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Diane D. Blair Papers (MC 1632)

1992 Clinton Presidential Campaign Interviews

Interview with Stanley Bernard Greenberg

Campaign Position: Pollster

Little Rock, Arkansas

December 10, 1992

Overview

Diane D. Blair was an assistant professor of political science at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, when she took a leave of absence to serve as a senior researcher in Governor Bill Clinton's presidential campaign. Approximately one month before the November election, Blair obtained permission from the governor to conduct interviews with participants in the Clinton/Gore campaign. In her own words, ". . . I had two major purposes in mind: first, simply to preserve for posterity an accomplished campaign organization that would essentially disappear on election day; and second, through discussions with campaign workers from all departments, to see what those on the inside believed to be the key ingredients of the campaign's success." She prepared a list of questions and began interviewing people as schedules allowed.

After Blair's death in 2000, her husband, Jim Blair, donated her personal and professional papers to Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries. Stanley Bernard Greenberg reviewed this transcript and granted permission to make this interview available to scholars, students, and researchers. The final document may contain edits requested by the interviewee. This transcript was processed as part of the Diane D. Blair Papers and prepared for publication by the editorial staff of the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History.

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[Beginning of Interview]

Diane Blair: Stan, how long have you had an association with Bill Clinton? Did you find him? Did he find you? How did this come about?

Stanley Greenberg: He found me. Or Frank Greer found me. I got a call from Frank and then from Gloria Cabe, who wanted me to come to Arkansas to work on the '90 gubernatorial race, to figure out the themes for getting Bill Clinton reelected. They had surveys, they had the forces doing polling, but building a rationale for another term for Bill Clinton was not as easy because he had been there for so many terms. I came and did both the focus groups. It is some measure of Bill Clinton's appreciation for the research, for the commitment to people, that I continued on. I did these focus groups. I'm a morning person, Bill Clinton's a night person. I did these focus groups, and actually found some very interesting things, but he wanted a report the night of the focus groups, and I never report the night of the focus groups. I need time to go through the notes and think about it. I usually like to read the transcripts. But he wanted the report the night of the focus group, so I came back to the mansion. I'd come from east coast time, so it was 12:30 at night or later east coast time. I was tired. I hadn't been over the notes. I started to talk and my mouth wouldn't move. I said, "Can we do this in the morning?" Everybody agreed. So we agreed for us to come and meet at, I think, 7:00 in the morning. For Bill Clinton to agree to a 7:00 a.m. meeting is very impressive. I

overslept. I overslept and missed the meeting. I got there an hour late, and he was still there waiting. I'd stayed up that night going over the data, but then I was so tired, I'd overslept and missed my wake-up call. Despite that, I ended up continuing to work on the campaign. So, I came back in a couple times, advising mainly on the media strategy. I was sending things to him, particularly a piece I was working through on the Democratic Party. Which appeared in *American Prospect*. I sent it to him in draft and eventually got it as an article. It was published. At one point he said, "All right. I've read this now three times. Enough." But it was clear that we had a common understanding of the problems of the party, a common understanding of how to change things. So when they had the initial meetings, I was called. Gloria Cabe called me so I was part of the first group of people that sat around and discussed the possibility of running.

DB: One of the things, obviously, that was a major problem for him was the commitment to serve a full term that he made in '90. Did you wince when he made that back in '90? Or was it already clear in your mind that he might be going in '92?

SG: When I worked with him in '90 I really took him at his word. I was not doing '90 because he might run for president. I'm focused. My focus in '90 was how to get him reelected and there was a genuine possibility of not getting reelected. I thought it was right that he said he was not running, because he said he wasn't running. I mean, I believed it; he believed it when he said it. I don't believe it was cynical. He

had said it before I was on the scene. It wasn't because of my research. I did research it in the focus groups. It was important to people, so it was important to him. I know that it was increasingly the main subject of conversation. He was very upset about this question. I remember him saying about a conversation he had with Chelsea. He described to Chelsea about his driving around the state talking to people. He said that Chelsea said to him, "If there is one person who thinks you made a commitment and doesn't want to release you, then you've made a commitment to that person." Chelsea didn't understand the concept of the majority of the people, or even the overwhelming majority were willing to release him. So, this clearly bothered him. I can tell you the insiders just didn't believe that this was real. I believed it was real.

