WILLIAM J. CLINTON PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH FRANK GREER

October 27-28, 2005
Washington, D.C.

Interviewers
Russell L. Riley, chair
Darby Morrisroe
Michael Nelson

Assisting: Jill Abraham
Audiotape: Miller Center
Transcription: Martha W. Healy
Transcript copyedited by: Linzy Emery, Jane Rafal Wilson
Final edit by: Jane Rafal Wilson

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Publicly released transcripts of the William J. Clinton Presidential History Project are freely available for noncommercial use according to the Fair Use provisions of the United States Copyright Code and International Copyright Law. Advance written permission is required for reproduction, redistribution, and extensive quotation or excerpting. Permission requests should be made to the Miller Center, P.O. Box 400406, Charlottesville, VA 22904-4406.

To cite an interview, please use the following general format: [name of interviewee] Interview, [date of interview], William J. Clinton Presidential History Project, Miller Center, University of Virginia.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY PROJECT

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH FRANK GREER

October 27-28, 2005

October 27, 2005

Riley: This is the Frank Greer interview, part of the Clinton—I would say Presidential History Project, but we have two portfolios today because we're also covering the gubernatorial period. So this will be a part of the overall Clinton history project. There are a couple things that we do at the beginning of each of these interviews. The first is to reiterate the most fundamental of the ground rules, which is that the interview is being conducted under a strict veil of confidentiality. Everybody at the table has signed the pledge and knows that the only person who is permitted to repeat anything that occurs in the room today is you, if you're so inclined. Just for the record—may I call you Frank?

Greer: Please.

Riley: Frank and I had a conversation before we began, reviewing the ground rules and stipulations, what would happen with the transcript afterwards. Again, we want you to feel comfortable in speaking candidly to history. Your audience isn't the few people seated around the table today, but more importantly college students and graduate students and professors and just common folk who thirty or forty years from now may want to get a better understanding of this unique period in history than they'll be able to pick up from the contemporaneous press accounts. So feel free to speak your mind.

Greer: Glad to.

Riley: The second thing, as an aid to the transcriber we go around and everybody says a sentence or two so the transcription person can figure out—

Greer: Figures out who these voices are.

Riley: Right. I'll begin, I'm Russell Riley; I'm an associate professor at the Miller Center and have been heading up the Clinton Presidential History Project.

Morrisroe: I'm Darby Morrisroe; I'm an assistant professor at the oral history program.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Abraham: I'm Jill Abraham; I'm a researcher at the Miller Center.

Nelson: I'm Mike Nelson, I teach political science at Rhodes College in Memphis.

Greer: Great.

Riley: Mike has helped us out before and is somebody who knows an awful lot more about the media and politics than I can claim, so I'm going to rely a lot on Mike's expertise to help us with some of those things. I told you before we began that we always like to get some biographical background, so if you want to share—

Greer: I'll be glad to give you a thumbnail.

Riley: Do that, and we may dig if you'll permit us.

Greer: I was born and raised in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. My parents were both teachers. My dad was a principal. My mother taught math. I developed an interest in politics primarily because I grew up in the era of civil rights turmoil and also of John Kennedy. I remember being the only person in my class who actually chose John Kennedy as the class project, my ninth grade civics class in 1960. Everyone else wanted to choose [Richard] Nixon because Kennedy was a Catholic. That always kind of troubled me. But also it was a period of time when people were inspired to public service by Kennedy. So early on I developed an interest in politics. Neither of my parents were particularly political and they still, to this day, do not know where it came from, but I loved it.

Riley: Would they have voted for Kennedy over Nixon?

Greer: They were good Democrats, perhaps just because they knew how committed I was, but I think they would have voted—they were more nonpolitical than they were either liberal or conservative. Education was the politics that drove them, in terms of the struggles of teachers and public education in Alabama, more than anything else.

Riley: Did you have siblings?

Greer: Yes, I have a brother who, by the way, is a professor of history and just retired from Virginia Commonwealth University. He taught Latin American history and Latin American culture and things like that.

Riley: He's older or younger?

Greer: Eight years older.

Riley: Were his politics also similar?

Greer: They were. He is also a Southern Baptist minister, so he has two or three degrees, unlike me, but he went to a theological seminary in New Orleans, Southern Theological, and it was very—

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Riley: My brother is on the faculty there.

Greer: Really? I find it very interesting that if anything, he got more liberal, which—the more I have studied Christ's teachings and the Bible, the more liberal I think people should get. So it's strange that this right-wing religious phenomenon in America is so conservative on issues of poverty and equity and justice and peacemaking and things like that. I actually think that what we learn from the teachings of Jesus Christ is very much the opposite of the evangelical fundamentalist politics of our day, and I find that somewhat disturbing. So my brother and I, probably because of religious influences, were more liberal than others we grew up with in Alabama.

Also, I worked in the state legislature as I mentioned to you, for a guy named Ryan deGraffenreid. This was an era when the South was trying to become progressive and trying to become the New South. It was just before people like Terry Sanford became Governor of North Carolina and—who was the Governor of Mississippi?

Nelson: Bill Winter.

Greer: Bill Winter. It was a period of time when the South was struggling to elect progressive, enlightened Governors. Ryan deGraffenreid was just such a candidate. He was a state senator, wanted to put behind the racial divisions of the time and bring the state together, really had an economic vision for the future. It was the first campaign I was just immersed in. I worked on his gubernatorial campaign when he was running against George Wallace. This was when George Wallace said he would never be "out-segged" again. So he had learned his lesson. And he was killed in a plane crash, mysteriously, a few weeks before the election. The theory had always been that he was killed, not that he had died in an accident.

Nelson: Was this 1962?

Greer: It was. So I worked in the state legislature and developed a real interest in the legislature. I went through Boys' State, was Speaker of the House in Boys' State. Don Siegelman was Lieutenant Governor—Don Siegelman who just got indicted yesterday, I can't believe that, the former Governor of Alabama—but he was a contemporary and we were really very good friends.

I then started writing letters to John Sparkman and Lister Hill, our two Senators at the time. We were the only state in America—I always took great pride, because Alabama always had such a poor image—we were the only state in the Union that had two Rhodes Scholars as our Senators, serving at the same time.

Riley: You're kidding.

Greer: Lister Hill and John Sparkman. John Sparkman, this is way before your time, actually ran for Vice President in [Adlai] Stevenson's campaign, 1952. Be that as it may, I wanted to be a page in Washington. I had read about it, I thought this would be a wonderful opportunity, and I was bound and determined I would somehow get appointed as a page. I had no political clout, my parents weren't involved in politics and usually these went as patronage positions to people who were well connected. But I stuck at it. Finally, out of the blue, in '63 I think, I got a call in the middle of the summer from John Sparkman's office that said, "We have an opening.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Somebody turned down an appointment. If you can be here in the next three weeks, you can have the job as page." So I had to persuade my parents, who were not aware that I was so anxious to leave home at the tender young age of 16, that I should be able to get on a train, go to Washington, D.C., live on my own—they didn't even have the Page School dorm at the time, you lived in rooming houses—and go to Page School. I was able to persuade them, and I took the job.

It was a truly historic time. I told this story at a function the other day and people were just astounded. Bookending that summer were, for you history buffs, two events. I don't know if you remember what they were. They came to integrate the University of Alabama, and a black woman who was there that day, I remember vividly, attempted to enter, and George Wallace stood in the schoolhouse door. Nicholas Katzenbach, who was the Deputy Attorney General, stood there and read the Federal order and federalized the National Guard troops and there was this incredible confrontation. I was as close as from here to that door, under a table, watching this, because it was three blocks from my house, I lived by campus. I rode my bicycle down there, I said, "I've got to see this." It was a real period of shame and embarrassment that we had a Governor who was doing this. If you fundamentally thought it was wrong, it was a deeply troubling time.

So I come to Washington, I'm working for John Sparkman on the Hill, and I see all these notices that there is a march on Washington in August. I said, "That's really interesting." Now, I'm a white kid from the South, a senior in high school. I'm thinking, *I probably shouldn't be going to civil rights demonstrations.* But I said, "I think I'm going to go." I walked from Capitol Hill down to the [Abraham] Lincoln Memorial and sat, literally, as close as from here to that door, and listened to Martin Luther King on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, giving the "I Have a Dream" speech. Now when you've had that summer, your life is kind of changed forever.

Riley: Did Winston Groom have you in mind when he wrote *Forrest Gump*? [*laughter*]

Greer: I swear, I've never talked to him about it, but those two things happened in my life that year. You develop, one, a sense of progressive politics. This will seem a strange connection to you, but I have always been very pro-labor because I saw the role of the labor movement in civil rights. I didn't expect to see any white people at this march, I figured I was the only one. But you walked down and there were all these people from the UAW [United Auto Workers], which was the most progressive union, and all these labor folks from the AFL–CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations]. I said to myself, *This is really an enlightened movement*. It changed my whole attitude about labor from that point forward. It was not just self-interest motivated, but motivated by what was good for the country and good for society. It's interesting that in the foundation of this firm we have always done a lot of labor work, as well as progressive politics and working for candidates and issues that we believe in. We've tried to stay true to those principles.

But anyway, that was my summer. I graduated from Page School. I had 15 people in my class. I've been deeply involved in politics ever since, and never turned back.

Riley: Did you begin doing campaign-related work professionally after that, or go off to school, or—

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Greer: I went to school, but I would drop out of school for a semester at a time on a regular basis to go work on other campaigns. As I said, I started out when I was in high school working on the gubernatorial campaign, but went back to work on Senate campaigns. Armistead Selden was a Congressman who ran in Alabama for the Senate, unsuccessfully. So I began back and forth working on campaigns.

Riley: When did you leave Alabama?

Greer: That year, 1963.

Riley: At that point you were doing work—

Greer: I was living in Washington, D.C., going to school, and every now and then I'd go work on a campaign.

Riley: And were you gravitating at that early period into media work, or were you doing—

Greer: No. I was doing organizing and grassroots. I quickly realized—and this was also the period of the anti-war movement, which I was very active in, and the civil rights movement—that the real, both power and need, was in changing people's perceptions and understanding, by educating and communicating. I mean, I really did believe that that was the way you changed the course of history, with effective communication.

I ended up working—it was the only Republican I ever worked for—but there was a guy named Charlie Goodell who was a Senator from New York. I went to work for him, with a lot of other people who had worked on the Vietnam Moratorium Committee and the Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, because he was the one Senator who was willing to introduce a bill to cut off funds for the war. We need somebody like that today, as a matter of fact. But anyway, he was willing to do it, he was a Republican from New York, so all of us—a lot of people who worked in the peace movement, David Hawk and Marge Sklencar, and there's another organizer of the Vietnam Moratorium Committee who later ended up playing a key role in the Clinton campaign, David Mixner—we all went off to New York to help this Republican.

Nelson: This was 1970?

Greer: Yes, exactly. In '68 and '69 I'd been involved in the Moratorium Committee and the demonstrations here in Washington, so this was '70. And I was the person who would write things for him and also developed materials, like brochures and printed materials. They had an advertising agency because it was New York. I believe it was Doyle Dane Bernbach. So I became the liaison with the advertising agency and all of a sudden I was kind of introduced to this world of advertising. I said, "I like this, I think I can do this, and I think I can learn a lot from it." So literally, I learned by doing and working with agencies in New York. That's how I got into it.

Also, about the same time, this would be a little known organization, but the Council of Churches and a group called Clergy and Laity Concerned about Vietnam had a project that organized commercial advertising artists and agencies to do advertising against the war in Vietnam. It was called Help Unsell the War, the Unsell the War campaign. I was asked to

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

coordinate that. So it wasn't just New York, it was agencies in L.A. and agencies in San Francisco, and suddenly I was thrust from my political perspective into the world of issue advertising. That's where it all began, in terms of what I was doing.

Nelson: You were still in your early or mid-20s?

Greer: I was a very young 20s, right. I was pretty young.

Nelson: Can I ask, did you come out of your early involvement in politics with any sense that you wanted the South to be the focus of your career, that you wanted to be a part of what you were describing earlier as this movement to elect progressive Governors and so on?

Greer: It was something I cared about deeply and wanted to see happen. One, I thought the need was greatest, and secondly, I thought the potential in the South was tremendous. I really always thought that if you were going to work out the problems of race in this country, you were probably going to have a better shot at doing that in the South than anywhere else.

Nelson: Because?

Greer: Because people knew each other, and had worked with each other, and could develop the kind of bridging relationships. Clinton always agreed with that. He really did think that there was a lot that the country could learn from the South and the struggles of the civil rights movement. So, yes, I was always—I did a lot of races in the South. I did a lot of races in North Carolina, a lot of races in Alabama. In Georgia, when Wyche Fowler ran for the Senate. I did two campaigns for Jim Hunt in North Carolina. And William Winter, whose education reform efforts I admired, was a good friend.

Riley: Let me pose one question about this, because Bill Clinton was at least a peripheral actor in the anti-war movement.

Greer: Right. And the interesting thing, the reason I mentioned the four people that I did, and David Mixner, is that Bill Clinton came through on his way to Oxford. He came through, but decided that he had to go on with his Rhodes scholarship. I never met him during that period of time, but there were a lot of mutual friends. Then he went back, also at a very young age, to run for Governor. He ran for Congress, ran for Attorney General. All of us involved in progressive politics knew of him, but our paths had not crossed. There were a lot of mutual friends who are his old dear friends here who remember those days, but I did not know him until he had been Governor for probably six to eight years.

Nelson: Were you involved in the [George] McGovern campaign at all?

Greer: Yes. I did communications in the Midwest and I was communications director in Michigan. Carl Wagner was the campaign director and stayed a good friend all the way through the Clinton years. We were occasionally together at personal dinners at the White House. He also knew Clinton from the McGovern campaign. I was a communications guy, Clinton was an organizing guy, and Clinton was the state director of Texas. All these circles are intertwined, people had known and worked with each other.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Riley: Was Hillary Rodham [Clinton] somebody you—

Greer: I had never met her.

Riley: And not even cognizant of her at this point.

Greer: Not really. So we're leaping ahead. I ran the Public Media Center. In 1975 I was asked to be the media coordinator for Fred Harris, a populist from Oklahoma. The best thing out of the Fred Harris campaign is that I met my wife [*laughter*]—who is actually someone you should interview at some point. She'll kill me for saying that.

Nelson: Was this in '76?

Greer: Nineteen seventy-five. This was the year when everybody ran for President. It was the first year of the new campaign finance laws after Watergate. I'm giving you far too much history.

Riley: No, this is wonderful.

Greer: Fred and others had figured out that this was the year where someone could come from nowhere, you could raise money and get it matched by the federal government, and you didn't have to be a big political Poobah, party boss, who was selected at the convention. This was going to be the grassroots year. This was going to transform Democratic politics. The only problem was that Jimmy Carter figured that out, too, and did exactly that.

But here's the difference. This is a little known part of history. Fred was out there, building his grassroots network and everything. The Federal Election Commission, because of the Supreme Court *Vallejo* decision, held up the initial funding of the campaign in January. So we're in Iowa and we have no money. We're in New Hampshire and we have no money. We had counted on these federal matching funds, right? We've been spending hand-to-mouth, but we were going to have the money to run a serious campaign. There's only one candidate who had the money, and it was Jimmy Carter. You know why? Because he had a friend named Bert Lance who had a bank, and Bert Lance said, "I'll loan you the money." So all the rest of us are waiting for the federal government. That is a turning point in history. Bert Lance, who later left in disgrace, gave them the loan so they had the money for Iowa and New Hampshire. Anyway, be that as it may, I'm sure a lot of other things would have changed the course of that campaign and Jimmy Carter probably would have won anyway.

Another funny short story. My wife is from Washington state, from Spokane. She was going to the Young Democrats convention, which is where we met. Birch Bayh, Mo Udall, [Henry] Scoop Jackson, I mean, it was an amazing list of Democratic candidates. Everybody in the delegation was for Scoop Jackson except for Stephanie [Solien]. She was for Fred Harris. She goes to St. Louis and I fly into St. Louis, and every other candidate is there except Fred. He's in his Winnebago out "on the road to the White House," but he's actually—they pass in South Dakota and she meets Fred in front of Mount Rushmore or something.

She gets to St. Louis and she's so disappointed. She tells the story, "I was just furious because all the other campaigns had their candidate there, and we've got this guy named Frank Greer and

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

he's going to give the speech for Fred Harris." She couldn't have been more discouraged. But she says, "I went to work and I advanced the event and we turned out three hundred delegates and everything, and when Frank walked out there it was love at first sight." And I felt the same way. After that, she got back in the Winnebago with all the Jackson folks, drove back to Spokane, and told her mother she had met the guy she was going to marry. I literally had to leave that day, but I kept saying, "God, I just am totally taken." I said to Peter Ettinger, who was one of our advance guys, "You know something, you should offer her a job in the campaign, she'd be terrific." She came back and worked the campaign, and we've been together ever since.

Nelson: Something came out of that Fred Harris campaign, didn't it?

Greer: I say that also because, as I had mentioned to Russell, she was probably the second staff person who left our home here in D.C. and went to Little Rock as the political director. She was one of many, many unsung heroes, who didn't promote themselves but who really put together a lot of the early political organization, including all the labor endorsements, all the state party work, and everything else that made Clinton credible in the early days of the campaign. So you should interview her at some point.

Riley: She doesn't get to see this transcript. [*laughter*]

Greer: This I'm taking out for sure. She did do the oral history with—

Riley: With Diane Blair. That will be very helpful.

Greer: She did do that. The other reason I bring up Stephanie, we always have been close partners and very much a team on politics, and she was working for a guy named Booth Gardner. I had been involved with several Governors, and we ended up going often to the National Governors Association meetings and the DGA [Democratic Governors Association] meetings. Stephanie kept saying, "This guy, Clinton, is extraordinary. He is a leader among the Governors. The Democrats and Republicans relate to him. He really is somebody you've got to pay attention to. This guy has the potential to be a terrific President."

Nelson: When was this?

Greer: This was in the mid-'80s, like '86 or '88. She ran the Washington D.C. office for the Governor of Washington state. So she had always stayed involved in Washington state politics. Booth Gardner, I'll have to look back on the years Booth was there, but Booth ended up also being Chairman of the National Governors Conference. Stephanie just kept saying she really thought Clinton was the one person who could bring the Democrats out of what had been such a weak period of time, in terms of candidates.

Then when we watched, and I was not involved, but we watched the disaster of 1984—I shouldn't say "disaster," but in 1984 we watched a good candidate who would have been a great President, Walter Mondale, fail because he couldn't communicate. I worked in that campaign. My partner, Jim Margolis, was one of the communications directors and I was a consultant on the outside. I never will forget, the day after that campaign, Mondale had a press conference in Minneapolis and he said, "Television was never very good to me and I never learned how to use

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

it effectively." It was most poignant. In this day and age, if you can't communicate and connect with people, then you can't succeed in Presidential politics.

So we watched '84 and it was heartbreaking, especially when you thought about how Ronald Reagan, a terrific actor, a terrific communicator, had basically seized and kept power for eight years, because of, I think, his communications skills. Then we see '88 unfold. There were many mistakes in '88, a lot of lessons learned. And at that point, I just said, "We can't let this happen again."

Riley: Now, were you involved—

Greer: I was not involved in '88, but I watched it from a distance and I thought that every aspect of it was a disaster, including the way they did paid media, and the lack of strategy and coordination and clear message.

Riley: Who was doing his media?

Greer: Well, that was one of the problems, no one ever quite knew. They were constantly changing. That was one of the great efforts to bring in a lot of "experts" from New York and a lot of advertising agencies. It turned into just a disaster. Bob Shrum was involved. I think Bob Squier was also involved. I can check that and find out.

Riley: That's checkable.

Greer: But they were kind of overlaid with all of these other advertising people who didn't really understand politics, and I always think that is a great danger in Presidential campaigns.

But Stephanie was saying, "Gotta watch this guy." I was in San Francisco at a Children's Defense Fund event, or maybe one of the Governor's events, and not only did Bill speak—and I had already seen him a couple times and been really impressed—but Hillary spoke that night, too. And I said, "This is amazing." She was as powerful and compelling as Bill was. I was impressed with three things: He understood public policy and was smart as a whip about how you solve problems and what you could do for the country. He had proven it in Arkansas. Policy and making government work was a passion of his life. Two, he really cared a lot about people and about the future. He had a true sense of concern for the future of the country. And three, he was the best communicator, campaigner, I had seen since John Kennedy. Unfortunately for Democrats, we had not had effective communicators since Kennedy.

I remember sitting through Lyndon Johnson speaking on television. It was a painful process, right? The Republicans had figured out that they could nominate people from Hollywood and it would work. Well, Clinton had all of the politics I admired, the practical experience of how to make government work for people, a proven record as Governor, and deep compassion. But more than anything else, he really knew how to connect and communicate, and he was really good on television.

Riley: Frank, I want to make sure that what I'm hearing—

Greer: You want this to be a logical train of thought?

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Riley: No, no, I just want to follow through on this because what I think I'm hearing is that you had seen him speak in a variety of settings and your sense about his communication skills had evolved as you had been watching him as a candidate.

Greer: Right.

Riley: This was not the reaction that you had—or was it the reaction that you had—as a result of that '88 convention speech, where he was doing the nominating—

Greer: Right.

Riley: The nomination speech that dragged on forever and ever.

Greer: The best three speeches he ever gave, that's what I always say. I had known and observed him, as had Stephanie, including—I'm trying to remember exactly when the Education Summit took place in Charlottesville—

Morrisroe: Eighty-nine.

Greer: I saw him walk onto the national stage and—this is easy to check, too—be a leader in education reform, and be a leader in NGA. So I had this very positive sense of him as a communicator. I think he had a bad night with the three—I mean, literally, he had three different speeches and he gave them all. It's not like everybody bats a thousand. He had a bad night.

Harry Thomason, a Hollywood producer who is a very good friend of Clinton's, helped him get on the talk show circuit and make fun of himself in a very self-effacing way. I told him that was the smartest thing he could do. But I also thought that while that speech was a big deal among political insiders, among the average citizens of this country, nobody paid attention to whether he went on too long that night or not. I didn't think it was a major problem. I'll tell you, even with the three speeches he gave that night, he was a heck of a lot better than anybody else we had getting ready to run for President.

Nelson: Had you hoped, or more than hoped, that he would run in '88?

Greer: Yes. And he actually asked me about it. We had become friends. I had not worked for him but we talked a lot, and he explained that he didn't think it was the right time, I think primarily because of the age of his daughter. His concern about Chelsea [Clinton] was the primary reason he did not run in '88. I also think he couldn't see a clear path for victory in '88 and he's a very savvy politician. He's very good at calculating these things.

Nelson: A clear path to victory in the nomination or in the general?

