

Conversation with Charles Krauthammer

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Highlight: Charles Krauthammer is a syndicated columnist, a political commentator, a writer, and a physician, he also offers one of the most important perspectives on conservative politics; Politico recently called him "a de facto opposition leader for the thinking right", he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for commentary in 1987; he has now published his first book, "Things That Matter" is a collection of his previously published writings.

Body

CHARLIE ROSE, PBS NEWS HOST: Welcome to the program.

Tonight, Charles Krauthammer author of "Things that Matter: Three Decades of Passions, Pastimes and Politics."

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER, AUTHOR: In some ways the book is an homage to politics. I wanted to write a book that was only about the nonpolitical stuff, the stuff that's outside of politics, the stuff that enchants me, amuses me, and moves me.

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: But in the end, I decided I can't really do that and the reason is because politics is so ultimately important. And as I write in the introduction of the book, it's sovereign. Because everything else - - all the lovely, beautiful other elegant, graceful things in life -- depend on us as a society getting the politics right.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

CHARLIE ROSE: Charles Krauthammer for the hour next.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: From our studios in New York City, this is CHARLIE ROSE.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

CHARLIE ROSE: Charles Krauthammer is here. He is a syndicated columnist, a political commentator, a writer, and a physician. He also offers one of the most important perspectives on conservative politics. Politico recently called him "a de facto opposition leader for the thinking right." He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for commentary in 1987. He has now published his first book. "Things That Matter" is a collection of his previously published writings.

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I am pleased to have him here at this table.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Pleasure to be here with you.

CHARLIE ROSE: What was the motivation to put this together? "Three Decades of Passion, Pastimes and Politics"?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Gambling debt.

CHARLIE ROSE: That will do it every time. They were at the door.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Putting my money on the Cubs and on Obamacare.

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: And somehow I lost it.

CHARLIE ROSE: And it was time to write, wasn't it?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Well you I've never wanted to do a collection, but having waited so many years I thought that a collection that goes all the way back to when I began in journalism -- actually my first day was the day that Ronald Reagan was first sworn in, January '81, that's when I started. I thought the span of time now -- it's over 30 years, really momentous decades -- would give a kind of personal history of the United States over this incredible time. So I thought it would have a value beyond being just, you know, a collection of the best stuff I had written.

And the other reason is that in some ways the book is an homage to politics. I had wanted to write a book that was only about the nonpolitical stuff, the stuff that's outside of politics, the stuff that enchants me, amuses me, and moves me.

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: But in the end I decided I can't really do that. And the reason is because politics is so ultimately important. And as I write in the introduction of the book, it's sovereign, because everything else -- all the lovely, beautiful, elegant, graceful things in life -- depend on us as a society getting the politics right.

CHARLIE ROSE: Politics -- I guess that was a working title -- there's more to life than politics.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: That's right.

CHARLIE ROSE: And you're quoted as saying, "In the end I couldn't, for the simple reason, the same reason I left psychiatry for journalism while science, medicine, art, poetry, architecture, chess, space, sports, number theory and all of the things hard and beautiful promise purity, elegance and sometimes even transcendence. Those things", you continue, "are fundamentally subordinate. In the end, they must bow to the sovereignty of politics."

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Well, it's a paradox in our lives because the practice of politics day-to-day is fairly low -- grasping, grubby, manipulative, cynical. But in the end, you've got to get the politics right. It's the reason that people walk away from politics.

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: They don't want to participate. Don't want to watch. Don't want to hear about it. But you can't, because in the end you've got to get it right. And I'll give you one example. You can have the most efflorescent and sophisticated of cultures and if you get the politics wrong, everything gets swept away -- Germany 1933, China during the Cultural Revolution. And you don't have to go back into history. North Korea today, the South has gotten the politics right. People live there --

CHARLIE ROSE: And the economics.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Right -- in prosperity and in freedom. The North has gotten it tragically, horribly wrong. Kind of -- it's in the grip of a mad kind of Stalinism.

And as a result, the people are enslaved and the society is a spiritual and material desert. That's what happens. And that's why even though I really enjoyed the practice of medicine and I believe to this day it's one of the most noble endeavors anybody can engage in. I left it because I thought everything in the end is going to hinge on politics. I want to be in the conversation.

CHARLIE ROSE: Now were you a psychiatrist who sat with patients and listened to their problem or were you some other kind of psychiatrist?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: I tried to do as little of the former as I could. When I was choosing which psychiatric program I would do after medical school.

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: I chose the one at the Massachusetts General Hospital for the reason that it was the most biologically oriented. I'm quite opposed to psychoanalytics --

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes you took the words out of my mouth. Are you in sync with the notion that neuroscience has overcome psychiatry?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: I am and I was. And that's precisely why -- I mean I think, you know, the psychiatry, the psychoanalysis, the theory that was rooted in really nothing but speculation and wonderful writing the Freudian theories and the offshoots -- really had to yield to the coming of the knowledge in neurology, behavioral psychiatry, et cetera. And that's why I chose a program where they emphasized that. And that's what really fascinated me, the interaction between the brain and behavior.

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: But the old stuff, look, I don't -- I don't want to denigrate it. It works for some people, but I'm not really into the interior life, so after about six years, seven year of medicine, I thought well maybe if you're not interested in the interior life, psychiatry is not for you. And that's why I left.

CHARLIE ROSE: It probably was a good choice for you because journalism, more than most professions, allowed you to look and reach into all of them.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Yes. That's exactly right.

