MR. TIM RUSSERT: Our issues this Sunday: Our Meet the Candidates 2008 series continues. An exclusive interview with Democrat Bill Richardson. He is now in his fifth year as governor of New Mexico. He was United States congressman from that state for more than 14 years and served as the U.S. ambassador to the U.N. and secretary of energy in the Clinton administration. This morning Bill Richardson joins us for the full hour, only on MEET THE PRESS.

Governor Richardson, welcome back to MEET THE PRESS.

GOV. BILL RICHARDSON (D-NM): Nice to be with you, Tim.

MR. RUSSERT: As you well know, the Democratic leadership in Congress had been trying to have a withdrawal date for all troops from Iraq tied to the bill which provided funding for the troops. They then agreed to take away that withdrawal language and pass the money without it present in the bill. Should the Democratic leadership have done that?

GOV. RICHARDSON: No. I believe the Democrats in Congress missed a great opportunity. What is not working, Tim--because the American people want us to get out of Iraq, and we must because it's hurting our national interest. What the Democrats have been doing in my judgment is focusing on the wrong initiative, and that is more funding cuts, more timetables. What I would propose is a deauthorization resolution, under the War Powers Act, Article I, that basically allows the Congress to determine whether we're at war at not. And what has happened now is, I believe, is that the first resolution that was voted on several years ago is not operative anymore. Sadaam Hussein is out, there are no weapons of mass destruction, the American people are totally against this war. I believe a deauthorizing resolution would pass. Under Article I, the president wouldn't veto it. But I do believe that the Congress missed, missed a--missed an opportunity. We must get out of Iraq. The American people, everywhere I go, not just in the early primary states, want an exit strategy. They want to see a policy where our troops are safe. They want us to regain our international stature. And the key is a withdrawal from Iraq.

MR. RUSSERT: You would have voted against a bill that did not have a fixed withdrawal date.

GOV. RICHARDSON: Yes.

MR. RUSSERT: On your Web site you say this: "Troops out in' 07. "We should get our troops out of Iraq this year. No residual forces left behind. We must remove all of our troops. There should be no residual U.S. forces left in Iraq." Now, I want to compare that to what you said in your book, "Between Worlds," which just came out about 18 months ago. You write this: "At this point … we must see this mission through. We mustn’t stay in Iraq past the point where the new government asks us to leave, but neither can we unilaterally pull out before the Iraqis have achieved control over their own internal security. We owe them the opportunity to make their democracy work. We must not undermine their efforts now." That's exactly what you're doing,
undermining their efforts.

GOV. RICHARDSON: Tim, I know this region well. I was U.N. ambassador. Eighty percent of my time was spent on the Iraq issue. I faced down Saddam Hussein, brought back two American hostages. I know the region well. I know the leaders there. I regret not having pushed more diplomatically early on with President Bush. I do regret that. But look where we are now. There’s a civil war, there’s sectarian conflict. Right now I believe we must withdraw all our troops by the end of this calendar year with no residual forces because our troops today are a target. We are viewed...

MR. RUSSERT: So, but then--though--to be sure--that’s totally contrary to what you wrote in your book. So you’re now, in effect, saying what you wrote in the book is no longer operative.

GOV. RICHARDSON: No, Tim, like everybody else, when we went into Iraq, I wanted to support the troops. But after incompetency, deceitfulness by this administration, the fact that there’s no weapons of mass destruction, the link to al-Qaeda was enormously suspect, what we now have is 61 percent of the Iraqi people feel it’s OK to shoot an American soldier, 71 percent Sunni, Shia want us out of Iraq. We--there is no basis for us to be there. What we need to do is disengage our troops but set up a diplomatic effort, three-pronged: One, a reconciliation of all the three religious and ethnic groups in Iraq--the Sunni, the Shia and the Kurds--for a division of power, coalition government, divide up oil revenues, a date and type separation of three entities, an all-Muslim peacekeeping force that I believe could provide security for Iraq, along with the Iraqis, and then a donor conference to deal with reconstruction.

Our troops have done a magnificent job, but now they have become targets. Now it’s up to the Iraqis to take over. And you know, Tim, the Iraqis are not necessarily today helpless. They have 300,000 security forces, they have $150 billion in oil reserves, they’ve had three elections, so they have, they have a constitution, they have democratic institutions. It is time for them to take over.

MR. RUSSERT: But there’s only 6,000 Iraqi troops that can stand alone and operate independently of U.S. forces.

GOV. RICHARDSON: Yeah, but there’s 300 other security forces that, that are--this was--this came out of the Department of Defense, May the 6th, that there’s over 330,000 security forces that are being trained. One of the problems, Tim, is the Maliki government is not stepping up to the plate in two key areas: one, national reconciliation between the Sunni and the Shia; and then secondly, in terms of training their own troops, they’re slow, there’s bureaucracy. Perhaps they don’t have the political will.

I believe that our obsession with Iraq, Tim, has cost us enormously. Not just prestige around the world, but also in focusing on the major threats of this country, which are international terrorism, nuclear terrorism, building an international coalition, nuclear proliferation, a loose nuclear weapon in the
hand of rogue nations, global climate change. So many other priorities. Darfur, issues relating to poverty, AIDS, refugees, the status of women around the world, sexual slavery, rape. There's so many other priorities that we're not focusing on because we have an obsession with Iraq.

MR. RUSSERT: Governor, your proposal of an immediate troop withdrawal this year is not being supported by anyone of consequence. Can you name one military expert who says that’s the way to go?