Greer: Both. But more than anything, I think it was a personal decision. He just wasn't ready. And Hillary was a major influence in that, I think she felt he wasn't ready. There were an awful lot of very disappointed people. Looking back on it, I think he could probably have won the nomination and he may have been the one candidate able to withstand the kind of Roger Ailes negative campaigning of [George H. W.] Bush Senior.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

The other question was, was the country ready and was there enough anxiety, both economically and culturally, in terms of the politics of the nation. I'm not sure that it would have been the right thing. So I didn't push hard. I would have been happy if he had run. I think a lot of people around him wanted him to run.

Nelson: It's interesting you'd say that, because on the face of it, a year out from the '88 election Democrats were more optimistic than Democrats were a year out from the '92 election. And yet, he ran in '92 and didn't run in '88 .What did he see that made him think '88 would be a bad year—

Greer: The economy. I think he thought that the economy was in serious trouble and getting worse.

Nelson: In '88?

Greer: No, in '92.

Nelson: But what was it that made him think '88 would be a bad year?

Greer: I don't know. That's why I say I think the major factor was personal, that he wasn't ready.

Nelson: Was it personal also in the sense that he was afraid of all these stories coming out from Arkansas about him and his personal behavior, and so on?

Greer: I wouldn't know the answer. But it's kind of like '88 was—I'm trying to remember who else ran. I guess Jesse [Jackson] ran in '88, [Michael] Dukakis ran in '88—

Riley: Did [Albert] Gore run in '88?

Nelson: They were the three finalists, so to speak.

Greer: Then also you had, in the early days of '88, [Gary] Hart, who dropped out.

Nelson: [Joseph] Biden.

Riley: And the Hart thing was—

Greer: May have had a chilling influence on Clinton, I do not know. That may have been a factor. But be that as it may, I was not one of the close advisors pushing hard for that. At that point, I just wasn't that close to either of them.

Riley: You did not go to Little Rock for the meetings in '88.

Greer: For the announcement, no. It never happened. [*laughter*] That's okay, there were a lot of people who came in '92 who thought it still wasn't going to happen. They were absolutely convinced. I'll tell you a story later about how it almost didn't happen.

Riley: We definitely want to hear that. So you actually, you go to work for him fairly soon.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Greer: I'll tell you exactly. In '89 we had just finished the [Douglas] Wilder campaign in Virginia, and out of the blue—I guess it was more the spring of '90, but right before the '90 gubernatorial campaign, which was the only Clinton gubernatorial campaign I worked on—Clinton calls. I can remember the words as clear as if he were on the phone today. He said, "Frank, I'm in trouble. My numbers are dropping like a rock, they're tired of me. 'It's been ten years and taxes,' that's all I hear on the campaign trail." He says, "I'm about to mess around and lose this Governor's race and you wanted me to run for President. Hell, I won't be able to run for dog catcher if I lose this race, so you've got to get your ass down here and help me out." So I said, "Okay." And I went down.

One of the interesting things is he had a weird and long-term relationship with Dick Morris, which unfortunately came about again in '96. So I went through the first few weeks with Dick Morris, but that was obviously not a good relationship and we certainly didn't have any good research out of that. Dick was someone who did a poll and always had numbers on a little piece of paper, and you always really puzzled about whether or not he had actually done the calls. I'll tell you a story about that in the gubernatorial race.

So I brought in Stan Greenberg. Stan was a real pro, one of the smartest people in the Democratic Party, I thought, and a terrific researcher, terrific pollster. We went to places like Darnell, Arkansas, where they don't have a focus group facility, you have to sit in the Holiday Inn dining room or conference room with the recipients. You're sitting in the corner watching this. But we did focus groups all over. Another funny thing is, Stan overslept the morning we were supposed to go to the mansion in Little Rock to brief Clinton. We were searching for him and finally found him, but he was like two hours, three hours late. But they still developed a good relationship and Stan recovered. Clinton wasn't always on time for things himself, so he was very understanding. I was angry as hell.

Morrisroe: Did he join the campaign during the primary or during the general?

Greer: The primary was over, it was the general, so it would have been like June of that election year. We persuaded him that he could shift from the defensive posture on ten years and taxes, to having a real vision and program for the future. We developed that with him and ran a very positive campaign. We had a lot of testimonials from people about how he had done such a terrific job and how they trusted him with the future of the state. If there is an interest, we probably have all of those in our files somewhere.

Riley: Sure.

Greer: From that campaign. I'm trying to remember who the opponent was.

Nelson: Sheffield Nelson.

Greer: Sheffield Nelson, yes indeed. In the midst of this campaign I get a call from the campaign manager, Gloria Cabe, who had been a state legislator, been a friend of my wife's, been around Democratic Governors Association and politics for a long time. She was terrific. She says, "You're not going to believe this, but there is this crazy former state employee," whose name I don't remember right now—

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Nelson: Larry Nichols.

Greer: Larry Nichols. "He's going to hold a press conference at the state capitol and he's going to talk about how Bill Clinton has had affairs with five women. You've got to understand—" I mean, if you could imagine how bizarre all this was— "Larry Nichols was fired from the state government for making too many phone calls on his state phone to the Contras in Central America." This guy thought of himself as kind of a Special Forces, *I'm going to help the Contras from rural Arkansas*. He was just weird. There's a whole culture around Arkansas of these kinds of people.

I swung into action and, I will be honest, I basically just said, "We've got to stop it. No legitimate press person should give this kind of thing credibility without any substantiation, without any second sources," and all of that. So we talked with everybody in the press and not one reporter reported it. It was something that didn't have the substance or the credibility that would be required of anybody in the press corps, so therefore I didn't think it would ever be a problem in the future. Now, later that didn't stop the *Star* and all the tabloids from reporting it and the mainstream press from picking it up from that.

So when this came up in New Hampshire, I said, "I've been through this before, there's nothing to substantiate it, he has no evidence of this, he will just get up and make the accusations." Unfortunately, you had a tabloid press that was willing to go with that. And I think in the future you're going to have blogs doing that. In other words, the whole ground has shifted. But I grew up in the politics where the press would not go with something unless they had substantiation and a second source. You can't just stand up and say, "You're an adulterer," and have people run with it. So we dodged that bullet in Arkansas.

Nelson: Can I ask you, why do you think Clinton called you in 1990?

Greer: We had a friendship and I believe he thought that I really understood southern politics. He thought of me, coming out of Virginia, as someone who was from the South who could quickly get up to speed on the ground. I never will forget meeting him at a restaurant on Capitol Hill. He was there with Al From, who was head of the DLC [Democratic Leadership Council]. I had encouraged Al to take on the leadership of the DLC and he introduced me to Clinton. This will sound self-promoting, but he introduced me as somebody who could "sell refrigerators to Eskimos," that was his common phrase.

If you read Clinton's book—I haven't finished it, because it's much too long, *Jiminy Christmas*, I'm thinking, *Clinton, why did you do this to us?*—but in his book, he says that one of the reasons he wanted me involved was that we were both southerners and came out of the same political experiences. We are exactly the same age, so both came through a segregated South and then the New South and the development of progressive politics of the country. So I think he was very comfortable with that.

Nelson: Did you have the sense when you were doing this campaign that you were laying the groundwork for a Presidential campaign?

Greer: Yes, and that was one of the reasons—that's why he said, "You want me to run for President, you've got to get me reelected Governor." That was the whole idea. Now, there are

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

three things that I remember vividly from this campaign. One, he knew that Greenberg and I, if no one else in the country, were absolutely convinced that he was the one person who could win in '92, and knew he had to run. We talked about it. We kept saying—and he would always put it off, "I'll think about it, I'll think about it, I'll think about it." But we said, "The one thing you cannot do—" and this is facing Hillary right now— "is go out there and say unequivocally that you're not going to run for President."

Nelson: That he would serve out his four-year term.

Greer: You've got it. Sure enough, he went up somewhere in north Arkansas for one of these little candidate forums, a debate, and Gloria Cabe, the campaign manager, called and said, "You're not going to believe what Bill Clinton just said." She had gone out into the hall or whatever. I said, "Oh, my God, what?" She said, "He just said that he was going to serve his four years and he wasn't going to—" He didn't say he wasn't going to run for President, but he did say he was going to basically serve his four years as Governor. I was furious. I mean, I know how, in a debate, he could get boxed into that, but it was a big, big disappointment.

We actually spent a lot of time in the early days of the campaign figuring out, with the people of Arkansas, how to let them urge him to run so that he wouldn't have to break a promise to the people of Arkansas, although the Republicans, and his enemies that have always been there, basically like to say he broke his promise to the people of Arkansas, and that's how he started his Presidential campaign. Unfortunately, he got trapped into that. I watch both him and Hillary as she is trying to very carefully navigate the Senate race, which she has done successfully. I hope I don't have another phone call, "You're not going to believe what Hillary just said."

Another thing that I never will forget, Dick Morris has this interesting personal relationship with Clinton. It's a love-hate relationship. They yell at each other a lot and yet Clinton has a lot of respect for him.

Riley: Had you worked with Dick before?

Greer: I had never worked closely with him. But I knew a lot about Dick by reputation. His reputation is controversial at best, and fairly negative at worst—very negative at worst. The stories about Dick Morris and how you can't trust him are legendary. Having seen the way he performed with Clinton, coming back in and then sent, kind of proves the point that Dick is primarily out for Dick Morris.

So I get this call from Clinton in the last week of the campaign and he says, "Dick's just run a poll and it shows us dropping like a rock. We are down 15 points and we're going to be down another 15 before the weekend is over. The election is on Tuesday. We're going to lose. We've got to do something." So we quickly did a response ad. It was also on taxes. Dick was saying, "The tax spot's working."

Nelson: Working for Sheffield Nelson.

Morrisroe: Raise and spend.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Greer: Yes. The attack on Clinton for raise and spend, raise and spend. Dick says, "It's working, it's destroying us." We had no evidence that that was the case. So we did a response ad and we decided to hand deliver it the next day. And Bruce Lindsey, the finance chair, literally gets in the car, has to go borrow some money so we could get this response ad on around the state. All because Dick Morris had convinced everybody that we're down 15 points, we're going to lose another 15 points, and we're going to be dead. All of our other polling had us up 16 points.

Sure enough, all hands on deck, we did a response ad, delivered it to the station. On weekends it's hard to change spots and everything else, but we did it, and we got it all over the state. Come Tuesday, we win by 16 points. On the money, on the money. By this point we are all very suspicious of Dick's polling. So Gloria Cabe says to Dick Morris, "Dick, I'm not going to pay your bill for that poll until you provide me with the receipts from the phone bank that shows me that you made those calls." It was $35,000 or something, a good chunk of money. To this day that bill has never been paid, because he couldn't prove that he made the calls.

Going forward, I think Clinton also knew—Dick was so controversial, with all of his Republican clients, including Trent Lott, by the way. He did more Republicans than Democrats. In our business, I've always worked for Democrats, with the exception of Charlie Goodell, but I've always worked for Democrats. You usually don't cross the lines like that, and you certainly don't cross the line that much ideologically. I mean, I try to basically work on things I believe in and work for candidates I believe in. Dick was a mercenary, he would work for anybody.

I think Clinton and Hillary knew at that point—plus there's always a lot of friction with Dick—that if he was going to run for President, Clinton needed a mainstream Democratic firm and he needed a mainstream Democratic pollster. That was Greer, Margolis, [David] Mitchell, [Annie] Burns; and that was Stan Greenberg. So we became the team. From that election forward, I don't think we ever, ever, ever gave up, or even took a breather, between turning to Clinton and to Hillary. But at that time there were only three of us in the meetings and in the room. There was Greenberg, myself, and a guy named Mark Gearan. Have you talked to Mark?

Riley: Sure.

Greer: Mark was terrific, and instrumental in this whole thing. But he was head of the Democratic Governors Association and a good friend of my wife's. He also talked her into moving to Little Rock. From that point on, we wanted to do everything possible to encourage Clinton to run, and to deal with any of the barriers or anything that would keep him from running. And we did.

Nelson: In '90, you and Stan Greenberg become part of his Presidential campaign, as do some of the Arkansas people around Clinton, Bruce Lindsey, and to some extent Betsey Wright and [James] Skip Rutherford.

Greer: Actually Betsey wasn't around.

Riley: I was going to ask you about that because she's phasing out—

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Greer: Betsey was always a bit of a puzzle because she had been chief of staff—and I'd actually met her at some of these Governors meetings when she was chief of staff—but there had been a falling-out—

Nelson: Between her and Clinton?

Greer: Between her and Clinton, but I'm not even sure I should say it was a falling-out. I just know that she was not the campaign manager for the gubernatorial reelection campaign, and Gloria Cabe was. So really, until the problems developed in the Presidential campaign, Betsey was not involved. She was not around.

Nelson: Well, take out her name for the moment, the question—

Greer: Bruce Lindsey was essential.

Nelson: Talk about Bruce.

Greer: He was a very close friend, very selfless in terms of his dedication to Clinton and making Clinton's political career successful. His wife at the time, they're now divorced, was a woman named Bev Lindsey, and Bev and I went back to the Mondale campaign. She was an advance person and really had more of a national profile than Bruce did. But they were both good friends. That may be one of the other reasons that Clinton called me, that Bruce and Bev and folks like that knew me as someone they were comfortable working with. But they were always around, and Bruce was his closest confidant other than Hillary. I mean, Hillary was definitely the closest confidant.

I think Bruce was somewhat reluctant about the idea that he should run for President. Let's just say he was not as committed to this as Greenberg and Greer and Gearan, "the three G-men from Washington," as they always used to call us. But Bruce was around; Gloria Cabe, who had been campaign manager; Mike [Gauldin], who was his press secretary in the Governor's office, was also around, in and out a good bit; and then there was a local advertising guy, whose name was David Watkins. We worked together.

Riley: Is that the person who had been doing—I mean, there must have been somebody who was the Frank Greer before Frank Greer comes in.

Greer: There was. He was filling in and had some of the work—David Watkins. One of the other national consultants, who is from Louisiana, he's written a book about his experiences—Ray Strother.

Nelson: Oh, yes.

Greer: He had done the early part of the primary, and there was a falling-out with spots—he had spots that somehow blew up because they were interviewing people who hadn't given their approval. I mean, it's one of these classic—I felt sorry for the guy. Ray Strother was the consultant. Ray had worked with Clinton and Dick Morris in the early years, so he had done his campaign traditionally. In the primary something happened and it was a big blow-up, and they

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

decided they needed another consultant. In the interim, David Watkins, who later came to the White House—have you talked with any of his gubernatorial staff?

Riley: We have not. The Arkansas people will be doing all of that, we just happened to inherit that for this particular interview.

Greer: After the Governor's race, I would say the key people were Bruce and Hillary, and then Greenberg, Mark Gearan, and myself, who were primarily in most of the meetings to map out—but the whole idea is that Clinton was still reluctant. He remembered his promise in the debate and he just said, "I don't know how I can do it, and secondly, I don't know whether Chelsea is old enough and whether I should delay." Also, you had Bush with very high favorabilities, had just won the Gulf war, was the hero of the first Iraq war. And yet, my theory was that the people were really hungry for a change and that the economy was going to continue to deteriorate, which it did.

Riley: Let me ask you a couple of questions—Darby, you may have some follow-up about—was there anything distinctive about Arkansas? You have an awful lot of experience in working with other southern states, and I'm wondering, going down there again because our portfolio includes that part of Clinton's career, did you find anything distinctive or unusual? There was this, as you say, industry almost, of odd people and rumors and things of that nature. Is that different from what you've encountered in other states?

Greer: Yes. The culture there was very much more negative and critical, and I think there was a deep-seated resentment that Clinton had always been so successful. It just drove a certain group of people crazy. Secondly, it was a state, unlike any other southern state, which was dominated by major industries like poultry and Wal-Mart, and the Clintons were always fairly close to those industries. I will tell you, it's very interesting, Stephanie, who is a big environmentalist, basically worked long and hard to get Clinton more environmentally oriented, including the Forest Summit in the Northwest, during the campaign.

Riley: Chickens are dirty.

Greer: That's exactly right, and they are the biggest industry in the state. And he was not particularly pro-labor. Actually we were opposed, in the early days of the Presidential primary, by the state president of the AFL-CIO, even though we were trying to win over unions here in D.C. So Clinton had figured out—which also just reinforced in my mind that he would be a good President—he had figured out how to work with various interest groups, keep a progressive path, have things like commitments to education and welfare reform and jobs as the core of his focus, and he'd actually been able to get a lot done. So he understood both that small cadre of people who were the Clinton-haters, how to deal with them in good humor, how to deal with the power structure, a classic power structure of a southern state, which was challenging, and still get a lot done in a very progressive way for average people.

Riley: Let me ask you, you're working with him as a candidate for the first time. Did you find what you expected to find in the quality of the candidate that you were dealing with? Were there things about his personality and his temperament as an individual that you were finding either

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

particularly amenable to working with or particularly challenging to work with, as a gubernatorial candidate?

Greer: It reinforced my sense that he was an effective communicator. He was very good on television, he was very good on camera. It's interesting, some of the footage we used in the early days, before we had a lot of money or time, was footage that we shot during the gubernatorial campaign. I mean, he was really good, he was terrific. He is very impatient. He does not sit and wait for all the machines to get running and would just say, "Why is this taking so long? Why is it so complicated? I don't want to do this." Let's just say it was a challenging situation that we managed in good humor, but he would often get impatient with sitting for spots or scripts or things like that.

Now, you put him, I never will forget, scenes in a classroom with kids, scenes leaning over the back of a pickup truck in front of a rural country store outside of Little Rock with blue-collar, very redneck kind of folks—and I say that in the fondest way, because I think of myself in that culture—with senior citizens, et cetera. He was superb. You could see there was magic in the way he related to people, in the way it came across on television. He was the best.

Riley: Other than the impatience, any particular problems that you recall?

Greer: No, not really. Well, he had, throughout his administration, a tendency to listen to many voices. The story about our emergency response to an ad because we were dropping in the polls is just an example of listening to a voice who can convince him that—I sometimes call it the "last guy syndrome," listening to whoever is the last person to raise a doubt or point out a problem. So it is both a strength and a weakness, but Clinton listens to a lot of different voices.

Nelson: You mentioned that Morris had a poll, but you had a poll.

Greer: Greenberg had a poll.

Nelson: And yet he responds to Morris' poll. Maybe that's about his regard for Morris over Greenberg, or maybe—

Greer: I think it's more that he is wanting to be sure that he's responding to the worst-case scenario.

Nelson: I was going to ask you about that very tendency, or is it a tendency, in Clinton to glom onto—he hears many voices. If there's one that tells him there's something you need to worry about, is that the one he would tend to listen to?

Greer: Often. Here's the other thing that a lot of people did not understand about working with Clinton: he often will respond to the negative voice, somebody who is being critical, or somebody who is warning him about a serious problem, as opposed to those who say, "You're doing great, everything's fine, nothing to worry about." He's always, and I think it stood him in good stead in life, in his political life, that he's always been very sensitive to, "Should I be concerned about this, or should I. . . ." So those negative voices or the voices of concern often are the ones he will listen to.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Nelson: I'm not asking you to put him on the couch now, but did you see traces of insecurity in Bill Clinton in responding in the way you've described?

Greer: I would call it politically cautious, not insecure. The thing about it is, in reality, if he gets all the information, including the negative information, and he can process it, he will come out with a very savvy political strategy or response. First of all, he is, without a doubt, the smartest person in politics I've ever worked with, and I've worked with a lot of people over 30 years. And he knows it. [*laughter*] But he also knows that he can ask a lot of questions, get a lot of answers, and process all that, and he does that often. I wouldn't call that insecurity. I would say it is being sure that he has gotten everything to factor in and then make a wise decision.

Riley: Frank, I've often heard that said about him on political strategy, polling, checking the cross tabs and so forth. Is he the same way—or let's try to keep this in the context of the gubernatorial campaign for right now—was he the same way when it came to the media and the advertising component? Was he hands-on and challenging you with the way that you were constructing ads or writing content or anything like that? Or did he have a greater degree of—

Greer: He was surprisingly accepting of scripts, concepts, and ideas. He often would have opinions about a spot before it went on the air, some of which I thought were correct and some of which I didn't. But a lot of the scripts we would give to him and he would change maybe only a word or two, which is unusual in our work with candidates, especially candidates who have been in office for 10 or 12 years.

Nelson: You mean unusual that they would make such minor changes?

Greer: So few, yes, that they wouldn't want to make many more. But we had a good trusting relationship, and I think he basically thought we had the right approach and the right scripts. There were times that he would want to assert his, "Why don't we do this?" But that's typical of every politician. Do I think he was second-guessing a lot? Not really. It was a fairly good relationship. There were times that he would be accepting, but then he'd want to get a lot of people's input. He'd hear a lot of other voices and then he'd say, "We've got to change that spot," or whatever. So half the time I thought it wasn't necessarily him, it was just that he was getting other feedback.

Morrisroe: Can you tell us a little bit about your observations of Hillary Rodham Clinton during the campaign and what she brought to the campaign and their relationship?

Greer: They're very close. She participated in most of the strategic meetings—for example, the briefing for which Greenberg showed up late, and the focus groups, not that I would want to say that against Stan. [*laughter*]

Riley: I'm normally not—I'm very careful about doing this, but Stan has copped to this in his own interview.

Greer: Oh, he has?! Good. I'm reinforcing it. It was a hell of an auspicious beginning, I had brought him in, and this guy doesn't even show up. I was thinking*, Oh great, I really recommended a humdinger here*.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

But Hillary was always involved and always asked a lot of good questions, always had a lot of good ideas, and always played a positive role. Beyond that, in terms of my bailiwick, she had strong opinions about the media, but it was a good partnership relationship. They had a very good relationship and have always had that kind of special connection on politics. Not a lot of disagreements.

Morrisroe: One question area I wanted to talk about a little bit was the role of the RNC [Republican National Committee] in that election. There have been accounts of Lee Atwater's desire to essentially take Clinton out early because he saw him as a possible or a strong opponent for Bush in 1992, and his pushing Tommy Robinson early on.

Greer: Right.

Morrisroe: What did you find when you came for the general election? Were you surprised at the level of involvement of the RNC?

Greer: First of all, I think that a lot of Sheffield Nelson's—and he's not a terribly deep—anyway, I think a lot of his campaign was run out of RNC strategy because they focused on taxes and they thought that was the great weakness. I think a lot of that was coming from the RNC. I cannot say, although it wouldn't have surprised me, that they were behind the Larry Nichols' whisper campaign. I'm trying to remember if there were any examples that stand out and I just don't think of anything, although I always thought that their basic message, ten years and taxes, was coming out of the RNC.

Riley: Do you recall any of your own—

Greer: And he had a lot of money too, I think he had a lot of national money as well. I haven't looked at that, but—

Riley: Were there any of your own spots from that campaign that you particularly remember?