DB: Are you surprised that the Republicans didn't make more of this? When I did my list of the points where he was most vulnerable, to me, this was fundamental.

SG: Yes. When he went to Michigan on one of his trips, the Michigan Republican Party did, like, a five-minute video. In fact, what was aired by the Michigan Republicans—I presume it was made by the Republican National Committee—which was a critique of Clinton, had him breaking his promises. They had the film footage of him saying he wouldn't run, so I thought they would use it, particularly since one of Bush's vulnerabilities was "Read my lips" and here was a cancel—breaking promises. Here was hypocrisy and being political. But they never made the hits.

DB: It got squished into a big ad with lots of other, "He said this and did that."

SG: I remember during the debate prep we went through this. Clinton talked a lot in that about what happened. How he handled that question of that commitment. He says, “George Bush virtually posted this on a bulletin board and said, ‘Read my lips,’ and didn’t take his pledge seriously.” Bill Clinton took that pledge seriously and clearly agonized over it. Traveled all over the state, was involved in the process that took weeks before he reached a comfort level.

DB: Endless phone calls with his friends.

SG: We were all waiting for the process to conclude. I believe that the people of Arkansas that he met while traveling around the state, had they said, “We resent this,” I think he wouldn’t have run.

DB: But he did decide to run. What was your role? One person, when I asked, “If you went right up to the top, where is the real decision-making center?” said, “Well, if you got right up to the top, you’d find a focus group.” How do you respond to that?

SG: I don’t think that’s right. Obviously there are different phases of the campaign. Decision-making changed by day. It varied at different points. At the very beginning of this I played an organizational role that had nothing to do with research. I’m a good organizer. The initial process lacked good organization, lacked a plan. In fact, I remember at one point I was asked to write a memo laying out two strategies—a plan for going forward and for not. We’d made a decision that he was going to decide what he was going to do by August 12, which got delayed, and delayed, and delayed. I was supposed to write a memo on what we’d do if he doesn’t run and also a memo on what he should do, organizational steps, who he should hire, etc. I wrote the memo on what we should do if he decided to run, never

thinking about the number one, his decision not to run. I sent a memo in just saying, “Nuts.” I didn’t write it. In any case, early on I was trying to get the thing staffed. Clinton had a very small view. He had been advised by Gephardt that he shouldn’t spend money up front. We had an announcement that was coming up that was supposed to be at the end of September. We had no staff. We had nobody. We had no press secretary, no staff, no way of doing anything. So it was very hard initially to get him to spend money. And the research was incredibly limited at the beginning. I did focus groups in New Hampshire in September, but other than that I don’t think we did research until almost November. The campaign in its initial days and initial planning . . .

DB: So the announcement statement and everything, that was done without the benefit of focus groups?

SG: We did focus groups in New Hampshire so that we’d at least have them in mind, but if you look at the Cleveland speech, the DLC Cleveland speech, which predates any research and predates the announcement, most of the things were there. There were some modifications. But essentially this was a campaign that he had conceived over the years. We now can see that maybe back in 1980, 1981, but it was certainly there over the year that he was working on the DLC, flying around the country. I remember the writing of the speech. Frank did an initial draft and it was just overwhelmingly basically chunks of previous speeches, mainly Cleveland. Then he rewrote the speech. He must have spent five hours in that little room off the kitchen rewriting the speech. Not rewriting, but starting from scratch. It was very late, almost 11:30 at night, and I was on the verge of desperation and he looked at what

he had written. Bruce Reed was putting it into the computer, and looked at Frank, pulled out one of Frank's earlier drafts and he said, "Frank, maybe your draft was better." Frank's draft was 90 percent Bill Clinton words, anyway. He said, "Why don't you take the best of those drafts?" So then Bruce Reed, Frank and I, by 2:30 we had it pieced together into a speech. Bruce Reed and Frank worked the rest of the night cleaning it up. Then he got it about 7:00. He only went through it one time before he delivered it. And he didn't have a teleprompter. If you saw him deliver it, you thought he had looked at it. In any case, all of that is a way saying so much of this comes out of his head. The notion that there is a focus group there is an insult. I think it is Bill Clinton.

