

Special Collections
University of Arkansas Libraries
365 N. McIlroy Avenue
Fayetteville, AR 72701-4002
(479) 575-8444

Diane D. Blair Papers (MC 1632)

1992 Clinton Presidential Campaign Interviews

Interview with Franklin Owen Greer

Campaign Position: Media Consultant

Telephone Interview

December 28, 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. Franklin Owen Greer 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.

The Diane D. Blair Papers are housed in Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. Permission to republish or quote from this interview must be obtained before publication. Please contact Special Collections at (479) 575-8444 or specoll@uark.edu for assistance. A "Permission to Publish Request Form" may found at <http://libinfo.uark.edu/specialcollections/forms/>.

[Beginning of Interview]

Diane Blair: Frank how did you come to be associated with the Clinton presidential campaign?

Frank Greer: I was associated with the Clinton gubernatorial campaign. So that I go back a little bit further than the presidential campaign To give some background, I hoped he'd run in 1988. I had developed a friendship with the Clintons and admiration because of his leadership with the National Governors Association. As had my wife, Stephanie. So that I thought of him as really the best possible candidate for the Democrats in 1992, after he'd decided not to run in 1988. In June of 1990 he called. This was after we had already filled up our schedule with campaigns in 1990. He called and said he was facing a real challenge in the general election with Sheffield Nelson and if I wanted him to run for anything including dogcatcher I'd had better get myself to Arkansas. I did. The only reason it's valuable to go back that far is to also point out that we came in and realized it was a serious challenge and he had to take it very seriously. He was under 50 percent, etc. I suggested he bring in Stan Greenberg, with whom he had not worked with. Suggested that Greenberg would be perfect—even though he was working with another pollster at that time, named Dick Morris—that Greenberg would be great to do focus groups. We had to do them quickly. We did the first set of

focus groups, I think, in Dardanelle, Arkansas, in a small little Holiday Inn dining room. Anyway, we came back to Little Rock and Greenberg, I think the first morning he was supposed to give a report to Clinton, he overslept. It was amazing. He was so worried about being late. So anyway Stan and I worked on the gubernatorial campaign all the way through. I developed a greater appreciation for Bill, not only as a national leader who had thought a lot about solutions for the problems facing the country, but also a person who's a terrific campaigner, both at the grassroots, one-on-one level, and also on television as somebody who could really communicate. I thought even more so, that is exactly what the Democratic Party needed. Somebody who had solutions, somebody who had thought about problems facing the country, somebody who had a real deep commitment.

DB: You say, a problem solver and a campaigner. I've also been interested in the extent to which he is a political strategist.

FG: Yes. And he was very much involved in every decision, as was Hillary, as a matter of fact during the gubernatorial campaign. He thinks about it a lot. But it is part of his unique ability to connect with the public. To motivate, to inspire, to move them. I think it's one of his true talents and skills. Understanding that you have to bring people with you and you have to communicate with them. You have to motivate them and inspire them. That in a certain sense is political strategy as well. It's understanding the political dynamic in a democracy. And he

understands how to motivate folks. But he thinks a lot about it and I think he's one of the best. They kept saying who's the key strategist, and I always said, "Bill Clinton is the key strategist."

DB: So then when did your involvement with the presidential campaign begin?

FG: I think I made it clear to him and I think that's one of the reasons he called me in June when he got in trouble. I made it clear to him that I really believed he should run in '92. One, that Bush was beatable. That he could win the nomination and I thought definitely he could win the presidency. So even after the gubernatorial race I stayed in touch and urged him to run. I think maybe the first meeting we had was March, where with Gloria Cabe and Bruce Lindsey I said, "Look, if you're going into the DLC meetings that's going to have a lot to do with your message and it's going to have a lot to do with how you're perceived as a national candidate. You need to think long and hard about that." What a very small group of us, I think decided to do, in the spring of '91, was to do everything possible to make it possible for him to run. To at least put in place and keep things moving in the direction, even though he had not decided. He and Hillary, I think, still had lots of doubts about whether he should run in '92. It was primarily Bruce, Gloria Cabe, myself, in some of the meetings, Mike Gauldin and folks like that. We'd usually meet at the mansion in the study. And Greenberg often came in for those. Probably one of the other great contributions I made to the campaign, I suggested we involve Mark Gearan. Early, early on and most people don't realize this, Mark had another job.

