

**PL12-- PAT CHOATE INTERVIEW, "THE KINGMAKER SPEAKS",
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The kingmaker speaks

Pat Choate, the man behind the strategy to craft a left-right-center coalition with Pat Buchanan out front, reveals the plan to seize the White House next year.

By Fred Branfman and David Weir

November 11, 1999 | WASHINGTON -- Pat Buchanan's announcement Thursday that his Reform Party presidential campaign will be co-chaired by Bay Buchanan, Pat Choate and Lenora Fulani shows the party founded by Ross Perot is striving to build a "left-right-center" coalition, Pat Choate told Salon News.

The unlikely threesome came together in the belief that party members' agreement on economic nationalism can outweigh their disagreements over social issues like abortion and gay rights, Choate says.

In a wide-ranging interview, Choate also made it clear that they will not seek the assistance of Jesse Ventura, whom he criticizes for his controversial Playboy interview and also for seeking a "placeholder" candidate in 2000 so that Ventura himself can run in 2004.

By switching her faction's support from Ventura to the Choate/Buchanan alliance, the left-wing Fulani has helped build what now appears to be the dominant group within the Reform Party, Choate says.

The party clearly has work to do. A poll reported by the New York Times Wednesday found that 53 percent of the public have an unfavorable view of the Reform Party, with only 26 percent favorable, and 21 percent expressing no opinion. The party faces an uphill battle

to achieve its goal of getting 15-20 percent of the vote in the 2000 elections.

To do so, it will need to counter the sea of ridicule that has greeted Buchanan's recent book arguing that the U.S. should not have declared war on Hitler, and the widespread belief that he is anti-Semitic, homophobic, racist and sexist. It must also get him on the ballot in all 50 states, raise its stated goal of \$20 million in individual contributions (which are limited to \$1,000 each) and get its candidate into the presidential debates.

And it has to do all this with Jesse Ventura and Ross Perot lurking in the background, possibly even opposing its efforts.

It is too soon to count the party out, however, for one simple reason: The Clinton scandals have demonstrated how much politics and entertainment have merged in our time. And as Al Gore competes with George W. Bush for the boring center, the Reform Party has become the best show in town.

It is, after all, the only political party in the universe featuring a paranoid billionaire ("the Republicans were going to sabotage my daughter's wedding"); a former pro wrestler turned governor ("religion is for the weak-minded"); and gay-bashing commentator ("the poor homosexuals have declared war on nature and now nature is exacting its retribution") who is called a "Hitler-lover" by his pompadoured casino owner rival ("the only men who say they want intelligent women can't get models") -- a man who Wednesday's New York Times poll found has the highest negative ratings ever measured for anyone in the history of polling.

It's conceivable that the combination of entertainment value and \$12.6 million in federal matching funds could make the Reform Party a significant factor in the 2000 election. If Buchanan wins the party's nomination and takes enough votes away from presumed nominee George W. Bush, it could tip the election to his Democratic opponent, whether Al Gore or Bill Bradley. The party's populist economics could also potentially attract significant support from those losing in today's

economy. And, if he succeeds in fighting his way in, the Reform Party candidate could be a major influence on the presidential debates. This is especially true of Buchanan, a natural debater in the format created by TV.

Then there is the sheer unpredictability factor. It seemed inconceivable just two years ago that a professional wrestler could beat a sitting attorney general who bore Minnesota's most revered political name to become governor; or for that matter, that the president's poll ratings could rise after revelations of adultery with a woman young enough to be his daughter. Although it seems most likely right now that the Reform Party will be consigned to a major role only on the late-night joke circuit, there is always the possibility that its candidate will end up getting more support than anyone now believes.

If the party does succeed, it will in no small part be due to Choate's efforts. Choate, who ran as Ross Perot's vice presidential candidate in 1996, is generally credited with bringing Buchanan into the party and is today perhaps its major power broker.

Choate's odyssey has been an unusual one. An economist who identifies himself as an "insider's insider," he originally came to prominence in the 1970s by calling for repairing America's crumbling infrastructure, a cause mainly championed by liberal Democrats and labor. He then became a prominent neo-liberal guru to a wide variety of politicians, notably Gary Hart, who in his 1984 presidential race championed Choate's proposal for individual training accounts to allow workers to change jobs more easily.