Greer: We did a series of testimonials: farmers, a nurse, a welfare recipient who was working. Then we did a lot of visuals with Clinton, during which, I remember vividly the way he interacted with kids or senior citizens or whoever. We did a whole series of testimonials that worked very well, and we did a whole series of his vision for the future. We did say, "You cannot run a defensive campaign trying to explain your record. You have to offer people some sense of the future, and you have to have a real substantive plan." That was the genesis of my deep commitment to running on a plan in a Presidential election. We tried that out and I think people really responded to it in the gubernatorial race. We had a whole booklet about his vision for the future.

Riley: In the focus groups that you were doing, are people primarily telling you he's been in office for too long, or are you also picking up a lot of this stuff where people are concerned about his personal character?

Greer: We did not pick up the personal character stuff as much as we picked up, "He's had his chance. He's been around a long time. Things haven't gotten that much better." We picked up a lot more about that, which is why you needed to give people a sense that you had a plan, an

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

agenda, and a vision for the future. We picked up a lot more of that than we did complaints about taxes, too. He was convinced that taxes were a big problem for him. I think the greater problem was that there was fatigue because he had been around so long and, "He's had his chance and we just don't see that much improvement." Part of what we did with the testimonials was to say, "There really has been a lot of improvement and we've really accomplished a lot." And clearly we could run on that in the Presidential race as well. It became, "I'm not just running to defend my record, but I'm running with some plan for the future."

Riley: You talked about the three G-men from Washington and you've now gotten through a campaign in the fall of 1990. Do you recall how soon it was thereafter that—?

Greer: We began meeting in the winter, visiting down there and then having regular conference calls. I think we started really getting serous about it in the spring. The interesting thing is, I would get reports from Gloria Cabe that he was waffling, "I think he's heading in the wrong direction, you better get him back." It was always this kind of seesaw that spring and summer. I'm trying to remember, maybe you guys know from your research, when was the National Governors Association meeting in Seattle, was it that summer? Booth Gardner was the—

Riley: I left my readings on that period—

Greer: Bruce Lindsey, Stephanie, and I, and some of his other key staff people, we literally sat on the bed in his hotel room—we did not have a suite or anything, we just sat on this one big bed, with Clinton eating something all the time—and just mapped out everything we needed to do. My theory was, you don't force him to make a decision, because in '88 he had gotten up to that point and backed out. You say to him, "We should be doing this if you are going to be able to make that decision when you want to make that decision." So our approach was, "We need to be putting in place the organization, the fundraising, the research, and the programmatic, the plans for the country, et cetera, so that if you decide to run, we've done everything necessary to make it possible for you to run."

Riley: Did a part of this include the business of trying to find a way to get himself extricated from Arkansas?

Greer: There were two things that he was deeply concerned about. One, "I've never served in the military, we've just had a war. George Bush is a war hero. How are they going to elect somebody who has never served?" I cannot tell you how many times he wanted to go over this, over and over and over again. "I just don't think it can happen, they're just not—" And I would say to him, "We're the same age, we both went through the era of Vietnam. There are millions of Americans out there who did not serve." At the time, his explanation was always, "I was willing to serve but I got passed over and didn't have to serve and my number was high." I said, "You're like millions of other Americans. If you have a good, strong foreign policy and a commitment to the military and you're willing to use American force, you can still be elected President."

But he was deeply concerned about that. I think he may have been deeply concerned about that because he knew more about the intricacies of the history of his National Guard issue and his letters. But even in the course of the gubernatorial campaign, he had said to me that the general, who later changed his story, the adjutant or whatever, had told the press, and we had a clipping

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

that said that he had offered to serve and fulfill his obligation but basically wasn't called up. So I think he felt, by the end of this six-month period of time, that he could overcome that. That was, I think, one of his greatest concerns.

Secondly, he said, "I have now said to the people of Arkansas that I'm going to serve my four-year term as Governor. What do I do? How do I get out of that? They're going to say, 'He broke his promise, you can't trust him.' It reinforces 'Slick Willie' and all of the negatives that people have, and it will be a disaster. If I don't have the support of my home state, then I'm not going to be successful running for President."

I fundamentally agreed with that, especially if you're running as a successful Governor who has done a good job in your state. But Roy Spence, an advertising guy I had known in 1984, who worked as the lead advertising guy for Mondale—Roy Spence lived in Texas, had known Clinton since his experience in Texas, and Roy does the advertising for Wal-Mart. So Roy had an idea that I reinforced. Clinton was ready to say, "I can't do it, I can't do it because I made this pledge when I stood up there in that debate. It may have been a mistake, Frank, but I did it and I just can't change that."

I said, "Why do you have to make this decision when you can ask the people of Arkansas what they would like? Why don't you go out and barnstorm?" It may have been Memorial Day. Roy's idea was to tour the state, just get out there, no press, don't make it a big deal, and talk to people. So Clinton did a whole—he did like 15 or 20 events. What he did not know is that, with Gloria Cabe and Bruce Lindsey and everybody else, we had organized an awful lot of people all over Arkansas to come to his events and tell him he ought to run for President. He would call me and say, "It's just amazing. You were right and Roy was right, if you just go out and ask people, they want me to run for President."

So I think a part of the campaign was, we had to have a campaign to convince him that the people of Arkansas—in reality, by the time we got up to the announcement, there was a lot of polling that said the people in Arkansas did want him to run. So it wasn't completely misleading him in that regard, but he had to go out and close this loop. He had to get a comfort level on issues that he was deeply concerned about. He also was, I will say, concerned about marijuana and would say, "You know, I've always—" And I would say, "What's the story? What do we need to be concerned about?" "I'll tell you, Frank, I have never broken the drug laws of this nation." [*laughter*] I should have thought, you know, that's a weird way to say it!

But as you go through all these meetings, and usually it would be at the end of the meetings, "What do I do about the military though? I didn't serve in the military." It was always—I mean, we spent months talking through these issues. And in the early days there was a lot of skepticism, especially in the chattering class and the elites of Washington D.C., that he had a womanizing problem, and that there were just too many skeletons in his closet. And that was a big, big problem. This was with Mark Gearan, I think, more than anyone else, but I finally said, in the fall of '91, "You need to somehow clear the air, and you need to do it in this town."

Riley: "This town," being Washington, D.C.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Greer: Right, Washington. And here's the other thing. It's indicative of the way Bill has always worked. He insisted, as we went down this path, that we have a big meeting of all of his old friends and advisors, which we had at the Sheraton on Capitol Hill by the Hyatt, I remember the room, the basement. This was where we brought in Mickey Kantor, and we brought in Carl Wagner. We had a whole roomful—Susan Thomases, Hillary's friend from New York and from the Connecticut campaign. He had to have a day-and-a-half-long meeting, which our staff put together.

Nelson: How many people are you talking about, roughly?

Greer: And by the way, Governor [Richard] Riley was there, too, from South Carolina, whom I love and adore and got to know in this campaign. Thirty people. All of them basically kept coming to the conclusion that he should run, but they—

Riley: These are friends of Bill's.

Greer: That's right, these were his oldest, closest, tight advisor group. But they were concerned about the buzz, the question marks. We left that meeting and came back to my office, which was over on Pennsylvania Avenue, and sat in my conference room. Greenberg was there, Mark Gearan, and myself. And I just said, "You have got to deal with this in a proactive way." I had set up a breakfast meeting with the [Godfrey] Sperling group, which is kind of a political reporter insider group, it meets on a regular basis. I said, "You need to go into that meeting with Hillary and you need to say, 'Things have not always been perfect in our lives but we're deeply committed to each other. So if the question is, *are we perfect*? No, we're not. But if the question is, *are we committed to our marriage*? The answer is yes. And we're also committed to the families of this country,'" that kind of thing. I could go back and get the transcript if you want.

We agonized about it. There was a lot of resistance, didn't want to admit to any problems, et cetera, but I said, "You've just got to clear the air." I'll never forget this. He leaves my office—we're supposed to do this at breakfast the next morning—to take a break and to go have dinner with Vernon Jordan, he and Hillary. We stay there, working on other stuff and getting ready. He comes back, he says, "I just had dinner with Vernon." This is also the last-guy syndrome. [*laughter*] "Frank," he says, "Vernon says, 'Just go screw them. You don't have to tell them a damn thing.' He says I shouldn't do it, I should just say, 'It's none of your damn business,'" which I think would have been a disastrous course of action. So for the next hour-and-a-half we're trying to talk him back to the—thank you, Vernon. Vernon is not running for President, he's been able to say, "It's none of your damn business," most of his life.

We came back, all the way around. He and Hillary went in that morning and it was a cathartic effect on the national press.

Nelson: Did somebody ask that question?

Greer: Yes. We were sure that it was asked.

Nelson: Say something about that.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Greer: I'm trying to remember who it was, but we had at least two reporters that we—not in a manipulative way, but we said, "If you ask this question—" and you know it's floating around—"you're going to get an answer." I should ask Gearan or Greenberg who they were, but we had two reporters primed. It played out.

I'll tell you also, it was the one action that laid that to rest, until Gennifer Flowers in New Hampshire. But I think it was just the courage of both of them stepping up and dealing with it, and not pretending that the issue was not out there, but saying, "The real question is our commitment to one another, and the commitment that we have to America's families." I've always thought, as I said in New Hampshire over and over again, that people in this country were a lot more concerned about their future than they were about Bill Clinton's past. That's why he made it through so much of this.

The other thing is that he had the tenacity and the courage to stand up and take it, when a Gary Hart or somebody—I mean, the tradition in American politics has been, Let's just collapse, let's walk away. You've got a scandal, don't even deal with it. What happened is—and this was certainly true in his administration, and the impeachment battle and everything—there is an inner beltway, kind of echo chamber, that just gets going, and I'll talk later about what happened in New Hampshire and the feeding frenzy of New Hampshire, that has no relationship to real people. Bill Clinton's favorability and job performance ratings were at 60 percent, and stayed at 60 percent, all the way through the impeachment. But if you read, or talked with a reporter in this town, he was dead and gone and done-for, and it was a disaster, and how could anybody support—but outside the beltway, everybody was still supporting the guy, thought he was a good President.

Anyway, it was necessary in the Sperling breakfast to finally step up and say, "Let's put this aside, we're going to say what we've said, and it's enough said." That was my theory all the way through, it's enough said.

Riley: I want to ask one follow-up here. I have a vague recollection of having read, in some of the materials in preparation for this, that you and others actually had a very serious meeting with Clinton before this to try to mine out what the story was behind all these rumors. Did such a meeting take place?

Greer: No. I mean, I had a heart-to-heart with him during the campaign about the first charges by Larry Nichols on the steps of the capitol, and he said there was just no truth to it. He just flat-out, "There's no truth to it." This was in the gubernatorial campaign. He flat-out denied that. My theory about—it's kind of like, I didn't want to know. I wanted them to say what they were comfortable in saying and cast it in terms of looking to the future, but I didn't want to go into a lot of the history.

Riley: Okay. Well, you don't know, because another reaction could be, not from the perspective of a media advisor, but as somebody who is about to cast their professional lot with someone, that if there's a lot of this smoke going on out there, rather than getting entangled with it, to mix my metaphors—

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Greer: I would say, the one meeting we had, which was the long, long meeting in my office on Pennsylvania Avenue, was to say, "Are you guys willing to say that you're committed to each other, that it hasn't been a perfect marriage, you've gone through difficulties like a lot of other people, but you're committed to each other?" That's what I cared about.

Riley: That may be what I had read.

Greer: That's the big meeting that everybody—but there was never a "tell us everything," and I actually thought it was a lot better that we didn't do that.

Nelson: Can I take you back to right after the '90 election when you said you were spending time with Clinton saying, "If you're going to run, here are the things you need to be doing." What were the things you were telling him he needed to be doing?

Greer: One, he needed to build a relationship with a lot of key state party people because he was not going to be the mainstream Democratic candidate.

Nelson: Who were you thinking would be?

Greer: The Tom Harkins of the world, the Bob Kerreys of the world. Not [Paul] Tsongas necessarily, but the—

Nelson: [Mario] Cuomo, were you still thinking Cuomo?

Greer: Yes, up until December, we were pretty convinced that Cuomo was going to run.

Nelson: December of '91.

Greer: This was after our announcement. Of course, we had the chutzpah to say, "Bring him on, we're hoping he runs because we'll be the giant killer and that will be the best thing that ever happened to this campaign. That will put us on the map." But when it happened, Greenberg and I just said, "Thank God! That would have been awful!" And it would have forced us to run to the left more than we wanted to.

But he needed to go out and create more of a connection with the mainstream Democratic Party folks, and he was beginning to do that. There was an event in Chicago, in the fall, before his announcement, it was the meeting of state chairs. All the candidates were there. He came in and he talked about how he was born and raised a Democrat, but gave just such an incredible speech. All these people who were, a lot of them more liberal than Clinton, but dyed-in-the-wool Democratic Party chairs, just loved it. Stephanie and I were both there and I said, "He can win them over." One, you had to win over the skeptics who were the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. Secondly, you had to win over the DNC [Democratic National Committee], also more liberal, and he did it—I think by just force of communications ability, political experience, and when he got before a group like that he could preach the Democratic gospel better than anyone, without giving up his principle as a centrist. It was very reassuring.

I'll never forget, he spoke at the DNC along with the other candidates in the fall. He was the last to announce, this was all when he was getting ready to announce. Ron Brown is in the back of

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

the room with me and he says, "You've got a winner. This guy is absolutely going to win this thing." There was another guy named Gary Gayton, an African-American fundraiser, a good friend of ours in Seattle, and he was on the Democratic National Committee. He walked out in the street and he said, "Sign me up, this guy is terrific." So you had to break—because people were very skeptical, both because of the whisper campaign about his personal life, and also that he was this too-conservative Democrat from a small southern state, southerner, all the kind of biases that grated on me as being a southerner.

Then I thought he really needed to develop a fundraising network, and Rahm Emanuel and people like that were key in developing that fundraising network.

Nelson: How does he connect with Rahm Emanuel?

Greer: It's the Illinois connection. A part of it is Hillary. I'm trying to remember. There's a political guy who is very close to Clinton in Chicago and I think close to Hillary, may have been close to Hillary's family. He was close to Rahm, and he brought Rahm in. And Rahm brought Dave Wilhelm in. But Rahm was really the key element early on. I will tell you—Rahm is now head of the Congressional Campaign Committee, God bless him—there are a few people I will say Clinton would not have been President without, and one of them is definitely Rahm. Early on he did a wonderful job of raising money, but in the critical time when the whole thing could have fallen apart, Rahm raised the resources to keep us on the air, to let us have the ammunition. Rahm probably played as critical a role in that campaign as anybody. And good advice and good counsel, he's energetic. I don't know if you guys have interviewed him but he will bowl you over, he's a character.

Nelson: I took you off track. You said party people, fundraising—

Greer: Party people, fundraising people and then constituencies like labor and others, which were the unexpected constituencies for him—labor, environmentalists, et cetera; people who could play a role. Remember, you're in a crowded Democratic field in a primary, and yet you do not want to lose your centrist image and message, so you've got to go out and do it in an almost personal way and win them over. And Clinton did it, he did it marvelously. He never let us down in any kind of meeting like that.

The other thing is, what we kept saying is that, on a number of issues and a number of agenda items, he needed to develop a rationale for the candidacy and what he wanted to do for the country. We had done that in the gubernatorial campaign. We felt it essential that he have a real agenda and a rationale and a plan for the country. I was a believer in that. I think he was a believer in that. That was the other part of what we were trying to put together at that particular time.

Nelson: Other than speeches, how did he win these people over?

Greer: Small meetings. For example, he began working with Ron Pollack, who was head of Families USA, but who was a leading healthcare advocate. The thing about Clinton is he loves policy. I never call him a wonk because he's just too damn dynamic to be a wonk about anything, but he loves policy. He was going out and finding those constituencies and putting

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

them together and meeting with people. A lot of this was one-on-one and small group meetings and he was just winning people over.

Nelson: Would he go out on the road to do this?

Greer: Oh, yes. He did a lot of it here at our office. He was spending a lot of time coming in and out of D.C. There were three or four pivotal points in the lead-up to his announcing. One was the state party chair meeting in Chicago. Everyone thought that the other candidates would win the day and they were skeptical about Clinton, he was too conservative, wasn't a real Democrat. A part of that was that he was too close to the DLC. There was this raging battle between the DLC and labor and the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. It goes on to this day, which is unfortunate.

He went to Cleveland in May or June and gave the keynote address to the national convention of the DLC, with Al From. It was one of the first experiences I'd had working with Clinton on a major speech. The interesting thing is, you can go back and get a copy of that speech today, and it is exactly what he did in his term as President. I ran through—your materials, by the way, were excellent. I don't know who compiled them but you did a great job—but I went through the accomplishments of his administration. He had mapped those out in the spring of '91 in the DLC speech.

Here, though, is something that gives you an insight. He wrote and re-wrote that speech until three or four in the morning, which at every major juncture, including some State of the Union speeches, was always my experience. It was exhausting, you'd try to bring him back, he'd make it worse instead of better. He'd write it over three or four times, he'd throw the whole thing out. So we're sitting there, getting—it's three, four in the morning. David Watkins, the advertising guy in Arkansas, would be in there at the computer typing. Bruce Lindsey would be there, and he and I would be—but we were down to middle of the morning, writing these speeches, and you'd think, *I can barely walk over to the event, much less stand up and give the speech*. He walks out there and he gives the speech of a lifetime.

A part of it also, on occasions like that, you wanted to dispel the "God, wasn't he terrible, didn't he bomb at the '88 convention." And he did. People were just bowled over. It was like an electric moment at that convention. Same thing in Chicago. Same thing in—my wife had worked in organizing this with our good friends, Lawton Chiles and [Kenneth] Buddy MacKay, but we went into the straw poll in Florida and people didn't think he had a snowball's chance, because it was also the Democratic activists, et cetera. Buddy MacKay, who was the Lieutenant Governor, and a very dear friend of ours, had really worked hard. But his speech that day won the straw poll, and no one had thought that Clinton—all of a sudden there was this critical mass. I read some of these papers where the press was beginning, by December, to make us not only the frontrunner, but the nominee—which is dangerous territory—before we ever hit a vote. Ask Howard Dean, "the nominee," or "President Dean." That's what happens.

But all of that was building this incredible momentum, and overcoming the doubts, overcoming the suspicions, and kind of winning people over. Winning the straw poll was phenomenal. I may be wrong, and the straw poll may have come afterwards, but I think all of this was before he actually announced in September.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Nelson: Yes.

Greer: But here's the other thing. I get to Little Rock a week before he was to announce, and Bev Lindsey pulls me aside. Bev, Bruce Lindsey's wife, is doing the event and getting ready. It was a beautiful event. As a matter of fact, look at this.

Riley: This is the announcement?

Greer: Yes, it's at the same place, yes. I get to town and he is the last to announce. We had postponed it, and postponed it, and postponed it. I think it is the first week of October, you'd have to check that. Bev Lindsey pulls me aside and says, "I think he's going to back out." [*laughter*] It's like, we've gone to a hundred PAC meetings and we have just, we've worked our hearts out for six months, nine months, we've developed a really good message. He has, in the DLC speech, mapped out his whole rationale for why he wants to run. We had a terrific draft for the announcement speech. Bruce Reed, who was at the DLC, was working on the speech. He's just superb and stayed with Clinton all the way through his administration. Bruce is also one of those unsung heroes, because he was not very visible and didn't do a lot of self-promoting. But that is another example of Clinton having second thoughts. We just kept trying to say, "Now we're going to announce this thing, we've got to get ready for it."

That was another speech where we literally stayed up all night, until three in the morning, four in the morning. I get over there at six o'clock the evening before, and he has just eviscerated this great speech that Bruce and I had worked on. It was in tatters, and had no theme, and he was going back to this academic college thesis kind of stuff and talking about what he'd learned in Georgetown. I said, "This is not an announcement speech." So it was just a knock-down-drag-out—and Greenberg was there, too. We're all just tearing our hair out. So finally we bring it back around, and Clinton finally makes it his own, and we finally get it. It's three in the morning. The event is that same morning.

We walked out and I said, "This is it, this is the speech, right?" "No, no, no. I think we ought to practice it again in the morning. You get up here at seven o'clock." I said, "No, this is it. This is the speech." I never will forget. I said, "And you can't change it." He said, "Oh, I'm not so sure," you know. I said, "You can't change it. We'll practice it, I'll be here at seven o'clock, but you can't change it." I went from there back to the Capitol Hotel, the old hotel, and I found out what room John King from the Associated Press—John King, now at CNN [Cable News Network]—I took the speech and I stuck it under his door. I said, "This is the speech, John, and you've got it." He's still a dear friend to this day because he had the exclusive that night so he could put it on the wire the next morning.

I get back up to the mansion and Clinton has, of course, torn it apart again. I said, "You can't do this because I've already given it to John King." [*screams*] "You what??!!" [*laughter*] I said, "It was the only way to get you to quit re-writing it." So that was the speech. He made a few changes in nuance, but he basically stuck to it. As far as the world is concerned, that's what they read on the wire. So that was how we finally had to shake it loose. Over the course of the eight years, I was not that engaged often, but he would always ask me to work on State of the Union speeches or other major speeches. It got a little better, but it was always like that and he was always working it to the last minute and always thinking it through and considering another

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

opinion. I think he has three or four opinions himself. It's not just listening to other people, it's like, *What about this?* Or, *I could argue this, and I could say that, too*. Anyway—

Riley: That's sort of John Harris' argument, actually, in his new book.

Greer: Really? It really comes from—I'll say it again—being one of the smartest people, intellectually, that I have ever, ever known.

Nelson: There were some reporters during the spring and summer, before he announced in '91, who really saw Clinton as the solution to the Democrats' chronic problem winning Presidential elections—Joe Klein and Ron Brownstein and some others.

Greer: Klein always had a love-hate relationship. You were never good enough for Klein, seriously.

Nelson: As witnessed by the book.

Greer: Yes. The funny thing about that is, I was the only person, from day one—the speculation about "Anonymous—" who said it was Joe Klein. I said, "There's not a doubt in my mind." Let me tell you why. As part of getting ready to run, we went and did a roundtable discussion with a teacher and students in Harlem, just north of Central Park. Harold Ickes was there—by the way, Harold also was a very close friend and advisor all the way through, and I love Harold—but Harold and Bruce Lindsey and I piled in the car and we're all hauling up to Harlem for this roundtable on education. Clinton was superb. There's only one reporter who was there and he rode along with us. It was Joe Klein. He was kind of skeptical about it, *Clinton preaches this stuff, but does he really believe in it? Is he really conservative? Is he Democratic enough for me?* That was Klein's kind of cynical view of it.

