

MELVIN LAIRD: A FIGHTER FOR FREEDOM

A Conversation with James J. Unger

Unger: I'd like to start, Mr. Secretary, actually, with your experiences. I think it's most appropriate today, as soon as you leave us here, you're attending the swearing-in of a new Secretary of Defense, here in this city. And in reading some of the materials for this interview, I was struck by a quotation that you gave: "The job of Secretary of Defense is a loser." Trying to manage the world's biggest business, you take a real and major battering under the circumstances.

Laird: It's much easier, now.

Unger: Well, that's what I was going to ask. Today, are we swearing in a loser or a winner?

Laird: Well, I think you can be a winner, now. When I was sworn in, the day I was sworn in, there were 538,000 men in Vietnam in ground combat roles. There were another 1.5 million support, 500,000 support in the Navy surrounding that area in Okinawa, in the Philippines, in Thailand, in Guam. So you had over in that area dedicated to that particular confrontation and that war, 2 million men and women. You were getting casualty reports everyday. And you can never be a winner when you sit there and get casualty reports on a daily basis. It is a losing proposition. I established the volunteer service. I ended the draft. I started a lottery and did away with college deferments, because it was unfair during that particular period. Early on, when I first went on the Defense Appropriations Committee, we had 367 men in Vietnam. Then it went up to 12,000 during the Kennedy Administration. Then that great escalation came in the latter part of the Kennedy Adminis-

tration, and the Johnson Administration. I made it a policy that we were going to reduce the manpower in that area everyday. And we did! Everyday, we reduced the manpower in that area, while I was Secretary of Defense. I got all the ground combat forces out of there before I left office. I got a lot of the Air Force and the Navy out of that area, too. So, it was not a pleasant time because the American people did not support our involvement. That's why Nixon was elected President of the United States. Because they were fed up with the over-involvement of the United States in Vietnam. Eisenhower said back in 1956, the worst place in the world to get involved in ground combat is in Southeast Asia. When he brought about the peace agreement in Korea he said, "Never again!" And he disciplined Vice President Nixon for saying we should help the French. Eisenhower came out and said not on the ground. Well, we were on the ground when I went over there. So, it was a difficult situation.

So, your quote is a good quote, but the conditions today are different. The manpower is just a quarter of what it was. The civilian employment is just about a quarter of what it was. So you've got an entirely different situation.

Unger: One of the headlines we've seen in recent weeks here in the Washington papers talks about the outgoing Secretary of Defense: "Perry resists cuts in military force." And my understanding is, right now, that the Pentagon is engaged in one of those on-going, many major reviews that we have of how best to size and shape U.S. forces. There obviously is a dynamic interaction between our capabilities and the goals

that we have. Do you see a major revision in that?

Laird: Well, as you know, when I came over in the Defense Department, the roles and missions were set up so that the U.S. military forces would be in a position where they could fight two major wars at one time. I changed that to one war, and one regional conflict. Then it was changed back by the Reagan Administration to a two war concept. That sets all your force levels and your equipment, and everything else. I believe they're going to have to make another change, and be in a position to be able to handle two regional conflicts, rather than the major concept. So that debate is going on in the Pentagon right at the present time. I think that's the way it will come out. You will have a greater reliance on the Reserve and the National Guard, as we go on down through the next year or two. That's part of that total force concept, which I started, and I think is going to require more and more of a reliance on the National Guard and the reserve forces.

Unger: You know, we think of our wars, the wars of the past, in global conflict terms -- World War II, or the Korean conflict, Vietnam. But for the wars of the future, we have a recent piece by Charles Robb in The Washington Post, the title of it is "Be Ready for Two Desert Storms." That's quite a bit different than be ready for a World War II or a Korean War. Where do you think we are in that?

Laird: Right, that's where I think we'll come out -- in that general area. And that discussion is going on. I spent a lot of time with some of them in the Pentagon just last week, going over

that whole scenario. And I think the article you referred to is the movement in that direction. That decision has not been made because Secretary Perry did not make the decision, and did not condone it as a policy, and the Administration is not condoning a policy in that regard, yet. I think they're going to have to face up to it, and make that decision, because you can't plan your force structure if you don't have that policy guideline.

Unger: *Are you satisfied that the current Administration, current Department of Defense, has an adequate input through past experiences to those individuals such as yourself and that they take account of it?*

Laird: They take account of it. I was very close to Perry; he was a very good friend of mine, over a long period of time. I'm not criticizing his failing to make the decision. It's a tough decision to make, but it has to be made and it has to be made in mind of how the total force concept works. Not only with our five bilateral treaties, but also with the four major multi-lateral treaties, which give us a military commitment around the world. Now that military commitment has changed under those treaties because the Soviet Union was once a major power. Now the United States is the last major military power in the world. And we take on certain responsibilities. You talked in your question about wars. There are twelve wars going on in the world today! Now, those are wars in which many thousands of people are losing their lives, almost on a daily basis. A lot of people don't pay much attention to those wars, because in order to get public attention, you've got to cover them on television, or you've got to be there with a lot of news coverage. The thing that's going on in Zaire right now is not being noticed. The

James J. Unger

Director of Forensics at the National Forensics Institute and American University, and former Director of Forensics at Boston College and Georgetown University, Unger received his B.A. as valedictorian from Boston College and his J.D. from Harvard University Law School. As an intercollegiate debater he reached the semifinals and finals of the National Debate Tournament. During his years as coach at Georgetown, his teams reached the final round of every major intercollegiate tournament, including the National Championship, often more than once. His teams were ranked "Number One" in the nation in the National Coaches Poll an unprecedented five times. As Director of Forensics at American University, his teams have reached the Final Round at numerous national tournaments and the semifinals at the 1994 CEDA National Championship Debate Tournament. A former "College Coach of the Year", Unger is a debate consultant to both NBC and ABC. In every election year since 1976 he served as Chairperson of the Associated Press National Presidential Debate Evaluation Panel. In 1992 he also assumed similar duties for United Press International and *The New York Daily News*, and appeared on more than thirty national media shows.

In a recent national poll of leading intercollegiate coaches and debaters, he was named *both* the Outstanding Debate Coach *and* the Outstanding Debate Judge of the entire decade of the 1970s. In 1982, he received an honorary Gold Key from the Barkley Forum of Emory University. He recently appeared as moderator-host for the distinguished NFL National Forensic Library, a comprehensive instructional videotape series supported by the Bradley Foundation. A substantial component of that series was "Unger and Company," a set of McLaughlin Group format tapes in which Dr. Unger led top national

fight that's going on in Ethiopia right now, very few people are paying attention to it. Angola has quieted down. There's a settlement that has been reached in the last three weeks; that bloody war that was going on there for the last twelve years, has quieted down. But you can go on, then, throughout Africa and you can go on over to Asia and look at those wars that are going on. Should we be a part of it? What is our responsibility here? What is the United Nations' responsibility? Do we stand by and let this killing go on? I mean, we got involved in Somalia because there was great public attention to it. We had great coverage of the situation that was developing and we had pictures almost every night for a while on television of these children starving and dying. And that aroused the public support and public sentiment.