GOV. RICHARDSON: Well, I have a military adviser, very distinguished general, Robert Gard, former head of the National Defense University, decorated soldier. I have many other advisers that believe that this is the—Philip Coyle, assistant secretary of Weapons and Evaluation, who was on the BRAC Commission. Tim, a lot of experts...

MR. RUSSERT: And they say withdraw troops this year?

GOV. RICHARDSON: They support my plan.

MR. RUSSERT: No residual force?

GOV. RICHARDSON: They, they support my plan. And, Tim, you know, a lot of these experts that, that, that are all over the Beltway are the ones that got us into this mess. I know the region, I’ve been to Iraq. I, I know the leaders in the region. I believe what is needed is a regional approach that also deals with the Israeli-Palestinian issue, that also deals with talking to Iran and Syria as part of a solution, of very tough negotiations with those two countries.

MR. RUSSERT: The New York Times today, front page lead story, talked to 40 Iraqi politicians, citizens, consulted other experts in the field, and not a one believes that an immediate withdrawal is viable. General Anthony Zinni, former head of U.S. Central Command, who opposed the war, said it’s going to take five to seven years for that area to stabilize. Do you really believe that an immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops would not lead to complete chaos in Iraq and the region?

GOV. RICHARDSON: There is chaos now. There's civil war, there's sectarian conflict. Look at the...

MR. RUSSERT: And it wouldn’t worse—it wouldn’t worsen...

GOV. RICHARDSON: Look, look at the...

MR. RUSSERT: If U.S. troops left, would it worsen?

GOV. RICHARDSON: No. Because our troops are the targets. And, Tim, you cannot start reconciliation, you cannot start unifying the region and protecting our interests until everyone believes that the American military presence is, is going to go. Now, you know, I—I’m for securing our embassy, obviously, with, with Marine personnel. But I do believe, Tim, that what is
critically important now is a diplomatic effort, a regional effort. It's called talking to your enemies. Like Yitzhak Rabin said, you don't make peace with your friends, you make peace with your enemies. It means talking to Iran, it means talking to Syria, getting an all-Muslim peacekeeping force--Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia--to be part of an all-Muslim effort that secures Iraq. And then the Iraqis have to step up and do it.

MR. RUSSERT: If Iraq completely destabilized, if you withdraw--withdrew troops, would you be willing to consider sending troops back in to stabilize it?

GOV. RICHARDSON: What I would do, Tim, is I would have troops where they're wanted, in Kuwait. We have bases there, in Bahrain. I would have a contingency in case of an international terrorist attack. I mean, al-Qaeda is our enemy. Our involvement in Iraq has led us to fail to focus on the true threat, al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, in the region. Nuclear proliferation, a loose piece of plutonium or uranium that is transported into some of our, some of our cities. The fact that we don't have a viable homeland security policy in this country to protect our ports, our aircraft.

MR. RUSSERT: But again, again, if the situation in Iraq deteriorated and further destabilized, all-out civil war spilling over into surrounding countries, would you consider sending troops back in to stabilize?

GOV. RICHARDSON: You, you know, a president would never preclude a military option. But I would be ready to provide the Iraqis with air power, special forces protection. There would be troops in the region that, that, that would be available for any contingency. But the problem now, Tim, is our presence has caused what I believe is a civil war, a sectarian conflict. And the best policy right now that protects our interest is for us to disengage. And I would do it by the end of this calendar year. Let the military decide that. But if you leave residual troops--and that is the difference between my position and all the other candidates, that our residual troops--what is it, 20,000 out of the 130,000 that are there? That is a significant portion. The Iraqis should be in charge of security and protecting our embassy and our personnel that stay there.

MR. RUSSERT: So you regret supporting the war initially?

GOV. RICHARDSON: Yes, I do. It was a mistake. But I was pushing intensively, at the time, for more diplomatic engagement, to go to the United Nations, to bring international support for our goals, to go to NATO, to, to get strong Security Council resolutions. I didn't push hard enough. I didn't push hard enough. But, you know, I, I didn't have the intelligence everybody else had. Incompetence, deceitfulness…

MR. RUSSERT: But you said you knew more about the region than anybody else.

GOV. RICHARDSON: Well, yeah.

MR. RUSSERT: So it was a mistake?
GOV. RICHARDSON: Yes, it was a mistake. It was a mistake. I, I openly state that.

MR. RUSSERT: Let me ask you about a controversy that has arisen from some speech you’ve been giving on the stump, particularly in New Hampshire, regarding a mother from New Mexico. Here’s the headline from the Associated Press: "Mother of fallen Marine says Richardson misrepresented conversation with her."

"On the campaign trail, presidential hopeful Bill Richardson tells a moving story about a New Mexico Marine killed in Iraq and his mom. But is it true?

"Three years ago, Richardson attended a memorial service for Lance Corporal Aaron Austin, 21, who died in April" of "2004. As he campaigns for the Democratic nomination, the New Mexico governor often recounts an emotional conversation with Austin’s mother, saying she thanked him for the federal death benefits she had received and even showed him the government check.

"In speeches in New Hampshire, Richardson has gotten Austin’s name wrong at least once," "age wrong at least twice. He also has called Austin the first New Mexico soldier killed in Iraq--instead of the third.