Well, the first episode in the Anonymous book, and in the film, is this meeting where the teacher falls in love with him. That's right out of that event. And there was no other reporter who went, who knew anything about it. It was not a press event. Nobody else knew about that except Joe Klein, and he described it. When I read the first chapter I knew immediately. I kept telling people, "This is Joe Klein." "No, no, no." "I'm saying it's Joe Klein, he's the only person who was at that event." Unless it was Harold Ickes. [*laughter*]

Nelson: You knew Bruce Lindsey didn't write it.

Greer: I don't think Bruce would have done it.

Riley: I don't think Harold did, either, because there weren't enough F-words. [*laughter*]

Greer: He could not have written it that cleanly.

Nelson: Was Clinton doing in '91 what Carter was doing in '75, which is trying to cultivate at least a segment of the national press, maybe the ones who don't go to the Sperling breakfast, but—

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Greer: Yes. I'm sorry, you were talking about money. We wanted to get opinion leaders and we wanted to get the key reporters. I will tell you, both Greenberg and I spent incredible amounts of time with Ron Brownstein and—If E. J. Dionne at the *New York Times* was actually writing for the *New York Times*—and with Klein, and people like that. There was a conscious effort to—

Riley: Don Baer was probably—

Greer: Yes, right, who later went on to be Communications Director and is a dear friend. He understood, he got the whole New Democratic message. We were definitely trying to court key members of the press and the opinion-leading press people, and policy and political people as well. But you also had to reassure people on the left. I mean, you had to present a New Democratic message and image, and I think Clinton did that very effectively, but you also had to reassure those state party chairs in Chicago. And he could do both.

Nelson: When did you start thinking of yourself as a New Democrat?

Greer: If you grow up in the South, you learn that pragmatic politics and common-sense middle ground on a lot of things is a better course. So I've always felt that way. The interesting thing—because the firm and I had always been, as I mentioned earlier, very involved with labor, and committed to labor—but going back to civil rights days, there had always been this battle royal between DLC and labor. It still goes on to this day. The theory was that you couldn't be a friend of Al From's and be a friend of the labor movement, I just never accepted that.

Most people thought of me as more of a liberal Democrat, because of our other clients, the other issue work that we do, and some of the candidates for whom we have worked. I always thought of myself as a mainstream, moderate, common-sense Democrat. The two people around Clinton who were closest politically, throughout the whole campaign—and people couldn't believe this, they always thought that there was this conflict—were Al From and myself. We agreed on almost everything. And Bruce Reed. It's like, there was never any daylight. It all made sense to me.

The other thing is, I had gotten really tired of Democrats losing. I thought it was a disaster for the country. I really think that the last two elections have been a tragedy because people forget how important a Presidency is, to everything. If you're concerned about the environment, if you're concerned about Davis-Bacon, wages for people who are rebuilding Louisiana, health and safety and OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration], whatever it may be—unless you have worked in government, like I worked in the Carter administration, you don't understand how important it is. Now we're facing a Supreme Court that could be a disaster for women. It's important.

So I said, "It's time to quit losing, it's time to start winning." And I'm pragmatic enough about politics and running races in the South that I was more than glad to have someone who could articulate that, but also reassure people who were liberal Democrats. I think Bill Clinton did that very effectively. Part of the problem is that we now have gotten into the idea that you're either a DLC Democrat, or a liberal Democrat, or a New Democrat, or a Move-On Democrat. We've let this thing polarize not only Democrats and Republicans, but we're polarized within our own party, and it is very destructive.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Riley: Our allotted time has run out.

October 28, 2005

Greer: So this is the second day of this wonderful experience. You had asked just before I left, when did I start to think of myself as a New Democrat or where that came from.

Nelson: Yes.

Greer: The efforts of the DLC, and I remember speaking to one of their conferences in Virginia, always seemed to be thoughtful and searching for a new approach. I didn't think that it had to be counter to Democratic Party principles or to the more liberal parts of the party. But during this period of time, E.J. Dionne wrote a book called *Why Americans Hate Politics*—he's a good friend, I was thinking that he should write an update on that because Americans hate politics today more than they did then—but it was this period of alienation, which I think helped Clinton tremendously. It was Clinton's favorite book. He carried it around with him, he talked about it all the time. The joke was that E.J. was going to have start giving him royalties because Clinton was promoting the book in every meeting he was in, in speeches, and everything else. It was all about false choices, that Democrats had always been plagued by the ideology that you had to be absolute, you couldn't question and you certainly couldn't find common ground solutions. So that was a seminal book and it had a major impact.

Clinton came down one day from upstairs in the mansion, we were always sitting in the big den study off to the side of the mansion—if you guys visit down there you'll see this. The Governor's mansion is not particularly large. Then they built this kind of meeting room, which is larger by proportion than almost any other room in the house except maybe the living room—he came downstairs and he said, "You know, I was reading this psychology book and I figured out what's wrong with the Democrats. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result." So if you were a Democrat who wanted to win, both E.J. Dionne's theory about false choices, and Clinton's assumption that you couldn't do the same thing over and over again and expect to win, were really the driving force, I think, behind a lot of people realizing that Clinton had an appeal, and that a New Democrat was exactly what the party needed. That's the long way of answering—

Nelson: Very good, thank you.

Riley: Was your credibility with the labor unions so solid that when you moved into the Clinton camp you were still on good terms with these folks, or did they—

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Greer: I think there was a great deal of suspicion and concern, but the pragmatic sense of wanting to win again was very strong among some labor leaders. Jerry McEntee, who was head of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, had a very pragmatic approach; he wanted to find a winner. It's interesting, during that whole period that we are discussing, which I think was the critical period in the spring and summer, it could have gone either way. Clinton had several meetings with labor leaders at their invitation. Another testament to his strength of personality and his persuasive powers is that he was winning them over at the same time that a lot of labor leaders in Arkansas were basically skeptical of him, critical of him. It finally got to the point that even after we had gotten the endorsement from AFSCME, Transportation Workers, and a couple of others, the Arkansas state federation president was issuing statements or publications condemning Clinton's labor record in the state. So we had to overcome that.

I would say that a lot of the early people around him, Stephanie Solien, myself, George Stephanopoulos to a certain extent, because George had worked for [Richard] Gephardt and so had the credibility of Gephardt, all of those were reassuring. The driving force was they wanted a winner and they thought Clinton was a winner.

Riley: At that point, I'm trying to recall the other Democrats on the horizon—

Greer: Tom Harkin—and perhaps Gephardt, although he did not run—Harkin was the darling. He was on the labor committee, was the darling of the labor movement, and all the expectations from the beginning were that he would wrap up the labor movement. When AFSCME broke, that was an incredible surprising breakthrough for the Clinton campaign.

Riley: Do you remember roughly when that occurred?

Greer: I think it was October—

Riley: Of '91.

Greer: November '91. Before New Hampshire. The other person who was working on it, and somebody who had a lot of credibility with labor, was Harold Ickes. Harold was very much pushing in New York. SEIU [Service Employees International Union] and 1199 SEIU and AFSCME were also key, which a lot of Democrats didn't understand, to getting on the ballot. In other words, you had to have so many signatures to get on the ballot in places like New York. When we finally got to New York there were only three candidates, I think, still in the race. So labor played a critical role in terms of the grassroots troops. But the other person who had credibility with labor was Harold.

Nelson: As you're getting to know Clinton, through the course of '90 and '91, do you like him? What kind of guy is he, in terms of how you interact with him, how he interacts with others? What do you like about him, or what things don't you like about him?

Greer: I liked him a lot. The things that are perhaps concerning about him are so overwhelmed by the positive elements of his personality. He is a warm and friendly person who really sincerely cares. He has the biggest heart in the world. He's just incredible. But there are maddening things like his being late, because I'm never late. It's something I never adjusted to.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

His constant seeking, never quite settling on his position or on a decision could be maddening in running or mapping out a campaign. But the positives were overwhelmingly.

We were close, I really liked the guy, and I thought he was extraordinary. I go back again, he was the smartest and most politically astute person I've ever worked for. And if you're in the world of politics, that's a pretty good recommendation. You're comfortable with that.

Riley: Do you remember any specific instances of being, early instances, I should say, of being bowled over by his reading or his intellect or—

Greer: First of all, he did read a lot. The fact that he, in the midst of all of the furious activity, had time to quote books, including quoting E.J. Dionne often, was impressive. The other thing I later learned is that he sleeps less than four hours a night and he spends a lot of time reading. He is very intellectual in that regard. More than anything else I was always bowled over by his knowledge of issues. He loved to sit and talk—I'm trying to remember, like with Brereton Jones, a Kentucky Governor who was one of our clients, he could sit and talk about coal policy and energy policy. I was thinking, *how does he—there's no coal in Arkansas, how does he know all this?* But he was impressive in almost every single meeting, and not just that he was persuasive and charming, but that he was really knowledgeable.

Riley: Did he have any blind spots? I mean, there's the one people will focus on, with women, but did you ever get the sense that he had an outsized confidence in an area where he perhaps shouldn't have?

Greer: No, I really didn't. It may just be my nature, but I didn't really pay that much attention to the rumors, whispers, criticisms, et cetera, of his personal life. My sense of it, and this goes back to the Governor's race, because I spent so much time with him, and traveled with him, and saw him and Hillary in so many situations, I just thought that a lot of that was overblown, maybe an issue in the past, but certainly not an issue in the campaign. And certainly not since I had known him. So it was always comfortable for me to be dismissive of those kinds of accusations.

Riley: Sure. Had you worked for other candidates who had had this sort of cloud trailing them that you had had to get acclimated to in the work you were doing with them? I'm just trying to get a sense for, as somebody who is a political professional, dirt is an element of politics, southern politics in particular.

Greer: You always assume that there are going to be negatives that come up. Without getting into particulars, because I don't think I should, on every candidate there were issues that you thought would come up. And those were issues that we wanted to know about ahead of time, wanted to prepare for, and that we were able to prepare for, in terms of response ads and things like that. I don't think I've had any similar situations in the personal arena, personal failings, personal life arena.

Riley: How do you approach this with somebody? If you have a candidate, and as you said, you want to be prepared for it. You get off the airplane, you've got your bags, you're getting in the car.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Greer: I always approached it that I wanted a current context and a future-oriented response and I didn't want to know a lot about the past. That may have been wrong, but that was my approach.

Morrisroe: Were there political figures in Arkansas politics upon which Clinton relied especially for advice, who were mentors in some manner to him?

Greer: Dale Bumpers was very close. And David Pryor. He was not particularly close with the Lieutenant Governor and actually had some real conflicts there. The Lieutenant Governor, I remember, kept making noise about making trouble and raising issues as we were getting ready to run. This is Jim Guy Tucker. The funny thing is, I had known his sister here and I remember having long conversations with her. I remember Gloria Cabe and being sent over by Clinton to talk to him to see if we could get him to get on board with the whole Presidential thing. He was an interesting guy, charming but not very cooperative. So I can't say I was successful, although it did help in that I think he lessened his criticism and was much quieter during that period of time so that we could go ahead and run. There was a time when we thought he was going to be sitting there taking shots at Clinton constantly. But that did not happen.

Morrisroe: There was some speculation that his decision to step out of the Democratic primary and run for Lieutenant Governor was the result of some conversation or agreement with Clinton, does that resonate at all?

Greer: Don't know anything about it. You mean not run against Clinton—

Morrisroe: Correct, in 1990.

Greer: That may have been the case. I think there was a lot of deep-seated, many years of resentment, competition, et cetera. But my whole theory was, "Hey—"

Morrisroe: You get to be Governor.

Greer: Yes, "This is your ticket. You can either help us or hurt us. If Clinton doesn't make it through the primaries, and doesn't run as the Democratic nominee, and doesn't get elected President, he's going to be Governor and you're going to be the Lieutenant Governor. But if you help, you've got a path here to the Governor's mansion," which of course didn't work out so well for him. But we're not here to talk about Jim Guy Tucker.

Riley: But as someone who has a bit part in this whole enterprise, we want to know these things.

Greer: I do remember, now that you've raised the question, that we were deeply concerned about the role that he would play and how vocally critical he might be. The two people, to answer your other question, that he relied on and loved, were Pryor and Bumpers.

Morrisroe: Did they play a pretty prominent role in the gubernatorial campaign, and then later, I guess, in the Presidential campaign?

Greer: I don't know that they were necessarily needed in the gubernatorial campaign. He had a fairly unified Democratic Party. They were good advisors and played a key role and he was always bouncing things off of them in the Presidential campaign.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Morrisroe: Just a quick follow-up. Who would you consider the best of his Arkansas advisors?

Greer: The best in what regard?

Morrisroe: In whatever regard you want to assess them.

Greer: The most loyal and savviest in a lot of ways was, I thought, Bruce Lindsey. Well, the savviest, best Arkansas advisor was actually Hillary, probably. And she was probably the closest advisor and very plugged into Arkansas politics. Bruce was very close and I think gave good and very thoughtful advice and was loyal, just incredibly loyal, to Clinton. Then you had Bumpers and Pryor, who were always around offering advice. And Skip. Skip Rutherford was, you think of him in terms of the library and whatever, but he was a very close advisor and a well-respected lawyer and political operative in the state.

Morrisroe: Was there any resistance from the folks in Arkansas to you and Stan Greenberg and others coming from outside Arkansas to play such a central role in the campaign?

Greer: You'd have to ask them. I don't actually think so, I think we got along pretty well. And Gloria Cabe played the key role, had been in the state legislature, and was politically savvy in her own right. She kept all the forces together. But, as I mentioned yesterday, she was not a big fan of Dick Morris.

I think everybody who had been through the campaigns with Dick Morris in the past was relieved and thankful that there was another team in place working with Clinton. I'm just assuming that. You would have to ask Bruce Lindsey and Skip and everybody else. But I always had a very positive reaction and warm welcoming kind of, "God, we're glad you're involved." So there didn't seem to be a lot of resentment.

Nelson: Could you give an example or two of the savvy advice you're describing Bruce and Skip giving candidate Clinton?

Greer: This is the Governor's race and it seems so long ago.

Nelson: The Governor's race? Is that what you were asking about, Darby?

Morrisroe: I was, but I think the Presidential race as well.

Nelson: I was thinking President because they're not national—are they nationally wired at that time into Democratic Party politics?

Greer: Not really.

Nelson: Are they continuing, though, to provide—in the Presidential campaign?

Greer: Especially Bruce. Bruce went on every trip and that continued while Clinton was in the White House. I don't think there was ever a trip on which Bruce did not go. I thought Bruce gave very good advice and raised good questions about political strategy, about people, about—Bruce

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

is a good, quiet judge of character. When Clinton was going off too far in one direction, following the advice of one person, if anybody could raise a question about it, it would be Bruce.

Bruce also had a very good sense of priority, in terms of which things we were recommending or pushing were really important and which things weren't. There were times when Bruce would say, "I don't think we really need to do that," and we would go back and forth. For example, going to California to try to get some endorsement, I don't even remember which it was—I remember meeting with Mickey Kantor when we were out there—Bruce would have a sense and he would question whether or not we had to do that, whether or not it was smart to try to get the AFSCME endorsement, for example. But once we had sorted it through and come to a conclusion, Bruce was always on board and you never felt he was going to—often with people who have a history and a very close relationship with a candidate, you expect that they're going to have the last say and they won't be honest brokers. Bruce was always an honest broker: "Let's talk about it, I've got doubts about it, why do you think we should do this, persuade me." And then you never thought he was going to come behind your back and try to re-litigate a decision.

Riley: That's important for us to know, because from the external accounts we know Bruce is important, and we know he's there, but we can't possibly know what the substance of that relationship is unless we can hear it from people who have been in the room when those conversations are taking place.

Greer: He was a very good, honest broker, who raised the right questions and let people offer the answers and then did not undermine you once a decision was made.

Riley: Were there people in Arkansas who were important at this stage of your relationship, who sort of disappeared off the screen for some reason that we might not know about?

Greer: Skip and Bruce continued to play a very key role. One key person on his gubernatorial staff was a guy named Mike Gauldin. Mike was his press secretary and communications director. He initially was very involved and then kind of pulled back the more there were national people involved. Mike was a good guy, played a very positive role in the gubernatorial campaign, was involved in the early meetings and early planning, but kind of pulled back and stayed at the state level dealing with state politics.

Riley: I think it's probably time for us to move out of Arkansas, but there's one other question I wanted to pose to you about this. Clinton, as Governor at least, relied on very strong women in staff positions, and Betsey is a good example. But when she takes off, it's Gloria Cabe in that position, which is striking I think. Did it strike you at the time that this was—?

Greer: Not really. I never really noticed in any profound sense because the strongest woman Clinton had around him and advising him was Hillary. He was totally comfortable with women in positions of authority and he relied on women.

Riley: In the South in particular, that's not a—at that time, maybe more so now.

Greer: Perhaps so. I don't know why, maybe because I had been in D.C. too long, or my own wife was head of the Women's Campaign Fund [*laughter*], it just didn't strike me. I mean, if anything, I probably admired that about him.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Nelson: One other thing, as Clinton is considering running—can you talk about Clinton and Gore at this stage? First of all, anything you know about their personal dealings, but also, did Clinton see Gore as a potential rival for the nomination?

Greer: Yes, and was concerned in a regional sense that Gore would provide a kind of competition if he got into the primaries. Gore made a decision fairly early on, as I remember, you may know better than I, but he at least sent the signals that he was not going to run this time. So it was not a big factor, but there was a concern about that, from a regional perspective, in terms of the field. The real concern, though, was whether or not Cuomo was going to run. As I said yesterday, we had the kind of bravado to say, "Bring him on, we think it would be great for the campaign," but all of us were so relieved when we learned he was not going to run, because that would have been a very difficult campaign.

Riley: Did you have inside sources that you were relying on to give you a reading about what was going on in the Cuomo camp?

Greer: Not really. All of our New Hampshire people—and, by the way, this is another example of Clinton's personal political appeal, we had won over a lot of key New Hampshire people—but we were getting to the deadline of when you had to declare in New Hampshire, and they would constantly give us reports about Cuomo: he was setting up an operation or not setting up an operation; a plane was coming from Albany and they thought it was the Governor's plane, but then it turned out to be another plane; he was sending someone to file and he was going to run, then he was not going to run. We did not know until the day of registration, when finally, on that day, he announced he was not going to run.

Morrisroe: You talked a bit about Clinton's ability to overcome perhaps perceived difficulties with labor. What about with other core Democratic constituencies, environmentalists—

Greer: The environmentalists were another big problem. As I said yesterday, when the largest industry in your state is chicken farming, and there were all kinds of other—there was a diamond field in Arkansas that has always been a real source of controversy, whether it should be preserved or not. It's public land and they allow people to go and pick diamonds. It's an interesting phenomenon. But there had been all kinds of criticism of Clinton for not protecting public lands.

He turns into the greatest environmental President since Teddy Roosevelt, and preserves more of the West—the Grand Staircase-Escalante, for example—than anybody else. Those of us who knew him, including my wife, were pleased that he became this great environmental President, because he did not have a sterling environmental record as Governor and he did not have a good relationship with environmentalists.

Morrisroe: How did you tackle that, or did you, in the period before he even announced for President, in the run-up period?

Greer: We did have to overcome a lot of the liberal constituencies' doubts about Clinton. We achieved that partly through his reaching out and meeting with people, and partly also by the people that he had around him, Stephanie and some of the other early folks in the campaign, with credibility, vouching for him that could overcome that.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Riley: African-Americans?

Greer: Absolutely. He had Rodney Slater, his closest African-American advisor, but he also had, early on, people like Maxine Waters from California, who is a member of Congress. I think some of the African-American community initially had doubts about this white southern Governor, but he had a lot of people vouching for him. He had always had a wonderful relationship with African-Americans in Arkansas. There was this guy—

Riley: In Arkansas.

Greer: Yes, who had been one of the key people on the Governor's staff. This guy was terrific, I loved him, and he was there at critical moments all the way through the campaign. But we quickly overcame those doubts. I think Clinton had more African-American support than anyone else.

Morrisroe: Were there any controversies with Jesse Jackson early on, and his role in the DLC leadership? That Cleveland DLC meeting comes to mind. How did he handle that?

Greer: Jesse was always taking shots and yet Clinton always—the question was what role Jesse was going to play. Was he going to run again? He'd run in '88 and was pretty destructive. If you remember, at the '88 convention it was like you had to negotiate with him to get the nomination, which read as a message of weakness by Dukakis. It was a mess. So the question was, what was Jesse's role going to be? We did not know. Harold Ickes, who was very close to Clinton, had been Jesse's campaign manager, or at least led the negotiations at the '88 convention in Atlanta. So we had some assurances that Jesse would not be openly critical, and possibly would even be supportive.

Once we were in a satellite interview—we did a lot of satellite interviews—and the microphone was still open, I'm not sure if the camera was still on. Somebody, which shouldn't have happened, walked up to Clinton and said, "The word is that Jesse is going to endorse Tom Harkin today." Clinton exploded. Clinton does have a temper. He said something like, "He's a traitor, he stabbed us in the back, you can't trust—" I don't even remember the exact words, all of which ended up on tape or ended up being broadcast. If we had wanted Jesse to stay neutral, I was thinking, this is going to completely blow the whole thing apart and he probably will announce he's going to run, much less support Harkin. But we were able to overcome it, we soothed the waters and said it was a natural reaction. The sad thing about it, that outburst probably wasn't called for because I don't think Jesse was actually planning to endorse Tom Harkin. But it's one of those dangerous things where you just don't want to tell a candidate some bad news in front of other people, and it was an emotional reaction on Clinton's part. He felt that Jesse had betrayed him and he was very angry. That all got patched back together.

But I don't think there was ever any desire, other than keeping Jesse from running and keeping him supportive, to have him play a prominent role in the campaign.

Nelson: When you say it got patched over, how did that happen?

Greer: I think Bill called and apologized and I think Jesse accepted it. It was our recommendation that we publicly say, "It was a misunderstanding, it turned out not to be the

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

case, it was an understandable reaction to some misinformation," et cetera. This is all vague memory, but I believe that Jesse accepted the apology and we kind of moved on down the road. So I don't think it became—but, I'll tell you the truth, it was truly amazing, when Clinton was having his problems in the White House, Jesse was one of his religious counselors. I guess they had a friendly relationship. I never thought they were that close politically.

Nelson: You mention that subject. I was looking for a chance to ask you about it. Clinton isn't often portrayed, in accounts of his Presidency or of his person, as a man of faith, as a religious seeker and as a Christian. Did you see that side of him either in Arkansas or later?

Greer: It is truly astounding to me that you would say that, because I think he's one of the most religious Presidents we've ever had.

Nelson: I'm characterizing the way Clinton is usually perceived.

Greer: That's a misperception. First of all, we've been to church a lot together. He is a Southern Baptist, I'm a Southern Baptist. I actually thought he had very deep religious faith and real commitment to the Baptist Church, and he was guided as much as anybody I knew in politics by the true kind of religious faith, much more so I think than a lot of right-wing conservative evangelicals who distort the meaning of Christ and his teachings. So I thought he was true to that.

