

Dan Rather Reports

Episode Number: 413

Episode Title: Everyone's Covered

Description: In Canada, everyone is covered by medical insurance. But there are often long waits to see doctors or have surgery. Also, an agricultural town where workers who climbed the economic ladder out of the fields are suddenly finding themselves without jobs. And, a conversation on the Middle East with noted scholar Fouad Ajami.

TEASE:

DAN RATHER (VOICE OVER)

TONIGHT. FREE DOCTORS. FREE HOSPITALS. ALL JUST ACROSS THE BORDER.

DONNA TACK, SPENSER'S MOTHER

I've never seen a bill. If something is medically necessary, then it's covered here in Canada.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ALSO, NO WATER MEANS NO CROPS AND NO JOBS.

FRANK STEENPORT, CHIEF OF POLICE OF HURON, CALIFORNIA

Seriously, if things don't get better, you have towns here that are going to cease to exist. They will become spots on a historical map.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND AMERICA'S ROLE IN THE MUSLIM WORLD.

FOUAD AJAMI, DIRECTOR, MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES, JOHN HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

It is this expectation that Barack Hussein Obama, he will change the attitude of the Arabs and the attitude of the Muslims toward the United States. It is not so simple.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WE'LL BRING YOU THE NEWS. TONIGHT, ON DAN RATHER REPORTS.

EVERYONE'S COVERED:

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

GOOD EVENING. TONIGHT WE BEGIN WITH A SIDE OF THE ECONOMIC MELTDOWN THAT FEW ARE TALKING ABOUT. FOR THE TENS OF THOUSANDS OF AMERICANS WHO ENTER THE RANKS OF THE UNEMPLOYED EVERY MONTH... THE SALARY LOSS IS JUST THE BEGINNING. ALSO LOST IS HEALTH CARE COVERAGE... WHICH FOR SOME CAN BE MORE FINANCIALLY DEVASTATING THAN THE LOSS OF INCOME.

IN HIS BUDGET PRESIDENT OBAMA SET ASIDE MORE THAN \$600 BILLION OVER 10 YEARS AS A DOWN PAYMENT TO START REFORMING THE U.S. HEALTH CARE SYSTEM. RIGHT NOW ABOUT 48 MILLION AMERICANS HAVE NO MEDICAL INSURANCE AND THAT NUMBER IS GROWING BY THE DAY. NORTH OF THE U.S. BORDER THINGS ARE DIFFERENT.

IN 1984 THE CANADA HEALTH ACT MANDATED HEALTH CARE FOR ALL CANADA'S CITIZENS. CANADIANS RELY ON PUBLIC FINANCED INSURANCE PLANS THAT VARY FROM PROVINCE TO PROVINCE. BUT ALL DOCTORS' VISITS AND ALL HOSPITAL STAYS ARE COVERED. CANADA SPENDS ABOUT HALF AS MUCH PER PERSON AS THE UNITED STATES ON MEDICAL CARE. SO WHAT, IF ANYTHING, COULD THE U.S. LEARN – GOOD AND BAD – FROM THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM NORTH OF OUR BORDER. TO TRY TO ANSWER THAT QUESTION, WE TEAMED WITH GRADUATE STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA'S JOURNALISM SCHOOL TO RESEARCH AND CONTRIBUTE TO A REPORT ON THEIR COUNTRIES HEALTHCARE SYSTEM.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THIS IS 7-YEAR-OLD SPENCER TACK, A VANCOUVER BOY WHO HAS SPENT MUCH OF HIS LIFE IN AND OUT OF HOSPITALS.

DONNA TACK, SPENCER'S MOTHER

He is still fully dependant for every aspect of daily living. He's suctioned. He's fed by a tube. He actually has a tube for feeding and then he has another tube from his stomach that vents and drains. He's had probably 16 or 17 surgeries since we've, you know in the last seven years that we've been home.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SPENCER'S MOTHER DONNA HAD LITTLE EXPERIENCE WITH CANADIAN HEALTHCARE – UNTIL SHE TOOK SPENCER TO THE HOSPITAL WHEN HE

WAS JUST 5 WEEKS OLD BECAUSE HE KEPT SPITTING UP. WHILE IN THE HOSPITAL A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT HAPPENED - A NURSE LEFT SPENCER ALONE ON HIS BACK AND HE CHOKED ON HIS SPIT-UP.

TACK

So he stopped breathing but was left for so long that his heart actually finally stopped and by the time that they had come back to check on him Spencer had global, catastrophic, devastating brain damage with brain stem dysfunction. Where do you go from there?

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

DONNA QUIT HER JOB TO CARE FOR HER SON. IT WAS A HORRIBLE MEDICAL MISTAKE, SOMETHING THAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED ANYWHERE, BUT IN CANADA, AT LEAST, SPENCER'S SUBSEQUENT CARE IS SUBSIDIZED. SO DONNA IS GRATEFUL. THE CANADIAN PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM PROVIDES HER WITH EVERYTHING SPENCER NEEDS PRACTICALLY FREE – HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS IN MEDICAL EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES WHICH HAVE TURNED HIS BEDROOM INTO A VIRTUAL ICU.

DOCTOR

Alright Mister.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND SPENCER HAS ACCESS TO SOME OF THE BEST DOCTORS IN NORTH AMERICA.

DOCTOR NAT SOT

Hey Spencer.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AT BRITISH COLUMBIA'S CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL.

IN CANADA DOCTORS AND HOSPITALS FEES ARE PAID BY THE GOVERNMENT INSURANCE PLAN. AND MOST MEDICAL EXPENSES ARE FREE FOR CANADIAN RESIDENTS, EVEN THOSE LIKE SPENCER WITH LIFE-LONG, COMPLEX ILLNESSES

TACK

This way for mommy.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

DONNA SAYS THERE HAS NEVER BEEN AN INSTANCE IN SEVEN YEARS THAT ANYONE HAS DISCUSSED THE COST OF SPENCER'S CARE... OR SHOWED HER A SINGLE BILL FOR HIS TREATMENTS. THAT'S A STARK CONTRAST TO THE EXPERIENCE OF MOST PATIENTS IN THE UNITED STATES.

TACK

I've never seen a bill. If something is medically necessary then it's covered here in Canada.

STUART ALTMAN, BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY HELLER SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

Well I think Canada should be justly proud of what they've done. They have done what many of us here in the United States wish we could do.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

STUART ALTMAN IS A PHD PROFESSOR OF NATIONAL HEALTH POLICY AT BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY JUST OUTSIDE BOSTON. HE HAS SPENT A LIFETIME TRYING TO REFORM THE US HEALTH CARE SYSTEM WHILE STUDYING THE SYSTEMS IN OTHER INDUSTRIALIZED COUNTRIES – INCLUDING CANADA'S.