In the late 1980s, while working for TRW in Washington, Choate took the fateful step that led him to break with the political establishment. He published a book, "Agents of Influence," an international bestseller that accused a wide variety of Washington's most prominent law firms, lobbyists and ex-politicians of betraying their country to foreign interests, especially Japan. He then joined forces with Perot, supporting his 1992 presidential run, before joining the ticket himself four years later.

Choate, who in May will publish "Stealing Ideas," a book on intellectual property, seems today to be enjoying life far more than when he was a mere policy wonk. He co-hosts a daily radio show with outgoing Reform Party chair Russ Verney, lives in a lovely rural area outside Washington with his wife Kay and clearly revels in his role as party kingmaker.

For many who knew Pat Choate in the 1970s and 1980s, however, the alliance with Pat Buchanan seems a strange one. As a person of enormous charm and knowledge about Washington's ways, Choate clearly admires Buchanan and defends him with gusto. But the mystery is why the highly respected Choate, who once stood at the pinnacle of Washington's policy establishment and still regards himself as a centrist, would so totally align himself with a right-wing social conservative.

Salon asked Choate to explain himself. If his answers represent a trend, then Buchanan may well end up having more influence over American politics than many would like to believe. In fact, if Buchanan succeeds in winning over more centrists like Choate in the year to come, the race for president will be a three-way affair.

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You've just announced an unusual coalition to support Pat Buchanan for the Reform Party nomination for president. What is it?

There are three co-chairs for the campaign -- Bay Buchanan, Lenora Fulani and me. It's a very nice balance. Lenora is a person of the left, Pat and Bay are persons of the right and, by and large, I'm a person of the center. We are putting together a left-right-center coalition, and we're saying "OK, here are four items we all agree upon -- trade policy, immigration, campaign reform and foreign policy." Imagine this. Pat Buchanan and Lenora Fulani are going to walk through the streets of Harlem, taking our program to the inner city.

Lenora and I strongly disagree with Buchanan on the abortion issue, and we have a whole list of other items we disagree on. But we can't do anything about even the items we agree on because we have a political system that is broken, that has been taken over by corporate interests. So our first overarching political priority, right-left-center, is real political reform.

What is your platform on political reform?

We have come to be governed by a corporate elite, who control and own both parties. That must be changed. You must open up democracy so it's possible for people other than the Republicans and Democrats to run. We should have public financing and strictly limit private contributions to \$1,000 -- with no PAC money, no soft money, no corporate money, no foreign money, no dirty money. Only American voters should be permitted to finance our campaigns. We are going to run a \$35 million campaign with no PAC money. We are going to run a straight campaign on public money and individual contributions. That's the way it should be done.

Secondly, we should have a common standard in this country on what it takes to get on the ballot and run for federal office. Right now it's balkanized into 50 states and D.C.

Third, we need real enforcement of the campaign laws that exist. We now have a sham called the Federal Election Commission, with three Republicans, three Democrats, and under law any campaign violations have to be dealt with by the FEC. And when the FEC deals with the issue, it usually dismisses major complaints against the two major parties. The general counsel of the FEC concluded that both the Clinton and Dole campaigns had major campaign violations in taking dirty money, foreign money and soft money. But by a 5-0 vote the commission rejected the advice of its own counsel and threw those away. We want the right of private civil action. If you're a candidate and your opponent goes out and takes Chinese money, which is a violation of a federal law, you should have a right through civil action to sue and get redress on that. Under the current law you can't have that.

What do you think of Buchanan's comments at the 1992 Republican Convention, that "there is a religious war going on in our country for the soul of America. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we will one day be as was the Cold War itself."

There is a cultural war under way, inside the United States. The core of that cultural war is whether we shall be one nation. Shall we be a melting pot of a country, where we share a common interest, a common history, a common language? Or are we going to balkanize this country into a hyphenated America? That's the issue, and it is destroying France, it is destroying Canada, it is destroying the Netherlands.

What about the social issues you disagree on? How can you justify working with Buchanan when he is so opposed to abortion, which you support?

You know, I don't agree with him on the social issues at all. I ran pro-choice, as did Perot. But you take his five campaign stands that his campaign is going to be run on. Four of those are straight out of the Reform Party platform and his platform. And in politics, any time you get four out of five, you close the deal immediately.

What case can you make to socially liberal voters that Pat Buchanan would not be an anathema to them on issues like abortion?

