



William J. Clinton

Presidential History Project

Briefing Materials

Frank Greer

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Prepared by Jessica Steiner, Research Assistant

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FRANK GREER TIMELINE

Prepared by Jessica M. Steiner

Miller Center, University of Virginia, 03/01/2004

1990 Greer is a media consultant in the Virginia and Arkansas campaigns for governor, with Douglas Wilder (D-VA) and William J. Clinton (D-AR).

1992

January On the 9th, presidential candidate Bill Clinton begins television advertising in the New Hampshire and Boston commercial markets. In an introductory ad titled “The Plan,” Clinton calls for a middle-class tax cut. He then invites viewers to call toll-free for a copy of his 15-page “Plan for America’s Future.” Media consultants Frank Greer and James Carville produce the ad. Greer states, “We think it’s a way to stake out the ground that we are the candidate of substance, we are the candidate offering a real plan.” Rival presidential candidate Senator Bob Kerrey (D-NE) calls the ad “completely misleading.” (*The Washington Post*, 01/10/1992; *Chicago Sun-Times*, 01/10/1992; *The Boston Globe*, 01/10/1992)

Reports circulate that Clinton is gaining support within labor groups, such as the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees and the American Federation of Teachers. Greer, Clinton’s campaign manager David Wilhelm, and political director Stephanie Solien actively lobby labor leaders to earn their support. (*The Washington Post*, 01/11/1992)

Major media outlets report that Clinton is the current frontrunner among the five major Democratic presidential candidates. Greer downplays this characterization to members of the media. (*The Boston Globe*, 01/16/1992)

Greer produces an ad for the Clinton campaign that criticizes Congress for voting itself a pay raise. Reportedly, Representative David R. Obey (D-WI) and other congressional Democrats are upset by the campaign’s decision to run the ad. (*The Boston Globe*, 01/24/1992; *The Washington Post*, 01/25/1992)

Clinton and his wife, Hillary Rodham Clinton, agree to appear on a special edition of *60 Minutes* after the Super Bowl to address allegations of extramarital affairs. Greer says, “We’re going to take this thing on and put it to rest. We’re going to go for the biggest audience and the biggest opportunity to address the American people. Not doing it is really destructive to the political process.” (*The Washington Post*, 01/25/1992)

On the 27th, Greer, Steven Roberts (*U.S. News and World Report*) and Republican strategist Ed Rollins appear on CNN’s *Crossfire*. Greer defends Clinton’s character against allegations of a 12-year affair with Gennifer Flowers and the

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group discusses how these allegations will affect his campaign. (*Crossfire*, 01/27/1992)

February

The Alliance for Rebirth of an Independent American Spirit (ARIAS), a Little Rock, Arkansas group with about 100 contributors, launches radio and newspaper ads against the Clinton campaign. The group pays for time slots that will air on a Manchester, New Hampshire station that is conducting an interview with Clinton. The ads are reportedly the most negative of the Democratic presidential campaign in New Hampshire so far. (*The Washington Post*, 02/07/1992)

Recent polls suggest that Clinton's support is waning in New Hampshire. Nevertheless, Greer maintains that Clinton is in the race for the long haul. He states, "If we finish second or third, this is a campaign that has the message, the strategy, the resources, and the organization on the ground that means we will still win the nomination. We are the only campaign that can say that." (*The New York Times*, 02/15/1992)

Manchester's WMUR-TV mistakenly runs a campaign ad meant to counter Gennifer Flowers's allegations that she had a 12-year affair with Clinton. In the ad, a narrator says, "The President's Republican operatives were involved in promoting the untrue Gennifer Flowers story to destroy Bill Clinton." After pulling the ad, Greer states, "We consciously decided not to run that ad. We didn't authorize it. A low-level employee put it on 11 o'clock at night." (*The Washington Post*, 01/19/1992)

A reporter for a South Carolina station tells Clinton that Jesse Jackson will be campaigning with Senator Tom Harkin's (D-IA) presidential campaign. Within earshot of a running television camera, Clinton tells a staffer, "It's an outrage. It's a dirty, double-crossing, back-stabbing thing to do. For [Jesse Jackson] to do this to me, for me to hear it on this television program, is an act of absolute dishonor." The video receives airplay on CNN nine times over 19 hours, Fox News runs it as its lead story, and footage also airs on NBC. Greer states, "I think it's unfair. Even Jesse says it was a human reaction. It was clarified. Jesse's not upset, Bill's not upset and CNN ran this 200 times." (*The Washington Post*, 02/29/1992)