"But that’s not what bothers the Marine’s mother, De'on Miller, of Lovington, New Mexico, who says the conversation about money never took place. "I don’t know a person rich or poor that would be told that" her "only living child has been killed, and you’re going to strike up a money conversation? Bill Richardson needs to stop pushing this lie. Aaron’s name had better not be used again in any way. Not mine either. A full written apology is due me for this.'" Will you apologize to her?

GOV. RICHARDSON: Tim, she--we have different recollections. That family is heroic, that young man is heroic. But let me tell you what that--my attending that ceremony caused. It inspired me to go to the New Mexico legislature and propose a $250,000 death benefit--life insurance--for every National Guardsman in New Mexico. It’s now $400,000. It passed. I made it happen. And then 30 other states--I went to the National Governors Association, and we pushed this--30 other states have made this happen. And the federal death benefit has gone up.

Now, I, I fully respect that family. We have different recollections. But that’s where I learned, at that ceremony, that the death benefit for our soldiers was $11,000. And look, Tim, I am not going to--there is nobody that has done more for veterans, any governor, I believe, than I have. No state income tax for enlisted people. I was just in North Korea two months ago, and I brought back--I’ve been working on this for years--the remains of six Americans from the Korean War. All kinds of initiatives, such as this life insurance policy that has been...

MR. RUSSERT: But if it troubles her, out of respect for Mrs. Miller and her son Aaron Austin, will you stop using his name and her name?
GOV. RICHARDSON: Yes, I will. I will do that. But we just have different recollections, Tim, and--but, but that family is honorable. I attended that service. I was really moved. You know, I call as many of the mothers of New Mexico soldiers that’ve been killed. But no one will ever question my commitment to help our veterans. I was in North Korea. I rescued--I helped rescue, helped push forward the release of--many years ago--of, of an American helicopter pilot. So I believe very strongly that we have to stand up for our veterans when they come back, coming back PTSD, they're not getting the help that they deserve.

MR. RUSSERT: But if Mrs. Miller feels used, you would apologize for it.

GOV. RICHARDSON: Well, Tim, I--that’s where I learned about this death benefit. There was an individual there that saw a piece of paper being given to me. I, I don’t want to get into this. I want this to--I respect that woman. I will not mention it again.

MR. RUSSERT: And you're sorry?

GOV. RICHARDSON: Well, I’m sorry for the way she feels, but I believe I acted honorably. Look at the result. The result was $400,000 life insurance for New Mexico National Guardsmen that served and then 30 states that covered all their veterans. They followed New Mexico’s lead. They followed my lead. The federal death benefit, which was shameful, $11,000, $12,000 is now significantly higher.

MR. RUSSERT: Let me turn to immigration. Last week this is what all the newspapers said. "The Senate’s compromise immigration bill is forcing the presidential candidates to confront a divisive issue. New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson praised the bill. 'This legislation makes a good start" towards "re-securing our Southern border.'" A few days later this headline appeared. "Hispanic presidential hopeful confronts immigration debate. On Wednesday Richardson said that after ready the immigration bill in detail, he decided to oppose it, saying the measure placed too great a burden on immigrants, tearing apart families that wanted to settle in the U.S., creating a permanent tier of second-class immigrant workers and financing a border fence. This is fundamentally flawed in its current form and I would oppose it. We need bipartisanism, we also need legislation that's compassionate. I’m not sure this is it.'" How can you be for it and 72 hours later against it?

GOV. RICHARDSON: Well, no, this is what happened. I was announcing for president, and the day before, I saw a summary of a bill that had been proposed in the Senate. And the summary, I believed, contained essential elements of a comprehensive immigration reform bill. One, that there be tougher border security, doubling of border patrol agents. That’s good. And two, a legalization program for the 12 million that are here. Three, it also contained penalties for employers that knowingly hired illegal workers. I thought that was all good. The bill is then presented, and I read it the next day, and it contained some problems. Now, I praise the Congress and the
president for, in a bipartisan way, putting something forward that is a good start. But the problem, Tim--look, I deal with this issue every day. I'm a border governor. Two years ago, I declared a border emergency in New Mexico because the flow of people and drugs were harming New Mexico. So I have strong qualifications on this issue. I've been dealing it--with it for years. The problem with the immigration bill, the way I read it now, Tim, is one, it separates families. It gives--it gives too much credence to job skills rather than families. The essence of all our immigration laws have been to preserve families, and this separates families. Secondly, a guest worker program. The guest worker program, first posting, should be to protect American workers to have the, the top job, to, to have the jobs and not the guest workers. There are no labor protections for those guest workers. And then third, what I also saw in the bill that was not reported in the summaries is that it's good to have more border guards, and we have to double them, and there's been a problem because the federal government has not trained enough to make that happen. But the fence, the fence, the wall between Mexico and the United States, there's more funding for it. This wall is wrong. This wall is a terrible symbol between two countries that are friends. And you're going to have a 10-foot wall, and what's going to happen is there's going to be 11-foot ladders going over that wall construct...

MR. RUSSERT: The wall hasn't worked?

GOV. RICHARDSON: No, it hasn't worked.

MR. RUSSERT: Anywhere along the border, the fence hasn't worked.

GOV. RICHARDSON: It hasn't worked. What has worked is more border patrols. What has worked is some National Guardsmen. What has worked is some technology. It's made the program better. But, Tim, we got to talk to Mexico, our friend, get them to do more. In fact, get them to stop giving maps to illegal workers on the most porous areas to court. And we also need to raise the legal immigration limits, the backlogs of workers that we need--Europeans, others that--Indians, H1B visas for job competitiveness skills.

