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PROGRAM TO "ABC NEWS' THIS WEEK WITH DAVID BRINKLEY."

**ABC NEWS**

**THIS WEEK WITH DAVID BRINKLEY**

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TOPIC: Unemployment, the Economy and the '92 Vote

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MR. BRINKLEY: Mr. Tarrance in San Francisco, thank you very much for coming in to talk with us this morning.

MR. TARRANCE: Good morning.

MR. BRINKLEY: Here in the studio here in Washington are George Will and Sam Donaldson, both of ABC News.

Now, Mr. Tarrance, you take polls. How do you read the presidential competition at the moment? Mr. Bush is in New Hampshire--was--he's back here now--and having problems. What do you make of it?

MR. TARRANCE: One of the reasons for being on this program, I suspect, is the bipartisan national survey that we just finished. We take measurements every six months, since our firm and our other collegiate firm have to do a lot of congressional and senate races.

But that finding was rather dramatic in this past one that was just released this week. The most important thing is, we have a re-elect question. And six months ago, 52 percent, a nice majority, said they would vote for George Bush no matter who the opponent was; and that's dropped to 35 percent.

If you assume about 100 million people would be voting in this election coming up, that's about a 17 million voter drop in six months, which is a fairly clear shift.

MR. BRINKLEY: Do they tell you why they've changed their minds?

MR. TARRANCE: Yes, it's very interesting, and this could be a subject for a longer discussion than today. But the economy, which we all know is one of the three major issue domains that all presidential elections have to compete in--the international affairs and the lifestyle or social issues being the other two--that the economy has actually doubled in six months in terms of being the vote determinant in the election. And because of that, we will have a very clear difference between the '92 presidential race and, let's say, the last three presidential races which have been competed on more international and social or lifestyle issues.

Now that economy is a lot different than simply being driven by government statistics like 1982. We know that government statistics are actually worse ten years ago than they are today. But there is a perceptual difference that we ought to discuss today.

MR. WILL: Well, go ahead and do it. Why the perceptual difference? A lot of people have noted the fact that America's pain threshold seems to have moved and we feel worse even though things aren't as bad as they were.

How do you explain it?

MR. TARRANCE: Well, it's always a bad sign in politics to have the perceptions in advance of the statistics. And that means it's volatile and simply uncontrollable, in some respects. Some of these patterns, Sam and George, will be set for the next six months, and then we'll have to wait and see who the Democratic opponent is.

But the economic perceptions or concerns are driven by a--if you want to use an academic terms in a way--perilousness. In other words, this whole Japanese trip not only backfired from a so-called

day-to-day standpoint, but it led into a perception that America no longer is in control of their economy. There are certain declines that they are beginning to feel. Instead of a temporary or episodic lay-off in some of these economic pastimes, it looks like you could have a career lay-off or a permanent lay-off, or a permanent decline.

And so that feeling is not being addressed by the Bush administration, and in some ways is very similar to the perilousness that a lot of people felt on the international scene the last time an incumbent president went for an election under these kinds of circumstances--that is, the '79 and '80 period when Jimmy Carter was running for re-election.

MR. WILL: Let me ask you about the second and third of the three categories that you say are featured in any presidential election. We've talked about the economy.

International affairs, everyone running for president has to pass a certain threshold of presidential caliber competence in foreign policy. And then there are the social issues that were so important just 12 years to the Republicans--abortion, prayer in school, busing, all the rest.

Can you address, first of all, the social issues? Do they retain anything like the saliency they had in the early eighties?

MR. TARRANCE: Well, in my opinion, no. Politicians have learned to balance out their approach. They understand the polarizing points. Most politicians, as you know, stay away from things that are bipolarized as best they can.

Secondly, the economy will drive out--like a strong wind from the north, it will drive out any current weather system no matter how interesting and salient some of those previous issues were. We always go to what's important at the current time, and we have to ask Winston Churchill, who was defeated after successes in World War II.

So the economy will be the driving force. It makes politicians very nervous when they don't have any new ideas. One of the things, I think, that's hurting George Bush--he is caught up in the traffic, it's not totally his fault, the Democrats still have yet to prove they have a worthy opponent and we'll know more about that later in the year, but--

MR. WILL: This is the first post-cold war presidential election. Given the evaporation of the adversary that dominated American thinking for 45 years, how hard is it for a challenger to George Bush to reach that threshold of acceptability in foreign policy? Do people take it that seriously now?

MR. TARRANCE: Well, that's an important point because Bush does have, even though it's being pushed backward right now, does have a latent strength in his experience in foreign policy stature. Democrats have had a rough time not only creating stature, but even creating ideas and messages that Americans agree with on the international front.