He sang in the choir, which he thoroughly enjoyed, for 20 years. All the time he was Governor he also took time to sing in the choir of the Immanuel Baptist Church. His minister was one of his closest friends and key advisors. Clinton wanted his minister to speak at the Democratic convention, so I got to know him by working with him on what he was going to say. He was glowing about Clinton and his faith and his religious beliefs. We in the Baptist Church believe in redemption, you may sin and then you can be forgiven. So Clinton was also, I think, a big believer in redemption all the way through and talked about it, in terms of his personal failings.

So I always thought of him as a very sincerely religious person, a student of the Bible and a student of Christ's teachings. It was one of the things I liked about him the most, and I thought that was one of the things that motivated him most.

Nelson: Did you try to show that side of him during the campaign, or get him to show that side of himself during the campaign?

Greer: I don't think in an overt way we did. We talked a lot about values, and about concern and compassion, but to be honest with you, I don't think we did. At the convention we had a lot of Baptist prayers and a lot of Baptist ministers. The watchword, I think, in a campaign for a New Democrat was new common-sense solutions, putting aside false choices, being different in the sense of having values, having religious faith, and having a sense of patriotism and love of country. I think Democrats too often have run from that. So all the way through the convention and our spots and everything else, I think we were conscious of not running away from those fundamental American values. Part of that was faith but it was not an overt George W. Bush kind of faith. It was much more driven by values of concern and compassion and wanting to do the right thing for people. We did not avoid religion, but he did not wear it on his sleeve, either.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Nelson: Were you worried that doing so to a greater extent than you did might turn off some of the liberal constituencies you were trying to recruit?

Greer: Not really. First of all, you already have the identity of a southern Governor, with all that entails. But you had the ability, because of his knowledge, his intellect, his charisma, his personal powers of persuasion, to overcome that identity. We had to be reassuring, but we never had to go and overtly say, "We're going to tell you, he's not a redneck, Bible-toting, evangelical that you have to worry about." Everybody was reassured by his demeanor, his style. We didn't go overboard or overtly try to do anything one way or the other.

Riley: I've got a general question area and I don't even know how to phrase it, so I'll just tell you the general question area, it's about his relationship with the more politically conservative evangelicals, which of course over time is very much corroded. But at the early stage, was there a sense that he was somebody who could relate well to that community by virtue of his past—

Greer: Let's just say, I think there was a sense that he did not alienate southern, evangelical Christians. But here is the real secret and magic. He had an amazing appeal to black religious leaders and black Christians. There is a huge bishop in Memphis, whose name I have forgotten—

Nelson: [Gilbert] Patterson, Church of God in Christ.

Greer: When they have a convention, it is twenty or thirty thousand members coming—

Nelson: Every November.

Greer: He spoke there a couple of times. It was the most amazing thing I'd ever been to in my life, and I grew up in the South. One of the speeches he gave was about welfare and parents' responsibilities, it was truly amazing. When you saw how he connected to that constituency, that was really a magical connection. And it remained that way. It remains that way now in Harlem where his office is. It is truly a special relationship. That is, in its core, a kind of religious connection, it's not a political connection, it's a religious connection.

Riley: Right.

Greer: He admires the Church of God in Christ, he admires that bishop, and it wasn't just that church. I remember in New York, the day that the Vietnam story broke. I was very sympathetic but other staff members were very angry that he hadn't been more forthcoming. I said, "Unless you lived through that period of time, trying to figure out how to deal with your draft board and avoid going to a war you didn't believe in, none of you should sit in judgment of Clinton doing everything he did to try to avoid service." But that was a very depressing day. We went out, got on the bus, and went to five black churches, and they were huge. Clinton, it was just like, it rejuvenated him. No matter what else was going to happen, no matter what negative press he had to deal with, and skeptics and criticism and everything else, when he was with that constituency, in that religious setting, it was as if he was born again. He really related to it.

Riley: Did you have conversations—I mean, during the period of time that you've known him, there has been an enormous amount of turmoil in the Southern Baptist Church about its own identity. Did you have conversations with him about this?

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Greer: Some, maybe because I would bring it up. I really thought that there was a political takeover of the Southern Baptist convention that went counter to everything Baptists believe. It went counter to the priesthood of the believer and the fact that you don't have a hierarchy dictating to either seminaries or to the church—

Riley: Independence of local churches.

Greer: Yes. We did talk about it and we both found it very disturbing. But beginning, really, with the Southern Baptist takeover and Ralph Reed, there was a conscious effort, I think, to take over and mislead evangelical Christians and create that political movement. I was concerned about it, I think Clinton was concerned about it. But to say that we had a strategy to go and "try to win them over," or take them on in some overt way, that wasn't the case. I think what happened with both Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton is that they were reassuring enough that they didn't lose 90 percent of the evangelical vote.

Riley: My question was less about political tactics than it was just about his own personal disposition on this very personal of issues about religious beliefs.

Greer: We did talk about it, and we talked about how unfortunate it was, and how counter it was to everything that Baptists, from Roger Williams on, have believed.

Riley: Do you know whether he ever contemplated leaving the Southern Baptist church?

Greer: I never had any indication that he did. I always thought it was really interesting that he and Hillary went to different churches. They profoundly wanted to pursue their own faith.

Riley: She went to a Methodist church, right?

Greer: She went to a Methodist church.

Riley: Where did Chelsea go?

Greer: That's a good question. I really don't know. I think she may have gone to the Baptist church. You should find that out. Knowing Chelsea—

Riley: Maybe the Episcopal church.

Greer: —and the way she has dealt with issues like that, I'm sure she went to both.

Riley: Mike, do you have anything else you want to pose—

Greer: Let me, if I could, just review a couple of things I said yesterday, which I think are fundamental to the core of the success of Bill Clinton. One, he was, without a doubt, an incredibly effective communicator, but he also had a tremendous intellect—as I said, he's one of the smartest people—and a real good political sense. So he was an effective communicator, he was smart, and incredibly intellectual. The third thing was, he had a real track record and understood public policy like no one who has ever run for President. Those three things, without all three of those, including the ability to communicate and connect in political terms, he would

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

not have been successful in that year, in that primary. And every bit of that came to the fore in the development of his message and his speech and his rationale for running, beginning—if people want to know where Bill Clinton's campaign came from, it would be the DLC speech in Cleveland and the announcement speech, which Bruce and I worked on until late in the night, and which I gave to John King to close the debate. But anyway, those two speeches.

Clinton, all the way through his term in office, would say, "You ought to go read that announcement speech, that's where I laid it out. I said it all there." Here was a guy who not only wanted to be President, but he knew why he wanted to be President. Sometimes that doesn't happen. I mean, a lot of people run because they want to be President. I'm not sure George W. Bush knew why he wanted to be President, but it seemed to be the thing that everybody wanted him to do. Clinton, from day one, had a clear sense of what he had tried to do as Governor and what the country needed at the next level in order for states to be able to survive and people to be able to prosper. He had a clear sense of that from the beginning.

I urge all of you to go back and read those two speeches; there is the message. It was always somewhat of a struggle when people came on board who didn't understand the underpinnings of the campaign, but if you read the announcement speech, he stuck to that all the way through the campaign. It was his core. He also stuck with it all the way through his administration. When I looked at that list, the excellent list that your staff compiled, of all the accomplishments during his administration, beginning with the Family and Medical Leave Act, every bit of it is who he was to the core. Now, it's pretty unusual in American politics that you have somebody who is a good communicator, a great politician, et cetera, but who also has a firm understanding of what he wants to do and then sticks with it.

Riley: Is it also accurate to say he had a very clear sense about how to get there?

Greer: Yes. He had a clear sense of what needed to happen to the country and how, policy-wise, you could get there. I think he had a fairly clear sense of how to persuade people.

Riley: My question was more related to the strategy. He's somebody who comes through in these interviews as having a very good electoral political sense, so that when you—

Greer: Yes, that's why I said—that's up there with good communicator, he's also an excellent politician. He has political skills that are unsurpassed.

Riley: A piece of the lore from 1991 is that the Senate race in Pennsylvania was an important marker. Let me just throw that out there and ask you, does that comport with your own recollection of that year? This is Harris Wofford, healthcare, [James] Carville, and so forth. Were you following that race?

Greer: I thought that it was an important Senate race, in indicating that an issue could be powerful in winning a Senate race. I don't think it had any impact at all on Bill Clinton's message, strategy, or the campaign.

Nelson: Not even on personnel? In other words, would he have hired Carville and [Paul] Begala after that campaign in Pennsylvania?

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Greer: Oh, yes, and here's the key. First of all, for the record, there was a team of people who had brought this campaign to the point, in December, where, as I said yesterday, it was perceived to be not only the front-running campaign, but the inevitable nominee. They (James and Paul) got involved because Zell Miller—that wonderful Democrat who did so much for the Democratic Party over the last two elections—Zell Miller called Clinton and said, "You have to hire these guys, they're terrific." I think Clinton also knew that they had been successful in Pennsylvania, but it was more Zell Miller, another southern Governor, saying, "These guys can really help you," that brought in Carville and Begala.

Second thing, which is kind of the untold story of all this, everything in this campaign, message-wise, strategy-wise, policy-wise was set before James and Paul got involved. We never wavered, and it had nothing to do with James. James created the mythology and the persona that he was the person responsible, and it just wasn't the case. James played a good coordinating role in the general election, but this is not a campaign or strategy that James Carville put together. This was a Bill Clinton campaign and he put it together. If there's anything that's unfortunate about what happened as a result of all this, it's the lasting mythology, because there was a lot of self-promoting going on, that this was not Bill Clinton, but was rather the smart people who came from Harris Wofford's campaign or whatever, and that is just not the case. I say to my core, that is not the case. This is Bill Clinton, Bill Clinton mapping it out, Bill Clinton understanding it, et cetera.

Riley: Okay. In the fall of '91, and this is probably further evidence of the point that you're making now, there were three policy speeches that Clinton gave, I think all three were at Georgetown.

Greer: Georgetown University.

Riley: You were involved in helping write those speeches.

Greer: At my office over on Pennsylvania Avenue, every one of them. First of all, we should step back. We thought that being a Governor from Arkansas and running against all these Senators—although I don't think America elects Senators for President, I think they elect Governors for President—we thought it important to lay out and to create this sense of intellectual heft and gravitas for a Governor from Arkansas. So one was on foreign policy and defense policy, one was on social policy, and one was on the economy.

Riley: Were you involved in the decision about the venue?

Greer: We—and I'll give Greenberg credit for this—I think we, the two of us, pushed very hard for the idea of doing this. A part of it also was dealing with the chattering class and the elites within Washington D.C. who were saying, "He can't do it, he can't be elected President," and, "We've got all these Senators who are running, why do we need this guy from Arkansas?" So we needed to lay down a marker that he was thoughtful, that he had clear ideas and real intellect about the big issues facing the country. We thought Georgetown was a good setting.

First of all, it was his alma mater, so it was a good way to remind people that he had not spent his life in Arkansas but had actually been beyond that. It was also a really nice room, I've been thinking about using it for something else. The president of the University was really positive,

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Clinton had a lot of old professors who were willing to talk about what a great student he had been. And it was very close to my office. If traffic was really bad we could walk up there—helpful in terms of trying to get him there on time, which was always a struggle, and trying to get him to practice. So it was a very convenient setting.

Riley: Do you remember much about the process of preparing for these speeches?

Greer: As I said yesterday, with any endeavor like this—and I should have mentioned these three speeches, too, as laying out the message of the campaign that he really stuck to all the way through his Presidency—it was always draft after draft after draft, fine tuning after fine tuning after fine tuning, and always down to the wire. That was true on every State of the Union speech, too. Just because he's so smart he puts a lot into it, and agonizes, and, "We can't say that," and—you would have thought that it was a speech that was going to set the stage for foreign policy for 20 years to come. That's how much he agonized over it. I'd say, "Well, we can say this and figure it out later," or, "We can—" I'm a 30-second media guy, right? And Clinton is a very deep intellectual thinker and there was always this conflict between what you had as a compelling message, plus what the legacy was going to be in terms of his understanding of foreign policy, or social policy, or defense policy. But they were "hammered-out," that's a good way to put it.

It was an interesting process, with a lot of expertise—Clinton has an amazing reach of experts, and people who are knowledgeable, and good advisors, and all of that came to the fore. It was a wonderful exercise. I also think that it served to establish us as a candidate with gravitas, with real credibility, and real stature. It also was a really good exercise for Clinton to think everything through. Going back to the DLC speech, this whole process forced him to focus on his reason and rationale and what he wanted to do. We got some press and people gave us some credit for ideas, et cetera, on those three speeches, but more than anything else, it focused Clinton on what he wanted to do. It was a great exercise. I think he would say that, too.

Morrisroe: How did the "new covenant" concept emerge in those meetings, if you recall?

Greer: New covenant was first mentioned in the announcement speech. I will be very honest with you, I was uneasy about it. It goes to your point—I thought it sounded almost too evangelical. I'll tell you where it came from. It came from Al From, who is Jewish, who had the idea that the covenant was an agreement between God and his people. For all those reasons, I was saying, "This is a little over the top." Clinton agonized about it and we went back and forth and everything, and I finally backed off.

It's interesting, the three watchwords for the campaign became "responsibility," "opportunity," and "community." But it had started as "responsibility," "opportunity," and "new covenant." We finally got to the point—although I had kind of warmed up to the whole new covenant thing—but eventually, a new sense of community emerged from the concept—we owe you opportunity, you have to take responsibility, and we need to build a new sense of community. That's how it all originated and evolved. But I've got to tell you, Al From was the one who came up with it.

Nelson: Can you trace the evolution of a typical speech?

Greer: Have you interviewed Al From?

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Riley: No, we have not. I don't mind telling you who we've talked with.

Greer: I've got to tell you, he would be—because if there's anybody else who was key to the meaning, the rationale, and political strategy, Al was a big part of it.

Nelson: How a speech developed. You talked about draft after draft, but would it start with Clinton saying to you or to others, "Here's what I want to say in this speech"?

Greer: I'm trying to remember exactly, but I know that we ended up with an initial draft and it probably came from discussions with Clinton. It then got circulated to a lot of people, some of whom were experts in certain areas, some of whom were good writers. I'm trying to think of the guy who wrote *Parting the Waters*, about the history of the civil rights movement.

Nelson: Taylor Branch.

Greer: Taylor Branch was always involved, you know, "Send it to Taylor, get his feedback." Taylor was excellent as a writer. A college roommate of Clinton's named Tommy Caplan was always involved. I just remembered, Tommy was there the night we stayed up all night writing the announcement speech. Tommy is a fiction writer, an interesting character. So it was a cast of thousands—not thousands, but there was always a lot of input. My key contribution, because I wasn't a policy expert in any of these arenas, was wordsmithing the speech so that it communicated clearly, was compelling, and was memorable, et cetera.

Then the other key was getting Clinton to practice it. He was awfully good, but if you're going be held to something like a policy speech, you really have to—and I was always nervous because we never quite had enough time to practice it. There were always changes being made and I would always be nervous that this was just going to be a disaster. But without a fail, he would walk up there and deliver it like he had memorized it. He does have a photographic memory, but it wasn't the photographic memory, he just was familiar and cared enough about the material, the content, that he could go up there and deliver it. All three of those speeches were—as I remember, and maybe it's just positive memories, but—were incredibly well delivered, a room full of students and intellectuals and professors, et cetera, and we got great press out of it. The speeches accomplished exactly what we had intended.

Riley: For a Governor, that's a very different method for developing words that you're going to go talk about. Did Clinton chafe at this, or—that may not be the right way to ask the question, but—

Greer: Chafe at the process of writing it that way?

Riley: Right.

Greer: No, because he basically came up with the first approach and drove the first draft, got a lot of input from people he trusted. If there's anything he chafed at, it was practicing it and honing it down and making it a little shorter. These were long speeches and brevity is not his greatest strength. He really likes to talk. If you're sitting around playing hearts, he just wants to talk. He is a very—he loves to talk.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Riley: How do you keep a speech like that from being a mushy soup if you've got that many authors?

Greer: It's not easy. One, I give credit to Clinton, but often he would get kind of mushy and go off on tangents and rabbit warrens, and you had to—Greenberg played a key role in this, and Bruce, too, but it was bringing it back to a real focus. When you achieved that, Clinton accepted it and appreciated that you had gotten more focus and pared it back down to where it was really on target. But if you had let him go without struggling about that, he would have ended up with something like the convention speech in 1988.

Riley: Length is one sign of that, I would think. You attribute it to the fact that Clinton just likes to talk. But one way you deal with the fact that you've got twenty cooks—

Greer: But he also is so damn smart that he himself, even if he didn't have twenty cooks, he himself is thinking, *Well, we could say this, and then if you really explain this concept*—it's a constant intellectual process with Clinton.

Riley: Which suggests that you have to have somebody around who is a good disciplinarian with the process or the ultimate words. You're suggesting Stan was that disciplinarian, or—

Greer: Stan and I, I think, played that role more than anyone else. I'm trying to think who else was in that room. Mark Gearan often was there.

Riley: Bruce Reed?

Greer: Bruce Reed, yes. But Bruce played a key role, certainly. Bruce was key in the DLC speech, certainly was key in the announcement speech, and I think he played a role in all three of those Georgetown speeches.

Nelson: What's a rehearsal like? What—

Greer: I believe that at the announcement speech, not at the DLC speech, but at the announcement speech and these three Georgetown speeches, we had them on TelePrompTer and it's the first time that Clinton had really done that. That's different from just practicing a text. I think we had a whole system set up in my office and up there. Since Reagan, major Presidential speeches are always given with TelePrompTers. I figured it was also a way to keep from going to the extemporaneous three speeches he gave at the Atlanta convention. So therefore we practiced—I know we practiced in Little Rock with a TelePrompTer.

Part of it is going through it and practicing the way it's going to sound, not just the way it reads in text. A part of it with Clinton was getting him to keep going, because he would want to stop—this was true in every practice we did at the White House, the State of the Union and everything else—he would literally go through a text that we'd all agreed on and he'd say, "Let me look at that again." And he'd want to make a change at the last minute. It's the reason we were often late to Georgetown, or the Capitol, or whatever. He was just constantly re-writing and re-thinking.

Nelson: During a rehearsal, are you stopping him and saying, "Now, why don't you say it this way?"

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Greer: Yes. Or, "It would sound better if you said it this way, and if you paused before this very important point, and if you slowed down a little bit. Give yourself a varied vocal pattern here." He took direction—and this is true of filming spots, too—extremely well. He was very good. He would only have to hear you suggest it once, "How would it sound if we did it this way?" and he got it. And that's true of all of his major speeches.

Riley: You've made reference a couple of times to, "I don't have this here with me." You actually have the recordings of these sessions?

Greer: No. I have films of the events, the announcement speech, et cetera. That would tell me whether or not we were using TelePrompTers.

Riley: I wasn't sure whether you also had retained—

Greer: No, no.

Riley: Historians—that causes the eyes to light up a little bit on these things.

Morrisroe: In the fall of 1991, I know a campaign organization is a fairly fluid thing over the course of an election cycle, but what did it look like in the fall of 1991? Who was doing what and where were they located?

Greer: They were in Little Rock. Stephanie, my wife, went down and was the political director, dealing with constituency groups; George Stephanopoulos went down as kind of the key hire; there were two Arkansas people, another person who stayed with, and actually was involved in the Gore campaign, whose name I cannot remember, but he was an Arkansas operative; Bruce Lindsey; Bruce Reed basically was up here but he would come down for writing and doing things like that.

Riley: You were up here mostly?

Greer: I was back and forth a lot, every week or so. Greenberg and Mark Gearan were back and forth a lot. I'm trying to remember.

Morrisroe: Was Wilhelm managing the campaign at that point?

Greer: He was not on board at that point. He came in later.

Morrisroe: Who was serving as manager, de facto manager, during that period?

Greer: George. I mean, if there was a manager, it was George. And Craig Smith. Rahm Emanuel was key early on. Rahm basically was putting together the whole fundraising operation, and did a superb job. As I said yesterday, I think he's one of the people without whom we would not, Clinton would not have been successful.

Riley: Was Mickey Kantor there by this time?

Greer: Mickey was there but he wasn't there full-time.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Riley: Okay.

Greer: There was another person coming in, Eli Segal, who came in, I've got to think, November or December. That is also about the time that David Wilhelm came on board. There was a core group, I believe, by September. We announced in October, October 9, I think. There were only four or five people during that period of time. Bev Lindsey did all the advance work and worked on the travel and stuff like that. Nancy Hernreich, who did the scheduling and ran the mansion, was involved and played a key role, but she was still on the state staff, I believe. Bev put together the whole announcement event, which looked terrific. So it was a core of maybe five or six people who were running the campaign. After the announcement it began to build up with David, with Eli Segal. Eli Segal, also one of the unsung heroes, played a really critical role in keeping it all together and managing the finances. Rahm raised it, Rahm didn't manage it. Eli managed it, and he was superb. He was one of these very invisible people, behind the scenes.

Riley: When we asked earlier about Carville and Begala you gave us—

Greer: They came on board, I think, in late December. I remember having a meeting in my office. They were not in Little Rock initially, they were here.

Riley: My question is about Stephanopoulos though, who was there. Had you known George before?

Greer: Greenberg and I knew of him. Mark Gearan thought very highly of him, and he had been on the Hill. I knew of him, but didn't really know him. The first day or two after he started he worked out of our office here, before he was able to move down. Clinton was really—I think George was considering another campaign. It may have been when they thought Gephardt was going to run, but no, I think Gephardt had decided not to run.

Riley: I think so. According to his memoir, he had his eyes on Cuomo for a while also.

Greer: He was kind of looking around to see—so a part of it with George was convincing him. I think Greenberg and I both tried to convince him that Clinton was going to be the one to win the nomination, if not the Presidency. Then I think Clinton convinced him. I remember Clinton was up here and they met one afternoon. Clinton called and said, "I think it went really well." They were competing to get George. He was a bright star on the Hill and had been somebody that people respected on Gephardt's staff.

Riley: Was there anybody that you didn't get? Were there people that you looked at—?

Greer: No, not that I know of.

Riley: Mike McCurry was working for Bob Kerrey at that time as a spokesperson.

Greer: I don't even know whether he had started but—

Riley: Maybe not.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Greer: I'm trying to remember what Mike did in '88. No.

Riley: You didn't lose in the staff sweepstakes, then, any place.

Greer: Not that I know of. And the interesting thing about James and Paul is that they were also playing the field. They were looking for who they thought was going to be the horse they could ride. They were not convinced initially that it was Clinton. So a part of it was, I remember we had a lunch at a restaurant called Donatello, where it was Greenberg and myself who were trying to convince them to come with Clinton.

Riley: Do you remember any—can you characterize that lunch for us?

Greer: I don't remember much about it.

Riley: We're about to the point where we're going to get into New Hampshire.

