected you most personally? I'm not talking about the whole nation. I'm talking about you, you as a citizen, you as human being, you as a person. Which two letters say, hey, for me, here are the two things that affect me most? We've got everything from the death of Ronald Reagan to Bill Clinton's book and the Medicare prescription drug card to higher gas prices and the effects of killings in Iraq, etc. Okay. Do you have it?

How many selected the death of Ronald Reagan, anybody? One person, James. Okay. How about the report of the 9/11 Commission? One, Cynthia. Higher gas prices, how many wrote that down? Put your hands up, I want to see those numbers. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Okay. Change of power to the Iraqi government? The film, *Fahrenheit 9/11*? Zip.

Changes in the stock market? Two. Prescription drug cards? Zero. The attacks and killings in Iraq? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. Okay. World War II Memorial? Nobody. Abu Ghraib prison torture? One, two, three, four, five. Bill Clinton's book? Bill Clinton is going to be very disappointed. I won't tell him.

[Simultaneous discussion]

MODERATOR: Okay. Let me just go to a couple quick things, but then I kind of have to stop and recover here. Higher gas prices, seven of you selected that. What are you telling me?

WOMAN: It affects me every day.

SHERRY: Every day.

WOMAN: I mean, I drive back and forth to . . .

MAN: . . .

WOMAN: My husband, when he's in, he drives back and forth to . . . and we live in Virginia Beach. That is hitting me in the pocketbook.

MODERATOR: Uh-huh. Sherry, why did you select it?

SHERRY: Same thing, I drive 15 miles going and coming. It's like, by the time I get over there on the 380 Pass, I'm on half a tank. Gas is expensive. It's crazy. I mean, it's like you don't want to go anywhere.

JOHN: I'm the same way. We budget all of our expenses, my wife and I. It was hitting the pocket because we try to stick with our budget really good, so we can afford to retire at an earlier age, if that's possible.

DOROTHY: My husband lives out of state, so the only time we get to see each other is on the weekends. With me driving to Maryland or him driving through Maryland, it's just too much, but we have to see each other. It's really killing us.

MODERATOR: Yeah. Okay. Whose fault is this, the high gas prices?

MAN: OPEC.

MAN: The refineries, actually, there is a lack of refineries.

[Simultaneous discussion]

MAN: It's a combination of both, I would say.

MODERATOR: Whose fault, anybody's fault?

MAN: To some extent, the . . . refineries, you can't build a refinery. Like there are 120 or something, and 20 years ago, there were almost twice as many as now. Nobody wants to live in a refinery.

MAN: It would be our fault for placing the stipulations on the greenhouse effect . . .

WOMAN: I agree.

MODERATOR: Okay. Good. Next one up here, obviously, is the attacks and killings in Iraq. What is the reason?

MAUREEN: Well, because the conflict supposedly ended a long time ago, but we're losing more military now than we did before. The handcuff that we have, that we've placed on our troops, they've been put in situations where they can't respond. They can't protect themselves or they're on a windy corner with no protection. So that's a major concern.

JAMES: It just angers me. I mean, they are there to protect another country. Yes, we invaded to overthrow a leader of that country who was in violation of certain agreements. We're there to free this country, yet, we're getting attacked by the people who live in this country.

MODERATOR: Okay. Anybody else, just quickly?

MIKE: They've served a purpose. They've caused a lot of anger. They are trying to make us angry to back out, but our resolve, I think, is our anger toward them.

MAN: . . . stay the course.

MIKE: . . . behind this guy.

DOROTHY: It just saddens me because, you know, I have friends and fellow coworkers over there. You just never know who it's going to be. You see them on the news, and you know that those people have families. They have friends. They have people that they work with that know them personally. You just never know when somebody is going to be on there that you know.

MODERATOR: Yep. This is the last thing, torture of Iraqi prisoners, five people raised their hands. Why?

MIKE: Five or six people put the whole country in a bad light.

WOMAN: And the rest of the military, it makes us look like we're all like that.

MODERATOR: David, you raised your hand on that one.

JON: Right. There are a couple ways to look at it. I agree. I think you're talking about so few, not even 1% of the actual military, especially if you consider how many people have been over there. It hurts me as a military member to see an egg on the military like that. It also gives a bad reputation for so few that were actually involved.

Then from the perspective that I was actually over there and dealt with detainees and so forth, you're dealing with people that aren't afraid to die at all. Shoot me. Go ahead and shoot me. That is the only English I think they knew. They were almost defying you to shoot. They almost want to be a martyr. You're dealing with humiliation. It's not torture. I think those headlines are wrong.

I think also that it got way too much coverage. You have people getting captured, like this U.S. Marine that is an American Muslim of all the situations, they don't show any of the decapitations or anything else, which I think is important. If you're going to be in the media and show news that is, you know, relevant to the American people, you need to show it all.

They spent weeks on Abu Ghraib because it was egg on the military. They want to tear down the military and make them look bad. They only spent 30 seconds on the four contractors that were dragged in Fallujah. I think that's inconsistency, and I just disagree with that.

MODERATOR: Okay. Sherry, let me hear from you.

SHERRY: I agree with what he said. In addition to that, because they did what they did, the killings that are taking place now are more gruesome. You know, the behavior of the people there, it's just like they are just deliberately choosing people and putting it on TV because of that one incident. If they had not done that, then these people probably wouldn't be losing their . . . like they're losing them.

MODERATOR: Okay. Lisa?

LISA: Well, I was going to say that as far as people saying it wasn't torture, there were a lot more pictures that were not shown that were torture, the dog that was allowed to viciously attack the people. They had, I can't remember the guy who actually wrote the story in the *New York Times*. They showed the dog actually viciously taking a chunk out of his leg.

They also showed, well, they didn't show, but they described the stomping on the head until the blood came out of the ears. They described some of the other things, some of the pictures that have not actually come out yet. Some of them have come out, but not all of them have come out. The killings, there have been several murders that they have not discussed in detail. So there was some torture in that, and that was very disturbing.

Another thing that was disturbing to me was when I was called back. After 9/11, I was called back on active duty. There was a sense that the regular Geneva Convention did not apply. I was going . . . the Yaser Hamdi guy, and he never had lawyers, nothing. For two years, he was not allowed any kind of representation or anything. He was an American citizen. I mean, he was actually born in America.

So that was kind of disturbing to me, that you can actually be picked up. In fact, most of the people in Abu Ghraib prison, 79% of them were considered . . . people who were just swept up off the street. So that was disturbing to me, that you could just be

picked up off the street and kept incarceration for two years without any type of anything.

MODERATOR: Okay. I'm going to move a little more quickly. There have been excellent points. I have one quick thing. When you think of America in the last four years, what words do you think of? I'm talking about America from 2000 to 2004, what words come to mind?