DB: There is also almost a stunning consistency, when you think how little deviation there was at the very end of the campaign from the ideas that he began with.

SG: He had a team that respected that, pushed him to that. He wanted to give a "New Covenant Speech" in Atlanta. For various reasons, everybody was again intellectually exhausted—out of ideas. The day of the New Hampshire primary I went in the van with him in order to talk through the "New Covenant Speech." Bruce Reed was waiting back at the hotel to write it. We also had some other people involved in it, including Steve Edward and others. We wanted to do a major speech in Atlanta. He was ready to do it. The campaign wasn't ready. It took a loss in South Dakota, I think, to bring home to us how unprepared we were. And ranting and raving by Bill Clinton. We were awful in that period—we were not focused. We wanted to go back to the "New Covenant" themes, particularly going south, but we just couldn't, as a campaign, rise to that level. We were just too exhausted from

doing the comeback in New Hampshire. And at the end of the campaign, as it became more and more political, more and more rallies, we were pushing for more “New Covenant” things. We said, “It sounds too political. You need to challenge people, here at the end. We need to elevate this as Bush is being political and attacking, we need to elevate this and go back to those original themes.” I think he built a campaign that identified with his ideas.

DB: When you say pushing to get back to the “New Covenant,” that phrase, “New Covenant,” what did that really mean?

SG: The two words “New Covenant” didn’t really do a whole lot.

DB: But the rights and responsibilities, service . . .

SG: The obligations, the service, and “We’re all in this together” values. Those were central to his campaign, central to why he would appeal to the voters to come back to the Democrats. It was our touchstone. He came back to it at various times. The campaign came back to it at various times.

DB: So, from the very beginning, there was a great compatibility, a philosophical compatibility, between you and the candidate? Also a candidate who understands research?

SG: He understands research. He understands all too well. One of the maddening things was his desire to edit questionnaires. He did say to me that he considered Dick Morris had been almost his alter ego. He had given me more leeway than anybody in his life to go out and do research on him, but he wanted to edit the questionnaires. The maddening thing was that his edits were very smart and very right. It became impossible. You just could not wait for him to get to the questionnaire. In the end

he really did not get that kind of input, which is too bad because it was invaluable. Frustrating. But he understood the data, he read it closely. He always looked at the worst news he could find in it. You could read him ten statistics which were all good news and he would find the one that said all but 40 percent say that I should stay as governor of Arkansas or something.

DB: Knowing the Bill Clinton who has always wanted every vote, every county—was it a battle within getting him to stick to the strategy?

SG: I wouldn't say a battle. There was a tension—he really had to be convinced. He did want to go to every state and get every vote. The first context was the problem of college-educated voters in the primary—upset him a lot for a number of reasons. I think he thought that since they're supposed to be the smartest people and he's the smartest candidate, he should get their vote. It's part of wanting to get every vote. The fact is that two-thirds of the voters weren't college graduates. He was winning those voters. Paul Tsongas had a message that was reaching those voters. Our voters were downscale. I remember in Florida in particular where we drew that, and New York. There were special reasons why you could do this, because in New York almost half the college-educated voters were Jewish, who we believed would not vote for Jerry Brown in the end, and in Florida a good portion of the college educated were seniors, and Jewish. And so we—again, we could go downscale but still go competitively with college-educated. So our message went downscale. It always bothered him that we weren't going for the whole spectrum of the electorate. It bothered him when the editorial boards, the *Atlanta Constitution* in particular [didn't support him]. In the general we had whether you go to Texas and Florida.

How far do you go in terms of states. He says after the election he was pleased that we didn't win them because then the expectation would have been so high that it was very hard to realize it. It was a constant tension because he wanted to go to all those states. This was not a bitter battle. You had to convince him, and he listened. He was really a great candidate in the general. Very focused and he argued his position. But if you argued with him, and you had your arguments marshaled, he went with the decision of the campaign, nine times out of ten cases.