DB: Now Mark was doing what at the time?

FG: He was head of the Democratic Governors Association. I had just an incredible respect for him at the DGA, and Stephanie did too. I said to both Bill and Hillary, because they had known him with DGA, “Here’s a guy whose got presidential experience. He brings a different perspective rather than southerners like me and Bill—or Greenberg, not as a southerner but someone who had not been involved in presidential campaign.” But here was Mark Gearan who had. Hillary and Bill both took to him. His good humor, his good nature. I would say that the first series of meetings were really around getting ready for the DLC convention and speech in Cleveland which was in May of that year. I think we realized it was going to be a critical point, whether he decided to run or not. In terms of his walking on to a national stage, in terms of his leadership in the DLC, in terms of his message, and it was the one opportunity to put behind us once and for all that speech at the ’88 convention.

DB: “The Speech,” as we call it here in Arkansas.

FG: That’s right. Or “The Speech and a Half,” as some would call it. Or it may be two and a half. Having been on the outside and not been that close, I had always admired Clinton and even in ’88 I really thought he should have seriously considered running. He would have been the best candidate. But I wanted to see him recoup his image. Because I thought he had really been done a disservice by that speech, and by that image. It’s the first thing you always heard. Whenever you talked to reporters or you talked to anybody in political circles about Bill Clinton. It was a horrible speech, he talked too long. So it was one of the hurdles we had to overcome. He did it with flying colors. It was his message, his speech.

It came out of twelve years of being on the receiving end of the Reagan Revolution. He had thought through a new approach to politics in America and to governing America. I really think it came through. If you go back and look at that speech it will really provide a guide for what I think was the whole message of the campaign. We never wavered from it. Because it was a message that I think Bill understood, and I really believe would be a message that could win the primaries and also win the general election. Democrats had never had that.

DB: Did your conviction that he could win this thing flag at all when Bush was riding at 90+ percent in the polls?

FG: Not for a moment. Because here is my theory. Bill and I used to have long talks about it. I said, first of all we are approaching the end of the cold war and foreign policy and foreign policy success is going to be less important in the 1992 election. Two, the economy is in such bad shape. This nation is on the verge of economic collapse. We are headed downhill fast. If we don't turn that around people know that there is something fundamentally wrong. And George Bush doesn't have a clue. And he doesn't have a program. I think Bill agreed with that too. I will tell you that there were times that Bill, being a student of history, pointed out to me that a sitting president who had won a war had never lost an election. But I just thought that world was changing. This was also the year that the Berlin Wall had come down. The Communists, Eastern Europe had collapsed. The Soviet Union had collapsed. It was such an incredible period of change, that I thought that people were going to turn to taking care of our own. What was our economic future, who was going to be able to solve the problems here at home?

The election finally turned on him. At least in recent history, it was also somewhat of an argument to say you could also run in 1992 and 1996 and there was a lot of discussion about whether running in 1992 would preclude running in 1996.

DB: Whether it would be a positioning race for 1996.

FG: Exactly. And there were some close to Bill who I think viewed it initially as a positioning race.

DB: But never you?

FG: Never me. Ask Bill Clinton this. You can ask him this. The fool that I am, I was absolutely convinced.

DB: What do you think Clinton had in mind?

FG: I think he began with great skepticism and probably—this is unfair of me to characterize this. One, I do not think that until late summer he had decided to run. And two, if he did run, I think he was going to view it as perhaps positioning for '96. But from May until August/September, he became more and more convinced that the problems of the country, the economic situation, would make it possible for real change. So I think he came, by the end, to the conclusion that this was real. He never got in this as a race for 1996.