Unger: *I've got a quote here from a memorandum--I think you submitted to President Reagan-- about a problem of defense planning. I want to quote it here, and then get your reaction as to where we stand on this issue today. You say "I know that the public can reverse its views on defense needs faster than of any other national issue. Recurring failures of popular consensus over the past 35 years have produced boom and bust cycles of defense spending. The key to breaking wildly destructive cycles of spending is a positive, stable consensus." Do you think we have that kind of informational consensus and awareness now on the part of the public that allow adequate economic support for the policies that we need?*

Laird: No, I don't. The two war concept is still in existence and I don't think that the American public can be brought to support it as a consensus position. So I think changes have to be made now in view of the changing cir-

cumstances throughout the world. We have to be watching very carefully the developments as far as China is concerned. Fifteen years from now with their tremendous annual growth rate of 10% China could be an immense global economic and military power. They're building up a strong, strong ground combat force. They don't have anywhere near the force that the United States has, as far as weaponry is concerned. But as I listened to Sam Nunn last night as he received the Paul Nitze Award from the Naval Research Center, it was a very interesting speech that he made. He stressed almost entirely where China would be a few years from now if we did not watch this situation in Hong Kong very carefully. Because if they come in there and take away the economic rights and the civil rights and everything else of the Hong Kong citizens, in violation of the treaty that they negotiated with the British, and if they continue their large military build-up, it does present a real problem.

Unger: *But back to this question of public awareness, is it a primary responsibility of the President, primary responsibility of the Secretary of Defense, the Congress -- to educate the public? Where are the sources of public awareness and the responsibility for that?*

Laird: The responsibility rests with the President of the United States, as Commander-In-Chief of our military forces and our strategic planning as far as foreign and international policy is concerned. So it rests with him. But that does not relieve the responsibility from the leadership of the Congress and the Committees of the Congress. But the media has a responsibility here, too. Sometimes they don't assume that responsibility, but they have it. But the real buck, as Harry Truman says, is on the desk of the President of the United

Melvin R. Laird

About America's greatest Secretary of Defense one publication recently wrote: "As much as anybody in Washington, Melvin R. Laird understands the clockwork of power . . . his views and expertise count on almost any subject."

Melvin Laird is Senior Counsellor for National and International Affairs and a Director of the Reader's Digest Association, Inc. He formerly served as Secretary of Defense, 1969-73; Counsellor to the President for Domestic Affairs, 1973-74; and nine terms, 1953-69, in the U.S. Congress, where he was Chairman, Republican House Minority and a member of the House Appropriations Committee. Prior to this service, he was a member of the Wisconsin Senate, 1946-52; Chairman, Wisconsin Legislative Council and served in the U.S. Navy 1942-46 in the Pacific Fleet.

Mr. Laird is a Trustee of the DeWitt and Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds. He has been active in some 27 non-profit organizations which include: The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts; The George Washington University; Boys and Girls Clubs of America; Laird Youth Leadership Foundation; World Rehabilitation Fund; Advisory Board to the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO); Chairman, President Reagan's 1987-88 Moscow Assessment Review Panel; Chairman, National Election Commission, 1986.

Mr. Laird has been the recipient of over 300 awards and honorary degrees, among them are: Presidential Medal of Freedom, 1974; Decorated Order of Merit - First Class, Federal Republic of Germany; Commander, National Order Legion of Honor, France; recipient of 15th Annual Albert Lasker Public Service Award; The Harry S. Truman Award for distinguished service in defense, 1985.

He is author of *A House Divided: America's Strategy Gap*, 1962; Editor: *The Conservative Papers*, 1964 and

States, the Commander-In-Chief of our forces, as far as military and foreign policy strategy is concerned.

Unger: *What is your own assessment over the past twenty, thirty, forty years - how many of our Presidents have done a good job with that buck, in terms of defense?*

Laird: Well, I think the best job was done by President Eisenhower. He understood it, and he was willing to take leadership in that area. There were people critical of him at the time, saying that there was a great missile gap developing in the United States. And as you know, when Kennedy ran in 1960, he made a big deal that we weren't spending enough on defense. But then when he became President of the United States he understood a little better what it was all about. And the missile gap that he talked about in the campaign disappeared, almost overnight. And so Ike really did a good job. He was very cognizant of what was needed and necessary. So I would think that you would have to give him the best marks.

Unger: *Any Presidents that you would be willing to say were failures in that regard?*

Laird: Well, I think that I would have to say in the latter part of the Kennedy Administration and during the Johnson Administration, they over committed American forces without being willing to pay for it. They felt that the thing to do was to fight now and pay later. We robbed from our NATO forces. We didn't tell the American people what the war was costing, not only in lives, but what it was costing in material costs during that particular period. And we took down ammunitions all over the world in order to finance the Vietnam operation. I think that was a great mistake. If you're going to commit American men and women to

combat in any way, you should let the American people know what the total costs of that are. But I think it was a mistake. Hillary Clinton was a young intern when I was Chairman of the House Republican Conference. Thirty interns worked with me during that period between their Junior and Senior year at Wellesley. She did a very good paper for me on "Fight Now, Pay Later." That paper was done in conjunction with the interns' work when I was Chairman of the Republican Conference. I used a lot of that material in a speech that I made, which had to do with this whole idea of expending assets and borrowing from the future as far as the Vietnam War was concerned.

Unger: *I imagine there were other readers of that paper, too, in influential positions. You touched before on the greatly differing nature of some of the future challenges that we have, and I want to explore that with you.*

Laird: Let me make this point, this was before Hillary met the President. She was a Republican at that time.

Unger: *That is not a widely publicized fact.*

Laird: No, she lived in Park Ridge, Illinois, and she competed for one of these fellowships that we had, summer internships.

Unger: *Has she submitted any more papers to you recently?*

Laird: Well, no, but I've talked to her about them, and she thought her experience was very good. I've often said that I hope it wasn't my leadership in the Republican Conference that caused her to become a Democrat.

Unger: *Well, there are probably some in your party that hope that it did. But before we turn to some of these*

future challenges, I'd like to turn it over to my colleagues, here, for some questions.

Behm: *In one of the essays that you wrote for Readers Digest, you were reflecting on the Vietnam War, and people, whose involvement was necessary and leadership was used. One of the things you said was "Looking back to the period between 1969 and 1977 has never been easy for those who were centrally involved with our defense policy at the time." Has that changed, as you've come further away from it and looking back? To use Robert McNamara's words, in retrospect, are there things that you would have done differently, or are there valuable enough lessons that we've learned that we've changed our policy, now?*

Laird: No, I don't have the feeling that McNamara has that I made a lot of mistakes. I really don't think that I have any regrets about my time in the Pentagon. I have no regrets about my time in the Congress. I have a very clear conscience about everything that I did. I never embarrassed the Defense Department or anybody in the military services, never embarrassed the Congress or country in any way. If I have one regret, it's that the peace accord that was signed in January of 1973, which was negotiated, mainly by Secretary Kissinger, had certain very firm provisions in it. The United States committed itself to replace material and military supplies to the South Vietnamese. Only replacements. And the Soviet Union agreed when the Paris Accord went into effect, that they would only give replacements to the North for military supplies and equipment. The Soviet Union did not abide by that agreement. They put in billions of dollars worth of equipment into the North, even after the Peace Accord was signed--as a matter of fact, \$2-3 billion during that particular time for a year.