WOMAN: Fear.

MODERATOR: What?

WOMAN: Fear.

MODERATOR: Last four years, happy times or sad times?

WOMAN: Patriotism.

MODERATOR: What?

WOMAN: For the troops.

MAN: Pride.

WOMAN: Divisiveness.

MODERATOR: Other words?

JOHN: I'd say loss of political correctness.

MAN: Focusing against . . . resolve.

MODERATOR: Okay. Good.

GERTRUDE: I thought of the slogan, In God We Trust, because, you know, we can feel the closeness there. The religion of God is a foundation in keeping us together and guiding us through.

JON: I think resolve. Over the past four years, I've never seen, in my lifetime, that much of our country coming together, so whatever word describes that.

MODERATOR: Okay. Great. New question. You're in the military either directly or indirectly. What three things do you feel it's important for the public to know about

military service today? What's important for the public to know about the military service, James?

JAMES: That any member of the military service, on a minute's notice, would put their life on the line for their country and for the people who are not in the military.

CYNTHIA: That in a sense, we're just normal people, but in another sense, we're people that go by . . . what other members of our country are required to do.

DOROTHY: I think one of the most important things that they should know is that we do not make a lot of money. I've read so many different articles of people saying, oh, we get this, and we get that, and we have so many benefits, especially after the whole 9/11 where everybody was just offering us things left and right, free injury care, and everything.

I mean, the general public civilian who really isn't part of military life may think that we have everything just given to us, and life is just oh so wonderful. It's really not, and I think they need to know that. I know that I'm working probably about minimum wage status right now compared to civilian life. It's not all apples and candy.

JOSEPH: I think they should understand or realize what type of personal sacrifices we make. I myself am a single parent. At any given notice, you know, I can be gone, but they don't really understand what impact that has on my family.

MAUREEN: That is exactly what I was thinking, the sacrifice, personal, and financial, and family.

MIKE: Something I was just talking about sort of made me think of it. I work half days, right? In upper-level management, I work half days. Half days is . . . 12 hours.

[Simultaneous discussion]

MIKE: I have three kids and a wife. Five years of their life I've missed during the amount of time I've been in. That is just six-month deployments. If I put the rest of the time with 16 years, that would probably take 8 years of family life. The time spent away from home is not really accounted for.

MODERATOR: Okay. Good. Do you think this is a more challenging period? If I were in the military five years ago, ten years ago, is it the same? It's always a challenging time if you're in the military or is this more challenging?

MICHAEL: This is definitely more challenging.

MODERATOR: Why?

MICHAEL: We have fewer resources, less money, more missions with less of everything, less people.

MAN: Yeah.

MICHAEL: We have more problems around the world where we have to deploy troops and ships. The money is not there, one, for the training and, two, for the maintenance. We have to get more people.

MODERATOR: yeah. Lisa, same question, is it a more challenging time?

LISA: Yes, definitely more challenging.

MODERATOR: And it's more challenging because?

LISA: Well, basically because we have been a Cold War status, a peaceful status since I've been in the military, which has been almost 19 years. Most of it has been in the Reserves, but since I've been in the military up until recently, even when we had the Gulf War, it wasn't . . .

MODERATOR: I've seen several places where some people in public office have suggested that we should return to the draft. Is the draft a good idea or a bad idea?

MAN: Bad.

WOMAN: Bad.

MODERATOR: Why? Let's go around, good idea or bad idea?

MAN: Bad.

MODERATOR: Why?

MIKE: Because of some of the 18 year olds that I get . . .

[Simultaneous discussion]

MIKE: If everybody was that way, then my job would be more than half days.

MAN: I agree, bad. It will foster even more turmoil. Like Vietnam, it was the draft era then, and it didn't go very well.

MAN: I agree. I think that . . .

CYNTHIA: Bad, because we need people who are going to be dedicated.

MAN: True.

MODERATOR: Okay. Dorothy, do you agree?

DOROTHY: Yeah. It would just totally bring down morale. If you don't want to be there, I mean, if you're just doing a bad job, and you could care less, then you're bringing down everybody else's mood too.

MAUREEN: I agree somewhat. I think it is a bad idea for those who are not in the mindset to do the best job that they could possibly do.

MODERATOR: Yet, I hear people say, well, it's really unfair. What makes it unfair is that there is a whole group of people who essentially . . .

MAN: Don't have an idea.

MAN: They're clueless.

MODERATOR: When you say clueless . . .

MAN: Well, like Israel, you have this mandatory service for two years.

MODERATOR: Right.

MAN: That's on the flip side. I think it would be great if everybody did that, but at their own choice.

MODERATOR: But a draft is a bad idea. Let me just make the argument on the other side, which people suggest. You can use it to go up against it. That is, it's unfair at this stage of the game, some people are doing 100% of the burden, and other people have none of the burden. Everybody of a certain age should be eligible for the draft. Obviously, we had a lottery at one stage. We had different forms of it. James, you're shaking your head, no, that's wrong.

JAMES: I made a choice to serve in the military, so that others don't have to, to protect other people's freedom. I don't believe everyone should have to serve in the military.

MAN: A draft won't solve that.

WOMAN: They'll run away.

MAN: People in the military still . . . of the burden in certain areas. That is just the way it's going to be. I agree.

JOSEPH: I agree, but then on the other side, especially for males, it touches on like the military side because a lot of them have never had a father or a male figure. Sometimes that will change some lives. You know? There are a lot of single parents out there. I know a lot of young males that don't have that. Not all of them, you know, may want to go initially, but sometimes we need to give that opportunity. Sometimes people's lives will change.

MODERATOR: Okay. This is a different subject. That is, should people in the military, soldiers, be allowed to be active in political campaigns? In other words, do you have the right to be active in political campaigns any way you choose? Why are you laughing?

[Simultaneous discussion]

MAN: . . . talk about religion and stuff.

MAN: . . . Muslim.

MAN: No, because we have to support whoever is in office at the time. If I said, okay, this guy is great, they would take it that the military thinks this. I'm just one person, but they see this guy . . .

MAN: You put on a uniform, and you're representing the military.

WOMAN: Yeah.

MODERATOR: So should you be allowed? You're saying no. Does anybody say, hold it . . .

LISA: I think in an ideal world, you should be allowed, but we don't live in an ideal world.

[Simultaneous discussion]

MODERATOR: Okay. Do I have anybody else besides Lisa who says, yeah, you should be allowed?

LISA: Well, I think you should be allowed to voice your opinion. As far as being active in a campaign . . .

[Simultaneous discussion]

WOMAN: But you should be allowed to voice your opinion as you see it because we all have one political vote, and we have one opinion.