Let's say Pat was to succeed in putting in Supreme Court justices that would share his view, which is tough given the Senate. Their only remedy is to reverse Roe vs. Wade. Then it would become a democratic choice, a state-by-state choice. The furor on Roe vs. Wade is in part about the abortion issue. But it is also about the fact the decision took it out of the political process. Yeah, Pat Buchanan would try to overturn Roe vs. Wade. But it would then be democratically determined and, by the way, that is the way it should have been in the first place.

How do you respond to gay voters who are concerned about such Buchanan statements as "with 80,000 dead of AIDS, 3,000 more buried each month, our promiscuous homosexuals appear literally hell-bent on Satanism and suicide"?

Pat's wrong on that. AIDS is a virus and a disease, it's not a moral judgment.

Do you support gay marriage?

If people want to have gay marriage, they should have gay marriages. Anybody that wants to have a relationship, want to say my benefits will go here and there, they should have the right to it.

What about Buchanan's comment that "women are simply not endowed by nature with the same measures of single-minded ambition and the will to succeed in the fiercely competitive world of Western capitalism. The momma bird builds the nest. So it was, so it ever shall be. Ronald Reagan is not responsible for this, God is"?

I disagree with that, obviously. Look at who's running the campaign, two women. I'll tell you what the risk is on that statement, he runs the risk of being slapped on the side of the head by his sister Bay. And, by the way, the gender balance in the Reform Party is heavily for women - lots of women, smart, competent women, that in the other two parties are pushed aside. And, Jesus, they're brilliant in this party.

Normally when a candidate runs for office he or she is trying to expand their base. But the perception from the outside is that Buchanan's basic appeal is limited to a base of homophobic, racist, anti-Semitic white males.

That perception is wrong. First of all, we are going to very aggressively go out to bring blacks, Hispanics, minorities not only into the campaign but to vote for Buchanan. The person who is going to lead that effort is Dr. Lenora Fulani. Fulani is the first black woman to run for president on the ballot in 50 states, twice. She got a million signatures to put her on the ballot. She is a practicing Christian. She is

a Ph.D. psychologist. She has done more for grass-roots democracy than any other person in the country, even Jesse Jackson.

And it's a very simple message she's taking. That you've been used by the Democratic Party for years, they've put into place programs that have widened the income and wealth gap inside this country. They have put into place a system that punished children of the poor, who are disproportionately black. They have put into place a system that aggressively punished single mothers, who are disproportionately black, and that they have not earned your respect or your vote.

What is your position on welfare reform?

Pat Buchanan is against the welfare-reform bill. What's the purpose of welfare? Fundamentally, to get the money to the children. Now what does this bill do? It was punitive on the parents; and who does it hurt? The children. Bill and Hillary Clinton knew it. It was political expediency. They didn't need to do that. They were going to beat Bob Dole enough. It was cheap politics.

How would you help minorities?

You've got to be reviving the schools. None of this nonsense of partial Head Start. You have real funding on that, you put your money into excellence, into schools with kids. You've also got to expand your college and other programs. You've got to give people who are going to work with their hands the same access as people going to college. Lots of people are not cut out to go to college, to learn a trade. It's a very honest and significant way to make a living, you need to make role for them.

What role is Ross Perot taking at this point?

Totally neutral, in both statement and in fact. He's running his business full-time. He replaced about most of the top management of Perot Systems a year ago and took it public. He is sending his son to Europe, they're making a massive expansion there. So he is building and bankrolling a major electronic processing company.

He could have presumably stopped Buchanan if he wanted to.

He could have been the nominee if he wanted to. But Ross is neutral, he's going to let the members of the party select their nominee.

The presumption was that when Jesse Ventura's candidate, Jack Gargan, beat your candidate, Pat Benjamin, for party chair, this implied he had more support within the Reform Party than do you.

No, what swung the difference there was Lenora Fulani's support. Ventura had Minnesota, some delegate strength. It was Lenora's people who made the difference, Lenora swung it to Jesse, to break the influence and power of Russ Verney, the existing campaign chair.

How do you feel about Jesse Ventura?

I have an evolving attitude. I've had Jesse on my show several times and he's a very likable, engaging guy. And, for all the World Wrestling Federation buffoonery, he's really a hero. He served as a Navy SEAL, put his life on the line.

As a governor, I think he's doing a pretty darn good job on the governing side of it. And he also did something enormously important for the Reform Party. Before Jesse there was a media embargo where they would only talk to Perot. The power, the real power, is the power to ignore. And he broke that media embargo. It was enormously helpful.