ALTMAN

They cover all their citizens. They do it in a fair way. In the sense that-- people don't have to worry about whether they're gonna lose their job, they're gonna lose their health insurance. And-- while there are significant differences, province by province-- the federal government has responsibility to make sure all of the provinces operate-- in a fair way.

RATHER

All right. So one of the things they do well, and part of what's good about it, is everybody is covered.

ALTMAN

Yes.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

And we mean everybody.

ALTMAN

Everybody.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT ALTMAN POINTS OUT THE CANADIAN SYSTEM HAS ITS PROBLEMS TOO.

ALTMAN

Well they do face, like every country, the fact that health care is expensive. And they have to raise almost all of the money through taxes and often the politicians are loathed to raise taxes and so they go through cycles when they cut back significantly in the amount of care that's available and it leads to problems some would say of rationing or wait lists.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WAITING FOR MEDICALLY NECESSARY TREATMENT IS SOMETHING MANY CANADIANS FIND THEMSELVES DOING A LOT OF. IN CANADA IT IS ILLEGAL FOR DOCTORS TO CHARGE PATIENTS FOR MEDICALLY NECESSARY CARE OUTSIDE OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH CARE SYSTEM. 73 YEAR OLD DORIS MACCONNACHIE IS ONE OF THE 750 THOUSAND CANADIANS ON A LONG WAITING LIST FOR A MEDICALLY-NECESSARY PROCEDURE – SURGERY TO FIX HER ARTHRITIC KNEES.

DORIS MACCONNACHIE CANADIAN PATIENT

My quality of life has gone downhill. I have a dog and I used to take him out and I'd walk 2 or 3 blocks with him, now I go maybe 300 yards and then I come back but it's very painful now.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SHE'S BEEN TOLD SHE MIGHT HAVE TO WAIT UP TO A YEAR FOR THE OPERATION... AND HASN'T EVEN BEEN ABLE TO SPEAK WITH AN ORTHOPEDIC SURGEON YET.

MACCONNACHIE

I can go on and on suffering and getting worse and worse and worse until finally I'm in a wheelchair and obviously I don't want that.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT AS A CANADIAN, DORIS HAS LIMITED OPTIONS. CANADA IS THE ONLY WESTERN NATION THAT DOES NOT ALLOW CITIZENS TO CARRY PRIVATE INSURANCE FOR TREATMENT THAT THE GOVERNMENT ALREADY COVERS.

ALTMAN

Every other country has, essentially, a failsafe system where anywhere from 20 to 30 or 40 percent of the population is insured privately. Now Canada has one big advantage in that it sits right over the border from the United States. And we do have a number of Canadian citizens that come across the border and receive their care in Buffalo, in-- in-- Seattle and in Detroit-- when the-- they feel the Canadian system is not being responsive enough.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT MEDICAL CARE IN THE U.S. IS EXPENSIVE AND MOST CANADIANS CAN'T AFFORD TO OR DON'T WANT TO PAY FOR IT. DORIS WAS DISMAYED TO LEARN THAT COST WOULD BE SO HIGH -- IN THE TENS OF THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS -- THAT CROSSING THE BORDER FOR HER KNEE SURGERY WAS OUT OF THE QUESTION. DORIS SAYS MANY OF HER FRIENDS ARE EQUALLY FRUSTRATED WITH THE PUBLIC CANADIAN HEALTH SYSTEM.

MACCONNACHIE

What I'm experiencing is probably just the tip of the iceberg of what's happening.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

EVEN PATIENTS WITH SERIOUS HEALTH PROBLEMS ARE WAITING LONGER AND LONGER IN CANADA. STUDIES SHOW THE WAIT TIME FOR ELECTIVE CARDIAC OPERATIONS IS 7 WEEKS. BRAIN SURGERY -- 8 MONTHS. CANCER PATIENTS WAIT ON AVERAGE 4 TO 6 WEEKS FOR TREATMENT. ALTMAN SAYS CANADA LIMITS SOME TREATMENT TO KEEP COST DOWN BUT ALSO BECAUSE THEY HAVE A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO LIFE PROLONGING MEDICINE THAN AMERICANS DO.

ALTMAN

We, as a country, do more things, more complicated things, much more complicated and expensive things, in the process of us dying, than every country that I have analyzed. Every industrialized country.

RATHER

Including Canada.

ALTMAN

Including Canada.

RATHER

That is to keep mother or grandmother alive.

ALTMAN

Exactly.

RATHER

Or keep yourself alive for a long period of time.

ALTMAN

Or keep yourself alive. And it's an interesting thing. In Canada they do less elective surgery. They claim, and I have no reason to doubt it, that for people that are really sick, they will intervene as quickly as we do. But they won't keep it going the way we do.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

Some Canadians don't like the government deciding for them how their doctors can practice.

RICK BAKER, TIMELY MEDICAL ALTERNATIVES

The Canada health act is responsible for more deaths, pain and suffering than any other piece of domestic legislation in the history of Canada.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

RICK BAKER IS A VOCAL CRITIC OF PUBLIC HEALTHCARE, HE SAYS CANADIANS SHOULD HAVE THE OPTION TO PAY FOR THEIR OWN TREATMENTS AND HE SET UP A COMPANY TO HELP CANADIANS FIND QUICKER TREATMENT OPTIONS.

BAKER

If it's a medically unnecessary procedure, if my wife is going to go for a boob job, you can charge for that because it's unnecessary. But if she had breast cancer that would be a

necessary procedure and she would have to wait and she could not pay to have it done. Now how crazy is that? If you don't need it, you can pay for it. If you need it, you can't pay for it.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

MANY CANADIANS SEEM TO AGREE. RECENT SURVEYS INDICATE MORE THAN HALF THE POPULATION WANTS TO HAVE THE OPTION TO GO TO PRIVATE CLINICS.

BAKER

People who have worked hard and saved their money and want to spend it on their own healthcare it's not fair if they're prevented from spending it, that's the thing that's not fair.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND ALTHOUGH SOME CANADIAN PATIENTS ARE CROSSING THE BORDER FOR TREATMENT THE VAST MAJORITY REMAIN COMMITTED TO THEIR PUBLIC HEALTHCARE ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY HEAR AND READ ABOUT HEALTH INSURANCE – OR LACK THEREOF - IN THE UNITED STATES. THE WHITE HOUSE ESTIMATES THERE ARE NINE MILLION UNINSURED AMERICAN CHILDREN WHICH IS ONE REASON WHY A 2008 UNICEF STUDY CONCLUDED THAT IN ITS OPINION THE U.S. HAS THE SECOND WORST INFANT MORTALITY RATE AMONG DEVELOPED NATIONS. AND CANADIANS LIVE ABOUT THREE YEARS LONGER THAN AMERICANS. BUT STUART ALTMAN DOESN'T THINK THE US HEALTH CARE SYSTEM IS ONLY REASON FOR THESE DIFFERENCES.