CHARLIE ROSE: Because it gives you the context to the quality of our life and our politics.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Exactly. And it gave me the freedom as a column writer. I could write about anything. And you're right, there is a common theme. What attracts me and sort of inspires me is anything that is extremely hard, that's an example of human excellence and transcendence -- it can be walking on the balance beam.

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Or it can be what Kennedy did with the moon shot when he said, "We do these things not because they are easy but because they are hard." And it's when humans undertake things that they really have no business doing, like orbiting the earth or landing on the moon.

CHARLIE ROSE: Moon -- right.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Or doing --

(CROSSTALK)

CHARLIE ROSE: Or mapping the human genome.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Exactly or getting a -- a shortstop getting a backhand in the hole, jumping like Jeter and throwing -- that's not what humans are supposed to do. They're supposed to walk on two legs, you know head for and run away from a tiger, and take the fruit off a tree. That's essentially what humans are built for. And they do all this fantastic stuff.

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: How can you not be thrilled?

CHARLIE ROSE: And chess appeals to you because?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: It's so intricate and because it's ultimately quite useless. It doesn't have a consequence, but there's something so wonderful -- I -- I actually twice -- not once, but twice -- I have to confess and I do in the book in the introduction -- drove from Washington up here to New York to see a chess match.

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: People think I'm truly eccentric. But I didn't sit there watching the game. I sat in the room with the grandmasters --

(CROSSTALK)

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: -- who were getting all the moves and we're throwing out analyses on the board -- you know he ought to do x, y, and z.

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: And I was sitting next to another amateur who was hearing all these and he said, "Unheard symphonies, melodies that will be lost forever" -- the variations that were never actually played. But there's something so musical and so impossible about chess that I've always found it incredibly attractive. And I have to say, addictive. I have twice now given it up because when you find yourself in the middle of the night playing Internet chess, be chess you think of yourself as an alcoholic in a motel room drinking Aqua Velva. That's when you know you hit rock bottom. You've got to quit.

CHARLIE ROSE: So you've got to say I'm out.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: I'm off -- I'm not sure if I'm off the wagon or on, but I'm not playing these days.

CHARLIE ROSE: You are not -- at this moment you're not playing.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: At this moment I'm not, but it will come back.

CHARLIE ROSE: It will definitely come back.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Yes.

CHARLIE ROSE: Let's talk about politics, then if that is the central core. I mean what's interesting to me about this -- this is the number one book in the country and it is a collection of what you have written over three decades. I mean this is looking back and it obviously says something I would assume you would believe about the good sense of the American people.

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But what else is it you think -- what do you think the country is looking for and then how it might be specific in the choice of this book?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: I do think that the country -- and this is sort of a theme that comes out --

(CROSSTALK)

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: -- in the book as we span the decades -- is trying to look for normal life. What I mean is this: we had 60 years of existential struggle, fascism, Nazism, communism. It ends in a miraculous way.

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Christmas Day, 1991.

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Communism. They disappear. I never imagined I'd live to see the end of the Soviet Union. I never imagined. It happens without a shot --

CHARLIE ROSE: Do you think it happened because Gorbachev chose not to fight?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: No. It happened because the system was inherently impossible. It completely contradicted human nature. All the incentives were wrong. It began as a militant ideology. It ended as a husk of cynicism.

CHARLIE ROSE: Clearly it failed because of a superior idea, which was freedom.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Right -- in the end it had to fail.

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes exactly right but I mean, you know, we'll never know how long it might have taken if in fact there was the struggle that led to --

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Gorbachev was the passive vessel.

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Reagan, Thatcher, Cole, John Paul --

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: -- the heroic Pope, they were the ones who pushed it. It turned out history has taught us -- and that I write about in the book -- you needed the push, you needed the pressure, you needed all of that.

CHARLIE ROSE: You needed the active.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: You needed the active or it wouldn't have gone away on its own. It did because as you say, it surrendered. There was no way it could compete. There's no way it could justify itself in its own eyes.

CHARLIE ROSE: Is it a moment, I mean can you look to Reagan saying Mr. Gorbachev "tear that wall down"?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: No, it was the inexorable pressure that began -- it began before him of course. It began with Truman.

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: And the containment theory as enunciated by George Kennan in the 40s, late 40s --

CHARLIE ROSE: Right. Containment.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: -- was in the end, if we put pressure on the system it will internally either reform and become ok, or collapse. And it collapsed. It tried to reform, but it was corrupted in its core. It couldn't reform.

So the pressure began with Truman. But in the end, when they were tottering, when they had reached actually the apogee, Soviet empire reached its apogee at the end of 1979, Iran had become anti-American, it took over in Nicaragua, it took over in Cambodia, it took over in Afghanistan the empire was overstretched and the fall began but Reagan was the one who undermined it. The defense built up. The pressure of what was called the Reagan Doctrine, supporting all these insurgencies against the Soviet empire. Strategic defenses -- the Russians understood they could never compete with American technology.

And in the end, it was the rhetoric, the rhetoric that said this is an evil empire and we aren't afraid to say it and the dissidents in the Gulag speak with Sharansky (ph), speak with others. They heard the word and that gave them life, energy, and hope. And that's what brought it down.