LISA: And that is kind of what we're fighting for.

WOMAN: Yeah.

MAN: Which we do voice our opinions . . .

WOMAN: Uh-huh.

MAN: But we don't . . .

[Simultaneous discussion]

WOMAN: Not to the press, right? That's not right. I think you should be able to voice your opinion. I think you should be able to. As a citizen, you have a vote, rights.

DOROTHY: I think we should be allowed to, but, of course, we're not allowed to. If we're supposed to be fighting for all these constitutional rights, but then we don't really have one. Our Commander in Chief, we have to support him publicly and stand beside him no matter what. Now, what we think when we go home, that is a totally different story, but you have to keep it to yourself.

MODERATOR: Okay. I have one other question. That brought up something I hadn't thought about. Should politicians or the Commander in Chief be allowed to do political rallies on military bases?

WOMAN: They don't. Do they?

WOMAN: Yeah, they do.

WOMAN: What?

WOMAN: They do.

[Simultaneous discussion]

WOMAN: It's kind of set up like we're coming to visit because we support you.

MODERATOR: Is that okay?

WOMAN: Sure.

WOMAN: . . . the only we're going to get . . .

MAN: It puts us in the spotlight.

MODERATOR: So that's okay?

WOMAN: Yeah.

MAN: Yeah.

MODERATOR: The fact that you can't voice your opinion, but they're allowed to use you as a backdrop . . .

WOMAN: I don't think anyone said it was okay for . . . voice our opinion.

[Simultaneous discussion]

MODERATOR: I'm moving on.

SHERRY: You have to realize too that there are a lot of people that are in the military that are not happy with the military. You can only imagine if you gave those people a chance to go out and talk to the press. It would not be good. I think that's why . . .

[Simultaneous discussion]

MODERATOR: Okay. Here is the next thing we're going to do. I'm going to read you a list of people who are in public life, public office, and I want you to give me a word or a phrase to describe that person. Okay. It's known as the lightning round. It's very quick.

Now, let me explain. If I were to say Nancy Reagan, don't say to me the widow of Ronald Reagan. I know that. Don't say to me, 83 years old. I know that. Don't say anything that is factual. I want a feeling that you have. Do you have it? So it has to tell me something about how you feel about that person. So you can't say to me, that's a senator, that's a governor or that person is six feet, three inches tall. Here we go. You don't have to write these down. Maureen, Ronald Reagan, word or phrase?

MAUREEN: Patriot.

JAMES: . . .

JON: Great communicator.

CYNTHIA: I just think awesome President.

DOROTHY: Leader.

SHERRY: . . .

MODERATOR: I knew she would.

[Simultaneous discussion]

MODERATOR: Okay. Here we go. Richard Cheney, Dick Cheney, word or phrase, Michael?

MAN: Hidden.

MIKE: . . .

JOHN: . . .

MODERATOR: Does anyone have anything for Dick Cheney?

MAN: Puppeteer.

MAN: . . . want-to-be-polished image.

[Simultaneous discussion]

MAN: Liability.

MODERATOR: Okay. Here we go. John Kerry, word or phrase, James?

JAMES: Lost.

GERTRUDE: He took it . . .

DOROTHY: No comment.

CYNTHIA: I'm interested in his views, so interesting.

SHERRY: I don't have any comment.

MAUREEN: I want to say shallow, but he's not shallow. I'm looking for the word . . .

MAN: Wishy-washy?

MAUREEN: Yeah. There you go.

[Simultaneous discussion]

MICHAEL: Shady.

JOHN: Wishy-washy.

LISA: Good intentions.

JOSEPH: I don't have anything for him.

[Simultaneous discussion]

MODERATOR: Okay. David, Colin Powell?

JON: Statesman.

GERTRUDE: Tired.

JAMES: He's a leader.

MICHAEL: He's a hero.

JOSEPH: Very hard working.

SHERRY: He's a great leader.

CYNTHIA: Strong.

MODERATOR: Okay. Donald Rumsfeld, John?

JOHN: Superior leader.

SHERRY: He's a leader.

GERTRUDE: I would say strong leader.

JOSEPH: Strong.

LISA: Arrogant.

MICHAEL: He's a leader.

MIKE: Has always stuck to his guns.

MODERATOR: Okay. George W. Bush, David?

JON: Come back to me for that one.

SHERRY: He knows what he wants. He's a go-getter.

CYNTHIA: Back to questionable again.

DOROTHY: Very determined.

GERTRUDE: Mobile character.

MODERATOR: What?

GERTRUDE: Mobile.

MODERATOR: What do you mean by mobile?

GERTRUDE: He's the . . . I mean, I just think that he reaches, he's definitely a risk taker.

JAMES: Courageous.

MICHAEL: Patriotic.

LISA: A puppet of the puppeteer.

JOSEPH: Steadfast.

MIKE: Supports the military.

JON: I don't have kind words, to be honest with you, Peter. Truthfully, I think he has potential to be a great leader. I think he listens to maybe the wrong people sometimes. He allows things to be too political.

I think the best moments he had and the reason he had great support after 9/11 is because I think he just spoke from the heart. The potential for his great leadership was evident then. I think if he was like that and allowed his heart to kind of . . . with Iraq, I think he would be better off than listening to wrong sources or whoever he . . .

MODERATOR: Okay. Laura Bush, Maureen?

MAUREEN: Devoted.

LISA: She has opinions, but she doesn't express them. She's not strong enough for me.

DOROTHY: I don't know much about her.

MAN: Supportive.

JOHN: Passionate.

MODERATOR: Okay. Good. John Edwards?

JON: A leader.

SHERRY: . . .

MODERATOR: How many people say, I don't know who John Edwards is?

WOMAN: I always think . . .

MODERATOR: Okay. We have one, two, three, four, five, six.

MAN: Money.

[Simultaneous discussion]

WOMAN: A man of integrity. I think he's very personable.

MODERATOR: Okay. Anybody else?

[Simultaneous discussion]

MODERATOR: John McCain?

GERTRUDE: No comment.

MAN: Maverick.

DOROTHY: I don't know him either.

MICHAEL: Extreme.

MIKE: Out there, not a clue.

JOHN: POW.

MODERATOR: Any feelings?

MAN: Patriotic.

SHERRY: I'm going to agree with him. He's out there.

CYNTHIA: I'd lean towards a patriot.

JAMES: Dangerous.

MODERATOR: John Ashcroft?

DOROTHY: . . .

MODERATOR: Don't know? It's all right, no big deal.

MAUREEN: To tell you the truth . . . but I don't really have a comment.

LISA: Very steadfast, headstrong, determined to do what he wanted to do.

JON: I agree with Lisa, steadfast determined.

MAN: Dependable.