Greer: I will only say that I think we had, by the time of that conversation, we had demonstrated and surmounted every kind of challenge or expectation so that the press and the political insiders were perceiving that we had a campaign that was definitely, if not the winner of the nomination, definitely the frontrunner.

Riley: Exactly. Why don't we take a break.

[BREAK]

Riley: I wanted to dial back and ask one more question before we get into '92. I seem to recall that the pledge to end welfare as we knew it was made in one of the Georgetown speeches. Did that—

Greer: "Welfare should be a second chance, not a way of life." First of all, and this is also part of thinking through the New Democratic approach of offering opportunity, expecting responsibility, building a new covenant or a new sense of community. A part of it was also that I thought, and Clinton thought, on several issues, that we had a need to be bold and counter-intuitive and basically take on things that people did not expect Democrats to take on. Clinton had already been successful on welfare reform and had done a very good job in Arkansas. So he was a believer. Even in the Governor's campaign, I may be wrong about this, but I think we did a spot with someone who had basically benefited from welfare reform and gotten off welfare.

The other thing was, Democrats had always been soft on crime. We wanted to be tough on crime—the "100,000 police on the streets," "community policing," as an approach, and also as a symbol of being tough on crime. So reforming welfare, helping people move from welfare to work, was a very important part of that.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Nelson: Can I bring in one last loose end, perhaps? I remember at the time it was considered a big deal that Clinton had gotten Robert Farmer to be his finance chairman.

Greer: That's right.

Nelson: And yet his name almost never comes up when you hear about the actual financing of the Clinton campaign. Could you talk about why it was seen as a big deal in the political community and why it—

Greer: I know Bob, he's actually a friend. Farmer had been the fundraiser for Michael Dukakis and was the epitome of the liberal fundraising guru who could tap into all of that liberal Dukakis-Massachusetts-New York kind of money. In reality, I don't know what kind of job he did raising money, I just know that Rahm became the key fundraising part of this. It was a symbolic victory, perhaps, without a great deal of substance, I don't know. I just never saw—but to give Bob his due, it was probably more difficult for him, in his circles, to raise money for a Bill Clinton than it was to raise money for a Michael Dukakis. That's just something I'm assuming. A lot of what you're going through at that stage, on everything, from AFSCME endorsements to whatever, is the symbolism of saying you're putting together the winning campaign, and having Farmer on board was a good message, a symbol of a campaign that was putting together unexpected support.

Nelson: Along that line, was Clinton already able to tap into Hollywood money?

Greer: Not really, but he was beginning to. Linda Bloodworth-Thomason, who had done *Designing Women,* and Harry, both were from Arkansas, both old friends. Harry actually was an ally, helping produce things in New Hampshire. They were his point of access in Hollywood, as was Mickey Kantor. Paul Cowan, who runs the UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles] School of Communications now. Very connected in L.A. Derek Shearer, whose father, Lloyd Shearer, was the publisher of *Parade* magazine, was also a very good friend. These are friends that go way back to Rhodes Scholar days.

What I had always heard from people I know in Hollywood, is that Clinton wasn't tapping into the Hollywood moguls, he was always at the second level down. So he wasn't considered the "Hollywood candidate" until probably '96. Then everybody wanted to get on board, he couldn't keep them away from him. Maybe even by the inaugural he couldn't keep them away. He had enough access in Hollywood and in L.A. that he could raise significant money there. Mickey Kantor, by the way, was also well respected and played a key role.

Riley: Iowa. Did you do much with the Iowa caucus?

Greer: Here's one of my observations about Democratic Party politics—and this may stand Hillary in good stead, too—the thing that helped Bill Clinton become President is that he didn't have to run in Iowa. Whenever Democrats do, they generally have a hard time winning the general election, even if they win the primary, like John Kerry did. The nature of Iowa politics, the nature of causes and grassroots and the policy positions you have to take, makes it harder to stay in the center. So, if you look back, historically, the only one who came out of there with a boost was Jimmy Carter.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

With Governor [Tom] Vilsack thinking about running this time, that may be the best thing that ever happened to Hillary, because you don't have to go run in Iowa. So, answer? No. Because Harkin was running, we made no effort in Iowa and we could say, "We're not going to run in Iowa because he's the favorite son and of course they're going to win." So we could go to a state that actually had a vote, where you could actually persuade people to vote for you. It's a very different thing, having worked in both.

Riley: You go up there, though, and you've got a neighboring politician.

Greer: Tsongas.

Riley: Was that unexpected? Had Tsongas been—

Greer: It had always been talked about. I thought he would decide not to run. I actually thought that he had—and it turned out later that he did have—a serious health problem. He also was not the most dynamic member when he was in the Senate, so I just didn't think of him as that formidable. But I always thought also, it would allow us to say, "Well, he is the favorite son. I'm from Arkansas and he's next door." In the final analysis, as the comeback kid, coming in with 26 percent was okay, because Paul Tsongas was the next-door neighbor. Had it been anybody else who was first in that thing, we would have been in serious trouble coming in at 26 percent.

Riley: Or even finished third.

Nelson: From the standpoint of, say, January 1, 1992, did you all have a strategy for winning the nomination?

Greer: Yes.

Nelson: Could you describe that?

Greer: Not only did we have a very clear road map and strategy of how to win the nomination, this was a campaign that also, even in April, May, began mapping out a very carefully designed scenario to win the Electoral College. We had models upon models of how to spend resources and where to devote time and energy, and that was true in the primary states as well.

Nelson: Can you describe the strategy?

Greer: First of all, New Hampshire was key. Greenberg and I actually thought we could win New Hampshire. Had we not run into a few scandals, I think we would have won New Hampshire, and I think we would have been on the road to a big victory. The next stop, as I remember, I'm doing all this from memory—

Nelson: This may help you.

Greer: The next stop was Colorado. But we knew, even if we had problems in Colorado with Harkin being next door, that Georgia was going to be extremely important. Georgia was going to be key. Washington and a lot of these other states were caucuses and we knew we would do well, but the next key state was Florida and we had already made that a priority. And we thought that

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

we could put this away by March 17 in Illinois. We wanted to try to have achieved the inevitability factor by Illinois, so that we didn't get drawn into requiring vast resources, expenditures in Pennsylvania and California.

It turned out that we did run a serious campaign in Pennsylvania, but a part of that was reintroducing Clinton, because by this time people had forgotten who he was and where he came from. They thought he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, he went to Oxford and Yale, and they didn't know that his father died before he was born and that he grew up poor in a place called Hope. So a part of Pennsylvania and beyond was running the kind of campaign that would reintroduce Clinton after all the scandals, and position us to win the general election.

Nelson: Did you have a theory about who would emerge as his major rival or rivals?

Greer: In 20/20 hindsight I could say that we did, but I think that all of us thought that Bob Kerrey was the serious contender, and Bob Kerrey self-destructed in New Hampshire.

Nelson: How so?

Greer: You really want me to tell you? He had terrible television spots. He assumed, because of the war record and everything else, that he would be, on the résumé, popular, and he never went out and worked for it, never worked very hard. But they did a hockey player ad, on a deserted ice rink, where he's talking about trade—which was not the key issue in New Hampshire, trust me. [*laughter*] At the end of the spot he turns away from the camera, meaning you, the voter, and walks away. Beautiful. I'm saying, "That is the biggest turn-off I've ever seen in my life." Even his healthcare spot was a turn-off. It's just one of those things where everybody thought Bob Kerrey was going to be the nominee.

I'm trying to remember, after Tsongas I believe there were five people in the field in New Hampshire. I think that Kerrey was always second or doing pretty well, until his media went on the air. That one spot I thought was just disastrous. We focus-grouped it, and people had a very bad reaction to it.

By the way, the other key was New York, coming out of Illinois and right before Pennsylvania. I could tell you the ones that we had targeted as the key kind of turning points: Illinois, New York, Florida, and Georgia. We ended up doing well in Colorado, which was kind of a surprise, but we really ended up doing well in Georgia and then on into Florida.

Riley: Let me go back and ask my question again. How do you explain an ad that tests that poorly getting on the air?

Greer: I have no idea. I mean, I had the reaction before we tested it, but Greenberg will tell you, we tested it. The other thing is, we had a very disciplined and thoughtful research process through all of this—and that is thanks to Greenberg, but also I think Clinton liked research—so that in New Hampshire we had spent a lot of time in focus groups and we spent a lot of time in polling. I'll just jump ahead if you want.

Right after the first of the year we were in fifth place, I think we were at 12 or 13 percent in the polls.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Nelson: In New Hampshire?

Greer: In New Hampshire. We were bringing up the rear, there's no doubt about it. We had developed a different kind of spot that basically had Clinton to camera for sixty seconds. Most people thought that was pretty unusual. He offered a plan and said that we wanted people to be involved in the campaign, we wanted them to take a look at the plan, we wanted them to have a copy of the plan. And we offered that on the air. That we had tested, we had tested it when we tested all the other spots, and people really responded in this age of cynicism and alienation. They said, "Great, here's a guy who knows what he wants to do for the country, and he wants us to know. He actually will offer us a copy of his plan."

Riley: Did that surprise you that it tested well?

Greer: No, because we had actually tried this in a couple of other campaigns, like the Lawton Chiles campaign in Florida and Brereton Jones in Kentucky. I had just known that in other gubernatorial campaigns it—in Clinton's campaign we had a plan for the future and we advertised that. It made a big difference. We went on the air, I wish I had the timetable of January. We went on the air, I believe, the second or third week of January.

Morrisroe: The ninth.

Greer: The ninth, so I'm not too bad. We ran that ad for seven days and we went from 13 percent to 35 percent in seven days, in a crowded field, with Tsongas as next-door neighbor. We literally held on to that all the way through, until Gennifer Flowers. We dropped back down to 19, 18, 20 percent. Greenberg described it as a meltdown. But if we had melted down from where we were, which was 12 percent, we would not have been in the race at all. So we had the strength to withstand two major bits of scandal, largely on the strength of his plan, his personal campaigning, and the fact that we were able to break through with a spot. We came back and did bio later, but we just broke through with a spot that says, "Here's who I am, here's what I believe in, here's what I want to do for the country, and I want you to have a copy of our plan for America's future." And it worked.

Morrisroe: There's an article in the briefing materials that posited that part of your strategy in New Hampshire was to circumvent the news media entirely and go directly to individuals, both through the advertising plan you described and also by sending out videotapes to individuals. Was that—?

Greer: Literally, this videotape and the plan, the written plan for America's future, we delivered to thirty thousand homes, and the videotape. We went far beyond just buying time on television. We were holding our own and we were seesawing, but basically ahead of Tsongas, et cetera. Then Gennifer Flowers hits. I'll go back to the details of how that unfolded. There were two things that happened. I was at a fundraiser in Boston and George Stephanopoulos comes up to me and says—I think he was there, he may have been on the phone—he said, "We've got a real problem with this story from Arkansas and the *Star* is going to run with it." I said, "The *Star*?" I literally didn't know what the *Star* was. He said, "It's a tabloid." I said, "What are we worried about?" He said, "I think somebody else is going to pick up on it." In other words, I was saying, "We have already dealt with this, we were able, in Arkansas—" and that was probably a mistake

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

on my part, to say to the legitimate media, "There's no substantiation for this, there's no corroboration for this, you can't run with this story, there's nothing to it."

But I honestly thought the standards had changed, in terms of—and the other standard that changed, and it was because of Bill Clinton, is in the past, if you had a scandal, true or not, but if you had a scandal like this that had that much feeding frenzy behind it, you dropped out. Gary Hart dropped out, right? Clinton, God bless him, had strength of character and said, "I'm going to stick in here and I'm going to stand up and I'm going to keep running and I'm going to make it through this." He did that on several occasions in his career, but you had to admire that, and that changed the rules as well. You could keep trying to talk about the future for other people as opposed to talking about your past.

Nelson: How critical in his being able to do that was the support of his wife?

Greer: Very critical, very critical. But I think a lot of it was the internal strength that he had, maybe even as a Southern Baptist—that *I am not without sin, but I am forgiven* kind of thing. It was a big, big part of who he was.

So to go to your point, this story hit and it was astounding that it didn't get picked up. Then Gennifer does her press conference where she has a tape, but still, we were holding up in the numbers. It proves my point that people were more concerned about what he offered for the future than what he had done in the past. There was this forgiving nature. So I went back to my basic position, which had worked so well at the Sperling breakfast, which was, take it head-on, don't get into the details, people don't want to know that much about your personal life, but they do want you and your wife to reassure them about your marriage and your commitment to one another, and that's it. Then go on and talk about what you want to do for the country.

There was dissent on that issue. But we decided—and I was very in favor of this—take it on in the biggest forum you can, don't try to deal with it piecemeal in a lot of small forums. Originally it was going to be Ted Koppel and we were talking with various folks about that. Then it was going to be *Good Morning America* or the *Today* show. This broke on Thursday, and this is all vague memory, but it was a major decision—how do we deal with it? Then George says, "Well, we've got an offer for *Sixty Minutes*." A lot of people said, "Oh, God, you don't want to do *Sixty Minutes*," and it was airing right before the Super Bowl. I said, "Perfect. Take it, accept it."

We went and did focus groups in Manchester, New Hampshire, on Friday night. This also shows you the value of Greenberg's research approach. Let's go research this. Then I flew down with Paul Begala and Greenberg, to Boston, to meet at the hotel where they were going to film *Sixty Minutes*.

We met—James, Hillary, I think Susan Thomases was there, I don't think Harold was there. Susan Thomases, by the way, is another key figure in all of this, a very close friend of Hillary's, always advisor to Hillary. There was a feeling on the part of some that we had to confess all. It's kind of like you said, "Tell us everything that happened, how many of these are real affairs or not real affairs, and let's just take it all on." I felt, especially after sitting through these focus groups—it may have been just Greenberg and I—I said, "People don't want to know, they really don't want to know the details of this. They want to know that you admit that you've had

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

problems, that you've had difficulties and that you're not perfect. And they want to know that you're committed to each other and that you're committed to the country, that's it."

Riley: Can you describe for us—I don't want to interrupt the train of thought too much, but can you describe for us how you were conducting these focus groups? How explicit are you getting with the groups about this issue?

Greer: We weren't. No. We were finding out what they knew and what they were concerned about, not imparting information to them.

Nelson: Were these Democratic voters?

Greer: I'm sure they were, those were the only folks we were concerned about talking to. There were two groups. One was all women because we figured they'd be more likely—the strategy is, in a focus group, letting them tell you and listening, and then the question you ask is, "How much do you want to know? What would make you feel better about this?" That's how you can determine whether or not it's a good idea to bare your soul.

I think Clinton and Hillary finally came to the conclusion that the Sperling breakfast approach—and what I had strongly advocated, and I think Stan did, too, that you basically admit that there are problems and confess you haven't been perfect, but you're committed to one another and you're committed to the country—that approach had worked well. I will tell you, one of the most frightening things was sitting in the other room, watching this. I was a wreck, not knowing what Clinton's final decision—in other words, you advise, but they're in a live interview and it's him and Hillary and they're sitting there and I'm thinking, *I don't know what they're going to do*. I literally didn't know what they're going to do. Another thing, we had a lighting bar, a kind of structure, collapse in the middle of it and almost hit Hillary. It was tension on top of tension. But it turned out great. It really was terrific.

So we made it through Gennifer Flowers, I'm thinking, *We made it*. Then the draft letter hits. On the draft letter, I said I thought it was very understandable. If you look at the thoughtfulness with which he had written this, I thought it showed a window into someone whom I would like to be President. And Lord knows, he wouldn't be in Iraq right now. He would be the kind of person who would intervene in the Balkans, but not at the cost of lives and not with troops on the ground. This was a Clinton who, if you read the letter, was very thoughtful. This time we went on Koppel. I thought Clinton did a very good job of explaining: this was a young man, this was heartfelt, this is what we were going through at that period of time. I actually thought we were going to be okay.

The problem was, the feeding frenzy continued. If you've ever been on a campaign trail where you're two weeks out from the primary, every reporter in the world is in New Hampshire, and every reporter thinks they've got to do this story, and they're screaming at you, and you literally can't move from the hotel to an event without these mobs of people. It was just out of control. Feeding frenzy beyond any feeding frenzy I've ever seen, and I've been around politics a long time.

So what do we do, what do we do, what do we do? So I said—and it was kind of a crazy idea, but this also comes from listening to focus groups—I said, "The people of New Hampshire are

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

more concerned about their future than they are about Bill Clinton's past. We should hold town meetings—" it was the beginning of the town meetings, by the way— "and we should buy time on the local television station in New Hampshire." I think we bought two or three blocks of time. "We should have an independent research firm recruit undecided voters—" not decided voters, but undecided voters— "put them in the audience and let them talk to Bill Clinton."

We produced our own television show. All the media had to watch it. They're all crowded in this studio, waiting to just rip him apart. The voters were really dignified and really thoughtful. You know what they asked about? They asked about healthcare, they asked about things like transportation policy, they wanted to know about jobs. In the first 30 minutes on our program that we produced, not one person asked about Gennifer Flowers. Not one person asked about the draft. This is in the midst of the feeding frenzy. So all of a sudden you're saying to the press and everybody else, "Hey, the voters may be concerned about something else." This was true all the way through Clinton's career. The press were totally consumed with Clinton's problems, and the people were not.

In the second town hall we did, this is all questions and answers, totally unrehearsed—and by the way, it became his favorite format, including the second debate with George Bush. This kind of give and take, no one is better at it than Clinton—in the second town hall program that we did, guess how many questions we got about Gennifer Flowers and the draft? One. Someone asked, in a very respectful way, "Given that you did not serve in the military, do you still believe you would be an effective Commander-in-Chief?" Not, "You were a draft-dodger," or, "Why did you lie to your draft board?" All of a sudden, I think even the national press corps said, "We may be a little carried away on this." That gave us the two weeks of breathing space where Clinton worked his heart out, went to the malls, went to the streets—we were as visible—but we would never have been able to get out of the feeding frenzy to do that, had we not had something that went directly to the people and demonstrated that the people were concerned about something other than Gennifer Flowers and the draft.

From that point on, Clinton loved town meetings. We did them all the way through the general election. They became like regional phenomena. WSB-TV in Atlanta would host it and there'd be five states that would do town meetings with us. It led all the way up to—when I knew we had won the election—the second debate in Richmond, Virginia, where it was a town hall meeting and it wasn't reporters, it was real people asking questions and Clinton would go over and engage them, and George Bush was looking at his watch to see how long he had to sit here with these people.

So that was, to answer your question in a very long, roundabout way, a very conscious strategy to go directly to people and not rely on the filter of the press.

Nelson: You did suggest that although the Gennifer Flowers incident didn't provoke a drop in the polls, the draft did.

Greer: I'm sorry, yes. We went, overnight—as Greenberg said, it was a meltdown—from like 32 percent to 18 on the draft. So that was a big issue. It may have been the cumulative impact of scandal after scandal, and people wondering what's wrong with this guy, et cetera. But then, the truly amazing thing is, because Clinton had the strength of character—everybody was kind of

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

holed up. We were all living in a Days Inn in New Hampshire, Mickey Kantor, everyone—and Clinton just said, "Let's go." He went out and campaigned his heart out every day. His only break was when he stopped for Dunkin' Donuts, which he did too much. He went up two shirt sizes and two coat sizes in New Hampshire from eating doughnuts. He really did.

Nelson: There's one other thing that I think was already manifesting itself before the Gennifer Flowers thing, and that is, as admiring as the national press was of Clinton while he was becoming the frontrunner, as soon as they defined him as the frontrunner, suddenly Paul Tsongas became the new hero. Is my memory of this consistent with yours?

Greer: Correct. The clean guy, yes, right. And a straight shooter. He was also honest. Clinton was too slick, Clinton would tell you anything you wanted to hear—which is not the case, the message never changed at all. But it is true, the press builds you up and they will very quickly tear you down. Tsongas became the truth-teller and the honest person who would tell you that we had to change Social Security and things like that.

Nelson: How did Clinton feel about that as it was happening?

Greer: Not happy. There are two things that I will confess drove him crazy. One, that Tsongas was considered to be more honest about public policy issues and better on telling the truth about Social Security and other challenges that we faced. The other thing is, and I should get you a copy of the spot, but the 60-second spot we did had a line, which we later used even in the general, that said, "Middle-class taxpayers get a break, and those who make over $250,000 pay more." Well, all of Clinton's wealthy, intellectual friends in New York, and maybe the Farmer crowd, I don't know, they were furious with him that he said that he was going to tax the rich.

He always gave me hell that we had done that. Greenberg and I kept saying—here's one of the great struggles with Clinton. He always wanted to win every demographic group, not just the ones we needed to win to win, but he wanted to win every demographic group. Therefore he couldn't stand the fact that he wasn't doing as well as Tsongas among college-educated, graduate-school-educated, higher-income people, and he said, "It's because of that damn tax proposal you stuck in there, Greer. If we hadn't done that, we would have had the—" Greenberg kept saying, "We don't need them! You don't necessarily want to worry about them, you're winning the middle class, the forgotten middle class." But he wanted to win every demographic. It really drove him crazy that Tsongas was winning the college-educated and graduate-school and high-income people.

So we bounced back from 18, Greenberg can confirm this, but I think we were at 18 percent, and we bounced back because of that kind of campaigning. He was superb. He's almost better when he's under attack, in those most challenging times. He always rises to the challenge. And he campaigned wonderfully in those last two weeks.

Nelson: Do you have a theory about that, why he was at his best?

Greer: I think that's part of his strength of character, when he feels he's just got to do it, he goes out and has that strength. It was during that time that the senior citizen came up there crying, even 12 years, 15 years after the fact, and told him the story of her Social Security and losing healthcare. She starts crying. Clinton goes down, hugs her, starts crying with her. All the

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

networks were filming it and it was breakthrough-city, it was just amazing. George Bush Senior would never have gone down and hugged her. He might have expressed sympathy, but Clinton, that was his nature. And that was really the nature of that whole two-week period of time, it was just phenomenal personal campaigning.

Riley: Did you develop some more spots?

Greer: Yes, we did. As a matter of fact, one of our last spots was of him hugging that little old lady. We had a number of spots. A lot of them were kind of excitement spots. We did a whole rally that we filmed in—maybe it was Manchester—going back to the symbolism, with lots of American flags, lot of inspiring music. It was very much a momentum spot. Then we did one at the end about who he cares about and this little lady. I will try, for your records, to get you a set of all the spots from New Hampshire and from the general.

Riley: Wonderful. Were there some spots that you didn't run? Were there debates about whether you had to come back and—

Greer: Not in New Hampshire. There was concern by some in the campaign about the nature of the spots we used in Colorado, but they were very similar to the New Hampshire spots. There are spots that we developed and tested for the general election which we did not use, and I'll get to that later. We got to the whole "putting people first" theme before we had actually published the second book, *Putting People First*. We also did a lot of work in Florida on Social Security and Paul Tsongas' position on it, especially among senior citizens. We wanted to finally lay Paul Tsongas to rest around that Social Security issue in Florida, and I think we did that. It was a pretty tough campaign. Most of it, though, was similar to the positive spots in New Hampshire.

