

## Bill Gates on the Financial Crisis, Innovation

September 26, 2008

Want to feel better about the current financial crisis? Listen to [Tom Brokaw's interview](#) with Bill Gates whose optimism about innovation and the economy is matched only by his wealth. Gates thinks investment in innovation will continue on through the crisis. Why do I think Gates is running for something? He comes off as a guy who might have some macro answers. I interviewed him a dozen times or more when I was editor of *PC Week*, an IT newsweekly. He's come a long way since he was a difficult and sometimes combative CEO in 1980s and 1990s.

Below are some excerpts (Brokaw's questions are paraphrased). Would you vote for him as president?

Can entrepreneurs still get capital?

"In terms of investing new medicines or improving software and coming with new ways of doing things, the level of investment will stay very, very high. This country in terms of its science and innovative businesses, it's a great thing for the world. We need a risk-taking culture. The mechanism of risk-taking is not under threat. Even if we did have an economic cycle that was negative, a lot of that endures. In the long run, the U.S. is going to do very, very well. The uniqueness of our universities, science and risk taking - all of that is very much there. It's just the financial sector that has developed these imbalances. We'll see our way through it and continue to be a fantastic country and have a great economy."

Do you worry about a "cataclysmic" event?

"The effect of a depression would be incredibly bad for all countries. The U.S. economy doing well is very, very important to the world. [We have] challenges like price of food going up and political instability. Fortunately, the general trend line has been very positive. In 1990, over 20 million children died of diseases. A few years ago, we had that below 10 million. It should be zero." How can innovative companies help the poor?

"Companies should think about their innovations and how they can help the poor. If you're a drug company, there are diseases you can put a little extra effort into. If you're a cell phone company, there are illiterate farmers who want to know farm prices or health advice. It's taking less than 5% of their innovation power and thinking about these things. Young people want to work for companies that are more involved in that type of innovation."

Are we going to wipe out malaria?

"Absolutely."