CHARLIE ROSE: Look at America today. I mean, if you look at that history you just talked about. Where do you think we are as we have gone from Reagan forward?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: We're trying to find our way. America is this incredibly reluctant accidental hegemon. We're the only imperial power in history that never sought an empire. The British did, the Dutch did, the Portuguese did. We developed ourselves -- quite isolationists -- and then what happens? Europe which dominates the world commits suicide in the two World Wars and what's left standing, us and the Russians. We didn't seek to be the dominant power. And then the Soviets our existential enemy we put pressure on.

One day we wake up in 1991, December 26th, Soviets are gone. We are left dominant in the world and I write about this in one of the essays -- we are the most dominant power on that day of any power since the fall of Rome. And the question has been ever since what do we do with this status?

CHARLIE ROSE: There are those who say and argue Zbigniew Brzezinski being one, that we missed opportunity between then and the Iraqi war to do a lot of things and to use that unique advantage we have. Do you find any resonance in that argument?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Well, I'm not exactly sure what they have in mind that we were supposed to do. The first thing that we did -- and I write about this in the book about the 90s -- the 90s were a holiday from history. The first thing that we sought was repose.

And we deserved it. 60 years of struggle against fascism and Nazism. We were exhausted sort of morally. We had spread in there and we won. I think it was Wellington who once said nothing -- nothing other than a battle lost is as melancholy as a battle won. So we win and we say the Peggy Lee line, "Is that all there is?"

CHARLIE ROSE: There is.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: So the 90s were a holiday from history where we basically said we had extraordinary peace and prosperity. There were no challenges to us of any substance, and we took a nice quiet ride.

There's a column in the book about a speech I gave to my son's high school in 1997. I tried to explain to them that we were living in a golden age. This was extremely unusual -- peace, prosperity, no challenges, no threats. This is very rare in history.

Now, I didn't want to tell them because it would have been child abuse that it's got to end, but I wrote it in the column because adults would read the column.

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: And I wrote in 1997 -- I have this sense -- golden ages always end. The only question is does it end in ice or in fire? And we know how it ended. It ended in fire on 9/11. That -- and we woke up. We realized history isn't over. We have existential enemies out there again. We didn't choose it, just like we never chose to be dominant and hegemonic. We didn't choose it, but they came after us and we now have a new challenge. History starts again and by history I mean great struggles that will last a generation over the essence of our life --

(CROSSTALK)

CHARLIE ROSE: Between whom?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Between the West and decency, and Islamic radicalism and depravity. And I'll tell you why I use that word. In the last few months, there has been a campaign in Pakistan in the Swat Valley by the Taliban. They have been killing polio workers.

CHARLIE ROSE: Right. That's right.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Now, when you have an ideology that drives you to kill people who are trying to prevent paralysis in children, there is no word that I can use other than depravity. This is a barbarous ideology that threatens the world. And thus has to be --

(CROSSTALK)

CHARLIE ROSE: Right but do you think that represents Islam today?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Absolutely not.

CHARLIE ROSE: Exactly. It's a corrupt portion of Islam by radical, fundamental Islamists.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Absolutely. I agree entirely, but I think the President's reticence and hesitancy to actually say the words, "Islamic radicalism" is because he's afraid by using that adjective it will tarnish all of Islam. And I don't understand that. I don't see why you cannot express respect for Islam as a great religion and for the overwhelming majority of Muslims in the world, and at the same time say there is a corrupt and diseased and depraved element of that -- small element but a militant element that kills polio workers in Pakistan.

And that a month before 9/11, the Taliban sent their troops out to the desert in (inaudible) -- I talk about this in the introduction -- and using machine guns and dynamite they blew up the two -- the magnificent statues of the Buddha. Now, what had the Buddha done to offend Islam?

(CROSSTALK)

CHARLIE ROSE: Ok but I mean, (inaudible) look what happened in Cambodia, I mean you know the kinds of things that took place in Cambodia when a group of radicals tried to change society, change everything that had ever been --

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: That's exactly the point I want to make.

CHARLIE ROSE: And destroyed human life into unprecedented ways.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: That's the point I want to make. Every once in a while these radical ideologies arise that want to remake human nature, want to remake society --

CHARLIE ROSE: And they're prepared to do everything to make it happen.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Empty the cities as was done in Cuba and kill anything that stands in the way. And the terrible event in our history is that we thought the fight was over with the fall of communism. We go to sleep for a decade. We wake up on 9/11 and discovered it's back in a different guise.

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CHARLIE ROSE: Our friends (inaudible) had it wrong. It was not the end of history.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Exactly. History returned and it is painful.

CHARLIE ROSE: Most of the eight years coming after the decline was within a Democratic control of the executive office in the presence of Bill Clinton.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: And I would say looking back historically he handled it reasonably well. And we weren't sure how to use our new status. And Clinton used it to rescue the people in Kosovo. He used it to rescue the people of Bosnia.

But there were no grand adventures because there was no grand provocation. There was no grand mission.

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: And domestically he did what you would do. You tend to your vineyards and the economy was a prosperous one. So I think he had a reasonably good tenure. But it was not -- I think he has even said that history never challenged him the way it did other presidents.

CHARLIE ROSE: Not only does he say it -- he said it and he's bemoaned.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Yes.

CHARLIE ROSE: To a degree saying he didn't have -- he didn't have -- I mean he didn't want war but he didn't have a war, he didn't have things that were -- that were changed by the nature of the event.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: And it denied him a chance at greatness.

CHARLIE ROSE: Greatness I mean he essentially had -- I know what he said he certainly have been reported. He certainly feels it. But he was there and during that period to be succeeded by George Bush.