The United States did not live up to its' commitment to the South Vietnamese. It broke the back of Vietnamization, when they wouldn't even approve \$350 million in military equipment to the Vietnamese during the early part of the Ford Administration. I was not in office at the time, but I probably should have been more outspoken. President Ford asked for it and it was turned down by a big vote in the Congress--due to public opinion. They were fed up with the Vietnam thing. But we did really welch on the Paris Peace Accord as far as the Vietnamese were concerned. And that just broke the back of the Vietnamese military. Within nine months to a year, they were overwhelmed.

Behm: *I had to smile when you mentioned Secretary Kissinger, because I actually just finished reading a biography of Kissinger. According to him and the people that knew him and knew you there, was a rivalry between the two of you. You were the only person who could challenge Kissinger in the Nixon Administration in terms of new ideas and policy alternatives.*

Laird: Well, I had a good relationship with Henry Kissinger. As a matter of fact I was the Editor of *The Republican Papers*, back in about 1964 and I had Henry work with me on those. President Nixon had never met Henry Kissinger until he was introduced to him up at the Pierre Hotel after the election in 1968, in December. I had suggested him, because I had used Henry Kissinger as a helper to me during the platform of 1964, when I was Chairman of the Platform Committee, in San Francisco. I asked Governor Rockefeller to loan him to me for about two months, and he was with me out at San Francisco. And so I had known him quite well, and he was a contributor to those papers that I edited. We had disagreements. I mean, I had a

major disagreement with him on bombing Cambodia. I had no objection to bombing the sanctuaries, which were across the border in Cambodia. But I didn't want to keep it secret, because there were 12,000 people who would know about those bombing raids over there, and you just can't have secrets like that. And I could have gotten complete support in the Congress for that sanctuary bombing. It wouldn't have been such a shock to the American people to then call it secret bombing and all that sort of stuff, when it was broken in the press by *The New York Times*. And that caused a great problem. I was right. Henry, Bill Rogers, and the President were wrong. I had my day in court over there. They turned me down. That's why they thought I'd leaked the story, and I hadn't leaked the story about that bombing. But I remember as I was playing golf, and Henry calls me up and used a little language, "What the hell did you leak that story for?" And I said "Well, Henry, you are crazy. I'm playing golf" and I hung up. But we had differences. And that was a major difference. And I think that I was proven to be right.

Unger: *I don't think Henry tells the story quite the same way.*

Laird: No, he does.

Unger: *In terms of his assessment, though, as to who was right and wrong.*

Laird: No, but he still feels he was right, because he felt that it would upset Sianook at that particular time. And I don't think that you can make a judgement like that. If you're going to do it and 12,000 people know about it, I don't care -- it's going to get to Sianook. You know how *The New York Times* found out about it? A reporter from *The London Times* was flying from Thailand over to Saigon. And he was just

looking down there and he saw all of these freighters. You just can't keep things like that secret. I don't want to invade Vietnam all over again. I wouldn't mind debating with Henry on that, because he'll probably say he's right and I'll still say I was right, and I think it was proven that I was right. When the thing leaked out, it made such a hell, Kent State! We had all kinds of demonstrations all over the country.

Unger: *But when you talk about it, it sounds like the bi-partisanship that everyone's talking about now in Congress, and between the legislative and executive branches. How do you think is the best way to reach that type of bi-partisanship? I mean, what steps can people take to reach those agreements? Or is it possible?*

Laird: I think it's possible. But you've got to have a respect for one another up there, a comity that doesn't exist right now. It's just a shame. You know, I was brought up by Speaker Rayburn. And it was always the House that was important. The House of Representatives, the people's body. I spent many hours visiting with him and I remember when he called me in one time, he said, "Melvin I heard your speech today, and it was great, you're coming along fine." He took me down the hall and said, "I want you to have this dining room, right over in the Capitol." A lot of the Democrats probably thought that was strange that he did that and assigned it. I had the dining room right off the members' dining room, and it was my own. You know, things like that aren't done too much over there anymore. I don't think the Speaker is looking out for young Democrats coming up or young Republicans coming up. Maybe he's watching them. But you've got to be willing to look at all of these young people over there that are coming along as new members of Congress.

As far as being encouraged, I was encouraged more by Speaker Rayburn than I was by the Republican House leadership at that time, Joe Martin and Charlie Halleck. He was more helpful to me than they were in many respects. I don't think that exists over there right now.

Unger: *For the vast majority of our readers, the people "out*

There are twelve wars going on in the world today.

there," outside of the beltway, their reports and their impressions about how Washington operates obviously come from the media. Currently, I've been struck by the willingness of public figures to go on record critically here. For example, there's a piece in *The Washington Post* recently, where Hillary Clinton bemoans the influence of the right-wing media, the conservative media character assassination and personal conspiracies aimed at her and others. The Administration just released a multi-hundred page report dealing with an information conspiracy by the conservative media organizations. Now, on the other hand, Republicans such as Speaker Gingrich and others have shown no reticence in condemning the left-wing media. Today the media has so many damn "wings" that I'm interested in what your own impressions have been. Are you satisfied with the way in which "inside the beltway" is reported "outside the beltway?" Is it reported relatively objectively, comprehensively, reasonably or not?

Laird: Well, I think a Republican does have to work a little harder with the media, than a Democrat. Seriously, if you look at all the statistics, you notice that of the media the vast major-

ity of them are members of the Democratic Party and quite liberally inclined. So, a Republican does have to work very hard with them. I spent a lot of time with the press and I really cannot fault the press in any way on anything they've ever said or done as far as I'm concerned. But you have to be honest with them all the time. If you make a mistake you've got to let them know immediately. I made a couple of mistakes but I let them know. I think they trusted me because I worked at it, and did it regularly. The night before I left the Pentagon the press had a party for me and they gave me a big National League Football, and it was signed by all of them, and it said, "Laird 212, Press 0." But they were doing it in a fun way. Like Sarah McClendon. Sarah was a great gal, and she's always kind of raising Cain with this or that. Once she was having trouble getting Lyndon Johnson's attention. I was Chairman of the House Republicans so I presented her at the Ladies' Press meeting, a beautiful, silver whistle, that she could use at press conferences. So you have to have a little fun with them and Republicans have to work a little harder, too.

Unger: *Oh yes, I was just wondering, as you were speaking, what the score would have been on Lyndon Johnson's football?*

Laird: I won't speculate on that.

Danzis: *The 1997-1998 high school debate topic Problem Area deals with renewable energy: How can the United States best reduce its fossil fuel consumption? Given your experience defending the vital interests of the U.S. and as a member of the Board of Directors of Phillips Petroleum, what is your perspective on America's dependence on foreign energy suppliers?*

Laird: Well, I think the American people are always

going to be in a position to have to depend somewhat on foreign supplies as far as energy is concerned. It's unfortunate, but our conservation efforts have not proved successful. The speed limit restrictions and the prices have not regulated and caused people to conserve. In fact we're becoming more and more dependent upon foreign energy. We're a long ways away from electric cars and from atomic power as far as mobility is concerned. So, I'm not too optimistic that we're going to become energy independent in the United States anytime in the near future.