JAMES: No comment.

MIKE: Right man for the job.

MODERATOR: Okay. Good. Bill Clinton?

MICHAEL: . . .

MAN: Liar.

DOROTHY: I think he was a good President.

JOHN: Blackened morals.

LISA: Likable and effective.

JOSEPH: He had fun.

MAUREEN: Immoral.

CYNTHIA: Immoral and dishonest.

GERTRUDE: I would say original.

[Simultaneous discussion]

MAN: . . . caused a lot of the turmoil we're in right now.

MAN: Have a cigar.

MODERATOR: One other final quick thing. That is, what bothers you most in how politicians use their relationship to the military? What bothers you most about how politicians use their relationship to the military? When I say their relationship, obviously, it could be their stands, their campaigning, any element that relates. What bothers you, John?

JOHN: With Kerry, he was in Vietnam, and he served his country loyally, and got out. Then he protested against it as soon as he got out in the Senate. He's a Senator now, so it's kind of funny that he's serving our country in that capacity now.

MIKE: Same thing. A lot of the politicians use . . . the military, which is good. That means they know what we've been through, and they know what the country has to do if we're in a conflict. So that is a really good thing. If you're going to tell the moderates that I threw away my medals or I'm ashamed of what I did or I'm ashamed of the baby killers and the rapists over there . . . and then turn around and tell somebody else, oh, yes, I was proud of Tet, and I wanted to be there. So back to the . . .

CYNTHIA: I do think that they use it to their advantage. If you're going to tell the story, like these guys are saying, tell the whole story. Tell your good points and your bad points because secrets are going to be found out. I mean, that does damage to them when they are found out.

JOSEPH: It shouldn't be, but it's like they only come around when they want something, when it's beneficial to them.

MODERATOR: Okay. Anybody else?

MAN: Well, it seems like whenever there is a campaign going on, every politician is, well, I'm for the military. I'm for pay raises. I'm for more ships. I'm for more troops. When they actually get in office, it doesn't seem to come around that way. We don't get the pay raises maybe that we're promised . . .

[Simultaneous discussion]

WOMAN: What bothers me the most is the politicians blaming things on other politicians. If the general public did the research, they would find out that the war actually started out with Reagan, when Reagan goaded Afghanistan and the Taliban . . .

MAN: Twenty years.

WOMAN: Exactly. To fight with Russians, so we could topple the Russians. We did topple the Russians economically. Then we stayed and sought Arabia to fight the Kuwaiti war against Iraq. The real reason they're in . . . now is because we stayed in Saudi Arabia. To them, we are considered infidels. We can't be on their holy ground.

That's what spurned Osama bin Laden. The whole thing started way back during the Reagan administration. Then when Bush went to fight the Gulf War, he told the people in Saudi Arabia that we were only going to be there for a few months. We couldn't leave because he didn't kill Saddam Hussein. Then we had to stay in Saudi Arabia, which is considered sacrilegious. We are infidels.

MAN: Right.

WOMAN: That bothers me that people don't really . . .

MODERATOR: Okay. Here is what I'm going to have you do. The election is today, and you have to decide how you're going to vote, who you vote for. One, write it down on the piece of paper in front of you. Then number two, on a scale of 1 to 100, where 100 means I'm absolutely certain that I'm going to support this person, and 1 means I'm as firm as unset Jell-O, in other words, the slightest little breeze may change my number, and you choose any number between 1 and 100 in terms of how firm you are in terms of your vote.

MAN: You said 100 is the firmest?

MODERATOR: Yeah. One hundred is like marble. Okay. I'm going to start down there with Sherry, and we'll go clockwise.

SHERRY: George Bush.

MODERATOR: And what's your number?

SHERRY: Ninety.

CYNTHIA: George Bush, 70.

DOROTHY: George Bush, 65%.

GERTRUDE: It's a tough one for me. I would say Bush, but, boy . . .

MAUREEN: Bush, 70%.

JOSEPH: Bush, 50%.

LISA: Kerry, 100%.

JAMES: I'll see . . . and raise you to Bush, 100%.

MIKE: And we're voting today, right?

MODERATOR: Yeah.

MIKE: Bush, 80%.

JOHN: I said Bush, and I said 85%, but I'll call that 100%.

JON: Bush, 90%.

MODERATOR: Okay. You seem pretty heavy in the Bush direction.

[Simultaneous discussion]

MODERATOR: Tell me the major factor that has you supporting Bush, Maureen.

MAUREEN: Well, the reason it's 70% is because I would really like to see a change, but I'm not totally convinced that John Kerry is the man for the job. I don't want to say it's the lesser of two evils. I think Bush has done right by the military in terms of supporting us and increasing the budget to help us do what we need to do, in spite of the fact that we still don't have enough resources. But the 30% is still there because I could possibly be swayed by Kerry. If something comes up in the next several months that I haven't seen yet . . .

MODERATOR: Yeah. I want change. Describe that change that you're looking for.

MAUREEN: I think focus is what I'm looking for, some decisions about where we're going. Yes, we've turned over the reins of the government. That is all well and good, but that is not the end. There is a lot to do. I just think that, symbolically, yes, I think we're headed in the right direction, but I still think there is a whole lot more that needs to be done. I just don't know Bush is going to get the support he needs to be able to do what needs to happen.

MODERATOR: Gertrude, you talked about Bush at 40%.

GERTRUDE: I do see a change. I see the necessity for change. The reason I said 40% for Bush is because I think he needs to undergo a whole new plan of action with a fewer personal actions and a little bit more plan from an entity being able to supply the demand as it is needed.

JOSEPH: Between Bush and Kerry, I would go with Bush because there is nobody else out there.

[Simultaneous discussion]

MODERATOR: What are you trying to say?

MAN: Don't hold back.

JOSEPH: Basically, between the two, I know a little bit more about Bush than Kerry. Kerry has some gray areas. I would lean towards Bush.

MODERATOR: And the reason I lean towards Bush is because . . .

JOSEPH: Because I know a little bit more of what he's capable of and what he's done, his track record.

MODERATOR: And what impresses you about his track record?

JOSEPH: He actually tries to do, you know, good for the people. Even when he talks, he has a sense of sincerity in his voice and the things he says.

WOMAN: . . . given a task or a charge and the ability to see it through. So whatever situations . . .

MODERATOR: Okay. Dorothy?

DOROTHY: I'm going to agree with James.

MODERATOR: . . .

DOROTHY: Yes.

CYNTHIA: Better than the last.

[Simultaneous discussion]

MODERATOR: I'm not going to let you off on that. Okay.

CYNTHIA: I admire George Bush's morals. I despise Bill Clinton's morals. I was teaching my children not to lie, and here is this man lying to our country. We let him get away with it, and that disgusted me. I think George . . .