When you look back at Bush 41 -- 43 and Iraq, Afghanistan, what's your judgment?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: I think the virtue of his presidency was he immediately understood the return of history. And he immediately leveled with the American people. We were in a new struggle a long struggle, a generational struggle. It was not just a bunch of guys running around in airplanes. This was an ideology implanted in the world that we had treated up until now as a law enforcement issue.

When there was the attack on the "Cole" in the year 2000, we sent FBI agents into Yemen as a way to respond. That is not the way to respond. This is not a burglary. This is war --

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes. I might take issue with that a little bit. They always send FBI agents in to investigate to see some of the circumstances of those kinds of --

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: When somebody attacks a U.S. warship --

CHARLIE ROSE: Right that's an act of war.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: It's an act of war and you might want to send an FBI. But you've got to send in something else and we did. Now after 9/11 was -- we have to send in something else.

Here's the dilemma -- Bush was right to go into Afghanistan and depose the Taliban, scatter al Qaeda no question. Bush was right to depose Saddam Hussein.

CHARLIE ROSE: Even if it meant distraction from the war in Afghanistan?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Well it -- the war in Afghanistan, the war to depose the Taliban and scatter al Qaeda took about 100 days. The war in Iraq to depose Saddam took three weeks. The dilemma that we had afterwards is

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what do you do? We're very good at destroying regimes. We can do it at a distance. We can do it quickly, and relatively speaking historically, cheaply.

But then what you do you do? Our choices were install a new dictator and leave. Our choices are let them have their own forms of government, which is not likely to happen because they're at war with each other.

And we took the third option. We're going to try to change the nature of the regime and society, hoping that by democratization or just some kind of decent representative government we'll create an ally and we'll be able to have an example in the region.

And that turned out to be fatally difficult in Iraq and probably impossible in Afghanistan and why we're leaving. And that was our dilemma, but the choices were not good.

CHARLIE ROSE: We are looking at a circumstance today in which President Obama's approval ratings are about where President Bush were at their lowest. Bush was at 35, Obama as we speak about 39, 38 or 39. And the -- the Bush approval ratings were a product of Iraq.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: And Katrina.

CHARLIE ROSE: And Katrina. One spoke to competence, one spoke to I guess competence, too, in terms of judgment and whether that was a war of necessity, a war of choice and if it was a war of choice, was it the wrong choice because of what did it mean?

But -- but that was to be followed by Barack Obama who comes in -- and I would think be a man that you would admire for intellect, for style, for a family.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Well I would add one quality, which is that he was ideologically honest, open and bold about how ideologically ambitious he was. He comes into office and five weeks in he delivers an address to a Joint Session of Congress which most Americans don't remember because most Americans have a real life and they do real stuff.

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: I for my sins -- for my sins I have to watch this guy every day and every night and obviously, my sins are many, so I remember it well. This was the most radically -- what I would call social democratic or liberal left speech and program of any president in --

CHARLIE ROSE: What made it that?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: He said essentially, "I came here not to reform around the edges, unspoken like a Clinton. I came here to fundamentally change America, unspoken, like a Reagan". Obama once said in '08, Ronald Reagan was historically consequential in a way that Clinton was not.

CHARLIE ROSE: And to the great displeasure of Bill Clinton when he heard that.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: He did it as a way to get the Clintons quite riled. But there was also historical truth --

CHARLIE ROSE: He didn't say that in a speech by way. He said that in an interview ---

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Right I think it was a radio in San Francisco.

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes right, yes.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: But this is -- and it's actually quite true. Reagan changed the ideological trajectory of America after 50 years of FDR, LBJ, the great society, the new deal, of these liberal (inaudible) incomes, Reagan within 10 minutes he declares government isn't the solution. It's the problem. That's a radical rejection of new deal

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liberalism. And he succeeds to the point where Clinton says in his State of the Union Address in 1996 -- he accepts the premise --

CHARLIE ROSE: That was Bill Clinton, I'm not even sure that had to do with philosophy. That happened to do with political reality. He realized what had just happened and so he could see the obvious.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: It's true, but then he followed it up by the abolition of welfare. So it wasn't only speech. It was action.

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes and some suggested if he had done welfare first rather than do health care he would have been in a much better place.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Absolutely right.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Including Daniel Patrick Moynihan.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: But the point of abolishing welfare was that he showed that in practice he would be willing to accept the premises of Reaganism. It is unimaginable that an Obama would abolish welfare as he did.

So you have a 30-year conservative ascendancy and Obama comes out and said "I'm here to end it. I'm here to restart the new deal, the great society. It was a series of speeches. It began on the 24th of February, 2009. It ended -- there were five speeches -- ended at Georgetown --

(CROSSTALK)

CHARLIE ROSE: Right, right.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: -- in April. And they were all about what he was going to do. "I'm going to change America" he said. And then he was quite specific. He wasn't abstract about it, in three areas --

(CROSSTALK)

CHARLIE ROSE: Is it a -- is it a valid norm -- notion that I'm going to change America if we have so x number of people not getting medical care, that I'm going to try to find a means of making sure that we don't have 30 million or 40 million people without access to insurance or access to medical coverage.

And if it's destroying families, that's not an America that you want. You want to figure out a better way to do it. Then you can argue over the better way to do it.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: But here's the problem. Had he been a normal liberal, a regular, a Clintonian liberal, he would have said exactly that and then he would have devised a program -- let's say increasing the level at which anybody is eligible in Medicare, that would cover all of the uninsured. You could do it in a bill that would be one page long, and would affect nothing else in health care.