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

FG: When we announced in Little Rock. It was such a successful announcement compared to anybody else. And by that point, most people forget that he was the last person to announce. But we had heard the message, or lack thereof, by all the other candidates. I had watched their announcement events and I saw that

compared to ours. I had neutral people call me and say, “You won the first prize in terms of the announcement.” Let me go back to one other thing. I’m not sure it’s that important for the history. I will tell you that Bill took to the road after the DLC. His DLC speech was very successful. It was the first opportunity that the national press corps, and we worked hard on the national press corps, to see a Democrat with a new and different message. It was the New Democrat unfolding. I think Bill felt very good coming out of that. He started to barnstorm the country looking at projects and ideas and innovative solutions to things. Including the Southshore Development Bank, etc., with the DLC. So here was a period prior to the campaign for him to go out and test the message. July 3 though, after he had gone through all this, and I felt we had a successful spring and early summer, Gloria and Bruce Lindsey called me and said—and it’s very interesting, I was sitting looking at the same view I’m looking at now on Orcas Island—and Bruce said, “Look I think you’re losing your candidate. I think he’s deciding not to run. I hate to bother you, I know you’re on vacation, but if you want to turn this thing around, you’d better do it now.” So I called Bill and it was July 3. He had three concerns, I think. One, as he had felt in ’88, was Chelsea old enough and would it be too much of an impact on her? He was very concerned about that. Two, and I think that this is also illustrative, and you may want to put this in or you may not, he was very concerned it was not a good time in terms of Hillary’s career, because she was doing a lot of very exciting things. She had become chair of the Children’s Defense Fund. She was doing this worker training and education project with Ray Marshall. Her law career was doing well. He said, “She’s

always taken time out for me and now we're at a point when her career is really going well. Should I wait and give her a chance?" It was a sincere concern. And I said, "I have no answer to the Chelsea question. That's a question for a dad, making a decision whether your daughter is ready. I've always thought she's a wonderful kid who really adjusted well to life in a fishbowl, at least in Arkansas. But that's your decision. At least in terms of Hillary, if anything, given the issues she's concerned about and the agenda that she really wants to move in this country, even in a campaign if we win or lose, she will have a broader forum, more opportunities to accomplish more in that campaign. If we win just think what a forum she will have in terms of children's issues and things she cares about." The third issue which he was deeply concerned about was he said, "I made a pledge during the campaign."

DB: That's right. I think that's something that haunted him throughout this year.

FG: We had long, long talks about it. To the point, not just the political expediency of how do I get out of this, but one, I'm trying to create a legacy in Arkansas and do I jeopardize that whole legacy. And do I add to, which was his deep concern, the sense of cynicism and alienation that people don't believe anymore in politics, because everybody breaks their promises. It was a serious problem. Here's what I said to him. I really believed it. Given the difficulties and suffering in this country, and especially in Arkansas, that probably he could fulfill his sense of obligation, commitment to the people of Arkansas, better by running for president. And if he was concerned about the future of the people of Arkansas, he could probably do a lot more to improve their lot in life and improve their future

as a presidential candidate than he could as governor. Two things I felt impacted. One he felt that he ran on a future-oriented pledge program in the gubernatorial campaign. Everything from job training, school-based health clinics, to boot camps. In the first session of the legislature, in the first sixty days, he had accomplished and passed everything that he had pledged in his campaign. So he felt like he had fulfilled his obligation from the campaign. And then I said, "Look before you decide not to run you really ought to go ask the people of Arkansas what they want you to do." I don't know if you remember, but in June there had been like 37 percent of the people wanted him to run, 5 percent of the people said they didn't want him to run. I said, "It's just like any other process in politics. I think it's best for their future, but you've got to give them a chance to participate in the decision." He went out the next day, which was July 4 and did twelve events, which is typical for him. He came back and I think I talked to him that night or the next morning. And he said, "It's amazing. I started asking people and they were saying, 'You ought to run.'" That, given the economic problems facing the country and given how hard it is for the people in Arkansas, that he was doing a good job, but there's limits to what you can do as governor. Think what you can do as president or even as a candidate. And he began to get the positive feedback I think that eventually gave him the sense that he could run. He began to feel more and more comfortable. I've got to tell you that even two weeks before he announced I still think he had serious doubts about running. And that was part of it. The interesting thing after he announced and the announcement

event in Little Rock, the *Democrat* did another poll and it was like 70 percent thought he should run.

DB: Well sixty-plus, maybe.

FG: Sixty-three, so okay, I exaggerate. But what I'm saying is the numbers had completely reversed. And a part of that is, I think, Bill gave people in Arkansas a sense that he was doing it for them and that they had a role in the process. That overcame this kind of cynicism and alienation.