He also made it clear that the Reform Party is composed of thousands of us. It's not just Ross Perot. Yes, he put up the money, he provided the leadership, but the rest of us really own the party. Up until Jesse it was "Ross Perot's Reform Party," like Ross Perot's car, Ross Perot's company. After Jesse it's never been that way again. It's now just the Reform Party. It was a major accomplishment.

The problem with Jesse is that he was catapulted into the position of a national figure before he had the experience to handle it. When

you're in national politics, there is no tougher game. I mean it's laughable when Donald Trump talks about all the tough New York real-estate guys he dealt with. They're minnows compared to the sharks in this pool.

So Jesse vastly overexposed himself, and he never should have done the Playboy interview.

What's your problem with the Playboy interview?

Jesse destroyed a major part of his base, both in Minnesota and nationally, with his interview. And in the process of doing that he destroyed a major portion of his influence within the Reform Party. His comments on religion and his seemingly condoning the Tailhook scandal, though he's equivocal in that part of the interview. But many people have interpreted that as being down on women. Those two things are killers.

But even prior to that, why was there a conflict between his side and your side?

Control. It's just about politics. Jesse clearly wants to run for president in the year 2004. Part of the convention he made with the people of Minnesota is that he would not run in 2000. So basically he wanted a stand-in, a Lowell Weicker or God knows who, to hold the seat until the year 2004. But you can't do that in politics. People don't vote for somebody who's holding your chair. You're either in it full bore to win or you're out of it. I mean, how many votes would Lowell Weicker get as a place-sitter? I mean give me a break.

Are there any differences in issues between you and Ventura?

Yeah, very different positions on trade and immigration, for example. He's very libertarian. But I really think we're past all that to be honest with you, I mean I think all of that is pre-Playboy.

Do you think he should leave the party?

My view is he made a major mistake, and he should be allowed to deal with it himself. But on the other hand Russ Verney has a positional responsibility. If he's calling for the resignation of Clinton, he should equally apply it to our own party.

Next page | Pat Buchanan is not anti-Semitic

How can you believe that Pat Buchanan can be a viable candidate, given that politics is perception, and the perception right now is that he is anti-Semitic, homophobic, sexist and racist?

Where does the charge hit? In the media, entertainment world, the intellectual community, Washington, New York and so forth. The way you deal with it is you just have to slog it out, literally, criticism after criticism, by putting it into context.

Well, let's slog it out on anti-Semitism, the charge that's attracted the most attention. We live in a sound-bite culture, and Buchanan's are that he blamed the Gulf War on the Israeli defense ministry and its "amen corner" in the U.S., referred to Congress as "Israeli-occupied territory," opposed Western intervention to stop Hitler whom he called a "great man," denied that the diesel engines at Treblinka could have killed people, supported Reagan's Bitberg speech, defends accused concentration camp guards, and has criticized Harvard for having too many Jews and Asians. Add it all up and Jews are worried. How do you respond?

Pat Buchanan is not anti-Semitic. Incidentally, none of this came out till he opposed the war in Iraq. Then suddenly he was an anti-Semite. Since then his critics take snippets, they can't point to whole sentences and paragraphs to support this vile demonization. It's McCarthyism from the left.

What about when he said, "There are only two groups that are beating the drums for war in the Middle East, the Israeli defense ministry and its amen corner in the United States"? He also focused on Abe Rosenthal, Charles Krauthammer, Richard Perle and Henry Kissinger; all Jews as William Buckley has noted. Why didn't he mention George Bush, Jim Baker, the Pentagon and the many other non-Jews who were far more responsible for the war?

He had a whole list of names. They focused on Safire, Rosenthal, Perle, Kissinger, Krauthammer, but he had a longer list including the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times. He had a whole series of institutions. They narrowed it down to that.

Is Congress Israeli-occupied territory?

I think it's a funny line and he does, too. It goes back to Menachim Begin at Camp David. He told Carter, "You take care of the Palestinians, I will take care of Congress." Carter was shocked. I've done a book on lobbying, AIPAC is one of the most powerful lobbies in this country. These are Americans, it's totally legitimate, they have the right to petition their government. But it's not legitimate to deny that that lobby is significant. That's the criticism. It's a statement of fact.

Was Hitler a "great man"?