ALTMAN

It has to do with our environment. Has to do with where we live. Has to do with our genes. It has to do with our lifestyle. And so to blame the health system, in the U.S., for the fact that we don't do as well as we could-- is not fair. I wouldn't say that there's no blame. But to say that we have among the highest infant mortality in civilized-- or-- industrial world, or that we don't live as long as most of the people in the industrial world, you can't attribute all of it or even most of it to the quality of our health care. I think our health care quality is good. Not great. We could do better. But I think all countries could do better.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND ALTMAN BELIEVES LAWMAKERS HAVE TO MOVE QUICKLY NOW TO FIND A WAY TO COVER ALL AMERICANS.

RATHER

I know you feel that we need to reform our health care system in the United States now.

ALTMAN

Yes.

RATHER

Why now? Particularly since we have this economic meltdown.

ALTMAN

Well, I must admit, I've-- believe now, for the last 40 years. But I think now is even more important than it's been. And the reason is we depend critically on our-- what-- employer based insurance system. And that is we have a job. And, through our job, we get our health insurance. Millions of Americans are losing their jobs. And so they're in a abyss. And what was a serious problem for many years, 'cause we had 42, 43, 45 million Americans with no health insurance, is the potential for a catastrophe.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AS FOR UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE THE UNITED STATES IS ONE OF ONLY TWO MODERN ECONOMIES TO NOT OFFER COVERAGE THE OTHER IS TURKEY.

RATHER

Well, going forward-- what do you think American policy makers need to remember about the Canadian system as they put together whatever our new system needs to be?

ALTMAN

Well, I think, most importantly, is that you can do it. All too often, people throw their hands up and said, "We can't do it." We can do it. They've done it. The English have done it. The Germans have done it. The French have done it. The Italians have done it. And we can do that.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

THERE ARE MORE PEOPLE IN THE UNITED STATES WITHOUT HEALTH INSURANCE THAN LIVE IN ALL OF CANADA – AND ALTHOUGH A CANADIAN STYLE SYSTEM MIGHT NOT WORK IN THE U.S. – IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THEY HAVE FOUND A WAY TO COVER A DIVERSE POPULATION AND WE MAY BE ABLE TO SUCCESSFULLY ADAPT

SOME OF THEIR IDEAS. WE'D LIKE TO THANK THE STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA'S GRADUATE JOURNALISM SCHOOL FOR HELPING US WITH THIS REPORT. NOW, WHEN WE RETURN, WE'LL TAKE YOU TO THE FERTILE FIELDS OF AMERICA'S SALAD AND FRUIT BOWL IN DANGER OF GOING DRY. SO STAY HERE WITH US.

AMERICA'S SALAD BOWL:

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

WELCOME BACK. WE HEAR ABOUT HOW THIS CURRENT ECONOMIC CRISIS IS THE WORST SINCE THE GREAT DEPRESSION. WITH THAT IN MIND, WE THOUGHT WE'D HEAD TO A PART OF THE COUNTRY THAT WAS SYNONYMOUS WITH THE TURMOIL OF THE 1930'S - CALIFORNIA'S CENTRAL VALLEY. IT WAS HERE THAT HUNGRY MIGRANTS LIKE THE OKIES IN JOHN STEINBECK'S CLASSIC NOVEL THE GRAPES OF WRATH CAME LOOKING FOR JOBS. MANY WHO WORKED THE FIELDS IN THE 1930'S STARTED UP THE LADDER OF PROSPERITY. CENTRAL CALIFORNIA IS KNOWN AS AMERICA'S SALAD AND FRUIT BOWL, BECAUSE THE RICH SOIL GROWS 25% OF THIS COUNTRY'S FRUITS AND VEGETABLES. IN THE ECONOMIC BOOM TIMES OF RECENT YEARS, IT WAS NOT UNCOMMON FOR FIELD WORKERS TO MOVE ON TO HIGHER PAYING AND MORE STABLE JOBS - THEIR FIRST GLIMPSE OF A MIDDLE CLASS LIFE. BUT WHEN WE WENT THERE TODAY, WE FOUND A MUCH DARKER PICTURE.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IT'S BROCCOLI HARVESTING TIME IN THE FIELDS AROUND THE TOWN OF HURON CALIFORNIA. PART OF A CYCLE OF FARMING THAT HAS BEEN GOING ON HERE FOR GENERATIONS. THE GREEN FIELDS SPEAK OF ABUNDANCE. BUT THESE ARE HARD TIMES IN THE CENTRAL VALLEY. CONSTRUCTION JOBS HAVE DRIED UP, BUSINESSES HAVE SHUTTERED, AND SO, PEOPLE HAVE FLOCKED BACK TO THE FIELDS, TAKING REFUGE IN WHAT THEY THOUGHT WAS THE ONE SURE THING IN CENTRAL CALIFORNIA: AGRICULTURE WORK.

FRANK STEENPORT, CHIEF OF POLICE OF HURON, CALIFORNIA

It's a very high possibility your tomatoes, your onions, your green onions, your watermelon your -- a tremendous variety of plants and produce come from this area.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

FRANK STEENPORT IS THE POLICE CHIEF IN HURON CALIFORNIA. HE TAKES PRIDE IN HIS TOWN AND ITS LONGSTANDING IDENTITY AS A HUB FOR AGRICULTURE. A CORNUCOPIA IS EVEN ON THE CITY'S SEAL, WHICH

CHIEF STEENPORT DESIGNED.

STEENPORT

Huron has been around-- for quite a while. It was settled in the late 1800's. Most of the cities in this valley were laid out along railroad tracks. And then when the aqueduct was built and everything could become irrigated, this is the center.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AGRICULTURE MEANT WORK, THE KIND THAT GOT PEOPLE STARTED ON THE AMERICAN DREAM. IT WAS A BEACON FOR IMMIGRANTS - FROM OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY, FROM OVERSEAS, AND THESE DAYS, MAINLY FROM LATIN AMERICA. MANY ARE HERE LEGALLY; MANY ARE NOT. ALL WERE NEEDED TO WORK THE FIELDS.

STEENPORT

Our resident population is 7,500 people. It will double to 14, sometimes 16,000 people here. That many people'll come in here. It'll look-- it'll look like-- LAX, 'cause these folks are comin' in here because the work is here.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT AS DESPERATE, NEWLY UNEMPLOYED RESIDENTS TRY TO FIND A Foothold BACK AT THE BOTTOM OF THE LADDER, THEY'RE FINDING THESE JOBS, TOO, ARE DRYING UP - LITERALLY. THAT'S BECAUSE AMERICA'S SALAD BOWL IS DEPENDENT, LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE IN CALIFORNIA, ON WATER. AND TO PROTECT AN ENDANGERED SPECIES HUNDREDS OF MILES AWAY, HURON'S SPIGOT HAS BEEN TURNED OFF. MANY THERE THINK THIS COULD BE THE END OF A WAY OF LIFE AND A DISTINCTLY AMERICAN LANDSCAPE. SO WITH PLUNGING TAX REVENUES, CHIEF STEENPORT HAS TAKEN ON MANY JOBS TO KEEP THE TOWN RUNNING.