March

Former Senator Paul E. Tsongas' (D-MA) presidential campaign mounts a counteroffensive against the Clinton campaign's recent attacks that portray Tsongas as a friend of the wealthy and an enemy of the middle-class. However, the Clinton campaign does not plan to air new advertising over the weekend before Super Tuesday. Greer states, "We have avoided sneak attacks. We've been really up front." But Greer grants the campaign may respond with new advertising "depending on what other candidates do." (*The New York Times*, 03/05/1992)

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On the 13th, the Clinton campaign launches a new television ad against Democratic presidential candidate Jerry Brown (D-CA). The ad airs only in Michigan and says that the former California governor's flat tax proposal is another giveaway for the rich. (*The Boston Globe*, 03/15/1992)

Greer believes it is not necessary to staff the Clinton campaign with a large number of commercial advertisers. He states, "That's never worked terribly well for a Democrat in the past, has it? We have a 55-person agency and could pretty much handle everything ourselves. That's not to say we wouldn't accept any creative suggestions from someone on the outside, but I'm not so sure about bringing in outside people." (*Advertising Age*, 03/23/1992)

May

The Clinton campaign reorganizes daily operations with the hopes it will deliver a more coherent message. The campaign centralizes its fundraising, scheduling, administrative, and most of the political and field operations in Little Rock rather than in Washington. However, the issues staff and some of the campaign's political operatives stay in Washington. Greer, pollster Stanley Greenberg, and consultants James Carville and Paul Begala remain in Washington. It is reported that this decision goes against the wishes of many on the Clinton staff. (*The Washington Post*, 05/17/1992)

The Clinton campaign begins to air an updated version of its ad, "The Plan" in Oregon. The ad originally ran in New Hampshire. This ad reemphasizes Clinton's economic plan and urges viewers to call an 800 number to receive a copy. According to Greer, when the ad ran in New Hampshire, the campaign banked 20,000 calls after it aired and the initial response of Oregonians appears equally positive. He continues, "Bill believes it gives [voters] a sense that they are part of the process." (*The Washington Post*, 05/19/1992)

The Clinton campaign announces that the political consultant firm of Greer, Margolis, Mitchell, Grunwald & Associates will serve as the "lead agency" for the general election. During the primaries, Great American Media, a unit of their firm, produces all Clinton's campaign ads. (*The New York Times*, 05/29/1992)

June

The Clinton campaign seeks to expand its communications operation. Boston media consultant Michael P. Shea begins discussions with Clinton's campaign team to help create commercials for the general election. Shea, who with partner Fred Woods produced television ads for Paul Tsongas' campaign, meets with Greer and media adviser Mandy Grunwald. Avis Lavelle, Clinton's press secretary based in Little Rock, nevertheless stresses that Shea is one of many prospects still being considered by Clinton. (*The Boston Globe*, 06/09/1992)

Clinton holds a half-hour question-and-answer session on national television with a group of 150 undecided voters. The Clinton campaign arranges for the Democratic National Committee to pay NBC \$373,000 for the airtime. (*The New York Times*, 06/13/1992)

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MTV supplies a forum for Clinton to field questions from 18 to 24-year-olds on a range of subjects. Greer views the MTV appearance as “a brilliant idea” that “adds a dimension to Bill Clinton as someone who cares deeply about getting young people involved in the political process.” MTV plans to air the 90-minute program a half-dozen times over the course of three days. (*The Washington Post*, 06/17/1992)

July

The Clinton campaign unveils a new advertising team headed by Greer and Grunwald that mixes veterans of Democratic political campaigns with Madison Avenue advertising executives. On the political end, Michael Donilon, a Democratic media consultant, joins the campaign. From the commercial advertising world, Deutsch Inc. will work to construct the candidate’s message. A number of commercial advertising executives not in association with their companies also join the communications team. They include senior vice-president of Walter Thompson, Linda Kaplan Thaler; senior vice president of Della, Femina, McNamee Inc., Ken Gilbert; Paul Spencer and David Angelo of DDB Needham /New York; and senior vice president of Uniworld Group Valerie Graves. (*The Washington Post*, 07/04/1992)