Danzis: *How do you assess the defense concerns that the U.S. has as a country largely dependent upon potentially unfriendly energy suppliers?*

Laird: It's one of the problems we have to take into consideration as far as our whole foreign policy and our military strategy is concerned. The American people have made the decision through their gas tanks that they are not willing to cut back substantially. Now that

. . .people don't pay very much attention to those wars.

puts a tremendous responsibility on our government to see that those supplies are forthcoming in the future. That's why we're concerned in the Middle East right now. We got concerned in Iraq, when Iraq went into Kuwait, because it affected the vital interests of the United States. In that particular war, there was not the loss of life that is going on in some other wars right now, today. But the national security interests of the United States came into play, because we are not energy independent.

Unger: *I want to make a*

real shift, here, in terms of our perspectives away from cosmic policy issues. I'd like you to reflect upon some of the other projects you have been deeply involved in after and during public service. They represent to me a kind of hands-on involvement, but in a totally different kind of approach. The first one I'd like you to talk about is the Laird Youth Leadership Day, part of the Laird Leadership Foundation -- what that project involves, what your thinking was behind setting it up and maybe some of the kinds of responses you've gotten.

Laird: Well, the project developed some years ago when I was in the Congress. There were a lot of young people helping me in my campaigns and interested in politics. One of them was David Obey, who now is in the Congress and has my particular seat. Now he was handing out shopping bags "Laird for Congress" all over the streets of Wausau. And I was a Republican, and he's a Democrat, but he was doing that as a young high school student. I also got the idea that it would be good if we could have two students from the Senior and two from the Junior classes selected in each of the high schools in the district to come together and discuss some of the major topics facing the country. The Library of Congress did a lot of work for me and they were very helpful in preparing the work papers these students would get. Then we'd have work sessions at the University of Wisconsin at Steven's Point. I'd always bring out some unusual leader to sort of keynote it and we'd have eight to twelve resource leaders in addition to that. It turned out to be a very worthwhile program because these young people would go back and speak to their Rotary clubs, their local community clubs; they'd have a high school assembly and give a report on their day's activities. They'd go to their

civics classes and government classes and give reports. It evolved into a very popular program, so even when I became Secretary of Defense, I couldn't stop it. I can't stop it, now. It's still going forward.

Unger: *Right up until today.*

Laird: Yes, we're going to have one on April 27th of this year. In addition to that we have this scholarship program where grants are given to worthy students who have shown some degree of special interest and special ability, to develop leadership, whether it be political or in chemistry, or in any other field of activity. But it's to award them for their leadership qualities. We've given well over 500 of those scholarships, and it's been a very worthwhile program. I started it by putting all my honorariums, if I got an honorarium for speaking anyplace, in the fund. I received the Lasker Award for medical and health research. I got \$25,000 for that, and I put it in there. So I was able to kind of feed that fund, and it's worked out very well.

Unger: *Let me pick up on that, though. The program itself, Laird Youth Leadership Days, is within the overall ambient of the Laird Foundation, which is a foundation, as I understand it, that you established in memory of your father?*

Laird: Well, the foundation wasn't established in memory of my father. The scholarships are in memory of my father. But, true, my father was very important to me. He gave me the greatest inheritance anybody could possibly pass on, and that was a good, respected name in central and northern Wisconsin and throughout our state. He was a very well respected person. He was a Presbyterian minister in Marshfield. That's where he met my mom.

And so I do honor my father, and each of the scholarships makes reference to my father.

Unger: *Do you find that your experience in a program such as this is relatively typical of how many public leaders are willing to go back with this kind of hands-on, individual contact, and continue it once the political element is totally removed? As you said, it's gotten a life of its own, now, really.*

Laird: Once you get it started, there is no way you can really stop. I've got it set up now so it'll continue forever. And I've endowed the program at the university substantially with well over a million dollars pledged. It takes on kind of a life of its own and people are asking when's the next one. Now I've brought good people out there. I've had everybody from John Gardner to Henry Kissinger to President Ford. Larry Eagleburger comes almost every time, because Larry was born in Stevens Point, Wisconsin, and in my first campaign for Congress, his mother helped me and worked hard for me in Portage County while Larry was crawling around on the floor as a little baby. I talked to him the day before yesterday. He's all bandaged up pretty bad, leg and knee, had a back operation and he still said, "I'm coming to the Laird Youth Leadership." We have Shirley Abramson, who's quite an outstanding liberal thinker in our state and now she's the Chief Justice of our Supreme Court in Wisconsin. She has never missed a meeting. We also have the Governor there too, you know, and it's gotten to be quite a nice thing. These young people come in loaded for bear.

Unger: *We're familiar with that from the NFL. I was especially anxious to get your perspective on this program. Because it touches very familiar strains with the National Forensic League, which,*

of course, involves outstanding high school coaches and teachers and students all around the country. And it seems to me that many of our constituencies are the same in that regard.

Laird: Some of these young people are better speakers than they were when I was going to high school there in Marshfield High School. I was very active in oratory and extemporaneous speaking and debate. But I tell you, these young people today are sharp. They get up there prepared.

Unger: *Often embarrassingly so.*

Laird: Yes, L.Y.L.D. is a great program. But it just is in Wisconsin in my old area there. The area is a big one including the Green Bay High Schools and Appleton, Wausau, and all the way up to the north with 550,000 people, it's about 240 by 220 miles. They don't have access to a lot of things that other people do. They've got the Green Bay Packers, though!

Behm: *The second project I wanted you to reflect upon was your very longstanding relationship with the Marshfield Clinic, and especially the Laird Center that is going to be established.*

Laird: I got involved with the Marshfield Clinic very early. In 1922, my father and mother moved to Marshfield. I was just a baby at the time and so my records as a patient there go back to the year I was born. But then I got involved with the clinic after I came back from the Navy. I had met a doctor, Stephan Epstein, who had come over as a refugee from Germany, and my mother and father had gotten very close to them, because they talked in English. So they were part of the community, and he was outstanding, one of the very renowned Dermatologists. And of course, he started to talk to me all the time about how

it's important that as a young state senator I get involved in this health business. And so I put in the first cash sickness disability legislation in the Wisconsin legislature. And then he got me interested in medical research. And in my first year out here in Congress, I got the National Institutes of Health interested in the Marshfield Clinic, and the first grant was made to look into the question of Farmer's Lung Disease. And this is rather an unusual clinic, because you have all the records from generations back, going all the way back four or five generations. And so it was a great place, there's no place like it. People are in and out at Mayo's. But these people in that general area, they're all inhabitants of a great area for conducting medical research. Because there's just one medical facility serving all these people. And so that's how I got involved with it, and I have to give Dr. Epstein the credit. I came out here, and as soon as HEW was set up, the Department under the first term of Eisenhower, I wanted to go on that committee. That's how I got involved.

Behm: *We've seen pictures of the new facility, of the Laird Center, itself. I was wondering if you would talk to us a little about why did you choose to lend your name to this project? Because I know you're very judicious in terms of the use of your name to such a front-on public service project.*

Laird: Well, you know, I have a real concern about that area. They were awfully good to me and to my family over the years. I love the area. Bob Froehke, was a boyhood friend -- we went to high school and to grade school together. His wife and I were great friends, even started out in Sunday School together when they were about four or five years old, and we have developed a friend-

ship over the years. He became my Secretary of the Army, first came out and was my Assistant Secretary of Defense Administration. He was President of Sentry Insurance Company up there in my particular area of the country at one time. He also was Chairman of the Board of Equitable Insurance Company. He came to me and suggested that this is something that he would like to do and he has taken over the responsibility of raising all the money. They're way over budget -- they've made their budget or are exceeding it in a very nice way.