STEENPORT

I am the chief of police of the city of Huron. I am also acting city manager at this time. And I'm also acting public works director. And I also have-- oversight of the finance department. And-- that's about it right now.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

CHIEF STEENPORT HAS BEEN EVERYTHING FROM A SMALL-TOWN POLICE LIEUTENANT TO A S.W.A.T. TEAM AGENT IN THE CONCRETE JUNGLES OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA. HE TOOK THE CHANCE TO BE A BIG FISH IN A

SMALL POND IN HOPES OF TURNING A DUSTY, DANGEROUS FARMWORKER-TRANSIT POINT INTO A GREENER, SAFER PLACE TO SETTLE. BUT AS LOCAL BUSINESSES BEGIN TO FAIL BECAUSE OF THE ECONOMY AND THE WATER CRISIS, AND TAX REVENUES PLUMMET -- CHIEF STEENPORT'S NOT ONLY TAKING ON FOUR JOBS WITHIN CITY GOVERNMENT. HE'S ALSO ECONOMIZING WHEREVER HE CAN TO PREPARE FOR THE EVEN LEANER TIMES AHEAD.

STEENPORT

We don't even have janitors. My policemen gotta take turns, myself included. We mop. We clean windows. We take out the trash. When the toilet breaks, I pick up the plunger, 'cause nobody's above workin'. And I lose sleep at night, especially since all this-- started. You know, don't go backwards. We've worked so hard to reduce crime.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

EVERY DAY, CHIEF STEENPORT GOES OUT AND GREETES PEOPLE OUT ON HURON'S MAIN DRAG. HE'S BEEN DOING IT SINCE HE CAME TO TOWN THREE YEARS AGO. BUT THESE DAYS, THE TOWN IS CROWDED WITH LOITERERS, ATTRACTED BY THE PROMISE OF WORK IN THE FIELDS AND BITTERLY DISAPPOINTED.

STEENPORT

All these guys over here, normally they'd be working. Just hanging out, and unfortunately, sooner or later they're going to get in trouble. As the unemployment rises, we have more and more people loitering, and drinking, and getting into trouble, so we have to kind of get on top of it, and work with the folks. When the construction field-- or the construction jobs, the home-building and these other jobs, have dried up, some of them wanna return back to ag-related business, things that they grew up in and said, you know, "I'm not makin' enough," or, "It's not dependable enough." And now they're looking at going back because there's nothing else. But I've never seen such a perfect storm, so to speak, of bad financial situations that have led to what we're at in general. And thousands and thousands of acres are going to lie fallow, that normally would be producing-- crops and cattle and the clothes on your back, because there's no water.

JOHN HARRIS, CHAIRMAN, HARRIS RANCH

Well, we would normally be farming-- about 14,000 acres. And we're down to about 4500 acres and that's because we did have some wells and we did save some water last year.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

JOHN HARRIS OWNS AND RUNS ONE OF THE BIGGEST FARMS IN

CALIFORNIA. BEFORE THE RECENT WATER RESTRICTIONS, THESE FIELDS WERE CHOCK FULL -- THOUSANDS OF WORKERS HARVESTING THOUSANDS OF ACRES IN FARM AFTER FARM, JUST AS IT HAS BEEN EVERY YEAR SINCE THE IRRIGATION PROJECTS OF THE 1930'S. AND JOHN HARRIS'S FATHER, WHO FIRST TILLED THIS SOIL IN 1937, BECAME ONE OF THE ORIGINAL TITANS OF THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY.

JOHN HARRIS

But looking forward, we're at zero this year and there's not much hope for next year.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

NORMALLY, MORE THAN 200 BILLION GALLONS OF WATER ARE DIVERTED ANNUALLY FROM THE SAN JOAQUIN RIVER TO IRRIGATE THE RICH BUT DRY SOIL OF THE CENTRAL VALLEY. THE RIVER, HOWEVER, IS HOME TO AN ENDANGERED TWO-INCH LONG CARNIVOROUS FISH CALLED THE DELTA SMELT. THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT REQUIRES CALIFORNIA TO DO WHAT IT CAN TO PROTECT THE SMELT. THAT HAS MEANT A TWO-THIRDS WATER REDUCTION LAST SUMMER, AND ZERO ALLOCATION THIS YEAR. WHICH HAS TAKEN AWAY THE ONE JOB LEFT IN THESE PARTS.

HARRIS

At one point, we had permanent employees of almost 200 people. And we're down to about 20 people now. We've just had to drastically reduce our staff, which is really sad, 'cause all the people who have been here for you know, 20, 30, 40 years, and all of a sudden, they don't have a job anymore.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THERE'S STILL SOME WORK TO BE HAD -- RIPPING UP NOW-USELESS IRRIGATION LINES, PACKAGING THE REDUCED YIELD OF ASPARAGUS -- BUT THESE WORKERS COST HARRIS FARMS NO SMALL SUM. THE PAY'S NOT GREAT, BUT SOME OF THEM ACTUALLY LIVE ON THE FARM. FOR NOW.

HARRIS

We have about 70 houses right here on our farm. So a lot of 'em-- aren't working right now. But they're here. That's the problem, 'cause there's nothing else for them to do here. So we're trying to-- you know, people are kinda hanging on.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND THE STORY'S THE SAME ALL ACROSS THE REGION.

RYAN FERGUSON, RANCH MANAGER, FERGUSON FARMING COMPANY

Behind us is our fleet of cotton module builders that build the bales of-- of cotton to be hauled to the gin to be ginned. This year, the equipment's gonna sit idle. None of this equipment will move at all this year.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

COTTON HARVESTER RYAN FERGUSON FEELS IT PARTICULARLY DEEPLY BECAUSE HIS BUSINESS, THE FERGUSON FARMING COMPANY, WAS STARTED BY AN OKIE FLEEING THE 1930's DUST BOWL WHO MADE GOOD IN HURON. THESE PHOTOS SHOW WHAT LIFE WAS LIKE IN BETTER TIMES - - TWO YEARS AGO THEY HARVESTED AROUND 13,000 ACRES OF COTTON.

FERGUSON

Well, we've had it-- people-- prospective employees comin' by, you know, some have been in construction as well as truck drivers comin' by looking for work, as well as employees that were capable of, you know, running computer systems on tractors that are being have-- that are having to be demoted down to-- more-- labor-intensive work, you know, just hand labor. There's just-- there's no jobs in the Ag community because of the lack of water.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IT'S PERSONAL, TOO...