MR. RUSSERT: I'm going to ask you in a second about a comment made by Brian Sanderoff who analyzes public opinion in, in New Mexico. But listening to you, you declared a border emergency, and yet you're against the fence. You were for illegal immigrants obtaining driver's licenses, and you were for legislation that would permit illegal immigrants' children to get college scholarships. It seems as, as if you're on both sides of the issue. This is what Brian Sanderoff said: "That's Bill. He's hard to pigeonhole as being definitely anti-immigration or pro-immigration. He's going to take a middle stance where he'll seem to have positions on both sides of the fence."

GOV. RICHARDSON: I'm a governor. I have to deal with this issue every day. Driver's licenses, law enforcement said to me we've got concerns about leaving the scene of a crime. If you want to find a way to keep illegal immigrants, you know where they are, you give them a driver's license. It helps with--they all get insured, it helps with traffic safety. I believe education
is the key. Yeah, I was for kids of illegal immigrants, if they fulfill the same academic requirements as New Mexico kids, to be eligible for a scholarship. Tim, I believe we have to bring the 12 million undocumented workers out of the shadows, set up a standard where they speak English, if they pass background checks, pay back taxes, obey the laws, embrace American values, give them a chance, a path to citizenship, not amnesty.

MR. RUSSERT: That is amnesty.

GOV. RICHARDSON: That—no, it isn't amnesty.

MR. RUSSERT: Would you send them back?

GOV. RICHARDSON: They have to go back, under the law, to reapply.

MR. RUSSERT: The whole—all the families, entire families?

GOV. RICHARDSON: No, just the head of household, under this bill. Under this…

MR. RUSSERT: You would—would you support that?

GOV. RICHARDSON: If it’s the head of household, and there’s a visa requirement that they can come back, I think that’s, that’s all right. Look, this bill that Congress has made with the president, a good start. I acknowledge that. It has the basic elements. But the key problem with the bill now is it separates families. There are children of illegal immigrants that are American citizens because they’re born here. That’s the Constitution. What we need is a practical solution that involves foreign policy, saying to Mexico also, "Hey, you guys have to, you know, work to give your folks jobs…

MR. RUSSERT: But bottom line, you would want people who came here illegally to be able to stay here with their legally-born children?

GOV. RICHARDSON: Yes. If they fulfill…

MR. RUSSERT: And become—and become U.S. citizens?

GOV. RICHARDSON: Eventually, over a 12-year period, following those benchmarks that I mentioned.

MR. RUSSERT: Is that rewarding breaking the law?

GOV. RICHARDSON: They have to pay a fine for breaking, for breaking the law. They have to do that.

MR. RUSSERT: But a couple thousand dollars isn’t…

GOV. RICHARDSON: No, well no, it’s—I think one of the bills has close to 10. I—you know, this is a 400-page bill. I’m—look, this is not an excuse,
I’m out on the campaign trail, I’m going one--every day, a different state. And--but I do believe that the Congress needs to fix this. Until then, I'm going to oppose it, because it's not right, Tim.

MR. RUSSERT: Let me show you a commercial you have seen quite a bit, but this is running on your behalf in some key states across the country, an ad paid for by the Richardson for President Committee. Let's watch.

(Videotape, TV commercial)

Unidentified Man: (To Richardson) Mm-hmm. Huh. OK, 14 years in Congress; U.N. ambassador; secretary of energy; governor of New Mexico; negotiated with dictators in Iraq, North Korea, Cuba, Zaire, Nigeria, Yugoslavia, Kenya; got a cease-fire in Darfur; nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize four times. So what makes you think you can be president?

GOV. RICHARDSON: I'm Bill Richardson, and I approved this message.

(End videotape)

MR. RUSSERT: You're running on your resume.

GOV. RICHARDSON: I'm running on my record. And the reason for that ad, Tim, is look, I'm an insurgent candidate. You've got to do things differently. I'm also positive. You know, politicians take themselves too seriously. I've had--I've had ads that poked fun at myself, like this one. I was trying to make the case that I'm the best candidate to be president. I have the record. I've been a U.N. ambassador, I have foreign policy experience. I have energy experience, I know how to make us energy independent. I've been a governor, I've created 80,000 jobs, insured kids under five. New Mexico's economy is in good shape, because some of the policies we've taken. Our schools are better. I am trying to get over the fact that this should be an election not necessarily based on celebrity, not necessarily based on who has the most money, which I don't. But I am competitive. I'll have enough to get my message over. But that the American people need somebody that can bring this country together. And all my life I've done that, as, as a diplomat, as a, as a diplomatic troubleshooter, bringing hostages back. As a governor, as a congressman of 15 years. So yeah, I'm trying to draw attention not just to my, to my record, but the fact that I can bring people together. The country is bitterly divided. We need to regain our luster internationally. We need to regain our international moral authority, which we have lost after these six years. I believe I know how to bring America back internationally, be a president for the middle class, improve our schools, universal health care. That was what I'm trying to get through in that message.

MR. RUSSERT: But let's go through the resume a little bit. First, there's governor of New Mexico. As you well know, they rank states in a whole variety of categories from one being the best, 50th being the worst. This is New Mexico's scorecard, and you are the governor. Percent of people living below the poverty line, you're 48. Percent of children below 48. Median family income, 47. People without health insurance, 49. Children without health
insurance, 46. Teen high school dropouts, 47. Death rate due to firearms, 48. Violent crime rate, 46. You’re the very bottom of all those statistics of all 50 states, and you’re the governor for five years.