Unger: *When you say over budget, you meant a surplus?*

Laird: Surplus, yes! They've raised more than they had set out to. I have to give him some credit for convincing me to do it. I didn't think it was a very good idea. But he's proven to be quite right. He had planned a train trip, started down in Milwaukee and went all the way through Wisconsin: Oshkosh, Stevens Point, Wisconsin Rapids -- had an eight car train trip, and different people would get on the train from one city to the next and then buses would take them back. And it was a big fundraiser to get people involved. I thought it was a crazy idea. But he was right and it turned out to be a great thing. We had a couple of outstanding people with us, Larry was there, again, and of course, Jerry Ford's coming out to dedicate the thing.

Unger: *You're providing what I'm anxious to get for the readers, that is the source of the personal linkage -- what the personal commitment is that is involved there.*

Laird: Well, you know, there's a personal commitment. My grandfather was first President of the Library Board, my mother was President of the School Board, President of the Library

Board, she was on the Board of Regents at the University of Wisconsin, and she was the second woman ever to be appointed.

Unger: *We're talking personally here. Because as I say, the policy input is very exciting to our readers, but every time I talk to the coaches, every time I talk to the students about these upcoming conversation pieces, they say please make every effort to get for us a sense of the person behind the title. They are interested in knowing the people who are in Washington, not just the titles who are in Washington. And one that I know that you'd be willing to at least talk with us was your own family experience with your wife Barbara and her reaction to the Washington experience, which I know in many respects was very unfavorable.*

Laird: It was very unfavorable. She enjoyed the years in Congress. She thought that was fine. But she got very fed up with the years as Secretary of Defense. Because there were unfortunate things that happened during that period. People coming up to your home and urinating on your porch and your steps and your front door. There were unpleasant things in that connection; there were a lot of things that were required of her that she really didn't appreciate. She was very active in the Red Cross and she was great in that. She was going to the disasters and whether it was Wilkes-Barre or whether it was down in the Gulf in Mississippi, she was always around the disasters. But she didn't appreciate the work I had at the Department of Defense because there wasn't a night that something didn't go wrong. Because of the time difference between Vietnam and Washington, DC, that was not a pleasant experience. I think she enjoyed the years in Congress, but I don't think

"The job of Secretary of Defense is a loser." . . . Recurring failures of popular consensus over the past 35 years have produced boom and bust cycles of defense spending.

she enjoyed the years in the Executive Branch.

Unger: *Do you think that was a function simply of the immense responsibilities that you had as an individual, or is that typical of the inability, almost the conflict, that develops in a family relationship within any administration with any major player?*

Laird: Barbara passed away about eight years ago. There was a tough last year down there. She was down at North Carolina at the Duke Medical facility, and she slipped very badly for a while. She had cancer. My daughter, Allison, did a tremendous job of taking care of her. It was a difficult period.

Unger: *Before coming down here, we have had periodic releasings of the Nixon tapes headlined today. Nixon discussed blackmail of LBJ over the war in Vietnam, the possible break-in in the Brookings Institution to get these damn files and so forth. I don't know if it breaches any confidences or whatever - did you ever have any discussions apropos any of these kinds of behind the scenes impressions with President Nixon, and taped discussions?*

Laird: Well, you know, once in a while the President has a bad day. And he probably says some things that he

shouldn't say, and he gets a little carried away. I've seen him get carried away once or twice. But you just do not pay much attention to that. I noticed the story in the paper today has to do with Brookings. I'm sure that no one broke into Brookings. But he [Nixon] was very upset about the Pentagon papers being leaked. And, of course, I had custody of all those papers. They were turned over to me by Clark Clifford. Clark Clifford didn't realize what was in them but McNamara knew what was in them. And from my standpoint, I was glad to have the Pentagon papers leaked.

Unger: *So now we know who the leaker was.*

Laird: No, I was not the leaker! But the day that the Pentagon papers appeared in *The New York Times*, I was on *Face The Nation*, and I was all prepared to have questions about it. And I didn't get one question about the Pentagon papers, and then they were all over *The New York Times* that particular Sunday. When you're on a show like that, you can't plant the questions, but I was surprised the press didn't ask me a single question about them. Because from my standpoint as Secretary of Defense, it was helpful to me to have all that material out. Because those decisions had been made prior to the time I was there, and I didn't have to take responsibility for them. So it was good to have those out. There were only two or three things in the papers that breached real security, and that had to do with some information that you could tell we had broken some codes.

Unger: *The question of the break-in, the whole question now is entitled Watergate; but it doesn't resonate very definitely, I think, with the public. Are there different ethical standards today, or do you think we've had a distinct relatively dis-*

reputable ethical standard or a high ethical standard in our government?

Laird: Well, I think that the whole Watergate thing was really a disaster as far as our country was concerned! And it was not handled properly by the President of the United States. I know the President of the United States didn't know about the break-in in advance. But he had told me that he had done nothing to cover it up. Then my General Counsel, who went over to the White House at the time that I did, Fred Buzhardt, came to me and informed me in May or June of 1973, that the tapes existed, and he'd listened to them and that the President was involved with the cover-up. And he should not have lied about that. If he would have fired those people and had got rid of them and come clean on the day it happened, there wouldn't have been a Watergate. But he chose to protect certain people, and didn't tell the truth to me and to others. That's a mistake. If you start getting caught up in lies, I don't care whether it's government or business or anyplace else, it just is not acceptable. You just get yourself in a lot of trouble. And it just multiplies day in and day out. That's true in business, too. I've found that in business, as well. As you know, I went on the Phillips Petroleum Board. I was appointed by a Federal judge, because Phillips Petroleum had violated campaign laws. They'd taken some money and given it as a contribution to Senator Kerr who was the Democratic Chairman of the Senate Campaign Committee, and to the Nixon campaign, back in 1958. There was a class action suit brought against the corporation because that money had come from India through Switzerland, and at that time you could contribute cash. But it was not a proper use of shareholder's money. And so the Federal judge, as part of the settlement, decided to

appoint an outside board. I mean, I think that's the problem you have over there now, is the problem you had with Newt Gingrich, it's the problem you have with the President and with Mrs. Clinton, now. They haven't been forthright, they haven't been truthful on certain things. And that just causes you lots of problems.

Unger: *And the people's response to the question, what is the ethical level in Washington, has shown a consistent decline in their assessment. The number of people willing to answer, oh, they're just a bunch of crooks up there, has increased. Do you think, in fact, are the American people onto something? Has there been a decline or not?*

Laird: No, I don't think they're onto anything, but I'm glad that they're concerned about it. And that's very important. Some of our political people have tried to cover up too much sometimes. And I think that that's led to a distrust. Here you go out and ask mothers and fathers of high school kids whether they want their children to go into politics, and it's almost unanimous, NO! And that's a sad commentary, as far as our country is concerned. And we're headed for serious trouble if we can't get that changed.