Floyd G. Brown, who heads an independent group promoting President Bush’s reelection, plans to air ads concerning Gennifer Flowers’s alleged affair with Clinton. The ad, which will air on the eve of his nomination at the Democratic National Convention, urges viewers to call a Nevada number, set up by Brown, to hear Clinton’s “intimate conversations” with Flowers for \$4.99 per call. In the 1988 election, Brown helped to develop the Willie Horton ad for the Bush campaign. Greer states, “This is exactly the kind of sleazy, negative politics that people in America are sick and tired of. It is the responsibility of the White House to have this kind of trash taken off the air.” (*The Washington Post*, 07/09/1992; *The Boston Globe*, 07/10/1992)

Clinton chooses Al Gore as his vice-presidential running mate. Greer says the ticket signals “a new era. It is post-Cold War. . . . People are ready for the kind of change they’re bringing.” (*USA Today*, 07/10/1992)

Following the Democratic National Convention, Greer says the Clinton campaign will hold off buying advertising time before the Republican National Convention. He states, “It would be icing on the cake. I don’t think we need to waste money on commercial advertising right now.” The campaign believes the Clinton/Gore bus tour is an effective method for conveying the message that the candidates are in touch with Middle America and share their values. Greer also states that footage of the trip may appear in a political advertisement, but also adds, “We were not doing this for commercials.” (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 07/22/1992; *The New York Times*, 07/22/1992)

August

The Clinton campaign launches two new television ads to counter attacks made against the Democratic presidential nominee at the Republican National

Convention. Greer states, campaign officials “didn’t like the first day of their attacks on Bill Clinton and Al Gore, so we’re going on the air. We want to set the record straight in response to their distorting our record.” The ads, which cost around \$50,000, will run for a three-day span on CNN and local network affiliates. (*The Washington Post*, 08/19/1992; *USA Today*, 08/19/1992)

September Following the debate between Clinton and President Bush, Greer answers reporters’ questions concerning the campaign’s strategy for dealing with the draft issue. He explains, “We basically wanted to take on Bush on the draft issue. We were going to say what most Americans want to hear, which is, here are the facts; now let’s move on and talk about the economy.” (*The Columbus Dispatch*, 09/20/1992)

On the 22nd, the Clinton campaign begins to run ads attacking Bush’s economic record. The ads are tailored for local markets in Ohio, Michigan, Connecticut, Georgia, North Carolina, Louisiana, Kentucky, New Mexico and Colorado. However, ad dollars are not being spent in New York and California where Clinton holds a comfortable lead. (*The Washington Post*, 09/23/1992)

October On the 1st, the Bush campaign begins to air an ad that suggests Clinton will raise taxes on middle-class workers by more than \$2000 a year if elected. However, when reporters press the Bush campaign to explain the ad’s charges, Charles Black, a senior Bush campaign adviser, emphasizes that the ad uses the word “could.” Democrats denounce the Bush ad. Greer calls the ad “a bald-faced lie,” while Carville asserts the Bush numbers “came from outer space.” (*The Washington Post*, 10/02/1992)

On the 2nd, the Clinton campaign airs an ad in 20 states that attempts to refute the Bush campaign’s portrayal of his economic plan. The ad accuses Bush of having the “worst economic record of any President in 50 years.” (*The New York Times*, 10/02/1992)

Clinton prepares for the upcoming presidential debate with his campaign aides. Mickey Kantor, George Stephanopoulos, James Carville, Mandy Grunwald, and Greer test Clinton with informal questions during a mock debate. To prepare, Clinton also studies two briefing books: one on domestic and economic policy and the other on foreign policy and defense issues. His aides also attempt to dissuade Clinton’s inclination for citing statistics in his answers. (*The Boston Globe*, 10/08/1992)

The Democratic National Committee runs a \$1 million advertising campaign to attract younger voters. The 30-second spots appear on networks with younger viewing audiences who watch shows such as *Beverly Hills 90210* and *Roseanne*. (*The New York Times*, 10/22/1992)