GOV. RICHARDSON: Well, Tim, let me just say that we’ve made enormous progress in all of those areas. Let me, let me talk to you about child poverty. I followed eight years of a Republican administration that did not invest in health care. What I have done as governor is I’ve insured every child under five. Secondly, I’ve gotten rid of junk food in schools. Through my wife Barbara’s efforts, we’ve increased immunization rates. We have expanded health care access to working families. As president, I would be a president for the middle class. I would deal with these poverty issues. What would I do as president? One, unionizing. That is critically important. Only 8 percent of our people are unionized. I think a union gives a family an opportunity for health care. I’d expand the child care tax credit. I would expand the earned income tax credit. I have cut taxes for the middle class in New Mexico. I have cut taxes for working moms. For working families I’ve cut taxes. We have significantly improved in the poverty area. I could give you similar statistics in health care and education, the...

MR. RUSSERT: But these rankings are troubling.

GOV. RICHARDSON: Well, we’re a poor state, Tim, but the fact is that we have been moving forward. And I was re-elected with 69 percent of the vote, 40 percent Republican. I have been given very strong rankings as a, as a governor. Governors deal with problems directly, Tim. This is why I believe historically this nation has elected governors. I balanced budgets five times. At the same time that I balance budgets, we’ve given tax cuts to every New Mexican. We’ve increased spending on education and health care to attack some of those problems that you’ve seen.

MR. RUSSERT: We’re going to take a quick break and come back and talk more about your resume and about your position on the issues.

GOV. RICHARDSON: Sure.

MR. RUSSERT: Bill Richardson is our guest, Meet the Candidates 2008 series. He’s running for the Democratic presidential nomination. We’ll be right back.

(Announcements)

MR. RUSSERT: More of Meet the Candidates 2008, Democrat Bill Richardson. He’s running for president, and he’s the governor of New Mexico. After this station break.

(Announcements)

MR. RUSSERT: We’re back with Democratic candidate for president, Governor Bill Richardson of New Mexico. We’re talking about his background, his positions.
You were secretary of energy. This is the way The Washington Post described your tenure: "On Richardson's watch at the Department of Energy, there were allegations that nuclear secrets from Los Alamos National Laboratory had turned up in China. Richardson was roundly criticized in Congress for his handling of the alleged breach, for the botched case against Taiwan-born Los Alamos scientist Wen Ho Lee, and for lax security at the country’s national labs. It killed his chance of becoming Al Gore's running mate in 2000." Do you agree with that?

GOV. RICHARDSON: Well, it’s probably true. But I believe I had a good record as secretary of energy. I got, for instance, energy efficiency in appliances. For example, air conditioning is 30 percent more energy efficient because of an initiative that I took. I helped with oil prices around the world by traveling to OPEC countries. I believe also we had significant advances in our nuclear proliferation initiatives with Russia and loose nuclear weapons. And lastly, I’m very proud of this, what I did, Tim. A lot of our nuclear workers, for years, had not gotten compensation for some of their medical cases because they were performing work in some of our nuclear weapons complexes. I pushed through the Congress an initiative that I started with some DOE officials to compensate those nuclear workers.

Of course, yeah—we had a stormy tenure. We had some issues with the nuclear secrets issues and Wen Ho Lee. But I think on the whole I was a good energy secretary.

MR. RUSSERT: But this comment that you made in 1999, "I can assure the American people that their nuclear secrets are now safe at the labs."
The--President Clinton's foreign intelligence advisory board, fellow members of your administration, said you should not have said that, it just wasn’t true.

GOV. RICHARDSON: That is correct, Tim. There were problems, and there have been ongoing problems, too, with nuclear secrets at the national laboratories. But I took action. I increased funding for cybersecurity. I ordered polygraph tests for some of the employees. It was very unpopular. We also appointed a security czar to deal with the problem. But the reality of those nuclear secrets, a week later after they were misplaced, or sometime later, they were found behind a copy machine. But there are still serious ongoing problems that need to be addressed.

MR. RUSSERT: And you should not have said that.

GOV. RICHARDSON: I should not have said that. But I believe with the actions I took, I believe with the work of the FBI and the labs—I mean, I ordered very intensive actions that, that we had secured significantly some of those secrets.

MR. RUSSERT: You have put a very comprehensive energy plan on your Web site. You say you want to be the energy president. One thing that caught my interest was that nuclear power should be part of the mix. You're in favor of nuclear power?
GOV. RICHARDSON: I believe it should be part of the mix. I’m not—I think the future for Americans’ energy independence, and there I believe we need an Apollo program. And I believe I’m the greenest governor in this country.

MR. RUSSERT: What would you do with the nuclear waste?

GOV. RICHARDSON: Well, what I would do, Tim, is I would—technology I think is the answer. I would not put it in Yucca Mountain, because when I was secretary it was obvious that it had environmental problems. It had water problems, there were issues relating to transporting that waste to Nevada. I don’t believe there’s another solution that has been advanced, and that is to store some of the waste at existing sites or in regional sites. I believe the answer is technology. What I would do is get our national laboratories to come up with a technological solution to dispose of this waste.

MR. RUSSERT: You also say that you would have fuel standards for automobiles to 50 miles per gallon in 2020. The automobile industry, Standard & Poor’s, has now weighed in, saying that you could—that would increase the cost of a car or truck in this country by $6,000. The Detroit News editorialized that real possibility you could bankrupt the American automobile industry with that proposal.