Danzis: *A couple of times President Nixon remarked, there goes the most devious man in government. He said it, I guess, to Henry Kissinger in regard to you. And then in one other article it said that he's not devious, but he's playing the game at a different level. And I hear you talk about friends and a few good people like Elizabeth Dole, or the people that you mentioned from administrations, and people that you called good friends are actually very powerful people that have been around. How did you start off on this track*

of meeting people and getting to where you are today?

Laird: Well, I started out campaigning very early in the 1930's, and got involved in campaigning for my father. He was running for the state Senate at that time, and I was a young person in high school, and I got very much involved in the 30s in the campaign. I got more involved than my dad did. As a matter of fact, I made more speeches, and I barnstormed all over, trying to get him elected. The whole idea of this Laird Youth Leadership thing that I've tried to develop there in central and northern Wisconsin is to get people involved. To get young people involved, get them an appreciation of government and how, if we're going to succeed in this country, we've got to have good young people involved. And there are great opportunities for young people in politics.

Danzis: *You mentioned young people, and you were only 24 when you first won your State Senate seat, right?*

Laird: I was either 23 or 24, I can't remember exactly. I guess I must have been about 24.

Danzis: *That's incredible.*

As co-Chairman of the Commission on National Elections, you concluded that the election process during the 1980s was not too long, it was not too costly or messy, and the truth of the matter is, the process worked pretty well. Has your reaction to the election process changed in the 1990s?

Laird: Yes, it's gotten too expensive. We're spending too much money and we've got to put some reforms in. It's just gotten out of hand. We thought that when we were writing that report that we were entering the new era, because we were going to have Federal contributions to the Presidential campaigns and

we'd be able to control them better. But that just hasn't worked. I mean, it didn't work in this last campaign, I'll tell you that. Although the Presidential Election Campaign was financed by the taxpayers, there were many side-shows going on around in the Presidential campaign, and that's got to stop.

Danzis: *At one time you recommended raising the maximum contribution from \$1,000 to \$2,500. Is that still a reform you support?*

Laird: I think that's all right. I don't have any problem with that. But I think you have to have some campaign limitations, on overall spending. And I think you're going to have to have some public financing of campaigns in order to get agreement with the candidates. Because the way the Supreme Court rules now that you can't limit the expenditures of anyone running for office is really unfair to a lot of candidates. In order to get around the Supreme Court ruling, you're going to have to go to some sort of federal financing. Once a man or a woman accepts that, then certain restraints can be placed upon them. I think there has to be greater restraints put upon the Presidential candidates if they accept that Federal financing, now, than there have been in this last campaign. This was BAD in this last campaign. And I don't think we anticipated at the time when we wrote that report that the Presidential funding of the taxpayer's money wouldn't work. But it didn't work.

Unger: *Do you think that America is going to continue to remain a country of just two major political parties?*

Laird: I hope so, because I think it's very important that we put all the emphasis we can on encouraging two major political parties. I think we should en-

courage that. I think it would be a disaster if we got to the situation they have in France and Italy and some of the other democratic countries, where there is really no party responsibility developed anymore at all. They're all just kind of floating around and no real leadership that

I really don't think that I have any regrets about my time in the Pentagon. I have no regrets about my time in Congress. I have a very clear conscience about everything that I did.

can be expressed. I think the British have done it a little differently and they have gone into three parties at some times. It's still very difficult to do that in Great Britain, and I think we should encourage trying to get everybody involved in two major parties, because it's better to fix responsibility that way.

Unger: At least at the level of Presidential politics, here, do you think that the elections were helped or hurt in '92 and '96 -- in '92 by the inclusion of Ross Perot in the Presidential debates, and exclusion in 1996. Would you have supported both of those decisions, either of them, neither of them -- what?

Laird: I think I would have been for excluding Ross Perot in this debate, yes. I really think he wouldn't have added much to the debate. All the polling data showed that he wasn't a major candidate, and you just don't want everybody to get in there and you get the right-to-lifer's

or you get the abortionist's, or you get all these other people on these crazy single issues, that really hurt politics, and really take away from a focus on the real issues facing the country. And I wouldn't want all those candidates in there.

Unger: Are you satisfied that we have struck some objective criteria? What standards, what thresholds, would you set for inclusion in the Presidential debate?

Laird: Yes, we have some standards that we set up in our Committee Report for that. We got into a lot of difficulty with the League of Women Voters at that particular time, because they were of the opinion that everyone should be included. And that's one of the reasons that we were able to get agreement with the Democratic and the Republican party to go forward with this -- we could never have gotten agreement, and never put this in concrete if we would have encouraged all of these other people to get involved in this debate process. And I don't think that would be a good idea at all.

Unger: One final question that I'd like to ask in conjunction with the campaign and electoral process, touches very heavily on a lot of our constituents. Our members in the NFL, are very actively involved, even at the high school level, in politics, much like some of the experience that you cited before. President Clinton, in his inaugural address, in some of the recent interviews that he's given, says, and I'm quoting him again, that "one of the great challenges of leadership today, and maybe in any democracy, but certainly in ours, is learning to get the poison out of your system." And he's talking about the tone of politics, which has arisen here. At the level of government, and at the level just of public discourse, do you think that the entire tone

has become much more political, much less personally genuine? Is there an element today of harshness, of politics in virtually everything that you would say maybe did not exist twenty years ago. Or at least, is the situation getting worse?

Laird: Well, I think it's getting worse because there are so many people who are only interested in politics for just one issue. We've got a lot of one issue people and the only thing they think about in government is this particular issue or that particular issue, and they are unwilling to look at the broad scope of the problems facing our country, which are really, in many cases, much more important than the one issue that they're interested in. And I think it has affected the manner in which politicians sometimes treat one another. I don't think it's as much fun in the Congress as it used to be. We used to have an enjoyable time. It was fun for our families, we had great relationships, Democrats and Republicans alike. There isn't as much of that as there should be, now.

Unger: One question that I'm always asked to ask. You served for

Giving away money is not as easy as some people think!

nine terms in the House of Representatives plus a huge number of other career appointments. I'd just like to get your reaction: Is there a role for institutional term limits on the length of service in the Congress?

Laird: No. I think that's a great mistake.

Unger: That's a pretty clear answer. I'm going to quote from a recent golf commercial that I

saw, because it relates nicely in the area we're talking about. Lee Trevino is doing this piece, and I was really struck by it. He's talking about in his own very nice style, guys on the Senior Tour, they're driving it 320, 330, 350 yards! Why? Well, it's this Titanium driver. These guys are old. How do you think we're doing it, wheat germ or something? It's technology! I'm using the commercial as a set up, in terms of your reaction, especially, to the immense growth of technology in all of our areas. How do you see that as coming down in terms of our future capabilities? Are we in a position to appreciate what the 10 years, 20 years, 30 years from now, the entire content of society is going to look like?

Laird: It's very difficult, you really can't give a snap answer to that, because I'm not sure how it's going to evolve. I'm concerned about it. I'm concerned about people not reading as much as they should. They want to be spoon fed everything now, and all of the things that are going on bother me. I'm not sure. Maybe we're going to get too much information fed to us and not have enough time to think about it.

Unger: Is the responsibility for monitoring, for correction, primarily one of family, of local government, of national government? Where is the responsibility?