And what does he do instead? He completely changes health care in America in every way in a bill that is 2,000 pages long that even today nobody quite understands the extent --

CHARLIE ROSE: Suppose that he did just what you said. What column -- he said, "Look, I want to provide the kind of health care for all Americans that Medicare provides for Americans over 65." Would **Charles Krauthammer** have written a column saying here's a guy who understands a way to deliver a medical care to the American people that has been tried and is successful in other places?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: If he had said, as you said, just a moment ago, I don't want to see 40 million Americans who don't get health care. And I'll provide a program that will do it with a simple stroke. I'm going to say the poverty level isn't enough to be eligible for Medicare.

CHARLIE ROSE: Right, right.

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CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: But what is it, four times or whatever? And I'm going to include all of those. I would have supported it and I would have asked for a tax that would be dedicated -- it would be open, honest and he would say to America, that there is no free lunch. We're going to do this.

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes you have to pay for it.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: I would have -- I would have -- I would have added on to that radical tort reform because we are wasting half a trillion dollars a year in defensive medicine. I know it because I practiced it myself.

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: And that was something that there's not a word of that in Obamacare, not a word of that that everybody understands that we need. The reason that we have the most expensive health care on the planet is because we have an insane malpractice system which causes doctors to do referrals, testing, and procedures that --

CHARLIE ROSE: And to leave medicine in fact.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: -- so you would save the money on one side and I would devote it to ensuring the uninsured. But that's not Obama.

CHARLIE ROSE: You would have liked that idea.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: I think it's a humane society, and a rich society would want to protect everyone from the lack of medical care. I would support that. I don't know if a lot of conservatives would but I would because I believe that's an element of life that's important.

But the point I want to make is this -- Obama is not an ordinary liberal. Instead of doing it in a targeted **way**, he wrote himself a bill that changes a sixth of the American economy, that cancels the policies of up to now, what, five million Americans? Tens of millions in the future? That changes the requirements of health care -- that does everything, and why?

Because he has a sense that government is the arbiter, ought to be the regulator of American life. And that's why I call him a different kind of liberal. And that's why I say he came to change America, not to patch it up and reform at the edges.

CHARLIE ROSE: Ok. Let's assume that he made the wrong choice and the American people seem to think he did, do you think that was a failure of competence or a failure of something else -- a failure of ideology?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: It's a failure of candor. What he told America is "I'm going to give you -- I'm going to insure 40 million new people. I'm going to give you free mammograms, free birth control, free this, free that." And what did he say? "It will not cost the government a dime."

Now, if you're nine years old you understand that's impossible. So how is he going to do this? Well, now we know, and the deception is the reason that his numbers have collapsed and America has turned against Obamacare.

The deception was that they knew they would have to kick tens of millions of Americans off their plans into the exchanges where by law, they would be required to purchase plans that would include stuff they didn't need. I don't need lactation services. Perhaps I did in the past. I don't need them right now. And they would be, therefore, overpaying, and the surplus would be used to subsidize others.

The whole idea was to transfer wealth, using this system, so when Obama promised it isn't as if he didn't know that the idea was to get people off their individual plans and now we're going to see tens of millions who are going to lose their employer insurance, and it will cause a transfer of wealth as a **way** to pay for it. They should have been honest about it and say there isn't a free lunch?

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CHARLIE ROSE: He was dishonest because he believed that this was -- he couldn't deliver on his promise and so therefore, effectively, in the midst of a campaign, he lied.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: I don't like the word "lie".

CHARLIE ROSE: I know you don't, but why don't you?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Because the word "lie" is a word that implies that it was sort of a maliciousness behind it. I think it was a -- like a politician acts, as a way to soften the blow to make people think that this is going to be painless, thinking, that you see, the part I don't understand is because he's a highly intelligent man. Doesn't he know that at the end of the day, the deception is going to be revealed? Didn't he know when the cancellation of policies begins people are going to understand the reason that my policy is canceled is because he needs me in the pool to subsidize other people.

CHARLIE ROSE: How do you explain that?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: I can't. I do think it's -- it's a political error that's so colossal that I can't quite get my hands around it. I do think that he thought maybe if we get it in, once I pass it, we'll work it out down the road, and he does have a very high opinion of his political skills.

He must have thought, "Look, I was elected from nowhere, defeating the Clinton machine. I've been twice re-elected to the presidency. So when I run into these issues in the future, I'll work my way around it." I don't see how he can.

CHARLIE ROSE: And, therefore, you think that Obamacare, the Affordable Care Act, will fail. And because it fails it is one of the colossal political mistakes of recent time, and, therefore, it means that liberalism of a certain kind will collapse with it and it will be a long time before this country is prepared to address such a huge problem with such a huge government program.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: I agree with every word of that.

CHARLIE ROSE: That's what you believe.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: I do believe that.

CHARLIE ROSE: But define more what you believe.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: I'll explain it. I don't necessarily think that this has to fail. I think it is extremely likely that it will. So let's assume that it will. And I think it's going to be ironic. In the end it's going to be Democrats who bring it down. Democrats in the Senate and in the House who are now running scared because of what's happening with their constituents.

CHARLIE ROSE: There's an election around the corner.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: If it's Democrats who bring it down it's going to be a complete humiliation. And what it will do is it will tell people that Obama is not the kind of incremental liberal that you saw with Clinton who historically speaking had a successful two terms.