FERGUSON

It's devastating. It's-- you know, wake up in the night thinkin' about how we're gonna keep all of our employees going, and keep the ranch going, and it's a hard thought to bear, you know. My son comes out to the ranch, and I walk him-- watch him walkin' around out in the dirt and pickin' up dirt. You know, it's a scary thought to-- to think that he might not be able to enjoy the same things that I've been able to do, farming and being in the custom harvesting business.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

CHIEF STEENPORT ALSO COMES FROM A FAMILY THAT FOUND ITS WAY TO CALIFORNIA IN HOPES OF WORKING ITS WAY UP FROM THE FIELDS.

STEENPORT

My parents are immigrants. My mom is Filipino. The first farm workers in California were-- were Filipinos. I don't know if you know that. But, Filipinos came here first,

mostly after World War II. A lot of them were patriated to the United States.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND HE HIMSELF WORKED IN GREENHOUSES AS A CHILD. SEEING HIS OWN FAMILY STORY IN THAT OF THE COMMUNITY HE NOW SERVES IS PART OF THE REASON HE TOOK ON A TOUGH JOB IN A TOUGH PLACE.

STEENPORT

You think this is like out of Mayberry or something. It would be a lot easier just to put in eight to the gate, you know and not care, but that's not the way I'm wired. My reputation is one as being-- a problem-solver and a fix-it person. So, they said, "Can you fix it?" And I said, "Yeah."

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND THERE WAS A LOT TO FIX...

STEENPORT

This place was known as "knife fight city" for in the '40s and the '50s and it was quite a wild place-- very, you know, high murder rate, lot of bars. You name it, the-- the things you don't want in a city, we had it.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT CHIEF STEENPORT SAYS GOOD POLICING HAS PAID OFF IN RECENT YEARS.

STEENPORT

In three years, almost a 70 percent reduction in major crime. I have people there that've been livin' there 50 years and say they've never seen it as quiet and clean. And to somebody just driving through, they may say, you know, "God, this is a rough little town." But, you should've seen it three or four years ago. You know, so we're gettin' better. The-- the sad, almost heartbreaking, part is right when we-- we need the economy to be good-- we have a lot of people looking at, you know, building and-- and-- and developing, without destroying the agriculture. And right when we needed for good times to be here, we're in the middle of, you know, almost a depression.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

GOOD TIMES ARE FAR FROM ROLLING IN DOWNTOWN HURON.

STEENPORT

In most places, recycling is something you do to be touchy feely and save the earth. Here, a lot of these families live off of it. They fight over what's in the dumpster. I wasn't really happy about putting a c-train, you know, a container, in here, but these folks, you know, that's how they're making their money; that's how they're feeding their kids in some of these cases; this is their work.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

JUST ACROSS THE STREET FROM THE COMMUNITY CENTER WHERE BUSES COME TO PICK UP THE LUCKY FEW FOR WHAT FIELDWORK REMAINS, A LINE FORMS AROUND THE BUILDING AT WESTSIDE FAMILY PRESERVATION. IT'S A FOOD GIVEAWAY, HERE IN THE REGION THAT PRODUCES 25% OF AMERICA'S PRODUCE. DOORS OPEN AT ONE IN THE AFTERNOON, BUT IN THESE DESPERATE TIMES...

AMPARO YEBRA

There was-- people already since eight o'clock in the morning. And they bring-- they bring their chair and they just sit there until we give the tickets for the food.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AMPARO YEBRA IS THE DIRECTOR HERE, AND SHE SAYS SHE'S NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT. THEY'RE NOT EQUIPPED FOR THIS SORT OF NEED. THE CENTER IS NOT A FOOD BANK; ONCE A MONTH THE COUNTY COMES AROUND AND DROPS OFF SOME FROZEN CHICKENS AND BEANS. ONE BOX IS ENOUGH FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS.

YEBRA

Every month, we serve more than 400 families a month, but I seen the list and it's almost- - getting to 600.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

TODAY THEY WERE CAUGHT BY SURPRISE.

YEBRA

We ran out of bags, so we were having a tough time. And I know a lot of the women went into-- to their homes and brought some plastic bags. This is the first time. Yeah, this is the first time.

CARLOS ESQUIVEL (TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH)

So I started to work in construction, but back then the work situation was better.

RATHER

ONE OF THE THOUSANDS WHO'S SUFFERED IS CARLOS ESQUIVEL.

ESQUIVEL (TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH)

Then it all ended and there's no work now, and I left for the fields. And then that ended, too. And now I'm unemployed. I've been out of work for almost five months, with nothing. I go to the Home Depot, too; I stand outside to see if someone can take me to work, but nobody -- nobody comes to pick you up.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

FOR GENERATIONS, WORK IN THESE FERTILE FIELDS HAS BEEN A WAY TO GET A Foothold ON THE ECONOMIC LADDER. THAT CONNECTION TO AMERICAN HISTORY HAS ATTRACTED ATTENTION 2500 MILES AWAY IN WASHINGTON, D.C... FISH AND FARMER ALIKE HAVE BEEN HOT TOPICS OF CONVERSATION, AND FARM-OWNERS IN THE CENTRAL VALLEY ARE PUSHING FOR A TEMPORARY WAIVER OF THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT. THEY ESTIMATE THAT 80,000 JOBS COULD BE LOST IN THE REGION IF IRRIGATED FARMING -- AND THE BUSINESSES THAT SUPPORT IT -- ARE CUT OFF.

STEENPORT

Literally thousands-- you know, the estimate is 80,000 plus-- people are going to be unemployed. That's gonna cause a domino effect on-- on-- all-- all the related industries. You have towns here that are face-- seriously, if things don't get better, that are going to cease to exist. They will unincorporate it. They will become townships. They will become-- spots on a historical map.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

POLICE CHIEF FRANK STEENPORT AND THE TOWN HE'S STRUGGLING TO PRESERVE....HURON CALIFORNIA. ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS SAY THAT WITHOUT RADICAL REDUCTIONS IN HOW MUCH WATER IS DIVERTED FROM CALIFORNIA'S RIVERS, NOT ONLY THE DELTA SMELT, BUT WHOLE ECOSYSTEMS RISK DISAPPEARING FOREVER, ALSO BECOMING SPOTS ON A HISTORICAL MAP. PRETTY SOON, SOMETHING'S GOT TO GIVE. WHEN WE COME BACK ON THIS PROGRAM, A TOUR OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY THROUGHOUT THE MIDDLE EAST.