But I will say this. If there isn't something that George Bush can hang his hat on internationally--and we know Camp David accords didn't do it for Jimmy Carter, this mea culpa business of I missed the recessionary trend somewhat sounds similar to there was a malaise in the country. It really connotes more weakness than it does strength. The voters seem to be wanting new ideas. They're not hearing anything from anybody. And that may include the Democrats as well.

MR. DONALDSON: You know, you've been talking about what most of us would assume is the solid reasons why people vote for someone, but let me ask you about such things as personality and

to what extent that has something to do with this year's campaign.

Now, if George Bush had gone to New Hampshire and had been presidential instead of saying such things as, If a bullfrog had wings, it wouldn't drag its butt on the ground, and Don't cry for me, Argentina, would it make any difference?

MR. TARRANCE: Make any difference in what respect?

MR. DONALDSON: In the sense that people would feel better about him or that he would come up in your poll?

MR. TARRANCE: No.

MR. DONALDSON: Does his personality and the way he approaches things and the way he talks and the way he flaps his arms have anything to do at all with the way people will make up their minds on who to vote for?

MR. TARRANCE: Well, I think the voter's a little smarter than watching flapping arms, but I do think that the personality of George Bush has been around for a long, long time, and voters are going to look for some new policy ideas. And I think the so-called let's don't confuse progress with motion, Bush has got to understand that new ideas are needed.

Now, he did make a great recovery in the 1988 presidential with a good speech at the convention when he was laboring, as he is right now. Now, that speech actually gave him a jumpstart toward a pretty good presidential election. And the Democrats proved to be rather inept in some of their campaigning.

So Bush may rely on things like that, but that's relying on the other team to fail rather than win yourself.

MR. DONALDSON: Let's talk for a moment about the other team. How are voters reacting to what used to be called the six-pack, now is the five-pack?

MR. TARRANCE: Well, the--really I would call the more populist, anti-government Democrats that have run away from the Democratic Party the last three or four presidential elections, and like the Republicans, but they're the ones that are disappearing on George Bush. He had the same problem in the early summer of 1988, when they were going with this sort of Horatio Alger image of Michael Dukakis until they found otherwise. But that populist Democrat will swing away from the Republican Party if the economy is not right. They have built an image of the Republican Party as pro-growth and they like that, but they're not seeing any growth, and in fact if anything, you're seeing more permanent layoffs and that bothers them.

MR. DONALDSON: Is Pat Buchanan a true threat to the president's renomination or just an irritant?

MR. TARRANCE: Well, it is a threat in this respect, Sam. In terms of winning the nomination, no, but remember I said that the base for--the reelection base for George Bush is down to about 35 percent. That's pretty much the Republican base across the country. If you have an

intellectual and perhaps ideological counterpoint within your own base, as Teddy Kennedy was trying to do to Jimmy Carter in 1980, it could hurt that base vote. You can't win elections without a very fervent base turnout and that's what's going to hurt George Bush for the moment.

Now, a lot of those Republicans will come back, but the point is, these populist Democrats are watching in on this family discussion more than we think.

MR. BRINKLEY: Mr. Tarrance, is it too late to turn it around for George Bush?

MR. TARRANCE: No, not at all. He does have a narrow window. I think he is a little bit aimless in terms of dealing with it. But I do think if he has a good State of the Union message, he's setting you up in the press, he's setting the voters up for a major message, and that better be forthcoming because if that's not there, then we'll have further weakness being perceived by particularly these populist Democrats, who normally don't like the Democratic Party but they'll shift away on economic grounds in a minute.

MR. BRINKLEY: Do you have any figures showing how Pat Buchanan might do in New Hampshire?

MR. TARRANCE: No, but in fact, they're somewhat fugitive at the moment, if you will, because they're really not very predictive at this time, about a week before. Republicans or Democrats don't really make up minds within a family squabble until the very end. But if Pat Buchanan can get something close to 35 to 40 percent, that's a major message within the Republican Party, and I think he's headed in that direction, frankly.

MR. BRINKLEY: People who recall that Gene McCarthy got, what was it, 40 percent in New Hampshire, and called Lyndon Johnson to withdraw.

MR. TARRANCE: Well, some of the national surveys actually showed after that, they thought McCarthy had actually won that race. So perceptions are more important than the actual raw vote total in that race.

MR. BRINKLEY: Well, Mr. Tarrance, thank you. Our time is up. Thank you very much for being with us. Pleasure to have you.

MR. TARRANCE: Thank you.

MR. BRINKLEY: Coming next, Ed Rollins, a Republican strategist here in Washington; and shortly, the chairman of the House, Ways and Means Committee, where all our federal taxes originate, Representative Dan Rostenkowski, Democrat of Chicago. In a moment.

(Announcements)

MR. BRINKLEY: Mr. Rollins, thank you for coming.

MR. ROLLINS: Thank you.