GOV. RICHARDSON: That’s wrong. We must do it. We must become energy independent because it affects our national security. It affects—gasoline prices, this morning I saw the average around the country, $3.23. We must have fuel standards, and I believe it’s realistic with a 100 mile-per-gallon flex-fuel vehicle, great technology that we can develop. Also requiring that, by that same year, Tim, that 30 percent of America’s electricity be renewable energy. We have got to address global climate change by 2020, a reduction of 20 percent greenhouse gas emissions, mandatory cap and trade system.

Look, Tim, you know, here in Washington, all you hear about is this is not possible, it won’t pass the Congress. We must do it. I would lead an Apollo program like John F. Kennedy did—and I’m no John F. Kennedy—that—like when he went to the moon in 10 years, I believe we can reduce our dependence on foreign oil—which is imported oil, which is 65 percent, that is dangerous, countries that are not friendly to us—to 10 percent, with massive public and private investment in renewable technologies, in solar, wind, biomass, fuel cells, distributed generation, renewable fuels, ethanol, biodiesel, biofuels, investments, tax incentives, and conservation. I would ask the American people—you know, I’m going to say a word that may not be very popular—to sacrifice a little bit for the common good, to be greener in their way of life—lighting, appliances, air conditioning, when it comes to washing machines, driving efficient vehicles.

But back to your vehicles issue, Tim. We have the technology to have fuel efficient engines. We had a program at the Department of Energy with the auto companies, with Toyota, with the Japanese companies, to develop batteries and fuel cells and efficient engines, so that you can have an SUV, but with a fuel efficient engine that somehow helps us—you know what? What, what really
upset me, I just saw that the Bush administration once again said to the
Germans we’re not going to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, just like the
rest of the world should. I would launch a major diplomatic initiative to say
to China and India and developing countries that America is going to be a
leader in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, a cap and trade system that is
mandatory. We have to do these things on a mandatory basis.

MR. RUSSERT: Governor, when you left your position as secretary of energy,
however, you did join two boards—Valero Energy and Diamond Offshore Drilling.
Valero Energy, as you know, they are very much involved in
refiner—refining. The chairman, then CEO, Bill Greehey, boasted that
tighter supplies of gasoline "had provided outstanding profit margins for us.
The outlook for the next year is even better," as the Boston Herald says,
which means for car drivers even worse. You have significant stock holdings
in that company. Would you divest yourself of a company that is bragging
about all the money they made over higher gasoline prices?

GOV. RICHARDSON: Well, I already got rid of the stock.

MR. RUSSERT: It’s gone?

GOV. RICHARDSON: Yeah.

MR. RUSSERT: Do you regret going on their board?

GOV. RICHARDSON: No. No, I don’t. I have to earn a living. I
left—remember, when we left the Clinton administration in 2000, I had to earn
a living. I’m not against oil companies per se. Why, why would I—I’m no
against oil production. I strongly favor renewable energy, and I believe the
oil companies, you know, should not get the tax breaks they’re getting.

MR. RUSSERT: But you made a lot of money off the company.

GOV. RICHARDSON: No, I didn’t make a lot of—compared to other
candidates—come on, Tim, you know that. I, I went on those two boards. I
also went on the board for the Natural Resources Defense Council, the
strongest environmental organization. There’s nothing wrong with being on
energy boards. I have to earn a living.

MR. RUSSERT: Is there...

GOV. RICHARDSON: I’d always been in government.

MR. RUSSERT: Is there anything wrong with outstanding profit margins, the
outlook is brighter for the future because of tighter supplies?

GOV. RICHARDSON: Well, look, I do believe some of the tax breaks in the last
energy bill that the oil companies, coal and nuclear are getting, I would get
rid of those. I’ve always been very outspoken on these issues. I don’t
believe there’s anything wrong with trying to earn a living.
MR. RUSSERT: On a company that makes money off high--higher gasoline prices for consumers.

GOV. RICHARDSON: It's a refining company. It's a good company, Tim. And that, that guy the CEO is a first-rate individual who cares about energy security in this country.

MR. RUSSERT: Let me turn to gun control, and this is an article from your Sante Fe Mexican newspaper. "Listening to U.S. Representative Bill Richardson"--senior congressman--"explain his position on gun control to a Sante Fe audience is like watching Fred Astaire dance. 'I voted to repeal the assault weapons ban because it's always been my view that occasionally a member of Congress on an issue where he or she has some difficulty in justifying a vote, that I should respect the wishes of my constituents. In this case, the strong majority favor repealing the ban. That doesn't mean it's the right vote.'"

You voted to ban assault weapons, uzis, street sweepers, then you voted to repeal it, and you're basically saying, "Well I know it's not the right vote but my constituents want it, therefore, I'll give it to them."

GOV. RICHARDSON: Well, listen, I know--I've been in public life 25 years. I was the whip when President Clinton was--I was the whip, in other words, in charge of getting some of those votes for the crime bill, which put 100,000 cops on the street, which took some of those initiatives. But, look, Tim, you know, I--I'm a gun owner. I'm a western governor. I believe the issue is not gun control. The issue, as, as happened in, in Virginia Tech where I, I just--those--the tragedy there, the issue is instant background checks. I am for instant background--I am for a bill that Carolyn McCarthy is doing now in the House of Representatives which tightens background checks, which, which says...

MR. RUSSERT: Well, why do hunters need street sweepers or uzi machine guns. You voted to ban those. As president, would you seek to ban assault weapons.