MAN: . . . so we can find jobs. People get so worried. Good educational benefits as far as schools and stuff like that . . .

MODERATOR: Does anyone else agree with Michael? Michael says mediocre.

MICHAEL: Maureen does.

MODERATOR: What?

MICHAEL: That is why she said reactionary.

MODERATOR: Okay. Go ahead.

[Simultaneous discussion]

MODERATOR: Everybody has to find a twist. Okay. Maureen?

MAUREEN: The reason I said reactionary was because of the focus on one area. After 9/11, we reacted to what was going on, but we have lost sight of all those other things that need to be taken into consideration. We talk about the war on terrorism. If I may, it's not just terrorism outside of this country. I mean, my goodness, if you can't walk down the street at night, that is terrorism, because of the crime in this country. What are we doing about that?

WOMAN: Uh-huh.

MAUREEN: You know, we're worried about our troops overseas, but . . .

MODERATOR: . . . besides Michael and Maureen that would say, yeah, I'm concerned that this Administration is too focused on the war and terrorism. It's led too much of a . . .

MAN: I look in the light that . . . as leaders of a certain group of people . . . and people who have worked in corporation . . . certain people. You . . . people working for you. You've got five problem children. Those five problem children that you have working under you, they've got 95% of your time.

That is what is happening with this Administration. You've got the problem child for the Administration, Iraq and terrorism. The other things are . . . taking care of themselves . . . 95% of the attention of the Administration . . . the war in Iraq and the war on terrorism. As a . . . and working with other people . . .

[Simultaneous discussion]

MODERATOR: Okay. Sure.

SHERRY: I don't think that those other things are being ignored. I think they're just not talked about as much because right now, we want to know what's going on with Iraq and this war on terrorism. That's why I think the media has got it out as a problem child. I don't think the rest of this stuff is being ignored. I think it's still being addressed, but we're not hearing about it.

MODERATOR: Okay. Anybody else?

MAN: I agree with Sherry.

[Simultaneous discussion]

DOROTHY: I agree with Sherry. I honestly do. I think all the issues are being handled. I think the media is maybe just focused on the war on terrorism, so that's all we're seeing.

[Simultaneous discussion]

MAN: . . . a guy getting his head cut off . . .

WOMAN: Yeah.

MODERATOR: On your blue sheet of paper, write down what President George Bush reminds you of.

WOMAN: What?

MODERATOR: What President?

MAN: He looks a lot like his dad.

WOMAN: Yeah.

MODERATOR: Just put it down on your blue piece of paper, what President he most reminds you of. Okay. Gertrude, what did you put down?

GERTRUDE: George Bush, Sr.

DOROTHY: George Bush, Sr.

CYNTHIA: Same.

MAUREEN: I didn't write it down, but his father.

JOSEPH: Same.

LISA: H.W.

MAN: I put down actually two. I put George Bush, Sr. and F.D.R.

MODERATOR: Okay.

MICHAEL: Bush, Sr.

MAN: Reagan.

MAN: Bush, Sr.

MAN: I agree with James. Politically, he's more like F.D.R., but with looks and everything, I would have to go with George H. W.

MAN: He looks like his dad.

MODERATOR: And you all think he's sort of like his dad because . . . I mean, I'm talking about more than looks.

MAN: His action.

WOMAN: Yeah.

MODERATOR: Okay. So you saw George Bush, 41, as an action person. Okay. Cynthia, why did you think of his father?

CYNTHIA: Obviously, the looks, but, you know, he was raised by this man. He has to have affected his political views. They are kind of following right along with what his dad did.

DOROTHY: I think the same thing. They both, of course, growing up with his father has tainted his views on political aspects of things. His father took action, and saw something he wanted, and did it. So he is now doing the same things.

MODERATOR: This is the second question. Bush's finest hour, President Bush's finest hour was what?

MAN: The World Trade Center, Ground Zero.

WOMAN: Right after 9/11.

MAN: When he had the blow horn.

MAN: I have to agree. That was the first thing that came to mind.

MODERATOR: Okay. Anybody else?

MAN: 9/11.

MODERATOR: And what was it during that period? Somebody said it eloquently before, but I would love to hear from others. What was it during that period that made him such a good President?

MAN: It was real. It wasn't rehearsed.

MAN: . . .

WOMAN: It came from the heart.

[Simultaneous discussion]

MODERATOR: Okay. Lowest point for his Administration, Lisa?

LISA: Well, you know what came to mind? It was when the plane, the spy plane went into China, and we threatened to send all those ships over there, three aircraft carriers over there. I don't know why, but that just stuck in my mind.

MODERATOR: Okay. Low point?

MAN: I kind of felt it was . . .

MODERATOR: What?

MAN: With his daughters.

MODERATOR: With his daughters?

MAN: It was embarrassing.

MAN: Yeah.

MODERATOR: Okay. And what was the thing with his daughters?

MAN: What was it, drugs?

WOMAN: Drinking.

[Simultaneous discussion]

WOMAN: Drugs.

MODERATOR: Okay. Low point?

MAN: Afghanistan. We got into Afghanistan, and we're still there as well. We turned it over to them provisionally. But we weren't really there yet, and they were already going, you know, into Iraq. We just have that habit. That's an old point, going from one thing to another too quickly with not enough foresight to see the end goal, how many roads or how many forks we can take in the road on the way there. You said that fork in the road . . .

MODERATOR: Okay. Who else?

SHERRY: I think when those pictures were aired with the Iraqi prisoners.

MODERATOR: Okay.

SHERRY: Even though he didn't have anything to do with that, that was a direct reflection on him.

MAN: Yeah.

MODERATOR: Okay. Anybody else? Okay. George Bush is elected this year, and he turns to you and says, what would you like me to do differently for the next four years? What piece of advice would you give him, Gertrude?

GERTRUDE: I would say I would like to see more of a plan of action, a means of executing it by being able to put some . . . in the order in which it is going to be done. I would say just a plan of action.

MODERATOR: Maureen, he turns to you, and he says, what would you like to see changed? What would you like him to do differently?

MAUREEN: I would like to see him do more for the economy in terms of keeping more jobs in this country as opposed to all of these corporations moving outside the country.

WOMAN: Yeah.

MODERATOR: How many people say that is a concern for them?

MAN: Yes.

MODERATOR: Okay. Joseph, he turns to you and says, what would you like me to do differently?

JOSEPH: I'll expand on that. Keep the jobs at home. I sit here and look at this handout, and the . . . I picked about the economy and the jobs, which I look at it as the adults in this country. The second one was morals and values, which I looked at as the young adults. The third was healthcare . . . elderly adults. I think that a lot of that needs to be addressed.