The quote was in a review of John Toland's biography of Adolph Hitler. The critics have reached the point they don't even put in the ellipses. The first part of the sentence says that, to be sure, Adolph Hitler was an anti-Semite, racist, monster and so on, though at the same time he was so and so. He's paraphrasing Toland in his book.

What about the diesel fuel that he says didn't kill people at Treblinka?

That gets to the charge he denies the Holocaust. There is not one such statement anywhere by Pat Buchanan. Time and time again he has condemned Hitler and the Holocaust. Since his critics can't find whole sentences, they find code words like "Wall Street bankers." Wall

Street bankers has been a criticism of Wall Street that goes back to William Jennings Bryan and his "Crown of Gold" speech. The other code word they accuse him of is "Goldman Sachs" in his criticism of the Mexican buyout. But they never mention who was the lead banker for Mexico who got bailed out when they ran up \$18 billion in bad debt. It was Goldman Sachs, it was Bob Rubin.

That's the criticism. It's a legitimate criticism, not a code word. Let me ask a question: Why are people so willing to believe charges that are so easily disproved? What is going on here is demonization that cuts off free speech and cheapens the charge of anti-Semitism. It seems to me that the Jewish community should be the first to say we want this charge to be real when it is applied and not as specious as this.

Elie Wiesel condemned Buchanan, claiming he told him he supported Reagan's Bitberg speech.

The trip to Bitberg was laid on before Pat Buchanan came to the White House. He was not there; it was Michael Deaver.

Why, of all the oppressed people in the world, does he focus on people accused of being concentration-camp commanders like John Demjanjuk?

Were I a Jew I would respect Pat Buchanan for that, for a very simple reason. Who was the leading defender of Alfred Dreyfus? It was Victor Hugo. One writer took a man that the rest of the country hated. It recalls Frederick Douglass' line about Lincoln: "He had the courage to speak out in the faces of prejudice and few men have that." Demjanjuk was taken, stripped of his citizenship, taken to Israel and tried. It turned out the U.S. Justice Department had the wrong man. The Israeli Supreme Court so ruled. Now it took a lot of courage to defend an innocent man in the face of the attacks on Pat Buchanan.

What about the statement, "Now we really know who gets the shaft at Harvard -- white Christians." He's charged that too many Harvard

students are Jews and Asians. Do you agree that Harvard is biased against white Christians?

No, I don't think it's biased against white Christians. I think it is following set-asides and affirmative action. His point is you should be there by merit, period. Whatever the numbers come out by merit, that's fine.

But affirmative action and set-asides don't favor Jews and Asians.

His point is there are quotas, and there is affirmative action, and there are set-asides at Harvard.

But he singled out Asians and Jews.

Well, he singled them out because they are the beneficiaries. They're there. But it was an argument against quotas.

But there's no quota for Asians and Jews at Harvard. That doesn't make any sense. Which raises another question. Few people are going to get into all this detail. Who's going to defend Buchanan on all of this? It's not enough to put on yarmulkes.

No, he wouldn't do that. What he should do are things like the meeting that occurred five or six weeks ago, when I invited 12 to 13 of the leading Jewish members of our party. I asked they all read the book, take a look at all the criticism. We spent Sunday afternoon with Pat Buchanan. They are tough cookies, but they all came away saying he's not an anti-Semite.

Next page | The first cyber-party?

How many people are in the national headquarters of the Reform Party?

A couple, plus lawyers, accountants that we hire. They have a small budget to pay for Russ Verney, the Reform Party chairman, maybe

\$150,000 to \$200,000; in that range. But you know, the Democrat and Republican parties are 19th century artifacts. They're set up for very different times, when you had ward healers. You don't need the buildings, the 30,000 staffers or whatever.

The Reform Party is in many ways the first cyber-party, because we have thousands of people who are on these various Internet mailing lists, to whom we send our stuff, and they go out and campaign.

How many people wake up every morning and do something that day for the Reform Party?

Hundreds, hundreds, hundreds. You work at home, you're fully informed through the Net, you're able to communicate with vast numbers. You don't need the print room, you don't need the mail room. You write your message, you check it, you send it out and it's gone.

And we're all volunteers. As I said in accepting the co-chair of the Buchanan campaign, "I accept this in the tradition of the Reform Party as a non-paid volunteer." Now how much would I charge for 2,000 hours of my time per year? We have hundreds of people like that.

What's the scenario for the 2000 election?