Obama is a man who reached for a kind of European kind, socially democratic government-run health care. In fact, what was the argument that the liberals at the time were making when they were trying to get Obamacare passed? They said we're the only advanced democracy on the planet that doesn't have guaranteed health care, a form of national health care, and we have to join the ranks.

I do believe and I've always believed that Obama -- and I believed it from the day of that fateful speech he made to a joint session of Congress -- that Obama is a social Democrat on the European model. It was sold in some quarters as simply an attempt to insure the uninsured.

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But it's ambitious -- his ambitions are far beyond that. It sets a new standard of health insurance for everybody. It requires prevention. It sets a new ratio of how much the old and the young will pay in premiums. It sets whole new schedules. It has whole new commissions and it's going to end up probably in a kind of rationing. It's remaking how health care is delivered.

It wasn't only insuring the uninsured. If it were, as I've explained to you, I would have agreed with it in principle and tried to find a reasonably narrow way, small-government way of addressing it.

CHARLIE ROSE: Right, right, right.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: It is that everything has changed. Is there one aspect of medicine, is there a doctor or a hospital or a patient in America who isn't affected? And that's what's wrong with this.

CHARLIE ROSE: I assume you weren't crazy about a fee-based system.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Well, it started out in that way, and we have to find a way to reform it, or to create the competition that would keep it in check.

CHARLIE ROSE: There's also this notion -- and you write eloquently about foreign policy, too -- and we have had come up three things that are in play mainly in the Middle East -- and we can leave China out of this conversation because of where that relationship is --

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Right.

CHARLIE ROSE: -- but -- and there's a society that's also trying to deal with some (inaudible) reform as well in part for corruption reasons and in part for other reasons. But look at Palestinian-Israeli negotiations set in motion by John Kerry. Look at Iran negotiations which may very well have some interim agreement, and what you think about that. And then look at Syria, where you now have the United States and Russia trying to create a system in which they get the chemical weapons out of Syria and figure out some system for a negotiated arrangement for the future of Syria. Where do you -- how do you analyze this President in those significant arenas?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: The Israeli-Palestinian negotiations are a fraud. They're going nowhere. Everybody understands it. And I guarantee you there will be no issue from this.

The negotiations with Iran, I think, are terribly flawed, and if the interim agreement is concluded as is being described, it will do nothing to stop the Iranians in the march to acquire nuclear weapons, and it will begin relieving the sanctions, which have been the only instrument of even getting them --

(CROSSTALK)

CHARLIE ROSE: Will it delay, do you think?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: By less than a month.

CHARLIE ROSE: Really?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: It will have no --

CHARLIE ROSE: So essentially you accept the argument of Prime Minister Netanyahu.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Well, essentially I accept the argument that if the only thing that brought the Iranians to negotiate in the first place was tremendously serious and deep-cutting sanctions, then the worst thing to do right now is to relieve the sanctions rather than increasing them. And to relieve them in return for an interim offer which includes nothing of substance. There's not a single change in the infrastructure of the Iranian nuclear program. There is no reduction in the number of centrifuges or in the construction of them. And if you don't, Iran remains a threshold --

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CHARLIE ROSE: Do you believe the sanctions -- and understanding how damning they have been to the Iranian economy -- will -- would have -- if nothing had happened -- would have prevented the Iranians from getting a nuclear capacity?

I believe that the only chance of the Iranians giving up the bomb is if the mullahs believe that the regime itself is being threatened.

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: They're getting near that point, which is why they're negotiating.

CHARLIE ROSE: How do we know that?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Well, that's why they're at the table. There's no other reason.

CHARLIE ROSE: Ok, but they're at the table, but we don't know that -- you know.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: There is no other event, outside event which would explain why for a decade they stonewalled and had contempt for any negotiation and now they're trying to work out some --

(CROSSTALK)

CHARLIE ROSE: Well, there's a new administration there.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Yes. But that new administration is subordinate to an Ayatollah -- where's the change?

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes, but -- ok.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: So that hasn't -- all I want to say is if the sanctions are really causing the pain and the threat to the regime itself, then the logical thing to do is to increase the sanctions and to stop them only if you get the cessation of the program and not a hint of this or two which will do nothing to actually stop it.

CHARLIE ROSE: So here we have the Israeli-Palestinian conversations which will go nowhere. You believe an interim agreement is not in the U.S. interest.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Right.

CHARLIE ROSE: And then there's Syria. You believe what?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: There is a curious paradox in the Syria situation. The problem with Syria is that it is the linchpin of Iranians' colonies if you like -- its satrapies in the Arab world. You have a Shiite crescent. Iran is a threat to the Gulf States, to the Sunni states, to the Egyptians, Arab -- quaking in their boots. The Gulf Arabs are so afraid of a nuclear weapon that I guarantee you that if these Israelis ever attack, they're going to go over Saudi territory, and they're going to be flares on the ground with arrows in Saudi Arabia, saying this way to Tehran.

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: I mean the Saudis are really afraid that America's withdrawing --

CHARLIE ROSE: But the Saudis and the Israelis are on the same page on this.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Exactly, because the Iranians are the hegemonic -- if you like, they are sort of the mini equivalent of what the Soviets were in the Cold War. They are of the have-not power. They want to overturn the Sunni dominance in the Arab world.

And Syria is the linchpin. And the regime in Syria if it were to go it would be a blow to the Iranians that would be extremely serious. It would set them back. It would be the first real defeat of their aggressiveness in the world, their

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push into the Arab world, since the revolution of '79. And Assad was teetering and tottering. The United States did essentially nothing.