DB: It's clear that in these very rudimentary stages you were playing many different roles. You were adviser and encourager and consultant and press secretary. You were doing all these different things. At what point did a more specific mission for you become more clearly defined?

FG: I think that almost everyone always assumed that I would fall back to taking primary responsibility for the paid media. For example, we had a meeting at the mansion where Hillary, early on, expressed concern about the rumors of Bill's personal life being a problem, as unsubstantiated, etc., as they were. It was developing into a problem. We figured out a press strategy and that was going to the Sperling Breakfast and we met in my office to talk about how to do it.

DB: Whose idea was the Sperling Breakfast?

FG: I think that was my idea. It was generally agreed among myself, Greenberg, Hillary in one meeting, when we figured this was a real problem that we ought to take it head on. That we ought to somehow put it to rest. It is, by the way, the same strategy that we used in *60 Minutes*, I mean, the same message. The other thing is, one of the things beyond getting over his concern about the people of

Arkansas, Bill also wanted to have a meeting of friends and advisers in Washington, which we did on September 14-15. It was the most eclectic, incredible collection of political people I've ever seen in my life. Every spectrum of ideology in the Democratic Party. We were the ones who put that together. I guess Greenberg's office helped as well. But I was doing everything, including the staff work, all the way through September. Putting meetings together. Travel. Figuring out Sperling, whatever. We were kind of the two-man show and, if anything, my office did most of it. They used my office when they were in D.C., etc. We did not really hire staff until right before the announcement, which was the end of September. It's interesting, Eli Segal came in and began functioning as kind of a management consultant, somebody to interview folks. But we all interviewed. Greenberg and I interviewed David Wilhelm. I'd never met him before in my life, but everybody liked him. Mark Gearan was doing searches for people to work on the campaign. David Wilhelm was brought on board first. People locally, like Craig Smith, were invaluable. And David Watkins had plunged in. I mean God bless Watkins. He had literally taken on the responsibility of setting up an office. So we had a place to work out of to do the announcement. Bev Lindsey jumped in to do the announcement. So all the old team was there too from the gubernatorial campaign. Gloria Cabe was very active and very involved at that point, and kind of moving everything along. And Bruce Lindsey. But the second major non-local staff person was George Stephanopolus. It's very interesting, because George was initially hired as a deputy campaign manager. Oh, and Bruce Reed. The three early people were David, Bruce Reed,

and George. I think George never thought he would end up being press or communications, because that wasn't what he came out of. But as fate would have it, we needed somebody to worry about press. It is almost as if fate kind of brought people in at the right time. And people took on responsibility and it was an amazing team that always rose to every occasion.

DB: Several people have said that the New Hampshire experience was a total bonding experience, that by the time you all had been through that together there was a sense that nothing could stop you.

FG: Right. I think that's true. I've got to tell you that I think the Florida straw poll was very much a bonding experience. Where David Wilhelm, with Stephanie Solien on board, talk about people-work! I mean in other words, we pulled out a miracle for the Florida straw poll. You noticed at Harvard, the press corps said, "The turning point was the state chair's meeting." I didn't say it that day, but the other person who organized all the state-chair reaction, etc., was Stephanie. If Wilhelm packed the crowd, Stephanie did the politics. I encouraged the press to pay attention. I said, I think you're going to be really surprised. It was an amazing joint effort, where it worked. Both Florida straw poll and the state chair's meeting catapulted him into a position where he was in a position for New Hampshire. One of the things you probably learned about New Hampshire is that the Gennifer Flowers and the Larry Nichols stories really had very little impact. I think it probably was a cumulative impact. But the thing that really hurt us in the polls in New Hampshire was the draft story.

DB: Were you ever given a title?