MODERATOR: Okay. Lisa, what would you like me to do differently?

LISA: Work with the rest of the world.

JAMES: Bring my brothers and sisters home.

MICHAEL: I have to agree with Lisa as far as building strong relationships with our allies again, so we don't have to bear the whole burden for rebuilding Iraq.

MIKE: Education.

MAN: I'm piggybacking as I've been doing this whole session, work with the rest of the world.

WOMAN: Oh, bless you.

JOHN: I forgot the question.

MODERATOR: What do you want him to do differently?

JOHN: To keep, like she said, keep the economy strong by keeping the companies here. Now, they've actually started doing that. I can't remember who it was on the news the other day. They levied a 419% import tax on, I can't remember what country it was.

MAN: . . .

JOHN: It was somebody really high. Hopefully, that will preclude people from . . .

JON: Make sure he's vice president.

MODERATOR: Really, that's fascinating.

WOMAN: Do what?

[Simultaneous discussion]

MODERATOR: You don't have to change very much.

[Simultaneous discussion]

SHERRY: I would like for him to give us closure on this whole situation over in Iraq and then to put more focus here on the United States.

CYNTHIA: I'm kind of . . . because I thought Gertrude said the plan and then closure. I mean, if we have a plan, then we can seek closure and then focus on the economy.

DOROTHY: I think it would be good also, I mean, I would like to see how this whole thing plays out and ends. I also agree with Michael about making a peace with our allies. If we do continue have such burdens, we won't have to do them by ourselves.

MODERATOR: Yeah. I have one other thing here. That is, will you write down on the back of your blue sheet of paper any three things that you know about John Kerry? Just write any three things you know about John Kerry.

WOMAN: Like factual or opinions?

MODERATOR: It can be anything that you want to put down. It can be factual. It can be positions. It can be perceptions or anything, anything that you know. Okay. Does everybody have it? Here we go. Three things that you know, let's start with Joseph.

JOSEPH: . . .

MODERATOR: Give me one. What is the first thing you wrote down?

JOSEPH: Military member.

MODERATOR: A military what?

JOSEPH: Member.

MODERATOR: Okay. How many put down military member or something related to military? Let's see your hands up. One, two, three, four, five, everybody, but one. Okay. Lisa, what did you write down?

LISA: I think he has heartfelt opinions that he can't express.

MODERATOR: Okay. Heartfelt opinions, did anybody else write something like that? Okay. James, what did you write?

JAMES: I wrote down he has not provided anything of substance.

MODERATOR: Okay. That is fine. Did anybody else write that? Okay. Good.

MICHAEL: He's from New England.

MODERATOR: Did anybody else write he's from New England or Massachusetts or anything like that? Nobody else.

DOROTHY: Determined.

MODERATOR: Did anybody else write determined down?

GERTRUDE: . . .

MODERATOR: What did you write down?

GERTRUDE: I wrote determined.

MODERATOR: Sherry, what did you write down?

SHERRY: Counterfeit.

MODERATOR: What?

SHERRY: Counterfeit.

WOMAN: Lacks character, does that count?

MODERATOR: Okay.

MAN: Mine's two-faced, but it means the same thing.

MAN: Yeah, flip-flopper.

MODERATOR: Okay. And what are you thinking, Maureen, what did you write down?

MAUREEN: Lacks character.

MODERATOR: And the reason you feel that . . .

MAUREEN: I say that because, first, he talks about how proud he is to be a veteran. But then he forgets to tell everyone until it's brought to everyone's attention that he was a war protester. So he lacks character because he wouldn't stand up to tell, as we spoke earlier, the whole story.

MAN: He voted for the war, and then he goes back and criticizes everything that is going on in Iraq. You're either part of the problem or part of the solution.

CYNTHIA: One, obviously, I put that he's a Democrat. I also wrote down that he's concerned about the alienation of other countries by George Bush.

MODERATOR: Okay. Anybody else write that down?

JOHN: I wrote protester, but then antagonist comes to mind now.

MODERATOR: Okay.

JOHN: Which follows along those lines of flip-flopping. He's been doing it since the '70s

MODERATOR: What's the most important thing that you think you need to learn about John Kerry between now and the election? You may say, I'm 100% for Bush. I

understand that. Is there something we need to learn about John Kerry? Let me ask the people who are more in the middle. Dorothy, what do you want to learn about John Kerry between now and the election?

DOROTHY: What he's really about or what he stands for. He's kind of back and forth on a lot of things. I just want to know what he's about and what he's going to do differently to make everything better.

GERTRUDE: I would say character. Can he practice what he's preaching? You know?

MODERATOR: Do you think he has character?

GERTRUDE: I would like to know more about his character. I think the potential is there, but, again, he's kind of wishy-washy. Can you do what you said you would do? In some instances, some will go to any extreme to do it because they said that they would do it.

MAUREEN: As Dorothy said, I want to know more about what he stands for.

MODERATOR: Does John Kerry have any chance of getting your vote?

MAUREEN: Potentially, yes.

MODERATOR: And what has he got to tell you to get your vote?

MAN: No taxes.

[Simultaneous discussion]

MAUREEN: What does he have to tell me to get my vote? He's going to have to tell me how we're going to get out of this situation that we're in and come up with a very viable plan.

MODERATOR: Okay.

MAUREEN: He's going to have to tell me, give me some assurance that in the next four years, I'm going to see some change in our economy in terms of the job market, and that he cares about the people, not just getting elected.

MODERATOR: Joseph, does John Kerry have any chance for your vote?

JOSEPH: It's always possible. As far as what I'd like to know, where does he really stand? What's really in his heart in a political sense? What is his main interest for the people that he will represent?

MODERATOR: John, you probably aren't going to vote for John Kerry just because you put 85% down. Does he have a chance for your vote?

JOHN: No.

MODERATOR: Okay. He may be the next president of the United States. What do you need to learn?

JOHN: Tolerance and like . . . support the Commander in Chief, especially since I'm a military member, and it's something I hold as a value because of my patriotism.

MODERATOR: What would give you reassurance that if he were elected president of the United States, he's not a bad president? I mean, you're not going to feel like, boy, I've gotten a bad president that I have to live with for the next four years.

JOHN: I don't think anything can give me reassurance. I just think time will tell.

MODERATOR: Sherry, you're a 90, was it?

SHERRY: Yes.

MODERATOR: Is there any chance you will vote for John Kerry?

SHERRY: There's a possibility.

MODERATOR: And what would he have to tell you to get your vote?

SHERRY: I would need to know what his focus is, what his intentions are, and see some type of consistency. I mean, I don't want him to say one thing and then turn around and contradict himself. I mean, if we can get some consistency going, he might get my vote.