After waiting a couple of years the jihadis have come in on the rebel side, and Assad has now -- now, what happened with Obama's red line is that by declaring it, shifting around, zigzagging, he ended up working -- I think working out a deal that will probably be ok on chemical weapons.

But in return what he did, is he legitimized, he recognized and he essentially stabilized the regime in Syria which keeps intact this aggressive sort of archipelago of Iranian subordinate states which is a remaining threat to the region and we will regret that for many years to come.

CHARLIE ROSE: A means for the Iranians to find an access to Hezbollah and provide them weapons --

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Exactly.

CHARLIE ROSE: -- and all that kind of thing.

CHARLIE ROSE: So At the beginning of the Obama administration, George Will had a famous (inaudible) four or five days before the inauguration as I remember. You were there at George's house, as I remember, and other conservatives, neo-conservatives were there. Tell me then -- then recently there was a three-hour session.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: At the White House.

CHARLIE ROSE: At the White House. So how is your perception of him changed from that meeting before the administration began and then the three-hour session that took place recently?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: The perception I've had of him as a man remains unchanged.

CHARLIE ROSE: Which is?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Highly intelligent, personable, Socratic in the way he deals with issues. I was very impressed when we met before the inauguration. We tossed every question you could at him from monetary policy to foreign policy. And what he would do is he'd sort of restate your premise -- if it was a conservative one -- in an honest way -- it wasn't a tendentious way -- state his premise and sort of look for a common area of understanding. The way a professor would in answering a question in the classroom. It wasn't ideological. It wasn't ad hominem, it wasn't partisan.

So I was quite impressed with the method and what seemed to be an intellectual openness. And I have to say that one of the reasons I've been disappointed in him is I have seen that side of him in an off-the-record session. So I know that he's not only capable of that, but that's sort of part of who he is.

So when he would go around campaigning years later and not ever giving credit to conservatives for actually having cared for the country or having a principle that would be one that would be opposed to what a liberal would believe but would be an honest and sincere one.

I mean he'd go around saying, you know, the other guy, they care only about power and not policy, only about party and not nation. They care only about the next election, and not the next generation. I know that in his heart that's not something he believes. He understands the conservative argument, and he gave it some respect -- perhaps it was a fake. But I don't think so. It seemed genuine.

But when he gets out there campaigning when he wants to achieve something, he's willing to denigrate the other side in a way that I'm not sure he believes. So I've been --

CHARLIE ROSE: All this proves to me is that he's a politician. Go ahead.

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CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: That is true, but on the other hand you don't see a lot of politicians who had the kind of ease and smoothness that he does with ideas and what seemed to be a kind of understanding of the other side that he had presented. He did it again when I saw him a month or two ago. So that's what always impressed me.

There's nothing about him to dislike personally. And he has an exemplary family life. He has an incredible history and story. I just think he was a man over his head in the White House.

CHARLIE ROSE: So that's competence and experience.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: That's competence and experience and there's also a sense --

CHARLIE ROSE: Not competence that can be gained with experience.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Yes. But he's had a lot of experience --

CHARLIE ROSE: In the toughest job in the world.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: But he still ended up with this train wreck where he is right now. So I'm not sure --

CHARLIE ROSE: Now, were you wrong about him in any judgments you made?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: The judgment I made of him when he was running in 2008 was that he was an ideological chameleon. I wasn't -- and you remember the appointments he made in the transition of Volcker, a guy who collaborated with Reagan --

CHARLIE ROSE: Do you know the Volcker amendment has not been passed in terms of regulation after --

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: He put his invite (ph) on Volcker coal, Larry Summers. He kept Bob Gates, the **Republican** conservative Secretary of Defense --

CHARLIE ROSE: -- who was an admirer of the President.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Yes.

And he had a Clinton as Secretary of State. There was nothing radical at all about his appointments. So it seemed to be as if he was trying to send a signal that he's going to be a kind of Clintonian left of center politician. And then I think, of course, he deviated from that in the speech he made. When he said, "I'm going to change America in health care, energy, and education."

Health care is a sixth of the economy, education is the future, and energy, if you control the production and the pricing as you would with cap and trade, is the sinews of an American --

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes. But at the same time we are on the verge of becoming energy independent.

We are on the verge of being a net energy exporter.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Yes, despite his administration. I mean the reason that we have had the explosion is because of the technological advance in fracking. But all the increase in gas and oil has been on state lands and private lands.

CHARLIE ROSE: Ok. Let me ask you this then. I mean so there -- that's an analysis of Barack Obama who has -- and we'll see what happens in the midterm elections which may make it more difficult. If health care is a dominant issue, he could be looking at a **Republican** Senate and House.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: And then he's a lame duck.

CHARLIE ROSE: Then he's a lame duck, if not already, you know, because of what you say.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Yes.

CHARLIE ROSE: What's at issue now is credibility. And that's the worst thing you could lose.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Exactly. Exactly.

CHARLIE ROSE: Who would you -- if you were given the great option of choosing the next president -- it's not going to be an election. **Charles Krauthammer** has been give by God, or whoever chooses to make the choice, who would you choose? Who would be good?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Let me just say -- I'll say it right here -- if nominated I will not run. But if elected, Charlie, I will serve. I'm just lazy. I don't want to go to the Iowa state fair.