Riley: Did you run any negative spots in New Hampshire?

Greer: We did not, not at all. As a matter of fact, I think the first contrast spot was in North Dakota, we tried running it out there. I'm trying to remember if that's where we had a spot that went on the air by accident, which does happen sometimes.

Riley: It actually shows up in the timeline.

Greer: You ship a spot to a station and you don't intend for it to go on the air. Sometimes you ship a spot to a station just to scare the opponent.

Riley: Manchester, let's see.

Greer: Yes, we prepared a spot to respond, but as I was saying, my theory was that we didn't need to respond, and that ad was not supposed to run. I think it ran once.

Riley: I interrupted you. You said you prepare a lot of spots and you even ship them out, but you—

Greer: Beginning, I think even before the convention, for the general election, we did a mock test campaign against Clinton with probably six to eight spots. One of the spots I did was a wasteland spot about the failures in Arkansas, and sure enough, Bush used a version three

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

months later. It was truly amazing, it was as if I had copied his spot or he had copied my spot. But we went into focus groups and tested all of the spots against Clinton and tested responses, so that even before September we knew how to respond to everything.

Nelson: I have this vivid memory of Clinton, when the results of New Hampshire came in, somehow turning a defeat into a victory. How did that come about? How did that moment, that comeback kid moment, come about?

Greer: I'll tell you the truth. I think a lot of that was Paul Begala writing the speech that night. It may have been Clinton, but a lot of it was Paul. This goes back to my other point. As long as we were second to Tsongas we were going to be okay, because we showed surprising strength against the next-door neighbor. We started out in fifth place, no one thought we were going to be second. So unfortunately we had shot up to first place and then come back and we had been beaten and battered. But for us to get 26 percent, I think Tsongas only got 32 or 33. It wasn't as if he won with 50 percent of the vote. The other candidates came in way behind. So it was a strong showing and the comeback kid was a great way to portray it. A part of it also was just demonstrating that he's a fighter and he has strength of character. It was a very good image.

Riley: Were you paying any attention at this time to what was going on on the Republican side?

Greer: We were. I was actually paying a lot of attention to Ross Perot, too.

Riley: That early?

Greer: I thought he could hurt. As the spring unfolded, we were very focused on winning Georgia and Florida and Illinois. I forget when Perot first announced, that's probably in your book somewhere, too, but my theory was that it was going to help us and hurt Bush. Do you remember when Perot first announced? But we had a long way to go. We had to kind of reintroduce Clinton, we had to try to build up his positives. Even though we were still winning, we were kind of losing because on the national level and looking at the national polling, we were weakened. We had low favorabilities. People didn't know who Clinton was. So we were watching in that regard.

Even after we'd gone through all these primaries and slugged it out in Oregon and California—we were then broke. No money until the convention. We gathered in Little Rock. We were all dismayed because we were in third place in the general election polls.

Nelson: In the national polls.

Greer: That's right. Ross Perot was in second, Bush was doing okay. Even after we won all of these primaries, our image was lousy. A part of it was that they had forgotten who he was. It was just controversy and conflict and a lot of campaigning and a lot of politics, but, "We don't really know who Clinton is." So a part of what we had to do—we began this in Pennsylvania, I remember doing a spot, which was the first "Man from Hope" recap of his biography, because we hadn't really done a lot on where he came from or who he was. We found, in Stan's focus groups, that people thought he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, he went to all these Ivy League schools, he went to Oxford, he wasn't one of them. They had forgotten that he came

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

from Arkansas, his father died before he was born, and that he grew up poor. So we had to reintroduce him in that regard.

Then also we came up with another strategy, born out of necessity—we had no money—but it was also a good strategy that made sense. I guess we came up with this the second week of May, that we were going to seize every opportunity for Clinton to go on the air, this goes to your point earlier, to let him do what he did best, which was connect with people, and let them see for themselves. Let us get out of the prism and the filter and the lens of the press telling people about Clinton, let's let Clinton tell people about Clinton. We did the morning shows and a lot of the other broadcast opportunities, we went on the *Arsenio Hall* show.

Clinton called and said, "You're going to hate it because I wore sunglasses." I said, "To tell you the truth, I hate the tie you wore more." Clinton and I always used to battle about ties. He was always into things that I thought were really distracting, like the Children's Defense Fund stick-figure ties. People in focus groups would look at him on film and they'd say, "What's that on his tie?" I said, "Clinton, they're not listening to anything you have to say, they're trying to figure out what you're wearing." But anyway, they called from the *Arsenio Hall* show and Clinton said, "You're probably not going to like this, I wore sunglasses." I said, "Oh, my God." And he says, "And you're not going to like the tie even more."

Riley: Was there much debate about whether he ought to go on the show, or you're saying, by necessity you felt like—

Greer: We were taking every venue we could. I wasn't wild about it. I am much more for maintaining your stature and respectability, but it was pretty clear—and all the other formats were excellent—but it was clear that we needed every bit of airtime we could get. And it worked. I will not say that I was the biggest advocate of *Arsenio*.

The other thing that happened—I always say that in politics you have to be ready to take advantage of your opponents' mistakes—George Bush, for some reason, decided to attack Ross Perot, and Ross Perot attacked George Bush. Remember, there were all these accusations about his daughter's wedding and there was all this conspiracy about how the President was interfering in his family. They were just going at it. Folks in the campaign wanted to get in the middle of it, but I said no. It's kind of like on this Harriet Miers thing, I told all the pro-choice people, I said, "Just lay low. When your enemies are destroying each other, don't get in the middle of the fight. The right wing is destroying itself, let them go."

They began this negative campaign and, if anything, we encouraged the press to really focus on this in a very subtle way, but all of a sudden our numbers are coming up. We were going into the convention, I knew we were going to have a great convention. I still have, at my office in Seattle, the headlines of the day, on Tuesday or Wednesday, of the Democratic convention. By the way, our numbers had already gone up during that period of time, part of it was that our opponents were doing themselves in, but Clinton had also reintroduced himself to the nation. We had gone up until we were in first place, but then Ross Perot announced he was pulling out. I think it was the Tuesday or Wednesday—

Nelson: Of the convention?

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Greer: Of the convention, I mean, it was truly astounding that it would happen then. And our numbers just zoomed, just went up. From that point forward—and I will say very sincerely, we did a lot of work and we ran a smart campaign—but from that point forward, our numbers were at 45-plus and they stayed. Greenberg will tell you, they were solid as a rock.

Ross Perot got back in before the first debate, but still we held that lead. I think it was everything we had done to that point, our basic message and the basic rationale for the candidacy, good convention. Harold Ickes ran the convention, did a marvelous job. We had a really good message out of the convention. The convention also served to reintroduce Clinton because of Harry's film, the *Man from Hope*. But all of that happened to a point where, by the end of the convention, I thought it was inevitable that we were going to win.

Nelson: One last thing, going back to New Hampshire. [Patrick] Buchanan was inflicting great damage on the President at that time. I remember his theme was sort of *Braveheart*-inspired, peasants with pitchforks. Did Clinton have any concern, or did those around him have any concern that Buchanan might be tapping into support among blue-collar, working-class whites that, again, Clinton thought he should be getting?

Greer: He wanted to win them all. I guess, yes, to a certain extent. I remember the rhetoric of Buchanan, but I don't remember him having that much strength in New Hampshire among blue-collar voters. I think that early on we had done enough on the economy, on healthcare, that we held that base very well. That's a good question for your follow-up with Greenberg.

Nelson: So primarily you were just happy that somebody had put a dent in Bush's support within his own party, weakened—

Greer: Absolutely. Do you remember what the numbers were for Bush coming out of New Hampshire?

Nelson: That he won by in New Hampshire?

Greer: Yes.

Nelson: It was something like 50 to 35.

Riley: The upper 30s.

Greer: It was 30.

Nelson: Buchanan had a serious result for—

Greer: The other unexpected phenomenon—and I will tell you, it was unexpected—we wanted to know what to do after the convention, and the idea was to go on the road. David Wilhelm, I think, mapped out this whole bus trip. Another true confession. I was thinking, I don't know if this is a good way for a Presidential candidate to campaign, because there's so much time in between each stop, right? They took off—I remember the event at the hotel in New York, it was a great rally, I was with Stephanie—they took off, and then the first press reports came in, from

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Pennsylvania I think. There were amazing crowds, an amazing emotional turnout, and the press was giving it all kinds of attention.

The bus trip became a phenomenon. I called the office and I talked to George and Eli, and I said, "We've got to film this." It was the best footage I ever had—I met the bus with my team and crew in Kentucky and went on with them through Illinois. We got to one place in southern Illinois. It was at night, because we were late—and we were always late because it was the Bill Clinton campaign. We were probably an hour-and-a-half late—and there were ten thousand people on this square, in a town that probably didn't have more than three thousand people. And we were filming. We had a cherrypicker, just because I wanted to get the whole sense of the crowd. All through the heartland you had all these people sitting out on the roadside in their folding chairs holding up signs for Clinton and Gore. It was phenomenal. It was really a turning point emotionally. It just solidified the numbers. I'm not sure we picked up that much after the convention but we certainly solidified it.

One other thing I was going to say, and you cannot underestimate this, when we were at the low point, in May after the California primary, part of our strategy was to reintroduce Clinton, and talk about who he really was and what he wanted to do for the country, seize every opportunity for him to talk directly to voters through television programming, et cetera. The other part, which was really the turning point that moved our numbers up, and moved Bush and Perot down—besides their attacking each other—was Al Gore. We were filming for the convention film, and I was in Hope, Arkansas, standing with Clinton in the train station that says "Hope" on it. I had not gotten involved in the decision-making process but I said, "So what's your thinking?" and he said, "What do you think about Gore?" I made a 20-minute argument against Gore. [*laughter*]

Nelson: What did you say?

Greer: "You're too close regionally, you need more geographic diversity on the ticket," all the things that turned out to be the assets. Age, "You're about the same age, you need somebody older, with more experience, who has more gravitas." Clinton said, "I really think it would work." I said, "Okay." Thank God he followed his own instincts. It was very much, I think, Clinton's decision. A great decision.

Morrisroe: Warren Christopher?

Greer: Warren Christopher, that is exactly right. Ran a really great process, God bless him. There's not a doubt in my mind that he probably had advised for other candidates, although I can't even remember who the others were at that point, and that, in the final analysis, Clinton decided on his own that Gore was the best choice.

When we walked out behind the mansion for the announcement that day with the Gore family, they just looked terrific. Hillary, Chelsea, Clinton, you had a sense that this was the new generation. We did a spot in the general election that talked about a new generation of leaders, but it was all of a sudden kind of the next generation, as opposed to World War II, George Bush Senior, failed policies, et cetera, it was the new generation. I think that was a key turning point for the general election. Once our numbers got up at the convention, a successful convention, and then the bus trip, it was almost—well, let's not say that, because we did have a lot of negatives in

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

the general, but we were pretty well locked into what I thought was going to be a victory. We had to be smart about responding to the negatives, but it was all over by the convention.

Nelson: Do you know what Clinton's relationship with Gore was like, prior to the immediate events that led to Gore being picked by Clinton? I'll tell you why I ask. It seems odd to me that these two people of the same generation, from neighboring states, and Gore had run for President in '88, seemed to have had so little to do with each other, knew each other so little before.

Greer: Here's my theory about it. Gore operated in the world of the Senate and Washington—insider politics, he was very much a Washington insider. Clinton was a Governor and very much a Washington outsider. Clinton spent his time at DGA meetings and National Governors meetings and things like that. It's just a different political world.

I think there had been distance also because Clinton always considered Gore a rival, and thought that he could be a rival, as I said, in the early days of putting together the campaign. If Gore got into this, it would have been two southerners running against each other. What happens in Florida, what happens in Georgia, what happens in all the key states like that? So they were not particularly close that I knew of.

I don't know why, I should have asked him, but returning to that conversation I had with him in the train station, I think Clinton just thought that it was going to be the right team at this time, and he was right. It was kind of like, it was the synergy—it also was not the old-style traditional decision-making where you need to have geographical diversity, you need to have age difference, political difference, you need a liberal if you're a conservative. None of that. This was a new approach and he chose somebody that he thought was very much like him.

Nelson: When you had this conversation did he talk about Gore's virtues as a candidate or as a Vice President?

Greer: He didn't talk about it either way. It was not a discussion of, "Gore is a really good campaigner," and it was not a discussion of, "He'll make a great Vice President." It was much more, "I think he'll be a good choice, I think he'll be good for the ticket." I think Clinton did say, "I think he would be a really good Vice President." Certainly that was the way he talked about it from that time forward. And there was real chemistry between the families, and with Tipper [Gore]. On the bus trip they were together, just the four of them. They really got along. And Clinton gave him a fairly prominent role as Vice President. He wasn't a Dick Cheney, but he certainly was more influential than most other Vice Presidents.

Riley: We talked about the advertising spots, but you've mentioned on a couple of occasions the books, the original plan, and *Putting People First*. Were you involved in the production of those?

Greer: Yes, I was less involved in the second one. The first one we literally wrote quickly in our office because we were about to go on the air with an ad. If we were going to advertise something we had to have something to put out. I would say the key person on the second go-round—I did review it, but the key person was probably George Stephanopoulos. But by that time, also, we had the beginnings of an issues staff and they were all involved in it, too.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Riley: Obviously, in the first one you weren't specifically testing the contents, unless you'd been doing the issues.

Greer: No, we didn't test the content. We just had faith. It was very close—that's why I go back to what I said—the message, rationale, and content of this campaign were decided early on, by Clinton at the DLC speech, at the three Georgetown speeches, and at the announcement speech. It was all there. So this was putting it together. For the first booklet, that's another thing I did, I took the Georgetown speeches and added them as an addendum. "Take it away, this is approved content! Clinton has sorted through every word here." So I think we added that in to whatever we printed in New Hampshire.

It's interesting, "putting people first" was a phrase we were using in the television spots as a tagline before it ever got put on the book.

Riley: The convention movie is something that sort of stands out, in retrospect, as being a very important piece of reintroducing the President, as you suggest. Can you tell us a little more, you mentioned Harry Thomason as playing an important role in that, how you worked with him, what the division of labor was, and how you went about—?

Greer: I didn't know Harry at all until New Hampshire. After we came up with the idea of doing the televised town meetings, he called and said, "Need some help?" And I said "Sure." He met me in New Hampshire. He was superb, he was great, he was wonderful to work with. He and I literally did everything on that program, from scripting and running the control booth, to literally stapling and hammering down the carpet when it was just the two of us. We had to do the sets and everything else because the station offered none of that. So anyway, Harry became a good friend.

He volunteered to do the film. I should also mention that Linda Bloodworth-Thomason also was involved, and they're old family friends. They shot most of it in the mansion in Little Rock. They had access to the other footage that we had, which they used to some degree, but it was very much a Harry-Linda production. An aside, Linda does not like to travel by plane, she has a phobia about planes, so she travels across the country by train or whatever. One of Harry's companies is chartered airplanes, I mean, that's what he does, he does these executive jets. For his wife not to want to travel by plane, I always thought, was just the most ironic thing in the world.

She did come to Little Rock and played a key role in helping with putting the family at ease and directing them. I remember calling the night of the convention—the reaction was just terrific to the film—and I talked to Harry, saying, "This is just wonderful." I asked him, "Where's Linda?" He said, "She's at home in California." She wasn't even there for the film. So I called her from a pay phone at the convention hall, she was so appreciative, and said, "It was just wonderful, people loved it. It did exactly what we needed to do, it was superb."

We did, by the way, with Harry's blessing, use that footage and some of the other footage we had shot in Hope. At a critical moment, when things were pretty negative in the general election, we went back and did a spot called *Hope*. It's one of the technical feats, but in order to cut it into a 60-second spot, we had to go back in and get Clinton to record something in a hotel room—I

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

don't even know where, Philadelphia, maybe—that would match his voice as it had been recorded at the mansion. To show you how skilled he was, I brought in the clip from the film, played it for him—and we were rushed, too—and I said, "We need to match this. Here's the script, but it needs to be as if you recorded it at the same time." With two takes he matched it perfectly. If I showed you 60-second spot from the fall, you'd never know it wasn't filmed in the same place. Anyway, that's a small technical observation.

Riley: You managed to locate the footage from Boys' Nation of Clinton meeting JFK.

Greer: Yes. Peter Hutchins, who is our partner in charge of production in the production department here, went and searched the archives. Clinton had told us that story. So Peter went and searched the archives. We actually used that footage in a spot in New Hampshire, too, it wasn't just for the film.

Riley: Is that right.

Greer: Yes. He found it, and it was like a gold mine. It was, I'm trying to remember the name of the guy who wrote the book about being—

Nelson: David Maraniss?

Greer: No, no, I love David, but—

Riley: Forrest Gump again?

Greer: It was a Forrest Gump moment. It was kind of like, you're not going to believe what we found. It could have just been all the Boys' State people and we couldn't have found Clinton, but we found Clinton and we have him shaking hands with JFK, and it's like *wow*. Anyway, that was Peter Hutchins who found that.

Riley: All right—

Greer: We did use that in the film, yes.

Riley: I was going to ask you about the Manhattan Project but we sort of got beyond that. I don't know if you want to say anything more about that, revisiting how in the world you're going to get yourself out of third place.

Greer: It was called the Manhattan Project, I think, because we hatched it up in New York. I've already told you about what we did, I just didn't put the name on it because I'd forgotten the name. But the idea was, "We have to find a way to reintroduce Clinton, we have to figure a way to tell his life story, reconnect, and also use every opportunity we can to break through the kind of negative press and go to the voters directly."

Riley: Why don't we break now?

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

[BREAK]

Nelson: Jerry Brown didn't come up this morning, although he sort of came along during the primary season, became Clinton's last surviving rival at some point.

Greer: That's true.

Nelson: How did you all handle that, you really weren't expecting to have to deal with Jerry Brown after you polished off Kerrey and Harkin and everybody else.

Nelson: He won Connecticut.

Greer: That's right, March 24, end of March. I don't think we took it that seriously, but it just continued to be a problem because our favorabilities and general numbers were deteriorating and it stretched it out to where we did have to invest money in Oregon and California.

Nelson: New York got to be a problem.

Greer: That's right. He came in in Connecticut, that's right, and we did have to—but, of course, there were other revelations about the draft in New York. The letter came out, one morning we were there, I'm trying to remember what exactly it was. John King from AP [Associated Press] felt like we had not told the truth about—it had to do with the next step in the controversy after the letter had been revealed in New Hampshire. I think it was the person who had always said that Clinton basically fulfilled his obligation saying that he had not. All of it just forced us to invest money and keep reintroducing Clinton to say who he really was.

The basic sense was that he was limping to victory and that there were all these people still coming out critically or opposed to him and running against him. I don't think Jerry Brown did anything beyond Connecticut.

Nelson: New York got to be the place where you had to finish him off.

Greer: Right. [*looking at timeline*] We did well. In a five-person—we got 41 percent in New York. How did we do in Pennsylvania? This is fascinating, 57. We were getting our legs back by Pennsylvania. Here was, I remember, our one concern. In California it was 48.8 and 40. I think part of our weakness in being in third place after the primaries was that people kept seeing this erosion of credibility and positives for Clinton.

Greer: The weird thing is, in all of your notes and everything else, you talked about how James had worked on the initial spots for New Hampshire, et cetera. James had no involvement, whatsoever, in any of the early media production, television spots, scripts, or anything else, zero.

You should understand, in this office, counting the media-buying team, there were probably 15 or 20 people. There were a lot of people, like Annie Burns, Peter Hutchins and Kurt Guenther and others, who were working on creative and doing a lot of the work.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

On the advice of Susan Thomases and various others, we had recruited three advertising agencies. We went through this long process of reviewing reels and talking to creatives, and we hired folks, Donny Deutsch being one of them. Donny Deutsch to this day keeps talking about how he worked on the Clinton campaign. Linda Kaplan was from a New York agency and she actually has her own agency now. She played a very positive role and I worked with her on doing some healthcare spots. Donny Deutsch had almost nothing to do with the campaign.

For some reason there is this belief that you have got to get New York advertising involved. The reality is, they don't understand politics, they don't understand the campaign, they had little understanding of the strategy or message of the campaign. They do some interesting things that you end up not using. I think of it usually as a waste of resources, time, energy, and effort. If you have someone like Linda Kaplan, who was very good, who gets involved with the team that's already on the ground doing it, it works. The mythology that somehow you benefit from this is just usually not the case. It didn't work for Dukakis, and I don't think it worked for Kerry. I don't believe it works effectively.

Morrisroe: Who within the campaign was pushing to—?

Greer: Susan Thomases, who always had the imprimatur of Hillary. Susan Thomases and I guess James, to a certain extent. We kind of managed the process and then had a meeting with Hillary and Bill, and said, "Here's the team." And they said fine. Then we went ahead and did the campaign. It was kind of weird. It is something that I've seen in the Mondale campaign and certainly in the Dukakis campaign. There's this sense that you have to go out and do that.

Morrisroe: So when you're bringing in somebody from the outside, for instance in the Clinton campaign, are they working through you or are they going direct—

Greer: They're working through us, and all the production was controlled by our production staff and all the shipments of spots and everything else. They submitted and we'd make a decision or we'd make a recommendation to the campaign.

Riley: I want to ask a generic question about that, what exactly is the source of the problem for them? Is it that they don't understand politics, or they equate selling a candidate with selling soap and you therefore have a hard time getting them to sort of stand out of the way?

Greer: We didn't have a difficult time getting them to stand out of the way, we just wasted a lot of time and energy dealing with them. But one, they do not understand politics and how you appeal to voters versus how you sell a product. They also don't understand about the finite sense of wining and losing, as opposed to gaining market share. The other big problem is they're used to budgets that are ten or twenty times higher for producing anything. So it is very hard for them to work within the constraints of a limited campaign budget and tight timetables. They spend six months coming up with two or three ads, and we come up with two or three ads in an hour. So it's a different approach.

I think that if there are really good creative people who also have good political instinct, you can put them into a team, but bringing in agency folks just doesn't work and usually it is, as it ended up in this campaign, of marginal value but extensive cost in terms of time, energy, and money.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Riley: I can see a case where somebody coming in from outside like that might want to invest their time in creating a really beautiful ad, something that really reflects their own creativity.

Greer: Right.

Morrisroe: Was there ever any debate or disagreement among the campaign team about where you were going to place your ad buys and when, like where you should be focusing by state?

Greer: No. Very little.

Morrisroe: Was that because of the technological approach you took to determining where the resources could be best spent? I mean in terms of having all the statistics and polling data.