FG: I never had a title. David Wilhelm was hired as campaign manager. Stephanie was political director. George was deputy campaign manager who later became press secretary. I'll never forget one of the other times—it seems like every time I'm out here something happens—but, at Thanksgiving we had this potential big scandal with Sweet Connie and the *Penthouse* story. Gauldin had warned me about this. Here's her deal, her reputation, etc., etc. George and I were on the phone nonstop trying to get every press person not to run the story. We had succeeded, including the Hot Line, which everybody read, until one story appeared early in the morning on CNN. George got on the phone and we got that pulled by like 9:00 a.m. It was our first experience dealing with the crises of the scandals, etc. So, yes, New Hampshire was a bonding experience. I would say that by the time we hit New Hampshire, there are two other aspects in my experience. By December there was a staff in place and I was taking more and more direct responsibility for paid media and planning that. There are a lot of people like Ann Lewis who ran the whole media operation in our office, because we had a lot of other clients before Clinton. She did a marvelous job. We probably had more budgets and scenarios and computer runs, than any other presidential contender in history, because we had figured out every permutation of scenarios, of budgets, and how to allocate our resources.

DB: Are you talking now in the primary?

FG: Yes. One of the things people don't realize is how sophisticated this effort was. It kind of came together, but at least parts of it, the polling part, I think the media buying operation, the media planning operation. I remember we went down for a

meeting before Christmas in early December in the basement of the mansion where I brought Ann Lewis and Steve Miller who had run the governors' convention in Kentucky. Well they had done all these kind of scenarios and budgets that were essential in terms of realizing what we had to raise. We always had the resources and planned ahead. Rahm Emanuel was the best addition. I mean Greenberg and I saw to that. David Wilhelm did. We had worked with Rahm for years. We kind of knew the imperative of good planning, of mechanics, of knowing how to do things. Part of that was I'd been studying losing Democratic presidential campaigns for years.

DB: When you say that your effort was more sophisticated, can you give me some explicit examples?

FG: We had computerized all the rate structures, all the media-buying information for every state, but we had gone down literally to the precinct level to what is called ADI, area of dominant influence, so that we knew if we wanted to go into a state like Florida, here's what it would take to win a majority of delegates. Even if you didn't win the state with proportional representation, here was the best way to utilize scarce dollars to maximize the number of delegates. I think we expected it to be a much closer delegate race than it turned out to be. In the past people would say, let's buy Florida, let's buy Texas. Instead of figuring out where your delegate votes were in terms of the dollar expended. What was your best investment? What was your sufficient investment?

DB: Did you develop your own computer program for this?

FG: Oh yes. And we ran scenario after scenario of how to put it together. This was true in the primary and was certainly true in the general. We had the most sophisticated, incredible team doing media buying and planning for the general that I think any presidential campaign ever had, certainly in December. Primarily that was Ann Lewis and Steve Miller.

DB: After a lot of presidential campaigns, people seemed to have identified it all with one ad, the Willie Horton ad, or the bear ad. There didn't seem to be this year, at least to me, one defining ad.

FG: But there was one defining concept and we came back to it over and over again.

DB: And that was?

FG: That Bill Clinton had a plan to change America and he had a written specific plan to turn the economy around, to get the country moving, to deal with health care, to deal with the problems facing the country. That was the defining difference in this presidential campaign. It *cannot* be underestimated. I don't think people realized what a difference it made. One, Bill Clinton understood that people were frustrated, angry, alienated. That they had been turned off to politics. That a part of that was, I mean, there were two lines from the announcement speech. One, "We don't need another president who doesn't know what he wants to do for America." Bill's theory was George Bush and these other fellows ran on "Willie Horton, Read my Lips, the other guy's a bum." But they had no economic strategy, no plan, no vision. One of the other lines from the announcement speech was, "People know what we're against, let's tell them what we're for." So it was very important that Bill Clinton, who had thought about the solutions and thought

about what was wrong about America, and thought about what needed to change in America, was very specific about it. It is the reason we did, and don't underestimate the importance of the three Georgetown speeches. We put hours, and hours of agony and pain. And Bill would usually stay up till two o'clock rewriting, and putting them into his own words. This was from the soul. It was a cathartic experience that also helped Bill think through the message, the reason, the rationale, the plan. Why he was running. What he was offering America. And how he was different. We did the three speeches at Georgetown and then, going into New Hampshire, because a lot of people forget about this, he said, "I'm offering a specific plan." And the first spot, which I believe was the defining spot of the campaign, was Bill Clinton sixty seconds, looking into the camera, talking about what the problems were in the country. Talking about how we needed to change things and saying, "You deserve more than thirty-second ads and vague promises. That's why I'm offering a concrete plan. I want you to have a copy of it. Take a look, let me know what you think." It was that kind of thing which I think defined the campaign. We began the general election with a spot that Mandy did, but we all worked on it. We did for the general election a spot called "Change" but it was not only about Bill Clinton's record but also his plan. We offered the plan in the general election. That I believe was the difference. It broke through people's alienation and cynicism. It made them believe in this guy.