CHARLIE ROSE: Would you choose a scientist? Would you choose a politician? Would you choose a governor? Would you choose someone who is the brightest person you've ever encountered? Who would you choose?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: I would put it in these terms. This is a center- right country. I think that's what it is intrinsically if you look at the (inaudible). I think if you find someone on the conservative side, **Republican** side, who can explain and make the case for limited government but compassionate limited government in the sense that what we want is a safety net society. We don't want an entitlement society -- again, America and Europe, conservatism, and Obama-ism. If you make that case, you win the White House. You win the country. And if you govern in that **way**, I think you will help the country.

CHARLIE ROSE: You are beginning to see on the part of John Kasich and some others --

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Right.

CHARLIE ROSE: -- speaking to that idea --

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Exactly.

CHARLIE ROSE: -- of compassion and a safety net.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: Right. "Compassion" is a word that has been corrupted by the Bush administration because it means stuff (ph). But the safety net -- we have a humane obligation. We're a humane society. We're the most generous people in the history of the world. We do not want to see the elderly live in destitution or orphans thrown in the snow despite what liberals imagine.

We have an obligation. But we have to do it intelligently, and we have to do it in a **way** that will not bankrupt the country. That's the mission of a conservative government right now.

CHARLIE ROSE: You think that's what we'll see?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: I think there's a very good chance that the pendulum will swing the other **way**. If you go back to 1953, every time one party's had the White House for two terms -- with only one exception -- that's Reagan -- every time it's had it for two terms --

CHARLIE ROSE: Changed parties.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: -- tossed out on its rear end.

CHARLIE ROSE: And people thought Bush was simply an extension of Reagan.

(CROSSTALK)

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: A grateful nation gave him one more term.

Conversation with Charles Krauthammer

CHARLIE ROSE: Because we have been talking about these kinds of things, one last question. You know, we're looking back at 50 years after the assassination of JFK. I mean where do you put him? Because he had some of the conservatives values in foreign policy that you reflect. He made two brilliant speeches on civil rights and American University, about America's role in the world.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: He -- he -- he inspired the country. As I said earlier we do these things because they're hard, not because they're easy. I think that was the greatest achievement to, make us do something we wouldn't ordinarily have done. Look, Kennedy was a president of great promise.

CHARLIE ROSE: Promise.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: And the tragedy is we will never know. The practice of his presidency, the actual achievements were fairly minor. I think they were inflated as a result of his martyrdom, which is completely understandable. But I don't think that we can judge him on the scale of others. He had three years in office. If he had had eight years in office we could speak of him in relation to other important presidencies.

As of now, it was interrupted. And in a sense it was the Johnson presidency, the Johnson, the one who gave us the civil rights, who gave us the war on poverty, who gave us --

CHARLIE ROSE: Because he was a master tactician.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: He was a successor. He inherited the mantle and he knew how to do it.

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: But there's no way to render a judgment.

CHARLIE ROSE: The book is called **Charles Krauthammer**, "Things that Matter: Three Decades of Passions, Pastimes and Politics". If you look on the back, there are recommendations from George Will, who in his own inimitable style says, "Amid today's clutter of print and cacophony of broadcast commentary, **Krauthammer**'s lapidary judgments stand out and stand the test of time. Literature has been called news that lasts. **Krauthammer**'s columns take journalism to the level of literature."

Then there is David Brooks, "**Charles Krauthammer** is not only the most influential conservative commentator in America. His writing transcends the crush of daily events and can be read with profit always."

Just two comments: perhaps that is why this is the number one bestseller on the "New York Times" nonfiction list -- "Things That Matter" by **Charles Krauthammer**.

Thank you for joining us. See you next time.

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CHARLIE ROSE: On the next Charlie Rose, Nathan Myhrvold; his new book is called "The Photography of Modernist Cuisine".

NATHAN MYHRVOLD, "THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF MODERNIST CUISINE": We want to show people a vision of food that they haven't seen before. We all see food a couple of times a day right because we'd starve otherwise.

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes.

NATHAN MYHRVOLD: But usually you wind up looking at it in a perfunctory way. You don't really see it the way that you do if you focus on it intently. So the photos we take try to show you a view you hadn't seen before. So we have photos where we cut cooking pots and pans in half and cooked in them cut in half so that we could show pictures of how cooking actually works. We give you the magic view that's inside your food.

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes.

NATHAN MYHRVOLD: Other photos --

CHARLIE ROSE: How does cooking actually work?

NATHAN MYHRVOLD: Well, it depends. It's complicated. You know cooking is the only science experiment we all do on a regular basis.

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes.

NATHAN MYHRVOLD: And a simple act of cooking a meal involves lots of interesting chemistry and physics, thermodynamics.

CHARLIE ROSE: But do most great chefs know the science of cooking?

NATHAN MYHRVOLD: No.

CHARLIE ROSE: They don't.

NATHAN MYHRVOLD: No, most great chefs have an intuitive knowledge of it. They don't have a scientific knowledge of it.

CHARLIE ROSE: Ok. For people who have a scientific knowledge but perhaps not an intuitive knowledge, to what use is it for them?

NATHAN MYHRVOLD: If you want to do something new --

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

NATHAN MYHRVOLD: -- you know if you follow a recipe, you can follow that recipe and you don't even know how it works. You just need to know if I do Step A, Step B, Step C, you'll get the result.

CHARLIE ROSE: Right.

NATHAN MYHRVOLD: But if you want to make up your own recipe and do something new and different that really goes on a radical new direction then understanding how things work really helps --

(CROSSTALK)

CHARLIE ROSE: Yes.

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