MODERATOR: Is there any issue that you think John Kerry would be good on?

MAN: Negotiating with the Chinese.

MODERATOR: Is that sarcastic?

MAN: Yeah. It is sarcastic.

MODERATOR: Okay.

MAN: He was involved in the '96 campaign-finance scandal with Chinese intelligence.

MODERATOR: Anybody have an issue where you say . . .

[Simultaneous discussion]

MODERATOR: Does anybody say, I think there is an issue that I think he would be good on?

SHERRY: . . .

WOMAN: I think the heartland issues.

WOMAN: Yeah.

MODERATOR: What?

WOMAN: The home-front issues.

MODERATOR: Okay. Anybody else? Does anybody have a feel for vice president where you say, yeah, that would be a great choice?

MAN: . . .

MODERATOR: I'm sorry. She can only run on one ticket.

WOMAN: John Edwards.

MODERATOR: Does anyone else feel that John Edwards would be a good choice? Let me see the hands for John Edwards. One, two, three, four. Why John Edwards?

MAN: Just because that's who I hear talked about that he's going to have.

MODERATOR: But do you know anything about him?

MAN: I don't have an opinion.

MODERATOR: Or anything that would make you like him?

MAN: No.

MAN: I was going to say John Edwards. I'm sorry. I think the reason he would be good, one, he's a very articulate speaker. He's a trial lawyer, so obviously, he had success in putting forth a case.

Man: Yeah.

MAN: I think that's the vice president's job is to kind of sell the leader in an election type campaign situation, so I think that's why he would be a positive.

MODERATOR: Okay. Gertrude?

GERTRUDE: I think having the extensive training in leadership and in legal abilities would just really help him.

MAUREEN: The little bit I saw of him in the early days, I was very impressed with him. He just struck me as a very genuine, down-to-earth, John Q. Public kind of guy. I think he would, not for president, obviously, but he would be a good vice president.

LISA: He's very personable. I think he's sincere.

MODERATOR: Anybody else that you think . . .

MAN: Yeah, Jimmy Carter.

MODERATOR: Okay. Be difficult. Anybody else? Okay. And one other thing, that is, John Kerry's military service, does that make a difference? I mean, here's a person who obviously served. Does George Bush's military service make a difference?

MAN: No. It still doesn't really affect it either way. I mean, we've had great leaders that were past military, and we've had great leaders that weren't military.

MODERATOR: Okay. I'm just wondering, does anybody say, yeah, it affects me one way or the other?

MAN: No.

GERTRUDE: I would say more that would be of a concern to me would be whether he was the junior class president or if he was valedictorian of his class. That would give me more grounds to say, well, this could be a good candidate for . . .

MODERATOR: So nobody here, you're all military related, said this kind of service or anything makes a difference?

WOMAN: It gets my attention, but, I mean, you can have bad service people too.

MAN: Yeah.

MODERATOR: Yeah. Do you think John Kerry was a good service person or a bad service person? His military career was what?

WOMAN: I think when he was in the service, he was good probably. I don't know a whole lot about it. I would like to know more why he protested the war. Was he just against the policy or, you know, was he one of the ones sitting on the batter rams? You know? Why did he do what he did?

MODERATOR: Okay. Good. Mike, did you want to add something?

MIKE: Well, mine was from the get-go. I felt that anybody in office that had served time in the military knows what it takes to run an effective military and, in a sense, work with the rest of the world.

MODERATOR: Okay.

MIKE: To have been there . . .

MODERATOR: Okay. And George Bush's military service, is that a plus or minus or neutral?

MAN: A plus for me.

WOMAN: Yeah, plus.

MODERATOR: Plus because?

WOMAN: I'm military affiliated. I mean, my dad's retired. My sons are in. My husband's in. My brother's in. I was in. You know? It grabs my attention, and then I go deeper.

MODERATOR: Okay. I'm going to go around the room, and I'll start with Mike, and we'll finish with Michael. There are a few reporters back here. They're going to basically write a story. They're going to write about this election and this session. What do you want them to know about you or your thoughts in terms of this election, something that helps to crystallize, this is what I'm about? Okay.

As you go into this election and think about this election, I want you to sort of summarize it like, this is where I'm at. We've had a lot of great ideas. By the way, you've done a brilliant job, and I really thank you. I mean, I thank you in terms of just

being so well-informed and involved. I mean, it's really fabulous. I do these sessions all the time, and I cannot tell you how the level of information that you have compares to your average fellow citizens.

Obviously, the passion in which you speak and in which you care about it, I'm really grateful for the insights. What I'd like to do in terms of closing is this. This is your sort of chance where you're able to say, you know, as I look at this election, this is what it's all about to me. I hope people will understand this.

MIKE: Mine has been the same from the get go. Whoever I vote for or whoever is elected, my main focus is education. I feel in my heart that education will fix sort of everything in a big circle, as long as we put the right money in the right place, and we're supporting our teachers, who actually teach our future leaders.

MODERATOR: And do you feel that Bush is better than Kerry or Kerry is better than Bush or that's not the decision-making point?

MIKE: Yeah. It's not the . . .

MODERATOR: And the decision-making point between them for you is . . .

MIKE: It's one sticking to their word and one being two-faced.

MODERATOR: Good. I have to ask one question, and then we'll continue to go around the room. One of the things somebody said to me is that the really interesting challenge for voters to go through in this election is the sticking to his word versus not being able to make changes once he gets something sort of in his mind. That's the thing where they look at George Bush, and they say, I admire the fact that he sticks to his guns.

Somebody else says, my problem is that he's stuck in cement and won't change as the facts change. Does anybody have feelings on that? Is anybody worried that he doesn't change or that the situation changes, and he stays stuck in a place? Are there concerns?

MAUREEN: The concern I have from that perspective is the relationships with other nations. He shouldn't get so arrogant, well, arrogant is probably not the right word, but so . . .

WOMAN: Tunnel vision.

MAUREEN: Yes, that he bends, that he compromises.

MAN: Yeah, hold a grudge.

MAUREEN: That he's able to establish the relationships that we need as a civilization, as a free world to work together. I think it was Michael that had said it, we can't do it on our own. We need . . .

MODERATOR: And Gertrude, you started to respond.

GERTRUDE: Yes. I would say if he could just consider the world and not be personal about it, and adhere to, you know, what the nation is crying for, and, again, not be personal about it, but be in a position to deal with some flexibility because it's not really about him. You know, it's not about him. It's about our world and the world in which we live in, about making it the best possible place that it can be in all aspects. I think if we just put personal aside, that would be a good plus.

MODERATOR: Yeah. Lisa, can I just hear you on the same subject?

LISA: Actually, I have to go to the bathroom, so you need to repeat that.

