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Diane D. Blair Papers (MC 1632)

1992 Clinton Presidential Campaign Interviews

Interview with Stephen F. Simon

Campaign Position: Research Assistant

Little Rock, Arkansas

November 10, 1993

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. Stephen F. Simon 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: What were you doing immediately before joining the campaign?

Stephen Simon: I graduated from Tufts University in May 1992.

DB: What, specifically, were your responsibilities?

SS: They were various. Going through twelve-years worth of Bill Clinton's gubernatorial papers. Participating in debate preparation by researching the areas of gun control, drugs, and veterans issues. Monitoring the AP wire for Arkansas Record hits. Organizing the search of the governor's newspaper clip files. Preparing responses to incoming hits.

DB: Walk me through a day.

SS: No day was typical. Usually, I was occupied with a long-term task, such as completing the massive "box-room" search, or analyzing the contents of the clip files. My day was always punctuated by frequent checks of the wire for Arkansas Record hits. The workday usually began at 7:00 or 8:00 a.m. and stretched until around 10:00 with a break for lunch and dinner. I attended evening "War Room" meetings religiously.

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?

SS: Mostly, we were just more hungry than the Republicans. The GOP seemed tired and bored with power, while we seemed alive with energy and determination. I could feel it every day in War Room meetings, in the research department, in the halls of the building, and even on e-mail. I also think that, in Bill Clinton, we had one of the most gifted and effective candidates in the history of presidential

elections.

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

SS: My instinct was that we would win since the Democratic Convention, but true certainty came much later. I became certain of success when I learned of Bush's campaign schedule for the final weekend before Election Day. He planned to spend over thirty hours—two overnights—in Wisconsin—a huge amount of time so close to the election in a medium-sized state. That trip seemed to indicate that the Bush people were trying to save face, not trying to win the election.

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

SS: My personal high point is connected with what I believe to be the high point of the research department repelling the GOP Arkansas Bush tour launched by Lynn Martin, Sam Skinner, and Michael DeLand. Destroying their trip was an unparalleled thrill.

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

SS: The low point came in September, when I first heard the rumor that the GOP had found a letter in which Bill Clinton had attempted to renounce his U.S. citizenship. I had no way of knowing whether the rumor was false or not. But I remember thinking, "If this is true, the presidential race is over." As I discussed the issue with others who had heard the rumor, we all became despondent.

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

SS: I want political historians to note that George Bush ran a needlessly nasty, negative, and pathetically desperate campaign, while Bill Clinton mostly took the

high road. I also want historians to know that Bill Clinton was not just the lesser of evils. There was genuine enthusiasm for him in America. Finally, I hope historians note that the primary reason for victory was not so much strategic as it was emotional. We were simply hungrier for victory than the GOP, and it showed up every day in TV ads, on talk shows, in the field, and in the palpable energy of the headquarters in Little Rock.

[End of Interview]

[Reviewed and edited by Pryor Center staff]