DB: A two-part question. One is, how much polling, research, focus groups went on; and was there ever a feeling that you were doing too much or too little?

SG: It depends on the period of time. I would be surprised if you found many people involved in the strategic aspects of the campaign who feel that we polled too much. We had to make some pretty critical choices on how we handled the choice between Georgia, Maryland, Colorado. I don't know how we would have made that decision without research. If you watched the Kennedy School thing, if you listened to the Kerrey people who said, "We were bewildered, we had no data." We had data that said Kerrey could have won Colorado. We were stunned by that decision [to go to Georgia].

DB: But did you need a poll to show that?

SG: We were stunned when he went to Georgia instead of Colorado, but he had no data.

DB: I almost had a sense with that JFK retrospective that you were doing levels of analysis they [Republicans] weren't doing. Did you have that sense? I thought that they were supposed to be whizzes at this kind of thing.

SG: The polling for the Bush administration was much more erratic than for Reagan. Reagan had much more regular polling, but Bush was fairly erratic—his campaign operation was fairly erratic. I just don't know if it was that regular. We polled in the primaries—everybody. We used polling for very targeted exercises. We polled the party delegates. We knew where we were with the Florida delegates in advance. We polled the potential audience using the same criteria as the second-debate screening, so that he understood something about the likely attitudes of the people of the audience that he was going to be talking to. We polled once a week nationally, basically from the June primary.

DB: When you say national, was it national or in the states?

SG: A national sample, weekly, then increased to twice a week in September. Then three times a week—two-day polls. Three times a week in the last three weeks. If anything, the campaign was sorry that it missed one day. Five polls over six days, two-day polls over six days. The day there was no poll, no one liked me. I didn't have a sense that people felt we were overpolling. We polled heavy in June in order to get our strategic message straight.

DB: Heavy in June must have been a masochistic exercise.

SG: Heavy. We weren't polling to check where the race was, we were polling to tell our message and find the best way to move him up in the polls. We found the message, "Failed government, people first," which was critical to the way we moved the race. I remember Paul Tully for the DNC would do one national poll every three months. Paul would tell me he would spend two weeks studying the demographics, and only after he really felt that he knew the demographics would he look at the rest of the

poll. So here's poor Paul who was used to polling every three months, having two weeks of demographics—after California we were practically the nominee. We were working together with the DNC and they were paying for the polls. We polled once and looked at the data and the message test didn't work like we wanted, so within twenty-four hours we went with another national poll. Paul said, "I haven't gotten past the demographics. How can you be able to put out another poll?" Paul had to get used to the pace of this—research was heavy. It was research driven—that is, we were constantly testing what we were doing, but I think, always with an end in mind, the strategic end in mind, not just for the sake of knowing where we were. If there's probably any place we found any resistance to it, would be in media testing. We did test almost everything, I think we made some wise decisions because of it. I think we avoided some mistakes. I can give you an example. We tested the anti-Arkansas spot that the Republicans put on. The Republicans put all their money behind one spot—the first time they did it in the whole campaign.

DB: The vulture ad?

SG: Yes, the vulture. They put it on network, and all the states they had media on, they put that one spot on everything. They threw everything behind that one spot. We tested the spot. First we tested our version, because we got the text of it before it actually aired. So we produced our own spot. Frank produced his own spot using their text, but his own pictures. It was a better spot than their spot. It didn't prove very effective. Then we tested their spot, and it didn't prove very effective. So we made a decision not to go off the economy. To stay on our economic message.

DB: That must have been tough for Clinton, not to answer that Arkansas attack.

SG: It was very painful. It was actually the single most painful phone call that I can remember with Bill Clinton. He recalled 1980 and he recalled that he had never let an attack go unanswered. We concluded that the spot wasn't very good, they went overboard, people had heard so many things that it was just mudslinging, and that it was more important for us to make the end of the race about the economy, rather than answer the Arkansas Record. We all argued very forcefully, James, George, myself, on the phone with him. He agreed to it, but his heart wasn't in it. But when we look at the postelection poll the perception of Clinton's job performance in Arkansas did not drop a point. It had no effect.