DB: People really were hungry for information.

FG: Yes. And they wanted specifics and they wanted plain talk and straight talk. And they wanted a plan. I really believe you can't underestimate the importance of the

fact that we offered a written plan, and George Bush did not. And when he got close to doing it, we got really worried. 'Cause when he did that one "Oval Office" five-minute spot it was his most effective spot, then he dropped it.

DB: It seemed to me throughout this year that they could have been so much more persuasive. Were they not using focus groups? It just seemed like they would get started on something good and they would drop it. Or do it halfway. How do you explain that?

FG: I don't really understand it. And that's why I was trying to listen so carefully at the JFK meeting. We didn't get too much from them, but it seemed as if they were in disarray and they didn't know how to communicate themselves. They didn't seem to have the level of sophistication that we did, either in terms of research or in terms of media. The irony is they had people doing media that were *totally* unfamiliar with the world of political campaigns. And they did not have anybody like a Mandy or like our firm that coordinated and supervised the creative people on Madison Avenue. I don't know whether you noticed that was mentioned. But they had these advertising people off in New York who didn't have any political experience, which is the way the Democrats used to do it.

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?

FG: The most important element in making this an effective campaign—Bill Clinton. He understood how to run a sophisticated, modern political campaign. He understood that this was a debate, that people had to hear both sides. They couldn't just hear one side. You couldn't assume they were getting information,

you had to be sure they got it. And he also understood that you had to go out and communicate. Mondale said, it was the most poignant moment in his campaign, we were involved on the periphery. In Minneapolis the day after his defeat, he said, “You know, I never learned how to use television, and television was never very kind to me.” Compare that with a Bill Clinton, “I know that this is important and I’m going to go out and use it. And I’m going to use it effectively.” Another real turning point was in New Hampshire, when we were in our deepest, darkest days, and we were in deep trouble and Greenberg says, “We’re falling through the roof.” What did we do? We went out and bought thirty minutes of television time and said, “We’ll do our own program and we’ll let voters ask questions instead of reporters. We’ll take call-ins. We’ll basically go beyond or around the feeding frenzy of the news media.” And we did it very effectively.

DB: Is it ever harder rather than easier to be doing your kind of work for a candidate who is so sophisticated and knowledgeable about the political process? Did you ever wish he’d just say, “Great idea, Frank. We’ll do it ’cause you say to do it.”

FG: No. Not if you have a lot of mutual respect for each other. And I think we did. I think Bill basically had very good judgment. I don’t think he made any suggestions or changes or whatever that in the final analysis I don’t believe were absolutely right.

DB: Specifically with respect to the campaign organization, would you describe it as centralized, decentralized, or what? This organization was often described as a lean, mean, fighting machine, but inside it seemed a lot looser than that.

[*Laughter*] Why does everybody laugh when I ask that question?

FG: Well you're getting into very dangerous territory. I would describe the organization as ever-changing. I would describe it as dynamic. The question of effectiveness—do they work? Do they get the job done? In every situation going back to the announcement, the Florida straw poll, the Georgetown speeches, New Hampshire, Super Tuesday, Georgia, whatever it may be, or to the Rapid Response Team, or whatever, we figured out what needed to be done and we got it done. It was not a terribly linear or structured situation. But you had a lot of very bright people who were very committed, with a good bit of experience. You had the guidance of Bill and I've got to say Hillary's good judgment. Saying, "We need to be doing X, Y, Z." And so when we come out of the New York primary, James, Greenberg, Celinda, and I go off to figure out a general election strategy. I never will forget at that meeting—you were there—Hillary, at the end of the meeting, we were standing by the couch in the basement, said, "You know, Frank, we have got to get ready to respond to the negatives." That was during the dark period. And I made the point at that meeting, I said, "Look, you may not like being in third place, but Bill, it's a blessing." He said, "Oh really, what's the blessing?" I said, "Well at least the Republicans won't be coming after you. They'll probably be going after Ross Perot." Do you remember me saying that? And Clinton said, "Oh, that's the consolation for being in third place? They won't attack me in June?" I said, "Yes." And it was. But—

DB: Wasn't there also a sense at that meeting that after all was said and done and people were trying to think up new concepts and new names, really what we needed to do was go back to the basics?