FOUAD AJAMI:

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

ON HIS RECENT TRIP TO EUROPE, PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA STOPPED IN TURKEY TO GIVE A MAJOR SPEECH IN HOPES OF IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH THE WORLD'S MUSLIMS. SINCE TAKING OFFICE, PRESIDENT OBAMA'S FOREIGN POLICY FOCUS HAS LARGELY BEEN ON THE ISLAMIC WORLD. HE ANNOUNCED PLANS TO WITHDRAW COMBAT FORCES FROM IRAQ, BUT HAS ORDERED MORE TROOPS TO AFGHANISTAN. HE IS ALSO OPENING A DOOR TO TALKS WITH IRAN. IN LIGHT OF THESE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS, WE THOUGHT THIS WOULD BE A GOOD TIME FOR AN UPDATE ON WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE MIDEAST SO WE SAT DOWN WITH THE DISTINGUISHED JOHNS HOPKINS PROFESSOR OF ADVANCED INTERNATIONAL STUDIES AND FELLOW AT THE HOOVER INSTITUTION AT STANFORD, ONE OF THE WORLD'S BEST KNOWN AUTHORITIES ON THE MIDDLE EAST, FOUAD AJAMI.

FOUAD AJAMI, DIRECTOR, MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES, JOHN HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

I think the most important thing that's happening worldwide is also happening in the Middle East which is this great economic decline. And in fact the oil countries in particular thought they would be spared, that this calamity that befell everyone in the world will somehow pass by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai and so on. Well that hasn't happened. We know that the decline of the oil market has again put the Arabs in very familiar land, which is this time of disillusionment, this time of disappointment. So I think if you're taking a look at the Gulf you really are looking at people who are awakened to the fact the price of oil has again betrayed them. The economic realities have dawned on them. That's one story. The other big story Iran has become a Mediterranean power. It has defied geography. It is now present in Beirut by the Mediterranean, and the Arabs don't know what to do about it. So these if you will the two stories strategically the push of Iran into the region and then economically the decline in the price of oil and the reckoning in the lands of oil and in the middle of all this Iraq seems to be holding up. Which is never what we would have expected two or three years ago.

RATHER

Well I want to talk about Iraq, but I also want to ask you because you've always stayed in touch not only with the rulers but with the so-called "Arab street". Where does America stand on the Arab street and with the Arab rulers?

AJAMI

Well I think that's a good question. I mean there's this – this expectation that Barack Hussein Obama will remake the region and he will change the attitude of the Arabs and the attitude of the Muslims toward the United States. It's not so simple. Because if you

now take a look at the strategic landscape that has been rightly called the greater Middle East, that's really what it is. The Middle East now stretches all the way. It takes in Afghanistan and Pakistan. We're talking about the lands of Islam, basically, the modern world his-- this large area of-- of the Middle East, North Africa, and then moving over to the sub continent and-- South Asia. We invested ourselves in this narrative of Afghanistan, the good war. We had these two ideas: Iraq, the bad war, the war of choice; Afghanistan, the good war, the war of necessity. Iraq, the bad war, unilateral war; Afghanistan, the good, multi-lateral war because others were supposedly going to join us in this endeavor in Afghanistan. So now we are going to face Afghanistan because the-- the supporters of President Obama insisted that the war in Afghanistan is the good war, that's the war we need to win. And I think that's-- would be the test of his presidency in the Islamic world.

RATHER

Let me come right to point, if it were your decision to make-- it isn't, would you get out of Afghanistan now or very soon?

AJAMI

I don't think we can. I really don't. I mean, I think, you know, who knows? The American public, according to latest public opinion surveys, now we are told two-thirds of the American public support President Obama and support his plan for Afghanistan. This the beginning. And you have these two very commanding figures, one a civilian, large presence and large spirit, and that's Mr. Holbrooke, the President's representative for "Afpackia" as they call it, Afghanistan and Pakistan. And then this legendary soldier, you know, a close friend, someone I'm very proud to know, and someone I'm-- I covered and followed in-- in Iraq, and that's General David Petraeus. So we have these two remarkable men, we have the civilian in the presence of Holbrooke, and we have this commander, this soldier who won in Iraq and is coming to Afghanistan and we are going to give it a try. And I don't know what will happen there. I really-- it's-- it's the hardest thing.

RATHER

If we were different in Afghanistan—

AJAMI

Yeah.

RATHER

Than Alexander's great army, the British invading and for a while occupying army, and the Soviets, if we are different, how are we different?

AJAMI

We're not different. We're not different. We're just the latest-- we're just the latest foreigners to come into that land. And, in fact, in that territory of "Afpaki" of Afghanistan and Pakistan, people have seen us before. We came there and then we abandoned them. That is this great narrative of abdication and—

RATHER

This is after the Soviets—

AJAMI

Exactly. But also there is the great narrative that America came and-- to Afghanistan and Pakistan and then we bid them farewell, and then we went back after September 11th. We are going back to this region, and I don't think we can-- we can get over the narrative of abandonment. They don't trust us. They see us there, but they know we have-- we have home to go back to. They know that we're there, but we can also leave.

RATHER

Before I leave Pakistan/Afghanistan, is it probable that we can achieve anything close to our core mission in Afghanistan without eventually bringing in Pakistan, India, China, Russia—

AJAMI

Sure.

RATHER

The central Asian republics in the southern part of Russia and Iran?

AJAMI

Right.

RATHER

Possible?

AJAMI

Well, that's the big-- you kept the-- you kept the most important word to the end-- "and Iran." And because that also takes us to the question of how to deal with Iran. And that will be the-- that will be-- because, in fact, President Obama and his people, what they

have said is they're ready to do business with Iran. Now we will find out if the Iranians are ready to do business with the United States. For many, many years, so long as the option of negotiating with Iran was off the table, we could say the burden lies on the United States, that we don't want to negotiate with Iran. But I have-- I have a theory of my own, that is for Iran, Iran has had for many-- for many years, just the right level of enmity with the United States. Just enough to shore up support at home for this theocratic revolution. And if you take a look at the pattern of the Iranian-American relation, it's been steady. There has been no war with Iran, and there has been no accommodation with Iran. And the Iranians-- here's the surprise of all this, they don't want accommodation with the United States. They don't want to negotiate with the United States seriously, they have no interest in a deal with the United States. Because if you open up the realm, if you open up this theocratic republic of Iran, there is no assurance for the Mullahs that their hold on power will stay.

RATHER

Then what do you do about the-- developing nuclear weapons?

AJAMI

Well, that's-- I think that is where, if you will, the rubber hut-- hits the road on-- on the place of Iran. Is that an American burden? Is that an Israeli burden? Because now you have Prime Minister Bebe Netanyahu in Israel. Netanyahu has said publicly that he does not believe Iran should be allowed to acquire nuclear weapons. A decision will have to be made by the powers of the world, by Israel on the scene, by America from far away, by France-- even the French have been, believe it or not, bellicose on the question of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons. Can this regime in Tehran, can this regime acquire nuclear weapons, and would it be a normal regime because other nations have nuclear weapons. I mean, if you're an Iranian, if you're a proud Iranian nationalist, you look around the neighborhood you say, you know, we are the Persians. We are an excellent nation. Look at India. It's got nuclear weapons. And not only does it have nuclear weapons, the Americans even signed a nuclear deal with them to help them out. Look at Pakistan, it has the bomb, okay, and they have an American alliance. Look at Israel, it has the bomb. So the question of Iran, is Iran a normal nation, if you will, that should be allowed the acquisition of nuclear weap-- weapons? Intellectually, I personally think it shouldn't, but the question is on the table for President Obama.