DB: Why would they put all of their money into something when they could have done a better spot using the same data?

SG: I don't know. I can't explain it. We were very confident that this wasn't a good spot. It was aired at the wrong time—it was too late. The commercial media people thought we did too much focus-group testing response, but I think we avoided some big mistakes. I think we made some good decisions.

DB: This campaign is now being described as the most effective presidential campaign in recent American history. What, from your perspective, made it so effective?

SG: A great candidate. Couldn't do it without a great candidate. I think it was a very small, tight team. Camaraderie—belief in what we were all doing. There was a decision that Bill and Hillary made about having this campaign in Little Rock that was not always agreed with. Best decision the campaign made—best decision. What it created was what was created in New Hampshire. It was a great campaign in New Hampshire because, one, Bill Clinton stood up under pressure, held his

ground, was comfortable with himself and people came to believe in him. But the campaign was centralized in New Hampshire for the first time. Before, we were all over the place. When we all moved to New Hampshire, we all lived in the same hotel. We met in the morning. We met at night. We were constantly communicating, constantly sharing information, constantly making adjustments. The candidate was part of it. We were a machine. That last week in New Hampshire—if the campaign was the best campaign ever, the last week in New Hampshire was the best week of this campaign. We kind of replicated it in Illinois, when we moved up there. We kind of replicated in New York, when we moved there. But we replicated in a larger scale after the Democratic Convention when we said, basically, “Everybody move to Little Rock. You’re going to live this campaign.” And Bill gave this campaign authority. You can have it centralized, but it doesn’t mean a thing if the candidate doesn’t have faith in the team he’s created. It created a team. The team lived and breathed together. I was with my office from 5:30 a.m. on getting poll numbers—James at 6:45, with a 7:00 meeting every morning. The day was coordinated. We met periodically. We’d go back to George’s office and meet with the governor on the phone. We’d reach a common understanding with the governor. We’d meet periodically as we needed to during the course of the day. We had a 7:00 meeting—had dinner together every night to adjust where we were going. We did that from July on.

DB: Who was that team?

- SG: You had a core team. A strategic team, which was George, James, Mandy and myself, but a very close working relationship with Wilhelm, with Eli, and with Susan [Thomases]. I think it became centralized there.
- DB: Well, the press was certainly taken with the highly-disciplined fighting machine, but in war, doesn't there have to be a commander in chief?
- SG: James was clearly the most forceful. George had the most authority because he was the person most in communication with the governor, but George hadn't done a campaign before. George understood communication, he understood Bill Clinton better than everybody else on that team. He understood communication, he was extraordinary with the press, but he knew what he didn't know. James was the most focused, the most strategic of the group. One deferred. I was developing plans and themes, in addition to tracking. We all meddled in each others' areas, but there was respect for everybody and their areas. That includes Wilhelm, and Susan as well. People had the space to do their own work, but they weren't compartmentalized. You did come up with group decisions. It's hard to think of a major decision that we didn't arrive at collectively.
- DB: At the JFK conference, when Mary Matalin expressed frustration at trying to make decisions, getting all the sign-offs, she said at one point, "Well we knew we had to change, but it was like trying to turn a battleship around." I thought how different that seemed from our own group, which seemed able to shift as decisions needed to be made.
- SG: We could decide at night that we were going to go in a particular direction. We'd have the morning meeting and we knew the poll numbers, we would talk and meet

with the governor on the phone. We could persuade the governor, which we usually could, or make a recommendation of where we wanted to go. We could move very quickly. Everything was linked. The speech department was linked. The “War Room” operation was linked. When we moved, we moved. We could move in a matter of hours—make major strategic changes.

DB: The War Room meetings, what did they represent to you?