According to Greer, the Clinton campaign is spending most of its TV money in about 20 states it considers key to victory. He states, “We’ve been buying much more at the local level than at the network level.” (*USA Today*, 10/28/1992)

On the 29th, Greer confirms the campaign is purchasing its last round of television advertising before the election. The campaign spends \$2 million in last-minute network advertising, including prime-time half-hours on ABC and NBC. The campaign also continues to buy local spots in states up for grabs. The campaign decides to concentrate on 18 states and not to expend ad resources in Republican strongholds such as Florida and Texas. (*The Boston Globe*, 10/30/1992; *USA Today*, 11/02/1992)

November On the 2nd, Clinton is elected 42nd President of the United States.

Following Clinton’s victory, Greer says, “Having worked on a number of presidential campaigns going back to 1976, I was firmly convinced that we needed a candidate for the Democratic Party who could communicate, who was compelling on television and I had always felt that we had had candidates with good programs and maybe good ideas and a good record, but we’d never had anybody that could connect with the American people since John Kennedy. We had not had a candidate who could really go out there and communicate on the television set.” (*All Things Considered*, 11/04/1992)

1993

January During inauguration events, Clinton and his inauguration committee attempt to reaffirm the lessons of the campaign while setting the tone for Clinton’s presidency. Greer finds that inauguration events are “very much a continuation of the type of campaign that Bill Clinton ran – unconventional, reaching out, cutting through cynicism and alienation.” (*USA Today*, 01/05/1993)

President-elect Clinton and his health care advisers meet to discuss how the new Administration will fix the nation’s health care system. Greer says, once a plan is in place, Clinton will have to reassure the American people his plan “will maintain or improve” the system. But Greer asserts Clinton will “find every opportunity to bring average citizens in, as well as experts to explain his program.” (*USA Today*, 01/12/1993)

On the 20th, Clinton takes the oath of office as the nation’s 42nd President. Greer states, Clinton “realizes his goal is to inspire the nation and create a new sense of community.” (*USA Today*, 01/20/1993; *The Washington Post*, 01/21/1993)

February The Clinton Administration goes on the road to promote health care reform. The President promises to outline his plan by the end of May. According to Greer, it is important that the Administration’s plan “reassures the American public that they are going to continue having quality health care at affordable costs.” (*USA Today*, 02/11/1993)

May Appearing on CBS's *This Morning* Reportedly, President Clinton expresses his dissatisfaction with his White House Staff's performance and indicates a major shakeup is underway. Greer confirms the President is "concerned but hopeful" about the way things have been going at the White House. Greer believes it is likely that one of the changes sought by Clinton will be to name former campaign aide Harold Ickes as Chief of Staff. (*The Boston Globe*, 05/28/1993)

September On the 22nd, Clinton launches his effort to reform the nation's health care system with an address to a joint session of Congress. He tells the American people that it is time to fix a "badly broken" system and replace it with one that will guarantee health care "that can never be taken away." (*The Washington Post*, 09/23/1993)

Following the President's televised speech, the White House plans a major media campaign to earn support for the Administrations health care proposal. Commercials both for and against reform are run across the nation. The Health Insurance Association of America spends \$1.7 million in television advertisements. One ad features a couple complaining some of their bills are no longer covered: "The government may force us to pick from a few health care plans designed by government bureaucrats." Families USA, a consumer group represented by Greer, responds with a counterattack spot calling the industry ad "misleading" and charging that "the big insurance companies are spending millions to protect their profits and undermine health reform." (*The Washington Post*, 09/20/1993)

1994

March The U.S. Government provides advisers for political parties taking part in the first all-race election in South Africa. African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela receives occasional political advice from Greer and Clinton's pollster Stan Greenberg in his campaign for President of South Africa. (*USA Today*, 03/10/1994)

June President Clinton participates in events commemorating the 50th anniversary of D-Day, amid polls showing his support at home is dwindling, especially among males and individuals over 65. Greer claims the President's "solid performance" in Europe will help to stabilize support for the President. (*USA Today*, 06/08/1994)

1995

May President Clinton delivers the commencement address at Michigan State University. During the speech, Clinton takes on militia groups following the April 19th bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, and makes the case that government is not the enemy. Greer helps draft the language for the speech. (*The Washington Post*, 05/20/1995)