RATHER

I'm jumping around a bit but I want to turn to Afghanistan.

AJAMI

Sure.

RATHER

That there are those in the United States who believe we should be reaching out to the Taliban, that we want to accomplish anywhere near what we decided to accomplish, we're gonna have to deal with the Taliban in Afghanistan. Your take on that.

AJAMI

Well, that's, you know, General Petraeus has-- loves the word "reconcilables." You know, that there are-- that the Taliban is a big, amorphous organization. You know, what does it mean? The word "Taliban" seminarians, students of religion. Well, there are Taliban who are completely wedded to Al Qaeda and to terror. There are Taliban who are Taliban because they're Pashtun, that's the dominant ethnicity of the Taliban and the dominant ethnicity of Afghanistan. So, in fact, the strategy-- and if one reads what-- what General Petraeus would like to do, General Petraeus, incidentally, is a man-- we know him as a soldier, but he's really a cunning diplomat. He's a very smart diplomat. Like he took tons of money to the Anbar Province in Iraq. He believes very much in making deals with the tribes. He believes in trying to-- to split off a radical outfit as to who's-- see who's reconcilable. And I think will be-- his-- his theory would be tested. And given his record and knowing what I know about him, I'd take a bet on him.

RATHER

Well, that brings us back to Iraq in this sense and here for total transparency, you and I have known each other but you and I have been friends for a very long time.

AJAMI

Absolutely.

RATHER

There are a number of people, not all of them in the Boston, New York, Washington corridor, who say, listen, Fouad Ajami is brilliant, but he was wrong about Iraq. He supported the Iraq war. True, a vast majority of Americans supported the Iraq war when it started.

AJAMI

True.

RATHER

And as you rightly point out, held behind it for quite a long while.

AJAMI

Yeah.

RATHER

But you know the criticism. Is it, listen, you've been right about a lot of things, but you were wrong about Iraq. That the situation in Iraq now, while better, is very fragile.

AJAMI

Sure.

RATHER

As you pointed out yourself, General Petraeus used cold cash for Anbar Province and other places. I want to give you a chance to respond to those who say, listen, Fouad Ajami, when he talks about Iraq, is no longer credible because his has this record.

AJAMI

Well, my students tell me that, so-- (LAUGHTER) you-- you're in good company.

RATHER

So it's no surprise, huh?

AJAMI

You're in good company. (LAUGHTER) I think-- I think the American people have had buyer's remorse over Iraq. They've had buyer's remorse. And I think many of us went to war, metaphorically speaking, to Iraq. I mean, if you take a look at the coalition that supported the onset of the war in Iraq, it was the majority of the American people. Instinctively, the American people made a connection between 9/11 and Baghdad, 9/11 and Iraq, 9/11 and the terror in the Arab world. I mean, I wasn't out cheering the onset of the Iraq war. As a child of Beirut and looking at the calamity that befell the Americans in Beirut, this has never been-- this was never my first call, if you will. And my attitude was simple, it's like the attitude of a-- of a-- an adopted son of this country, naturalized citizen. My country went to war in Iraq, I went to war in Iraq. I went to Iraq nine times after the onset of the war in two-03 and two-08. And I think in many ways, I think there is-- there was a very intimate connection between American security and the fight in Iraq. I don't agree with the people who say that we were made more unsafe because of Iraq or we triggered the hatred of Al Qaeda because of Iraq. We were attacked long before Iraq. The ground burned in the Arab world throughout the '90s against the Americans. Go back and look at the first attack on the World Trade Center, '93, the attack on the Kobar

Tower in Saudi Arabia in '96, the attack on the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in '98, the attack on USS Cole on October 12, 2000, in the last year of the Clinton presidency. All this trail of terror was not about Iraq, it was about this Islamism, this radical animus toward America and against modernism itself. So I think we just simply wanted a return address for terrorism. And we couldn't be content with the return address in Kabul, because these were not Afghans who flew into our towers and crashed into the Pentagon, they were Arabs. So we were looking around. And guess who won the draw, who drew the short straw? Saddam Hussein because he was a very clumsy man. He didn't get out of harm's way.

RATHER

Well, looking back on it—

AJAMI

Yes.

RATHER

Which is all we can do now, would it have been wiser, given that the attackers of 9/11 were primarily overwhelmingly Saudi—

AJAMI

Yes.

RATHER

Did we invade the wrong country? Should we have gone to Saudi Arabia?

AJAMI

We were never going to do it. We were never going to do it because, in fact, the regime in Saudi Arabia could rightly say, which they did say. Look, Osama Bin Laden willfully and intentionally put 15 of the 19 hijackers on these planes from Saudi Arabia. That he targeted the U.S./Saudi alliance or the U.S./Saudi relationship. So we were never going to take it to the Saudis and the Egyptians, and we ended up being stuck with them. And we've been-- and in fact, President Bush circled them repeatedly for eight years trying to get them, A, to own up to the fact that their children attacked America, and B, to the fact that their kind of rule, that the regime spawned a culture of terror. And they just wouldn't do it.

RATHER

Well, Saudi Arabia, partly by design, I think, it keeps itself out of the headlines.

AJAMI

That's the plan.

RATHER

We sit here today, back in the headlines, where is Saudi Arabia in the orbit of the Middle East, and in terms of American foreign policy today?

AJAMI

That's a good question about Saudi Arabia because, of course, they have a slightly new king. He's not quite very new, but you know, he's been around for four years now as-- as king, King Abdullah. And King Abdullah, there is much hope invested in him. King Abdullah came in with the promise of reform. And the Saudis have taken a ride with the oil market. Everything in Saudi Arabia has to do with the price of oil, that's it. So King Abdullah is invested in the idea of reform. He really genuinely wants to change that country. He's appointed a woman deputy minister. Now you and I would say, hey, that ain't much in-- in Houston, but it's a big story in Saudi Arabia, a woman minister-- deputy minister of education for women's affairs. So he's trying to reform the country. He's trying to get the religious class, the clerics of the country, he's trying to get them to adopt a moderate kind of Islam. He really is trying to cap the volcano. He understood-- he understood the radicalism in the Wahabi doctrine itself. So he's trying to drag these clerics into the modern world and to cap the storm that overtook Saudi Arabia in the '90s. Now, on his success, if you will, hinges the future of Saudi Arabia.

RATHER

Israel's got a-- another change in government-- right? Benjamin-- Netanyahu, well known in this country—

AJAMI

Right.

RATHER

Educated in this country, former U.N. ambassador here. Where does this leave new President Obama s to reach some kind of peace agreement in the Middle East?