SG: It depended on which ones. The morning meetings were work meetings. The morning meetings—you got a genuine briefing on the news, you would check the calendar for the day. You organized your day around the calendar, what speeches were going to happen, what events were going to happen. They were very helpful meetings. The evening meetings were much more of a pep rally, morale building. That was very much James and George. It was very inclusive. I don’t quite know how to explain the campaign that was both very, very tight, and a small decision-making group, yet was very inclusive. I think people in that headquarters felt very involved. Let me give you an example. I’ve been reading about the White House—under Reagan and Bush, there were all these divisions, all these personal agendas, all the leaking. In the campaign, I wrote sixty-seven memos. I did thirty-two national polls after California, which were all circulated. The circulation list was at least thirty people who were getting the polls and memos, and that doesn’t count about two hundred state polls, and nothing leaked. Nothing leaked during the course of the campaign. People had one agenda, which was elect Bill Clinton who they had great respect for. And they had respect for each other. I didn’t see the personal agendas. I’m not trying to romanticize the campaign. I just didn’t see people going off on

their own trying to advance themselves and producing problems within the campaign. I think the morale was strong, with lots of solidarity.

DB: I have wondered if morale would have been that high if we hadn't been winning.

SG: There could have been that—taking credit—I don't know.

DB: When were you certain that Clinton would get the presidential nomination?

SG: Certainly from after the second debate.

DB: The nomination?

SG: Illinois and Michigan. Our plan all along was to win Illinois. In fact our initial plan did not include Michigan. Indeed, I did not have a poll from Michigan, 'cause it just wasn't in our plans. But we won so strong on Super Tuesday that when we went and took a look, we were nearly as strong in Michigan as we were in Illinois. So we had a chance of really putting it away. And we did. There's no doubt that the election was over then.

DB: When were you certain that he would win the presidency?

SG: I began to believe that after the Republican Convention and we went back to a steady ten-point lead. I began to believe that there was a structure to this race that was incredibly stable. It had to do with some combination of wanting to be done with George Bush and wanting to vote for Bill Clinton. It just didn't move that much. George Bush would vary between thirty-nine and forty-one in a two-way race. And our vote would vary between fifty-one, fifty-three, and just didn't move. From Labor Day on I was pretty comfortable that we were going to win it.

DB: Let me go back to when you said that in June, when you were really rethinking the message and the strategy, and you say it was putting people first, was our message

what turned things around? I mean, Perot got out, then the Gore selection—to what extent did message really count?

SG: Gore *was* message. The research started in April and we kind of finished it in mid-June. The most important piece was biography. We knew that. That was settled very early on in the research. That was so simple. Basically it was just the facts. The facts would turn it. I remember in focus groups where we'd give them a list of just simple facts about Bill Clinton's history. Born in Hope, Arkansas, a little town; mother went to nursing school. Lived with his grandmother. Just those simple little facts. People didn't just turn. They were angry. They were angry with the press. They said, "We didn't know this man. This guy can be for people. He can care about people. He's determined. He worked hard for what he got in life. He has values." Just a simple set of facts about his biography. So we knew our main task was biography. That's why we went to popular culture shows, because we could talk about biography, which is hard to do in newsrooms. It's why the convention and the convention speech. I believe it had an enormous impact. Perhaps biography was not the message. There was a congruence of message and biography. He wanted to make the argument that his economic message was to invest in people, educate them, give them the ability to get ahead. And his life was educating himself—working hard. He went back and raised the education levels of Arkansas. It all was one story. Message and biography came together. It's why I think it worked. So part of it was biography, part of it was message and luck. When we brought out our economic plan, we knew people were dead serious about the economy. They wanted specifics. They wanted a plan. The week we brought out

the economic plan, Bush and Perot were fighting each other, so you had this contrast of us being serious about the economy, them being political and mudslinging. That pushed us forward. I think the events—the Rainbow Coalition, the UAW, and AFSCME speeches—showed the strength of character. The Gore selection showed that this was a moderate new kind of Democrat. Young, new ideas, change. The convention. Perot was sinking badly before he pulled out. He was down twenty-one. He was up to, like, thirty-seven, then it dropped down to twenty-one. He was dropping a couple of points a day when he pulled out of the race. His withdrawal certainly helped us. The bus trip was also a message. All together pushed us into the lead. I think it was the message, a lot of luck. The bus trips were right, but they could have been a bust. The Gore thing was bigger than what any of us planned, hoped for.