[Simultaneous discussion]

MODERATOR: Quick question, that is, the idea of him sticking to his guns versus being affective.

LISA: I think it's a problem when you can't admit that something is not working. That is a problem when you can't admit that something is working. I think you need to change tactics.

MODERATOR: Okay. We'll be back to you after you get to the bathroom. We're going around the table quickly and wrapping up. John?

JOHN: I would like for people to know that prior coming to the military, I had no political views. Being in the military, it opened my eyes, politically, a lot. I would like people to know that regardless of who is president, I will back them 100% while I'm in the service.

LISA: Oh, I'll wait.

JOHN: . . . will also serve, you know, the way they're supposed to serve the public.

JON: The question . . .

MODERATOR: Essentially, what I'm trying to do is get a thumbnail sketch of how you're looking at this election. You know, this election, to me, comes down to this or this is what's important.

JON: I think this election comes down to the events of 9/11. I think it comes down to national defense, number one for me. I think what's most important is a commitment to the war on terrorism and so that we can maintain our great country, and continue education, and continue, you know, the beacon for everything, economically, medically, and everything else.

I think it comes down to that. Without that, I mean, I don't want to be worried about my little kids getting blown up at a Little League game in five years. That's the number one issue.

SHERRY: . . . that someone has a general concern for my well-being. Because there is so much power in that position, I need to know that he's going to take that power and do what's right. He's not going to take it just to have it and just run off with it. I want to know that he has my best interests in mind when he takes power. So when you look at Bush, and you look at Kerry, Kerry, I don't know a lot about him.

Bush, like everyone has already said, we know what he's capable and what he's going to do. I have a lot of respect for him. Kerry, I don't know him right now. I need to know that he's going in with good intentions. He's got our well-being in mind and not his own personal vendetta, something to prove a point. We don't need anybody proving a point. We need somebody who's going to make a difference.

MODERATOR: And do you think that Bush has a vendetta?

SHERRY: No, I don't.

MODERATOR: Yeah.

SHERRY: I believe he had an ideal. Like I said, he saw something that we cannot see or haven't seen. He had an idea. His thing, I think his intentions were very good. It's just that . . . he may not have known what to expect.

MAN: Yeah.

CYNTHIA: What concerns me most, especially because I am curious about John Kerry's views, but as other people have brought up, is he a truly honest man? I want somebody with integrity in our office. I also want them, if they see that their plan is not working, to be flexible enough to be able to back up, and reassess the goals and how they're going to achieve them.

MODERATOR: Do you worry about the flexibility of President Bush?

CYNTHIA: Yeah.

MODERATOR: And the reason?

CYNTHIA: Sometimes I think he gets too focused. Sometimes it's not maybe his flexibility, but his actions do alienate people, I mean, they have. I don't know if he can get that back. Sometimes it just may be the consequences of your actions.

DOROTHY: I agree with what John was talking about. Before I joined the military, I couldn't care less about politics, didn't follow them at all. Since I've been in, I've tried to get a little more into it and know what's going on in the world. I think it's a good thing that Bush sticks to what he believes, and he sees what he wants and goes after it.

Yes, he's not very flexible when he wants issues changed. To be in a leadership position like that, I think you do need to be that way because you have so many opinions coming from so many different people in so many different directions. Everybody is like, well, I think you should, I think you should. I think it's a good thing that he sticks to what he believes and is not so easily persuaded by all the outside chatter and different things that are coming from other people.

GERTRUDE: I'm sorry. Repeat the question again.

MODERATOR: When you think about this election, if you want to understand Gertrude, this is what the election is to her. This is what I'm thinking about.

GERTRUDE: Well, to me, it's important that loyalty is displayed, and honesty is displayed, and the ability to do a good job to the best of your ability. That is what this election is about to me.

MAUREEN: To me, this election is about electing a leader, a strong leader who is going to have the best interests of the American people, who will make the decisions not based on his personal gain or paying back all his cronies who helped him get elected, but genuinely making those tough decisions and not winning a popularity contest to do what is right for this country. I want to be able to leave that voting booth feeling good about the choice that I have just made.

MODERATOR: And has George Bush met that test that you have?

MAUREEN: Not totally. That is why I'm still open to the possibility of John Kerry as a possibility as president.

JOSEPH: To me, what it means, simply put, this election means a leader, someone who is not going to lie or sway their way of thinking. I need someone who is going to be supportive of me, and I say me, as in our country. I'm supportive or we are supportive of him in that when he gives the word, you know, I'm there. I need to know that he stands for me.

MODERATOR: And has George Bush met that test?

JOSEPH: Not wholly.

LISA: I'd say the United States not being more of a dictatorial status, but being more of a corporation status versus the world or at least some sort of communication status with the rest of the world . . .

JAMES: I'm looking for a president that has the same beliefs that I have. I've always been taught and raised to be patriotic, respect, love, and fear God, care for fellow men in our country . . . and a president that is going to be honorable and true.

MICHAEL: In this election, I'm looking for someone who is going to stick to the current objectives that we have as far as finishing the war in Iraq and on terrorism. Then come back around and continue to enforce the policies that give us good homeland security here, and then build up on the economy, and the education systems. I'm still not altogether convinced that either one of them is going to improve our economy or the education system.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Lisa. I want to thank each and every one of you. I want to thank all of you. You not only reflect brilliantly on yourselves, but also those of your service to your country. We are all fortunate to be so well-represented and so well-protected. We thank you ever so much. This covers everything. Are there any questions or things that you did not get to say, but you just want to say?

MAN: . . .

MODERATOR: Yeah. Pass up the blue sheets. *Fahrenheit 9/11*?

WOMAN: Haven't seen it.

MODERATOR: Would anybody see it?

MAN: Never.

MODERATOR: Did anybody see it?

MAN: The thought has crossed my mind the last couple weeks.

WOMAN: I was going to say . . .

MAN: I hadn't thought about the Clinton book until I heard you say something. I heard somebody comment on the *9/11* movie.

WOMAN: Yeah. I think the price of movies is too high.

MODERATOR: Well, that's tomorrow night.

MAN: I wouldn't call it a documentary. It did . . . \$1 million over the weekend.

MAN: Yes. Yes. It did.

MAN: It beat *Shrek*.

WOMAN: Nothing beats *Shrek*.

[Simultaneous discussion]

MODERATOR: Thank you very much. Hey, Maureen, what's your daytime job?

MAUREEN: I'm a deputy comptroller for the Navy Independent Test Agency.

MODERATOR: Got it. So you're . . .

[Simultaneous discussion]

MAUREEN: I'm a reservist. My ex-husband was . . . in the Army first.

MODERATOR: Okay. I got it. That's great. Thank you very much