AJAMI

Then Prime Minister Netanyahu, has already said the challenge for Israel is not Hamas and Gaza and the Palestinians, it's Iran. He genuinely believes in his own vision of Israel,

that Israel is under siege. And it's under siege not by the Palestinians, but the wider Arab-Islamic world.

RATHER

Is he right?

AJAMI

I think he's very right. I think the Arab-Islamic world, the region got radicalized. And I think suddenly the argument that there is a kind of an accommodation between Israel and the Arabs, it doesn't seem to be winning the day in the Arab street.

RATHER

Well, since we're in the region, Syria.

AJAMI

Right.

RATHER

Where does Syria fit in? With whom do they side at the moment? Or do they side with anyone?

AJAMI

The Syrians, I called them the swing state. They are right on the fence because you have - you have Iran right there, and then you have, quote unquote, the Arabs. Meaning the Egyptians, the Jordanians, and the Saudis. The Syrians are exactly on the fence. They're with Iran, but they're eternally hinting that they're open for a deal. And is there room for a bargain between Syria and Israel that if you're an Israeli prime minister and you don't want to make a deal with the Palestinians, the idea has always been, well, why not Syria? Why not Damascus? Let's try to go for Damascus. There has always been talk of a deal between Israel and Syria, there's never anything, nothing has really changed.

RATHER

And you don't think it's happening now or about to happen?

AJAMI

I don't think there is really room for any great change in the Syrian-Israeli relationship.

RATHER

We've mentioned but not discussed Egypt.

AJAMI

Yes.

RATHER

You and I have been talking for at least 20 years—

AJAMI

Yes.

RATHER

At least 20 years about what I as a journalist see as a building volcano in Egypt.

AJAMI

Yes.

RATHER

The United States spends probably the second amount of foreign aid, second only to Israel—

AJAMI

Absolutely.

RATHER

Egypt, which many people don't understand.

AJAMI

Yeah.

RATHER

And we-- we have a, quote, alliance with Hosni Mubarak, the president. But there are these rumbles from below, rumbles from below. Is it just a volcano that's going to continue to rumble below? Or is the lid going to come off there?

AJAMI

I wish I knew. I wish I knew something about where the story of Egypt, the drama of Egypt you know what shape it will take. We now have a man who's been in power in-- in Egypt since 1981, Hosni Mubarak. Everybody expected him to be kind of an interim president. He's been there now for practically, you know, 30 years. So he doesn't seem to be interested in reform. Mubarak is a cop on the beat, that's what he is. His-- his-- his-- his self image is-- what can he give Egypt? Stability. And he's given Egypt stability of a sort. Now, meanwhile, remember the explo-- the demography of Egypt is like a ticking time bomb. Like every year there's a million new Egyptians are born. So what now-- watchers of Egypt are asking the question about Egypt post-Mubarak. Mubarak is not in great health. I mean, I think, you know, at some point, two or three years down the road, we have to think about Egypt beyond Mubarak.

I

RATHER

Obviously, I have another 20 questions, but you've been so generous with your time. Fouad, it's always a pleasure.

AJAMI

Thank you very much.

RATHER

Appreciate you taking the time.

AJAMI

It's an honor, thank you.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

OUR OLD FRIEND FOUAD AJAMI. AND NOW FOR AN UPDATE ON A STORY WE FIRST REPORTED IN 2007 ... AT THAT TIME WE LOOKED AT THE THICK CLOUD OF CONFUSION SURROUNDING MEDICAL MARIJUANA...SEVERAL STATES HAD PASSED LAWS LEGALIZING THE MEDICAL USE AND SALE OF THE DRUG...IT'S RECOGNIZED BY SOME DOCTORS AS A VIABLE PAIN RELIEVER FOR WIDE RANGE OF DISEASES, INCLUDING MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY AND HIV-AIDS. BUT NOT BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, WHICH CONSIDERS ANY SALE OR USE OF MARIJUANA AS A PUNISHABLE OFFENSE. IN RECENT YEARS, POLICE AND FEDERAL AGENTS TARGETED SEVERAL MEDICAL MARIJUANA CLINICS THAT APPEARED TO BE OPERATING LEGALLY UNDER STATE LAW. THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION RECENTLY SIGNALLED THAT MAY CHANGE.

MEDICAL MARIJUANA UPDATE:

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

OUR STORY FOCUSED ON CALIFORNIA, AND CLINICS WHERE MARIJUANA WAS PRESCRIBED AND SOLD LEGALLY IN STORES LIKE THIS ONE. TO GET THE POT, ALL YOU NEEDED WAS A PRESCRIPTION THAT WAS EASILY ATTAINABLE FROM AN IN-HOUSE DOCTOR...FOR AWHILE, FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT LEFT THE MARIJUANA CLINICS ALONE...AND THE MEDICAL MARIJUANA BUSINESS THRIVED – ESPECIALLY IN CALIFORNIA, WHERE HUNDREDS OF CLINICS OPENED SINCE MEDICAL MARIJUANA BECAME LEGAL IN 1996. BUT, DURING PRESIDENT BUSH’S SECOND TERM, DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION AGENTS BEGAN RAIDING SEVERAL CLINICS, AND CHARGING STATE-LICENSED OWNERS WITH TRAFFICKING UNDER FEDERAL LAW. IT WAS ENOUGH TO CHILL CITIES LIKE LOS ANGELES AND SAN DIEGO INTO ISSUING MORATORIUMS ON NEW POT CLINICS...EVEN THOUGH THE CLINICS LARGELY HAD THE SUPPORT OF STATE AND LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS. CLINIC OWNERS – AND PATIENTS – NEVER KNEW IF THEIR WELL-MARKED DOORS WOULD BE BUSTED OPEN BY THE FEDS. WELL, LAST MONTH THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION CLEARED UP SOME OF THE SMOKE. ATTORNEY GENERAL ERIC HOLDER SAID HE WOULD EFFECTIVELY END THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION’S RAIDS ON MEDICAL MARIJUANA DISPENSARIES. TARGETS WOULD NOW BE RESTRICTED TO DRUG TRAFFICKERS THAT QUOTE – “USE MEDICAL MARIJUANA LAWS AS A SHIELD.”- END QUOTE. SOME MARIJUANA ADVOCATES SAW THIS AS A STEP CLOSER TO THE DECRIMINALIZATION OF POT. AT A TOWN HALL MEETING LAST MONTH, PRESIDENT OBAMA ADDRESSED A FLURRY OF EMAILED QUESTIONS THAT ASKED WHETHER HE WOULD CONSIDER LEGALIZING POT AS A WAY TO STIMULATE THE ECONOMY. PRESIDENT OBAMA SENT THESE HOPES UP IN SMOKE.

PRESIDENT OBAMA

"The answer is no, I don't think this is a good strategy to grow our economy."

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

...AND THAT'S OUR REPORT FOR TONIGHT...FROM NEW YORK, FOR HD NET. DAN RATHER REPORTING. GOOD NIGHT.