July

Reports circulate that Greer attends Clinton's Thursday evening political strategy meetings in the family quarters of the White House. At the meetings, Clinton and his advisers review the latest public opinion polls and discuss political and administrative strategies. Participants include First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, Vice President Al Gore, political adviser Dick Morris, Chief of Staff Leon E. Panetta and around 20 other top-level staff members in the Administration. (*The Boston Globe*, 07/06/1995; *National Journal*, 07/20/1996)

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Frank Greer Suggested Topics

Prepared by Jessica M. Steiner

Miller Center, University of Virginia, 03/01/2004

Joining the Clinton Team

- When did you first meet Bill Clinton? Describe your early impressions of him.
- Discuss how you became involved in the 1990 campaign for governor in Arkansas. Why did Clinton decide to change media consultants that year? Describe the particulars of that campaign and what you learned about Clinton from it.
- How did you come to join Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign as media advisor? What lessons from your prior campaign experience were especially useful to you in 1992?

Campaign Media Advisor

- Comment on your primary responsibilities as media adviser to the campaign.
- Describe the structure of Clinton's communications operation during the campaign. How did this office interact with the rest of the campaign team? Describe your relationships with Mandy Grunwald, James Carville, David Wilhelm, Paul Begala, Stanley Greenberg, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Al Gore, and other key players in the campaign.
- Talk about the decision to make your political consulting firm, Greer, Margolis, Mitchell, Grunwald & Associates, the lead agency on the campaign. Remark on the impact of Madison Avenue advertising executives on the campaign's media operations.
- Describe how developments in communications technology (talk radio, the Internet, 24-hour news channels) affected the campaign and its communications strategies. What other methods did the campaign use to convey the candidate's message other than television and radio advertisements (Clinton/Gore bus tour, Democratic National Convention, media appearances, etc.)? What factors determined where and when the campaign would purchase advertising time?
- Talk about the campaign's use of televised question-and-answer sessions on cable and network news, town hall meetings, MTV, late-night television, etc.
- Comment on the media's coverage and portrayal of Clinton during the campaign. How would you characterize Clinton's relationship with the press?
- Discuss the campaign's media strategy during the primary session. What strategies were used specifically against Paul Tsongas, Jerry Brown, Tom Harkin and Bob Kerrey? Compare the campaign's media strategy in the primaries to the general election. Were there major similarities and/or differences?
- Explain how the campaign approached running against an incumbent president. Remark on how Ross Perot's entrances into and departure from the race affected the Clinton campaign. What communications strategies were employed to counter Perot's and President Bush's candidacies?
- Discuss the political themes central to the campaign's advertising strategy ("Putting People First," "Ending Welfare as We Know It," "A New Generation of Democrats," etc.).
- How did Clinton's decision to make Al Gore his running mate impact the campaign? How was advertising used to convey the political symbolism of this decision?
- What impact did political scandals have on the campaign and your communications strategy?

The Transition and First Term

- What role did you have during the transition period and inauguration events?
- During the inauguration, what message did the transition team attempt to convey to the American people?
- Comment on your involvement in the Clinton Administration following the President's inauguration. Did you play a role in shaping the President's policy agenda (health care, economic reform, tax proposal, etc.)?
- Describe the weekly Thursday night strategy meetings in the President's private residence. What was the purpose of these meetings? Who were the usual participants?
- How closely were your efforts on behalf of candidates in other countries (such as Nelson Mandela) monitored by the White House? Were there coordinated attempts to develop a global network of like-minded, "third-way" leaders?

The Clinton Presidency in Retrospect

- Discuss Clinton skills as a campaigner. Evaluate Clinton as a public leader, a legislative leader, and party leader. Compare Clinton's leadership and communications styles to those of other politicians you served.
- How did Clinton respond to adversity and setbacks?
- What role did presidential rhetoric play in the Clinton presidency? How effective was Clinton's use of the bully pulpit?
- Was Clinton's relationship with the press more adversarial than usual for a president? If so, why? Can you identify any missed opportunities that might have led to improved relations with the press?
- What were the strengths and weaknesses of the Clinton presidency?
- What features of the Clinton presidency were missed or overlooked by the press? How should the Clinton presidency be viewed by history?