Laird: I think it has to be at home, in the schools, and the churches. But I think it has to be pretty much at home. I remember when I could never have breakfast at home until I made my bed. And one time I told my mother I had made my bed, when I hadn't, and I really got severely disciplined for lying. And it was a good experience. We didn't have television then, the only thing I had was a little crystal radio that we could kind of tune in.

Unger: There was a time when there wasn't television?

Laird: Sure, back when this discipline was taking place. But we did have certain rules about reading and quiet time. I'm not sure there's much of that anymore. I don't know. It bothers me.

Unger: Well, you touch on something that national surveys reflect, and I know our own constituents reflect, and that is the perception of a major decline in family values in our society -- the responsibility of the family, the role of the family, the influence of the family. Is that your sense, too? Are families fulfilling the kinds of roles that they used to, and that we're going to have to rely upon them in the future for?

Laird: I wish I could say that they are. I think there is a movement on to come back to that, because the family is so important. I think the President is trying to emphasize that, Senator Dole tried to do that in his campaign. I'm still hopeful that we can increase the responsibility that is the family's, and belongs to the family, and belongs to the schools. It belongs to the teachers and the coaches and it certainly is a responsibility of our churches, too. But education is going to have to play a major role in that. I serve on the Trustees of the DeWitt and Lila Wallace Funds, and we also have these seven trusts -- because when the Wallaces passed away, they had no children. And the Reader's Digest stock that they owned is set up in these seven trusts and these two funds in which I serve as a Trustee. And we have \$5 billion dollars in that. They gave away everything. And we are trying to do what we can with the Lila Wallace and the DeWitt Wallace Trusts to encourage young people. We're the biggest contributors to

. . . seeing that it's properly used is a great responsibility.

the Boys and Girls Clubs, the YMCA, to the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, the Campfire Girls. We're big in the inner cities. We're trying to do what we can in this area. And we meet on a regular basis. And it's a grave responsibility. Giving away money is not as easy as some people think! Giving away money and seeing that it's properly used is a great responsibility. And with these trusts and with these funds in all, we've given away 5% of the value of the funds and trusts each year, and it's not an easy responsibility. I hope we're doing the right thing. We're trying to encourage these things. Whether we are or not, time will tell.

Unger: I can see a lot of people who will be reading this, say giving away money is not a real responsibility -- oh sure, I'd like a crack at it.

In terms of that kind of discussion, one of the issues that I know we wanted to just touch on was the balance, the on-going evolutionary balance of the role of responsibility for the Federal government, for local government, and for private concerns. I'm interested to know whether you're satisfied that we're moving in good directions or bad directions about decentralizing the government, of less responsibility for the government, or is it a mistake? Given the complexity of the challenges we're confronting.

Laird: I think the move to get the government shifted as close to the people as possible is going to be helpful. You want to get people involved. You want to get families involved. You want to get people involved locally. And I think we're moving in

the right direction on that. I'm encouraged by that. Very much encouraged by that.

Unger: *Is this a movement that cuts across party philosophy?*

Laird: Yes, I think it is. All you have to do is look at the President's Inaugural Address. That Inaugural Address could have been given by any one of the last Republican candidates or Republican Presidents-elect.

Unger: *There were a lot of Democrats on the Hill saying the same thing. I don't think they're saying it with the degree of enthusiasm that you are, but --*

Laird: Well, you know, there are a lot of things that trouble you. But I'm really, at 75, still encouraged by where we're going and what we can do. I kind of like this particular ring, here. This is a Stanley Cup ring. And I'll tell you, there was great teamwork that went into that. And last night, the Avalanche played Philadelphia, as you probably know, they beat Philadelphia, and they continue to win.

And it all begins with commitment. That's what I kept telling those guys. You see, it all begins with commitment. That's not a bad thing to keep in mind. And I think a lot of people have to get committed to helping this country into making it a better place in which to live.

Unger: *To close the interview, I'd like to touch upon a few areas, almost where we started, and that goes back to the future of our country and some of your perspectives on what we are going to see in the future of war-related global areas. Henry Kissinger, in the most recent issue of Newsweek, published an article with a very fitting title, in terms of his speculations. He called it a "World We Have Not Known" in terms of the entire dramatic*

changes that may take place in some of these areas. I'd like to cite a couple of his comments there and get your reactions to them, as to whether you might agree or disagree, because they touch very heavily upon your areas of responsibility. He says, "the new Clinton Team has no more urgent a task than to devise a response to an explosion in the Gulf or an upheaval in Saudi Arabia." Do you see those as the kind of major problems that he does?

Laird: Oh, that's a major problem, there's no question about that. It all goes back to your energy question. And people have voted that way through their gas tanks.

Unger: *Are you satisfied with the directions that we have thus far evolved, in terms of our thinking that way?*

Laird: No, that goes back to the early part of our discussion. I think that we have not laid out a strategic foreign policy or a military plan as far as the responsibilities we will assume in the world, and what can be expected of us and what we have to do to meet those expectations. We're kind of living out of our back pocket right now.

Unger: *It strikes me, listening to you talk about a subject like this, it seems so obvious to say we are living in this way, we have not developed the proper strategic role. Is this just a case, in your sense, of inadequacy of the talent of the people at the top of our government, is it because they are too heavily influenced by politics, is it an unwillingness to face hard decisions? So often, the proper course of conduct seems relatively clear but the one thing that is equally clear is we're not doing it.*

Laird: Well, you're probably right. We're not giving

the leadership to this, and it has to come from the President, and the President then has to depend on his Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense to do it. But they're so busy taking care of the daily responsibilities, that they have not really addressed this. They are addressing it now. The article you talked about that Chuck Robb wrote is something that is to the forefront right now, I hope. And I hope that the President will recognize this. I don't think that it has been properly addressed during the last decade.

Unger: *And in that conjunction, in terms of these kinds of predictions, one of your former colleagues, Caspar Wineberger, Secretary of Defense for Reagan, has published a new book on the next war. And I haven't read the whole book, but I did read the summary piece in USA Today, and the big headline is, "Can the U.S. Really Win the Next War?" Here are the conclusions of the author. They set out a number of prospective scenarios in the Persian Gulf, in North Korea, the Japan area, with Moscow, in Mexico. And their conclusion is this -- they say gone are the days when America could rely on geographical distances to buy time until we could mobilize. Ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction have not only compressed geographical distances, but may also prevent U.S. forces from ever reaching a battlefield. The next war could be over by the time America is fully mobilized. They say the scenarios they're discussing here are fiction for now; but to be ready for the next war, we need to halt troop reductions. We need to halt the downsizing of our fleet. Funding for missile defense and stealth technology research needs to be restored and increased. These funding commitments will not only help to maintain our technology edge, but they are essential to ensure that we continue to*

recruit personnel to fight and to win the next war. Is that your perspective? When you look at the levels of the defense budget year after year after year, would you shake your head in terms of yes, no -- what would be your perspective on our size, in financial perspective, and a human perspective.