Depending where the states are, you need 38 percent to win the presidency. That's your low number, you shoot for 41, 42 percent. Pat's going to get 10-15 percent right off the bat from the social conservatives; he'll just pull them straight out of what was the Republican Party because the Republicans have gone left; Gary Bauer will not be on that ticket.

He will pull another 10 or 15 percent out of the traditional Democratic Party; the Democratic Party is going right. It's gone dramatically right with Al From and the Democratic Leadership Council.

He'll get the independent vote. He'll do very well with the 18-35 year-old generation. Perot did super with them. It was Jesse Ventura's best cohort. This is the generation that filters through TV. What they're

looking for is conviction politics. They might not agree, but they want to know, "do you really believe this?" Well, the one thing you can say about Buchanan is we won't have a pollster, we don't need one. This is what we believe and that's it.

Are you implying you might win the election?

I'm serious. Yes, that's the way we're running the campaign, to win the election. A good place to go back and take a look was the 1996 Michigan primary, which were open primaries. Times were good in Michigan in 1996, they were booming. Buchanan drew 34 percent of the total vote. Now we bring in the independent voter, the new voter.

Have you thought about any vice presidential candidates yet?

Fundamentally, you need somebody that can draw heavily into the Democratic base like [former congresswoman] Marcy Kaptur, though she hasn't been approached. A Democrat with solid labor ties, who was there on the trade issues, economic nationalism and foreign policy.

What would be your goals short of winning the presidency?

If you don't win in 2000, that you can win in 2004. We need to win 25 percent of the vote. That gives you \$75 million to \$80 million for 2004.

What percent of the vote would you regard as a defeat?

Anything under 15 to 20 percent.

You have to get on the ballot in 30 more states for Buchanan to become the Reform Party nominee. What's involved?

It varies state by state. Overall, we have to get about 600,000 signatures. You've got to get it done by July. It won't be easy, it's going to require a lot of work, but we've got Matt Sawyer, who did the stuff for Perot, hired full-time. We'll do it. There's no question about that.

When would you receive the \$12 million?

After Aug. 13, after you're designated the nominee of the party by the convention in Long Beach.

How much money will you have?

We'll raise about \$20 million, from individual contributions up to \$1000. With the public money, that will give us \$30 million to \$35 million, which is all we need. Here's what you'll never see in our campaign. You'll not see 737s and 747s hired. You'll not see two hairdressers, a million aides, a staff of pollsters and speech writers. You will see a lot of this campaign using commercial flights. And when you sum all that up, we will use our money competitively with the major parties.

You won 8.6 percent of the vote in 1996. Do you think Buchanan will be able to do better than that this time?

Absolutely. It's a function of the debates. Half the voters in America make up their minds on the debates. If Perot and I had been in the debates, we'd have beaten Dole.

Do you think you'll be able to get into the debates?

Absolutely.

Why can't they exclude you again?

I'll tell you what, we will sue them, we will chase George Bush and Al Gore all over the country on this. If they're unwilling to debate Pat Buchanan, a certified third-party candidate, they're unfit to be president.

So they could exclude you, but you'll try to build political pressure to force them to do it.

If the debate commission excludes us, we're just going to take it straight to the other two candidates and say, "Hey, quit hiding behind the skirts of the debate commission here." Or with George Bush, I mean, "Your mommy can't protect you here anymore, come on out."

Have you been designated by the FEC as a national political party?

There's only three. We are designated in 1997. Now if they want to set something for other parties, let them do it.

Next page | "How do you escape being seen as a nut?"

You say your left-center-right coalition agrees on foreign policy. What's your position there?

The U.S. should not commit the nation to war unless there's a vital interest. And any time we do commit war, it should be done with the support of the American people through a vote of the U.S. Congress.

As you know, Buchanan's comments implying the U.S. should not have fought Hitler have created a firestorm. Do you believe it was wrong for the West, with the benefit of hindsight, not to have stopped Hitler from going into the Rhineland and to have signed the Munich agreement?

The West should have stopped him from going into the Rhineland. But that was France and Great Britain's responsibility, because they were the guarantors of the peace there.

We have become the France and Great Britain of the modern world, that is the world's greatest power. What responsibilities do we have?

There are places where you would send troops. You would not tolerate China invading Japan or Taiwan, or Russia breaking into Eastern Europe. But you don't go as the bouncer in every bar fight every place in the world.