GOV. RICHARDSON: Tim, Tim, the assault weapons ban did not work. It didn't work.

MR. RUSSERT: So you would...

GOV. RICHARDSON: It didn't work.

MR. RUSSERT: You wouldn't do that as president?

GOV. RICHARDSON: It didn't work. What I would do is I would focus more of our efforts--for instance, background checks with those with criminal backgrounds and the mentally ill. We have to tighten up those background checks. I am for doing that. I am for do--but the problem is the states don't have the database, the resources.

MR. RUSSERT: OK. You received the endorsement of the National Rifle
Association, NRA, running for governor. There’s a picture of you at their podium heartily accepting their endorsement. Would you accept the endorsement of the NRA for president?

GOV. RICHARDSON: Yes, I would. I’m a gun owner. You know, Tim, gun control shouldn’t be a litmus test in the Democratic Party. I am for reasonable controls on—I don’t want to see uzis when you’re hunting, obviously, but…

MR. RUSSERT: But you wouldn’t ban them.

GOV. RICHARDSON: …this is the West. But, Tim, I’m a western governor. It’s a cultural issue. I am for strong law enforcement, putting criminals—I have a very strong law enforcement record. I believe it’s not necessarily a gun control issue. Let’s look at some of the issues affecting the mentally ill, the fact that mental health doesn’t have parity with other illnesses. The instant background checks are critically important. I’m for that. You don’t want anybody with a criminal background or mentally ill having these—and I think Representative McCarthy, who is one of the strongest advocates for gun control is—I am for that.

MR. RUSSERT: But the—being the NRA’s man is not going to be popular in some Democratic primaries.

GOV. RICHARDSON: Well, I—you know, I don’t, I don’t change my positions to run for president.

MR. RUSSERT: Well, you did on assault weapons.

GOV. RICHARDSON: I don’t change my positions.

MR. RUSSERT: But you did change it on assault weapons.

GOV. RICHARDSON: But, Tim, that was a vote as part of an overall bill that President Clinton proposed.

MR. RUSSERT: Let me move on to Gonzales—Alberto Gonzales, the attorney general. You called for his resignation.

GOV. RICHARDSON: Yeah.

MR. RUSSERT: You were reluctant to do so—earlier because you said he was Hispanic.

GOV. RICHARDSON: Yeah.

MR. RUSSERT: And people said, “How could race play into that?” Just because he’s Hispanic and you’re Hispanic, you gave him a little more license to do things that you didn’t agree with?

GOV. RICHARDSON: Yeah, I did. I’m not perfect. You know, I—you know, you want candidates that are—their consultants tell them, oh, on the one hand; on
the other hand. I gave him two extra days before I called for, for his resignation because he deserved a day in court. He went to the Senate Judiciary Committee. And then, in my judgment, he failed. He failed to answer questions. It was obvious he was politicizing the Justice Department. It was obvious that he was acting as if he was the lawyer for the president and the White House staff, a political lawyer, rather than the lawyer for the American people.

MR. RUSSERT: But when you say he did it because he's Hispanic, you're suggesting, "If he was white, black or Asian, I wouldn't have done it."

GOV. RICHARDSON: No, no, no. This is what I said, and, and this is what I feel. Look, the guy, a migrant worker's family, the highest ranking Hispanic in history. There's a human side to politics, Tim. And, and I'm, I'm admitting it. I said I gave him a few extra days. I, I have called for his resignation. And I was just really upset when I heard that he went to the--to, to Attorney General Ashcroft at the hospital in Georgetown trying to get him to sign an illegal eavesdropping--that really upset me. And I'd never thought I'd cheer for John Ashcroft, but I'm cheering for him now. But, you, you know, yeah. I, I admitted that. You're going to see me, I am, I am not a model of perfection. I believe I have strong principles. I believe that I am somebody that is going to tell the truth. I'm an unvarnished candidate. Yeah. I, I admitted that.

MR. RUSSERT: Well, another example of that, when Brian Williams asked you in the debate who your model Supreme Court justice was, you said Whizzer White, who is Byron White, appointed by President Kennedy. He wrote the dissent against Roe v. Wade for abortion rights. When you were told that the next day, you said, "That couldn't have happened. He was there in the '60s." Well, he served on the bench until 1993. I mean, shouldn't the president know who a Supreme Court justice is, how long he served, and what opinions he wrote?

GOV. RICHARDSON: You know, Whizzer White--I love John F. Kennedy. He's my hero in politics. He appointed Whizzer White. Whizzer White was a legal scholar. Whizzer White was an all-American football player. But he was also a legal scholar. By the way...

MR. RUSSERT: You disagree with him on Roe v. Wade.

GOV. RICHARDSON: He is...

MR. RUSSERT: Let's do a do--let's do a do-over. Who is your model Supreme Court justice?

GOV. RICHARDSON: I would say two: Ruth Bader Ginsberg, who wrote the dissenting opinion on, on the abortion issue, who I think is a distinguished scholar. Earl Warren, you know, who led a number of civil rights efforts. But, you know, I did not know that record of Whizzer White when I said that. I mean, Brian...

MR. RUSSERT: So we're off, we're off Whizzer White now?
GOV. RICHARDSON: Well, yeah. But, but, you know, he, he has said--I checked up afterwards--he said he was, I think he said something on, on the, he was for the right to choose, but he dissented on the opinion. Look, I was asked, I shouldn't have said that. So you're going to--I've been in public life 25 years. You're going to find a lot of these. It seems you've found them all here.