Laird: Well, I think we have to be willing to devote a sufficient portion of our Gross National Product to military activities and to defense spending. But you can't do everything. And you have to be very careful in the way these assets are allocated. An article that says the war will be over before it gets started, that's assuming that you're going to use a lot of nuclear weapons. I'm certainly for keeping up research in that area. But I can't believe that we can't go forward to establish a complete shield. Certainly, there should be efforts made to be able to intercept single missile firings that some crazy nut might try. But when you read over that particular article the way you read it to me just now, that's an invitation to a blank check -- and you can't have a blank check as far as the debt spending or national security spending in this year as we go into the next century. You've got to be very careful in how you parcel out those assets. Because the American people have got to be assured that we're doing right. And that hasn't been made as clear as it should. But I mean, just to endorse all of those things, you want to be for adequate spending in that area, but if you endorse all those things, you'd be giving the Defense Department a blank check. You can't do that.

Unger: I know my colleagues here, and myself, have called upon you to make a lot of assessments of individual leaders. And it has all been focused upon this country. I just wondered if you might

have some perspective yourself about the qualities of the leaders in the other major countries that we are encountering. Do you think that

I was very active in oratory and extemporaneous speaking and debate. . . . these young people today are sharp. They get up there prepared.

China, Germany, France, the Soviet Union, are as well led today as they were twenty years ago, thirty years ago? As responsibly led, that is.

Laird: That's pretty hard to make an assessment on that. I think we're very fortunate in the leadership that we have in the free world today, and I think that we're working pretty well together. I think that we've got to get to the point where we rely more upon NATO for some of these things, and working through multinational organizations. You know, I started out the Defense meetings with Japan. I was the first Secretary of Defense ever to go over there, and you'll see their Nakasone, who was the Defense Minister at that time, he later became the Prime Minister, on some of these pictures on the walls, here. We had a hard time getting the Japanese to come up with their funding to pay for the troops that are in Japan. They want the troops there, they really do want the troops, they want that security. And they want the shield. But they didn't want to pay for them. We finally got them paying for it. And they're paying for our troops there and the expenses. We had a hard time doing that with the Germans. And the French. But we've gone a long way in that regard. I really can't assess the new Prime Minister of Japan. I hope,

and wish him every success. I do know the leaders of Great Britain, and Germany. One of my closest friends was a former Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, who is still there and I contact on a regular basis. And I've got great respect and admiration for the men and the women that are involved. But I just can't give you a net assessment on everyone that's in office right now.

Unger: I know when I've conducted these kinds of conversations, that the favorite tag line that I have with individuals of your kind of talent is, well, I just have one more question. That goes on for about an hour and a half. But I do just have one more final question in this area, because I do want to get your reaction on it. Today, General George Lee Butler, published in the Washington Post what he called the "General's Bomb Shell," which was his own proposal for phasing out the U.S. nuclear arsenal. He says to bend every effort within his power and authority to promote the conditions and attitudes that might someday free mankind from the scourge of nuclear weapons. And I won't bore you with all of the specific details, but he does make out a case.

Laird: He's had a very good dream.

Unger: And that's what I'd like to get your reaction to. Is it just a dream?

Laird: It's a wonderful dream. But we're a long way from there. And the United States could do that unilaterally at this time, or start moving unilaterally at that time. We can reduce, but you would leave the world today in a very, very precarious position.

Unger: Do you find any danger to that effect?

Laird: There's danger now of someone using nuclear

The name of one of America's best-known public servants has not appeared on any buildings. Until now. The LAIRD CENTER, for which ground will be broken on May 3, will honor former Defense Secretary and leading U.S. Congressman Melvin R. Laird in his hometown of Marshfield, Wisconsin. The \$12 million, 50,000 sq. ft. edifice, due to be completed during the summer of 1997, will be home to a cadre of human health and safety research entities, including the internationally recognized NATIONAL FARM MEDICINE CENTER.

"It is altogether fitting that this new Center be named in honor of Wisconsin's favorite son, and one of the ablest supporters of medical research this nation has produced," said Robert Froehlke, national chairperson for the Laird Center fundraising campaign.

The executive director of Marshfield's research division, Dr. Paul Gunderson said, "The state-of-the-art LAIRD CENTER is critical to continuing the mission of the organization, which is three-fold: to engage in basic and clinical research, to support the broad spectrum of medical education, and to be an active participant in public service initiatives whenever and wherever possible."

The LAIRD CENTER, in addition to housing the staff of the National Farm Medicine Center, will also provide a newer, expanded working environment for professional staff in the related departments of epidemiology, biostatistics, molecular genetics and medical education.

devices. There's no question about it, because they're easy to build. They're very easy to build. And there's always that possibility, and we have to keep guard. We've got to do a better job, though, with our intelligence. To get that intelligence problem really solved, there are a lot of things you have to do. I mean, you have to infiltrate some of these groups, you have to be on the guard constantly. But this idea that we're just going to announce we're going to destroy everything, on an overnight basis, that's a wonderful dream. But it just isn't practical at this time.

Unger: *You know, Mr. Secretary, I commented at the outset of this speech, that you were going over for the swearing in of a new Secretary of Defense today.*

Laird: I think I'll get there for the reception.

Unger: *The reception -- I can't tell you how much we've appreciated the amount of time you spent here with us today. Of the individual interviews that I read earlier on, just to prepare for this particular conversation piece, all of them were obviously very complimentary in terms of your public service. The comment was made that Melvin Laird is "a real class act." And I just want to say my own reaction is that there are and will be a large, large number of high school students, teachers, and parents all across the country, when they pick up the particular issue of The Rostrum in which this conversation will appear, who will be indeed nodding their heads in agreement after reading this piece. You've been a real class act for us, and I think for thousands of members of the high school community. And I just simply want to, on behalf of the National Forensic League, and all of its members, extend our thanks to you.*

Laird: I've enjoyed being with you this morning.

Loren Danzis

Chief of Administration at the National Forensics Institute from 1991 through 1994, Danzis has been involved in directing NFI programs throughout his collegiate debating and coaching careers. As a student at American University, Loren served as both Captain and Administrator of the A.U. Debate Team. He was a leading competitor in CEDA's East Coast region, reaching the Final Round of many tournaments. Loren then served as Debate Coach during the 1993-1994 season, when his teams reached the Semi-Final Round at both the CEDA Varsity National Debate Championships and the Novice National Tournament. That year he also received the Best Debate Judge award in CEDA's Northeast region. In 1992 and 1996, Loren served as a panelist on the United Press International Presidential Debate Evaluation Panel and in 1993 evaluated the Perot-Gore NAFTA Debate.

Danzis is a student at New York University School of Law. Following graduation in 1997, he will practice securities law at Orrick, Herrington, and Sutcliffe in New York City.

Steven Behm

Coach of American University Individual Events Speech Team, Behm received his undergraduate degree from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, achieving a dual BA in Political Science and in Speech Communication in three years. As President of the Speech Team, Behm led the Illinois team to their first Intercollegiate Championship in 1994 by advancing four of his eight events into out rounds at the National Forensic Association Tournament. Steve Dean's Listed every semester for both degrees and received the Otto A.L. Dieter Award from Illinois for outstanding service to the field of Speech Communication.

Behm moved to Washing-

ton, D.C. and worked for National Media, Inc., one of the nation's leading political advertising agencies. After winning 29 of the 30 local, state and national campaigns on which he consulted, Behm moved to Capitol Hill, where he was appointed Press Secretary to Congressman Philip M. Crane, the youngest to ever fill that position.