Buchanan says that he has written his book to fight U.S. interventionism abroad. You seem to be saying, "Let them die in Rwanda, let them die in Kosovo." Unless we are directly attacked we don't have any role to play abroad in stopping genocide, in stopping crimes against humanity?

We don't. We didn't stop genocide in China, Russia, Africa, Tibet. We're saying we should not send our men and women to die or put their lives at risk unless one, it's in our vital national interest. And, two, the Congress declares we should go.

So you're saying that even if we know a million people are about to be killed in a Rwanda, the U.S. should not intervene on the grounds that genocide or international crimes against humanity are being committed?

Yeah. It's a horrible circumstance. However, you have major powers in Europe, France, Germany, Great Britain. You have Russia, who was supporting one side in the Serbian war. They have a responsibility too. And no, I would be very honest, I wouldn't send Americans to take the risk of death there, and neither would Buchanan. It's a great crime, a great crime. But others have responsibility.

And would you bomb there, even if it didn't put American troops at risk?

No, I wouldn't be out bombing.

You are very much nationalists. Einstein said nationalism was the measles of mankind. How do you respond?

I would say if one was to take a totally rational view, he was absolutely correct. But we wind up with emotionalism dominating so much of the world. Why is there a fight in Northern Ireland, between the Protestants and the Catholics? Why is there a fight inside Belgium? Why is there a fight in the Balkans? Because we have regionalism, we have religion, we have ancient animosities, we have tribalism.

And we have nationalism.

And we have nationalism. But in a real sense when you can find a real cohesive national state, you have less conflict.

How do you justify pushing American interests when we clearly need to think more globally in the 21st century?

We're the people who actually brought the concept of democracy alive from Greece into being, who made real the concept of human rights. We have the least sexist and racist society in the world. We give the greatest emphasis to merit and individual accomplishment. We're the only society in the world that says the creativity of your mind belongs to you, not society. We've best integrated different cultures, different people, into one country. We have generated most of the technological innovations in the world, and been generous enough to share them with the rest of the world. When they're clicking the ballpoint pen, it was invented here. When they're looking at a television, it's here. When they're on the Internet, it came from here.

Now, if we as a society want to dilute that, then we're going to dilute our social accomplishments, our democracy, our rate of technological innovation, and whatever force of good we stand for in the world. So I think there are compelling arguments here to value a society that provides this kind of moral force and leadership.

What do you think of Vaclav Havel's argument that we need more global and less nationalistic thinking?

Fundamentally they are arguing for elitism and against democracy. Because these global institutions are less democratic. You have a core of the elites who run it. They are unaccountable. I believe very much in grass-roots democracy. I think people should have a role in choosing their leaders, and that means to hold their leadership accountable. And under that kind of theory, you don't have it.

What are the other issues your coalition agrees on?

On trade, we should have absolute reciprocity with other countries, and must maintain a strong and viable manufacturing base inside the United States.

On immigration, we cannot have a country of hyphenated Americans. We must once again be the melting pot on which this country was founded. We need a breathing spell, as we've had many times in our history, to assimilate existing immigrants into this country. We should bring in a quarter of a million a year and stop illegal immigration. We should become again a country where everyone speaks English. Every culture that has this kind of hyphenation blows apart. It's our strength, the melting pot.

I've talked to a lot of people in this town who are saying, "Why is Pat Choate, whom we know is not a right-winger, pushing this right-wing nut Buchanan?" That's the basic vibe. Are you seriously arguing that you think the combined forces of the Internet and Lenora Fulani will overcome these forces against you, and that you can escape being seen as a nut?

Richard Nixon was probably the most vilified politician of our time. Ronald Reagan was vilified as somebody who was a dead, finished person. If you can break through to the American people -- and say he's not a right-wing nut, that he's really speaking for many of the same things that concern you, that the reason you're getting this level of vilification is because he truly is a threat to the established order and many of the other elites who are unable to argue their points -- just as Nixon and Ronald Reagan won, he can win.

The "if" is what we're asking about, though. Is the Internet strong enough to get the message out?

There's much easier and faster access to the public today than there was in 1980. You have 1,000-plus radio talk shows that didn't exist then. Two million people read Salon magazine. It becomes additive. One of the great changes in American politics is there are no longer three networks that control access to the American people.

Are you saying you can pull this off in the year 2000?

Yes. Do you think I'd be doing this for no money, if I didn't think I could do it? I wouldn't.