MR. RUSSERT: Well, I'm just trying to set the record and trying to give you a chance to respond, which is fair.

GOV. RICHARDSON: OK. No, yeah, that's fine.

MR. RUSSERT: One other thing that has surfaced in the campaign is that your resumes and other things had always said that you were drafted in major league baseball since 1966 by the Kansas City A's. You now say you were not drafted.

GOV. RICHARDSON: Well, at the time, if you look at that year, Tim, the draft was just starting. I was offered a contract, $25,000, by a, a, a, a Houston Colts scout by the name of Jack Johnson, who has a notarized statement that said that he--I was offered this. So I assumed that having been offered this, I had been drafted. And then when I played in the Cape Cod League as a pitcher, my arm was already starting to go because I'd thrown too many curveballs, that, that was in the program. So I always assumed it had happened. I made a mistake. I should have checked. But I was a decent player until I was about 21.

MR. RUSSERT: You spent a lot of time in, in Massachusetts. Are you a Red Sox fan?

GOV. RICHARDSON: I'm a Red Sox fan, but I got into trouble in New Hampshire. You know why? Because I said...

MR. RUSSERT: Luis Tiant, the fund-raiser. But, now, governor, this is very serious. In your book on page 18 it says...

GOV. RICHARDSON: No, about Mickey Mantle?

MR. RUSSERT: You said you're a Yankee fan!

GOV. RICHARDSON: No, no, no. I said--no, no, no.

MR. RUSSERT: I mean, you can, you can...

GOV. RICHARDSON: No, no, no, no.

MR. RUSSERT: ...you can have different views on immigration, assault weapons...

GOV. RICHARDSON: I, no no no no. No, what I said...
MR. RUSSERT: But when it comes to Red Sox, Yankees.

GOV. RICHARDSON: What I said, the Associated Press asked me, "If you weren't running for president, if you weren't running for president, what would you rather be?" I've always been a Red Sox fan, but I said if I weren't running for president I would like to be number seven, Mickey Mantle, playing center field for the New York Yankees.

MR. RUSSERT: "Because of Mickey Mantle, I became a Yankee fan."

GOV. RICHARDSON: I, my favorite team has always been the Red Sox.

MR. RUSSERT: You're a Red Sox fan.

GOV. RICHARDSON: I'm a Red Sox fan.

MR. RUSSERT: End of subject.

GOV. RICHARDSON: End of subject.

MR. RUSSERT: You better get rid of this book.

GOV. RICHARDSON: Oh, no! I'm also a Yankee fan. I also like...

MR. RUSSERT: Oh, now, wait a minute!

GOV. RICHARDSON: You can--Tim...

MR. RUSSERT: I guarantee...

GOV. RICHARDSON: No, I know, I got in trouble...

MR. RUSSERT: ...if you go--if you go to Yankee Stadium or Fenway, you cannot be both.

GOV. RICHARDSON: But I like--Mickey Mantle was my hero. If I weren't running for president, and the Associated Press asked me, I'd play center field for the New York--I wanted to be number seven. And--but I still love the Red Sox as a team. I mean, this is the thing about me, Tim. I can bring people together. I can unify people.

MR. RUSSERT: Yankee fans and Red Sox fans?

GOV. RICHARDSON: Yes.

MR. RUSSERT: Not a chance.

GOV. RICHARDSON: Well, I bet you I can.

MR. RUSSERT: Before you go, Iowa. Way back in '88, after the Democrats had not been successful winning the presidency, you said this: "One of
Richardson’s ideas for the Democrats’ next try at the presidency is to stop holding their first primary in Iowa because of the predominance of special interests in that state." You still say that?

GOV. RICHARDSON: 1988?

MR. RUSSERT: Yeah. Do you still share that view?

GOV. RICHARDSON: No.

MR. RUSSERT: You love Iowa.

GOV. RICHARDSON: No, I love Iowa.

MR. RUSSERT: I thought so.

GOV. RICHARDSON: You know, let me just say something. I’ve been campaigning in Iowa and New Hampshire. Those voters really scrutinize you, and I am for them staying as number one. I hope they move up their primaries because I believe that those states have--they, they feel that responsibility of scrutinizing everybody, they’re issue-oriented.

MR. RUSSERT: So Iowa no longer…

GOV. RICHARDSON: Well, that was 1988. I mean, I…

MR. RUSSERT: So they no longer have a predominance of special interests?

GOV. RICHARDSON: No, I haven’t noted any.

MR. RUSSERT: Governor Bill Richardson, we thank you for joining us and sharing your views for the full hour.

GOV. RICHARDSON: Thank you.

MR. RUSSERT: And our viewers should know, as part of our Meet the Candidates 2008 series, we’ve invited all the major candidates for president--all of them--to appear here for the full hour. We’re also archiving the transcripts and videos of the entire series on our Web sites so you the voters and viewers can review the candidates’ positions and answers throughout the entire campaign. We will be right back.

(Announcements)

MR. RUSSERT: And that’s all for today. If you want to find out more about Bill Richardson, including which world’s record he holds in 2002, check out our conversation on Take Two, Web extra, our Web site this afternoon at mtp.msnbc.com.

We’ll be back next week. If it’s Sunday, it’s MEET THE PRESS. And today and this weekend, we remember on Memorial Day all those men and women who gave
their lives for our freedom, and particularly their parents, who'll mourn and grieve their loss forever.