FG: You remember that Bill Clinton made the most poignant statement that day. We went through this whole presentation, I was feeling it in my gut, by the way, because I had been there from the beginning. Paul Begala does his thing, and Bill says, “What you’re talking about is going back to my announcement speech.”

DB: That’s exactly right.

FG: Which in the dark of one or two o’clock that night, it was basically, me, Bill, I think Greenberg was there, sitting at the mansion working on that announcement speech.

DB: And then remember, when he came out election night, the pride with which he pointed out to people that the message was the same in his acceptance speech and his announcement speech.

FG: I just burst into tears. But that goes back literally to having spent twelve years on the receiving end of the Reagan Revolution and having figured out—and if you go back, and read the DLC speech in Cleveland and follow through the summer, the DNC speech, etc., up to the announcement, they were all a refinement and development of the message. And that was the message that carried us through.

DB: Let me ask one more question about the organization.

FG: I didn’t answer that last question. Let me not answer it other than to say that this is a campaign that basically was a group of very talented professionals who always rose to the occasions and did what needed to be done.

DB: Right. Let’s leave it at that. Frank, what, from your perspective, was the low point of the campaign?

FG: I would say the week after the California primary. The spring basically from Oregon to California and then the week after that. The interesting thing is that I think we all, I mean I really had a lot of faith in the message. I was puzzled by Perot, not puzzled, but concerned about Perot. But I figured that we could turn this around. What we went back to, if you remember in June, was we did town meetings, television appearances, everywhere we could. We reissued the economic plan, "Putting People First." The week that came out, and I swear that this was fate, was the week that Ross Perot and George Bush finally started attacking each other.

DB: So they were slinging mud and we were offering specifics.

FG: It was the week we went to the conference of mayors. Then we went, and I will say, I stood at the back of the room at the National Association of Manufacturers, which I suggested that we do something like that, and this business crowd, in Washington D.C., it was a packed audience, they loved it. So I said, "We're back on the way. This is going to work." And then Al Gore. It was like everything was back on track and we were all on message, we were all on the team. It was working. I felt great about the convention. That was Harry and me and everybody working together. But it was like we never had any big disagreements about the convention. We had to move the DNC certain ways. To have the walk and things like that, that they were reluctant about. But Harry and I never had a problem. Never.

DB: What, from your perspective, was your moment of supreme satisfaction? What do you most cherish as a memory?

FG: You're going to make me start crying. There are so many. I think election night. Standing on the edge of the stage. I've got to tell you I still wake up every morning, and I don't believe it. This is actually—he's going to be president of the United States. Just going all the way back. The night of the Illinois primary was incredible. Part of that was Stephanie was there and we didn't get to spend so much time together, but we got to share Illinois that night. I think in a weird way, when Greenberg called me after six days of the "Plan" spot in New Hampshire and said—and this is the first time Stan and I actually said it to each other—he said, "He's gone from 15 percent to 30 percent. I think we can win this thing." That's the reaction to that first concept of the plan and that "First Plan" spot was a real high point. It was the first realization, I think, Greenberg and I allowed ourselves to believe this is going to really happen.

DB: Do you have one ad that's your favorite?

FG: The "First Plan" spot. Absolutely. I think the second one is the "Change" spot that talks about the plan, that we began the general with. I liked them all to tell you the truth.

DB: Frank, what is it that you want to make certain the future knows about this campaign?

FG: I think more than anything it was a campaign that gave people in this country a restored sense of faith and empowerment that it was their country, their campaign. And that you had a campaign that had a great deal of respect for the American voters and for the country. It was passionate about wanting to change things for the better. Bill Clinton has the best sense of what America is supposed to be all

about: of giving people their country back, empowering them, letting it be their election. Letting it be about change that impacts their lives, their families, their futures. That's what it's all about. It was a campaign about something and it was about improving the lives of the American people. But it was their campaign, it wasn't just our campaign.

[End of interview]

[Reviewed and edited by Pryor Center staff]