DB: You're saying planned or hoped for. It was my understanding that the strategic, political people were pretty much kept out of the vice-presidential selection.

SG: Absolutely. Clinton solicited opinions. He asked me and I'm sure he asked each of us what we thought, who we wanted, what were the arguments for and against. Clinton asked me for my views on at least two occasions. The consultants as a group did a memo to Warren Christopher on criteria for a vice-presidential selection. We became more actively involved at the end.

DB: What, from your perspective, was the low point of the campaign?

SG: There were a couple points. During New Hampshire when I just thought it could not be saved. I remember saying to Frank, "I'm just not sure about this campaign."

DB: People used the word free fall.

SG: There you had press out of control. You had an issue you couldn't control. It was beyond your reach. It was frustrating, but it was beyond your reach. After South Dakota it was in our hands. We did what we had to do in New Hampshire. He did what he had to do. We had a great win, a comeback that felt like a win. But then we were really at sea. We did not have a concept. We did not have a strategic idea of how to win, and we knew it, but we also didn't have the energy to do it. We also were all over the place. We were all together in New Hampshire, very tight, but then as soon as that was over, James went to Georgia, I went back to Washington, Clinton went on the road. George went with him on the road. So that now we were all over the country. We weren't meeting together. Clinton knew we didn't have a concept. We weren't ready for South Dakota. We didn't have enough energy in New Hampshire to both win New Hampshire and think through a strategy for South Dakota, which had to have been done simultaneously. We didn't have it. We went off and did Maine, which was a mistake. We basically didn't have an underlying idea on how to win this.

DB: So what turned it around?

SG: Bill Clinton beating us all up. One, Bill got angry with everybody to the point that everybody had to address the fact that they didn't have an idea how they were going to win this. I think the debates—this was Mini-Super Tuesday—we had debates right before, leading up, where in one twenty-four hour period we debated in Colorado, Georgia, and Maryland. And we were brought back together for that. We traveled together. We went from an awful morning, I remember, in Denver. Clinton was with Frank and me and it was a terrible debate. Then in Georgia, we had a good

debate, and a great debate in Maryland. I think both our spirits changed and our sense of—because we had to talk through each debate, it forces you to look, “What do we want to achieve here? What do we want to achieve in each of the states? What do we want to achieve overall?” These things are all run together. They’re being televised nationally. It forced concentration. Getting the media right for Georgia, which we knew we had to win. Then we went on to Florida. We were ready. We knew the day after Georgia, we knew how to run. We knew how to beat Paul Tsongas. We knew how to run the day after Georgia.

DB: What, from your perspective, was the high point of the campaign?

SG: I think the second debate. I think it was just the culmination. He was so spectacular. The debate prep was just right—but it also was him. There was him identifying with people and they with him, and they’re putting their hopes in him. That was the reason he was winning. Not because of some debating points. It’s just like I said, “He’s right for these times.” These other folks are irrelevant. I just thought for sure after that we couldn’t lose.

DB: What is it that you want to make certain that the future understands about this campaign?

SG: I don’t know if it’s so much the campaign. This is a great man. He’s become a great man in the campaign. The campaign was a test in democracy. Bill Clinton intellectually understood how to run, but he wasn’t a great debater at the beginning, he even wasn’t a great speaker. The crowds weren’t rushing to Bill Clinton in the beginning. He grew, and grew, and grew and when he got to that last thirty-six hour period, where he went all through the night and finished up in the west, everybody

else was exhausted, but Bill Clinton got stronger and stronger. Not just that day, but through the campaign. If he were still standing at the end of this process, people knew that they had someone who wouldn't lay down and wouldn't give up. Even though he was this young, he was big enough to take on the country's problems. He emerged as a great candidate, I think. I think that's why he may end up as a great president.

[End of Interview]

[Reviewed and edited by Pryor Center staff]