Greer: That's what I was going to say. I think we were driven by good research and everybody was on board in terms of the priorities and where the resources should go. Thanks to Rahm we were raising enough money that we could do it. There were very few, I may be blocking them out of my mind, but I think there were very few creative disagreements about scripts and things like that, everybody seemed to basically agree. And no big disputes about media buying or priorities.

Riley: Let me go to the larger question about strategy. You said that you had a very well defined strategy coming out of the convention about what you were going to do in the general election. There are two or three component pieces of that on which we'd like to hear from you. One would be your sense about what the overall media approach was going to be. The second would be the kind of oppositional stuff that you were doing in distinction with Bush, how you were developing that, where you felt his vulnerabilities were. Then you've already indicated that there was a very precise sense about what you wanted to do with the Electoral College. We'd like to hear who was involved in making those decisions and what went into—

Greer: There are two people who were on our staff, Steve Miller and Ann Lewis—Ann works at the Senate Campaign Committee and Steve works for an industry group now—but I remember them going through the permutations at the convention. They did all the scenarios of how we would target states for the electoral college and what the relative merits—we had four priorities, levels of investment, in each of the states, depending on what the polling data showed and what we needed to do. So we had probably ten or twelve scenarios that were built into the computer. We actually got ready to present all of these during some downtime to Clinton and all the staff in New York. We had put a lot of time, energy, and effort into this. All of the scenarios assumed Ross Perot. We were to do the presentation the day after Ross Perot pulled out. So we scrambled and re-did them all. We had very sophisticated models all the way through.

One of the tragedies, I think, for the Gore campaign, and I wasn't involved in the Gore campaign, but it seemed to me that they didn't have a strategy of how to win the Electoral College with a margin that would give you a comfort level in case you lost Tennessee, or in case you lost Florida. We had that. By the way, one of the other unsung heroes, like a lot of folks, but one of the people who was most essential, in terms of the targeting, and in terms of allocation of resources, and in terms of the field, was a guy named Paul Tully. Paul Tully had been kind of a guru of organizing and targeting and precincts. You would go into his office here—he was at the DNC before the convention, then after the convention he was in Little Rock—and there were

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

maps of America down to the precinct level. Incredible color-coding and everything. All of that was factored into our computer models of how we were going to spend on paid media and paid television.

There was another hero of this, a guy named Michael Whouley, who runs a group called Dewey Square. Whouley was involved in the Gore campaign and the Kerry campaign. He comes out of Massachusetts but he is the field genius. I give him a lot of credit—along with my partner, Jim Margolis—for Kerry winning in Iowa when no one thought that he had a chance, that he was coming out of nowhere. Whouley and Margolis had that all targeted and they knew where the voters were and they were going to pull it off.

Whouley and Paul Tully—Paul Tully literally died in his sleep, in a hotel in Little Rock, in the middle of the campaign. It was a great loss, it was a great sadness. He's one of these people who was largely responsible for putting together the strategy and no one knows who he is. He worked himself to death, he literally did. Anyway, Tully was a hero and we had all of that targeting. It was clear, I don't think we had any disagreement about this, we were going to reintroduce the substance of the campaign, the plan, and we were going to basically run on the key issues that we thought were important.

The other part of it is a spot we called "New Leaders," which was, "We're not the old Democrats, we're a new set of Democrats." It was about welfare reform being a second chance, not a way of life. It was about fighting crime and 100,000 police on the street. I think it also talked about supporting the death penalty. There was a third item about economic opportunity and responsibility. In addition to the planned substance of the message of the campaign, in terms of what Clinton wanted to do for America, we also positioned it as the New Democrat theme and New Democrat messages. That was very much based around welfare reform and crime and opportunity and responsibility.

Then of course, we prepared for what we predicted. By the way, our predictions of the negative ads they were going to run, we had already done and tested. It was very clear. I had a tax ad that was almost like their tax ad. I had an Arkansas-is-a-disaster spot, and they had exactly the same spot.

Riley: So you were producing these spots and showing them to focus groups in advance.

Greer: And showing responses. We played out the whole campaign. It was uncanny how close it was to what they came up with.

But let me go back to the positive messages because this is one of the great myths. Clinton had a very—I know we're going to talk about the Presidency, but he had a very tough first three years. He came in and announced he was going to take on healthcare, and that that was his first priority, and he gave the charge to Hillary. Then he ran into this incredible opposition, and the ads, and "Harry and Louise," and everything else. And it turned into a disaster in his first term.

Harold Ickes—this may have been after the '94 mid-term elections—calls and says, "You've got to come over and you've got to talk to the President. We're going to have four or five people in, he just wants to talk about what he should do and what went wrong." So I go to this dinner in the small dining room upstairs at the White House. Clinton is saying, "I just don't understand, we

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

ran on healthcare and we tried to do the right thing. I know there are a lot of interest groups that we're up against and—" I turned to him and I said, "Mr. President, how many spots do you think you ran on healthcare in the general election?" He said, "I don't know, four or five. We ran a lot on healthcare." I said, "Zero. You didn't get elected on healthcare. You didn't run one spot on healthcare. You ran on welfare reform and you might have been better off if you'd started with that. You ran on cops on the street and you did put that up and you got that passed and that became popular. You ran on economic opportunity and you got your budget passed. But you didn't run on healthcare."

And the reason was, we did a lot of health care spots and we never could find a message that worked because people are too uneasy that if you change the healthcare system and if you expand coverage, but you don't guarantee their quality—that's a lot of what's happening with Medicare now. People are full of anxiety about whether this was a good idea or bad idea. People get very nervous about healthcare and if you have not run a campaign on it, if you haven't gone out and spent three or four years talking about how we can reform it, it comes out of the blue and you're an easy target, and that's the reason. But it was astounding to me that everybody around this White House thought that we ran on healthcare. We didn't. We ran on welfare reform. Anyway, that was, shall we say, an eye-opening experience for the President. He agreed, when he thought about it, that that was indeed the case. We had not run on healthcare.

But getting back, we did run on those issues, but we were prepared for the negative. Stan and Celinda Lake—who was Stan's partner, who did a wonderful job on the campaign, another unsung hero of the campaign—every week we had two, if not four, focus groups going on in one of the battleground states, in one of the key pivotal states, play-hards—we called them the "play" and the "play-hard" states—we constantly had a focus group going on that we could test things in, so we could test their spots, we could test our spots.

The first big negative they ran against us was an ad that we called the pipe-fitter ad. The interesting thing is, I had watched the Neil Kinnock campaign in England. The Tories had run exactly the same kind of spot against Labour, "This bakery worker, her taxes have gone up $2,000 a year; this pipe-fitter, his taxes have gone up $3,000 a year." Literally, it was almost the same spot. It comes on the air. We got wind of it—often they'll ship a spot to a station and we'll get the station to let us look at it, or we'll find out what spot is sitting at the station. Sure enough, it's pipe-fitter.

We got all the counter-information to the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, by the time they shipped it to the stations. Then we did a response ad where we kind of slotted in what I thought were going to be some of the responses by the press, and the press did criticize it. This was also a campaign where they were really monitoring the accuracy and the veracity of the ads. I got on a train, because I knew we had focus groups in Philadelphia. I took their ad, the pipe-fitter ad, and our response. Our response was, "It's not true and the press says it's not true, as a matter of fact. No wonder he's talking about this, he has the worst economic record in fifty years. What he doesn't want to talk about are his failed economic policies."

Respond, set the record straight, raise a question about his own economic policies. It tested like a dream. We had people at all the papers at twelve-midnight when the first morning edition came out, so we got the quotes from the *Wall Street Journal* and we got the quotes from the

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Washington Post, I think are the two papers we used. We recorded, cut the spot that night, and satellited it into the stations at seven o'clock the next morning. I'm sure they're still trying to figure out how this all happened. Literally, their ad went on the air that morning and the response ad went on the air at almost the same time.

We did the same thing when they did the buzzard-in-the-tree, I call it the buzzard-in-the-tree spot, about the dismal record in Arkansas. We had all the facts and figures about how they'd led the nation in job growth and everything else, and we had it on the air almost at the same time they went on the air. So there was not a charge that was out there that we did not respond to and respond to quickly. My whole theory, which I fought for in the campaign, was not just to hit back with mutual escalation—you said something bad, I'll say something worse—it was to try to address the charge, set the record straight, and then raise a question about Bush. That worked and we followed that approach all the way through.

Other than sitting down and going through the spots with you, that's all I can remember about those spots. I think we had a fairly clear, positive message. It was a New Democrats message. By the way, the first spot we ran in the general was also a 60-second spot and it was a plan spot. It talked about "get a copy," and we advertised, we let people feel they had a role to play in the campaign. So the way we began New Hampshire is the same way we began the general election.

Morrisroe: Were there any advertisements, with the benefit of hindsight, that you took a real hit on with press commentary of the ads, or that ended up not working out how the focus groups had predicted?

Greer: I may just be blocking this out, but I actually don't think so. I think we did pretty well. We paid attention also to, as we do in all of our campaigns now, documenting our positive charges or negative charges. We didn't just make them up out of thin air. We always assumed they were going to be looking for the documentation anyway. I think we were really careful and I think it actually worked pretty well. You may know better than I, and I may be completely blocking out one that was an unmitigated disaster, but I don't think so.

Nelson: Did you all talk, I'm sure you did, about how to use Gore through the fall campaign, how to deploy Gore?

Greer: By the way, the spot I talked about, on a new kind of leaders, featured Gore. By that point, we had gotten a sense that Clinton was right, I was wrong, in the train station, that this was symbolically smart, a new generation of leaders, and that was how people would perceive it. So Gore was on a lot of the bus trips together with Clinton. He was in television spots together with Clinton. We used him prominently—I would say probably more so than any other time in history, the Vice Presidential candidate was included in the media.

Nelson: What about the Vice Presidential debate that year? Were you involved in that in any way? Were people talking about it?

Greer: I've got to tell you, it's one of my favorite lines of all time and I usually—what was the occasion? I was at some very technical meeting, for the Institute for Systems Biology or something like that, way, way beyond my knowledge level. I stood up and I said, "I'm here with all these distinguished academics, and I'm reminded of one of the classic lines from American

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

politics." It was the Vice Presidential debate in 1992, it was Al Gore and Dan Quayle. And General [James] Stockdale, the Vice Presidential candidate for Ross Perot. Stockdale stood there, it was the opening line, he stood there and looked at the camera and he says, "Who am I, and what am I doing here?" I said, "That's the way I feel in this—" I wish I could remember what it was, some academic meeting. I said, "Who am I, and what am I doing here?" He couldn't have done it better.

Anyway, I think the Vice Presidential debate helped, and I think Quayle was a liability, but I still don't think people vote for Vice Presidential candidates, I think they vote for Presidential candidates. That's their calculation in the end. I think they liked the idea that Gore was going to be a part of the team and it was a new generation, they liked that. I'm not sure the Vice Presidential debate made that much difference.

As I remember it, correct me if I'm wrong, Quayle did okay and Gore was kind of pedantic, am I wrong about that?

Nelson: What I remember is that Quayle essentially used all his remarks to attack Clinton.

Greer: That's right, he went after Clinton.

Nelson: And the Clinton folks, what I've read, is they didn't feel that Gore really stood up for him as strongly as they would have liked.

Greer: I just remember there was a disappointment with Gore's performance.

Nelson: But it didn't affect their relationship, as far as you know?

Greer: To tell you the truth, it didn't affect their relationship because I don't think it affected the numbers. [*laughter*] If it had, it might have affected the relationship.

Riley: Were you involved in the preparations—

Greer: Not really with Gore, but I was deeply involved in the preparations with Clinton.

Riley: Tell us a bit about that; how do you prepare for a debate?

Greer: A lot of it is, which I think is of marginal value, but you have all the policy people and the research people who feel it is important to dump all this data into the candidate. I think the most valuable part is doing the actual practice. And what I suggested, and Greenberg suggested, out of this—because there were times that Clinton would go on and on, and times that he would have either an emotional reaction, or off-the-point, or not make his point, or whatever. After the first practice we took the tapes that we had used from the practice, and took them into focus groups. So we were able to come back and say, "They really got turned off by this," and "They really responded positively to this." So he had the ability between debates to learn what people liked and what they didn't like.

In Williamsburg for the town hall debate, we not only mapped out the set for the debate but we had chairs that were just the right height for Clinton that we practiced on. Then we heard that

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

they needed, they were trying to find the chairs, they were high stools, for the debate. I called up and I said, "You know, we've got some. If you'd like to use them, we'll let you use them." So Clinton had the benefit of having a chair exactly the right height for him and Bush did not. We heard that they needed them and we sent them in. It was the chair that Clinton had been practicing on in Williamsburg. It was terrific. So that was one of the reasons Clinton was so comfortable and Bush was not. He was looking at his watch and trying to figure out how much longer. Anyway, be that as it may, they were really tall chairs and I think they really were too tall for—it's one of those little footnotes in history where you end up with a godsend.

A large part of it was going through, practicing. Bob Bennett played Bush, and he was superb. Then we had—and this is really another kind of sad and poignant thing. We had a guy named Mike Synar, a Congressman from Oklahoma, who played Ross Perot and did a great imitation. He died very soon thereafter of brain cancer. But he was superb. He had the mannerisms down and he had the rhetoric down. It was great.

Riley: Did Clinton, you've said before that you sometimes had trouble getting him to focus and practice speeches—

Greer: If he had his way, he'd sit and kibitz and talk about it rather than get up and practice.

Riley: And this is true also of debate practice.

Greer: Absolutely, absolutely. It was painful to force him because he'd rather sit around talking. A part of that, I think, was avoiding having critique. It's not an easy process. You have five or six, eight people in the room saying you did this wrong, you did that wrong. My theory, by the way, instead of everybody throwing in what's wrong—and I believe this for media training, I believe it for debate prep—was having the candidate watch himself or herself. They learn more by teaching themselves than they do by you sitting around hearing, "You should have done this, you should have done that." If you see it, you can make those adjustments. That's why I wanted to take the tapes and put them in a focus group so that he could then see what real people, beyond us or him, might think about some of his responses.

Riley: How do you keep somebody in that environment from not becoming overwhelmingly self-conscious about every little mannerism? If I had five or six people around trying to coach me on don't tug on your tie, or don't scratch your nose or whatever—

Greer: That's why you need to, as Warner Wolf's said in *Let's Go to the Videotape!* You let him see for himself, as opposed to everybody throwing in their opinions. The other thing, it's so funny, you have these policy types and you're practicing a debate and their instinct is to stop and say, "No, no, no, you've got that wrong, here are the correct facts." And I'm thinking, *No, you don't stop a debate. You're taping it. Wait until we go back and look at the tape together*. Anyway, it's a learning process.

Clinton was a very good performer, he did well in the debates. I thought Richmond was a home run. In Richmond he was superb. That's where he was very much, he didn't say it in these words but, "I feel your pain, and I can imagine what you're going through," when a guy talked about losing his job, and all of that. So that was definitely his format.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Riley: You had signed off on having Ross Perot involved in these debates, or did you think it was a bad idea to have Perot?

Greer: My theory from watching that period of time before our convention is that there was a personal animosity between Bush and Perot that probably would benefit us and that they would—and they did, to a certain extent—kind of go at it with each other.

Riley: But there were some people in the campaign who were vigorously supportive of—

Greer: Yes, I think so, the debate negotiators. Our friend, Vernon Jordan, was head of the debate—or maybe it was Mickey, or maybe Warren Christopher. There were some people who were more adamantly opposed to having Ross Perot in. It did tend to lift his stature. You always hesitate to do that. I think it worked to our benefit though.

Riley: Were there any surprises during the course of the campaign about the direction the Bush people went? I mean, one illustration of this is, foreign policy was practically nonexistent.

This was the guy who—

Greer: Had won the Gulf War.

Riley: Had won the Gulf War, and that was largely set on a shelf during the course of the campaign. Had you prepared to deal with that if it came up?

Greer: Yes. Even going back to the Georgetown speech. Here was—I'll be really honest, I was astounded they ran such a bad campaign. I mean, I think we ran a pretty good campaign, and we made a lot of the right decisions, and we had a terrific candidate. Clinton was great as a candidate, Gore was a good candidate. What we really benefited from was the disarray of the other side. I never thought they had a strategy, didn't seem like they could make decisions quickly. They never had a consistent negative attack line on us. They never raised the issue of foreign policy.

I went to the Harvard seminar after this was all over and Mary Matalin was there with Charlie Black and three or four of their team—they just went at each other in this Harvard forum. I was thinking, I know their problem in this campaign. They really fundamentally disagreed. They never really got on the offense. It was a campaign in some disarray.

For the purposes of this project, you might want to go look at the transcript, because it was all published, a transcript of the Harvard—after every campaign they do a review. I was there, and Greenberg was there, I'm not sure if James was there. Anyway, it was dismaying. I really felt for them. I think they had a campaign in disarray.

Nelson: Were you surprised that it turned out that way, given that the Republicans had won three Presidential campaigns—

Greer: And it was the same President who had won in '88 with such an incredibly disciplined campaign. I think we were blessed not to have Ailes and company and Lee Atwater back in there. It would have been a much, much tougher campaign. We had the potential to face a kind

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

of Willie Horton or Swift Boat campaign attacking us from the outside and we really didn't have much of that. So we were blessed in that regard.

Riley: There was some concern, though, having come out of Willie Horton—

Greer: That it would backfire.

Riley: That the environment was not suitable for that kind of negative campaign.

Greer: I actually did something on *Nightline*. I had, because this is my nature, but also because of my beliefs, I had really been raising the warnings about negative advertising, how people were sick and tired of it. I was basically running a negative campaign on negative campaigning, always talking about how people were sick and tired of it and it could backfire. I think there were lots of signals that I sent. The funny thing, on one of these *Nightline* things, I was going on and on about negative advertising. At the beginning of the show James had been talking about, "We're going to go after them, we're going to rip their heads off—" whatever. I said, "I've got to disagree with James, I just don't think that's the kind of campaign that people want to see in this country." Then I went on, "And with the Republican tactics and Willie Horton and everything else—"

Ted Koppel said, "So, Frank, you've just done a really negative ad against negative campaigning." I said, "That's exactly right." I mean, I still believe that you can make an issue out of negative advertising. I think we had set the bar pretty high, and that made it more difficult. That's not to say they didn't come after us. They came after us with taxes and they came after us with a failed record, the wasteland of Arkansas spot. They did all of that, which we anticipated, but I also thought that we were pretty good at responding to it.

The key negative that we had was Bush's failed economic policies—the worst economic record in 30 years, since the Great Depression. Unemployment up, incomes down. It was the kind of stuff that was just, "Here are the facts, folks." It was hard for them to refute. They never responded to us.

Riley: And never had a compelling, positive reason to reelect the President, at this point, if I hear you correctly.

Greer: That's right. And never any future—it's what I said to Clinton about ten years and taxes, "You've got to give them some positive reason to want to elect you for the next four years, some plan and vision for the future." I don't think they ever gave that to the American people.

Riley: Did you think, based on the survey research and the focus groups that you were doing, that foreign policy might have been a fruitful area for them to work on or not?

Greer: It was not a concern of the public. You should ask Greenberg, but it just wasn't on the chart.

Riley: So if they had tried to develop a positive ad with all of the flags waving—

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Greer: Or if they had tried to say, "Who do you want in the Oval Office, somebody who has the experience—" They might have been able to do it in terms of experience, in terms of if we were to face a foreign threat or whatever. But they didn't do that.

Riley: You could imagine a splendid ad with the Berlin Wall coming down and [Vaclav] Havel and [Nelson] Mandela and all these global changes—

Greer: That Ronald Reagan brought about? [*laughter*]

Riley: That George Bush could be associated with.

Greer: But Ronald Reagan had already taken credit for it. We did not run their positive campaign as a way of testing that, We ran their negative campaign. We predicted all of that. I certainly thought they would have more of a positive strategy and they just didn't have it. I would urge you to talk to somebody like Mary Matalin, but it seemed like a campaign having great difficulty.

Nelson: What did you think of Perot's strategy of using 30-minute talks?

Greer: I was into longer formats, not quite 30 minutes, but I was in to 60-second spots and Lord knows we used them in the primary and the general election. But I think you use longer formats when you have a more appealing candidate. In other words, I didn't think he was particularly appealing.

Morrisroe: Prolonged exposure didn't increase popularity.

Greer: I got tired after two or three minutes, and going on for 30 is really tiresome. I personally liked the idea of the charts and the facts and the figures and "get under the hood," and all that stuff, but I think for most people it made him a caricature. He would have been better off if he had had ten business people talking about what a brilliant problem-solver he was, rather than him doing all of it in an angry little way [*imitating Perot's voice*], "I just want to tell you about this." I just thought it was counterproductive. I like longer formats, I like substance in a campaign, but I just didn't think it worked the way it was done.

Riley: Do you recall any point between the convention and the November election day where you were feeling that things were tilting against you and that you were vulnerable in some way? Or is it the case that—the numbers, you were always on top.

Greer: Yes. And the numbers were pretty solid from the convention on. I will say that it was a campaign that ran with quick response; and with the war room and everything else, we ran like we were ten points behind. I think that's the smart way to do it. I've got to be honest with you, there was never a point at which I did not think we were going to win. Had we had a night like the draft night of polling where we dropped 20 points, I would have said we were in trouble, but Greenberg was coming back with fairly consistent polling and the national polls were holding up.

The great thing was, thanks to Paul Tully, God rest him, who died in the cause, and all the targeting that we had done, the *USA Today* headline after the election said, "Landslide!" When

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

you win with 45 percent of the vote, it's kind of like—landslide? [*laughter*] Well, it was a landslide, they had it right. And I've saved that, I don't have it here, I think I have it in Seattle, but saved that headline because, given our electoral strategy, we did win by a landslide, it wasn't even close. I think it has been one of the great—even the Kerry campaign, in the general, getting down to the point that you're dependent on three thousand votes in Ohio, when just by devoting some resources in states that are unexpected, you could have had a cushion. Or even for Bush to let it get that close in 2000, I thought they could have had a cushion somewhere. We had a very sophisticated Electoral College strategy, and that's what it takes to win—until we change the Electoral College.

Riley: You mentioned the war room and I have to ask you, who made the decision to let the movie cameras into the war room?

Greer: Actually, I will go back much further than that. I can't remember his name, but there was a young reporter with *Newsweek* who wanted to have unlimited access to the campaign. It may have been before the first New Hampshire debate, at our conference room over at Pennsylvania Avenue. We were getting ready for the debate and James Carville comes in and says, "Governor, I've got this nice young guy who's really good and he wants to get behind the scenes and cover the campaign." I said, "I think that's a big mistake. Campaigns are not run for behind-the-scenes dramas. I think that it is a disservice to the candidate and to the campaign, and that you end up with a lot of people posturing and playing games." Unfortunately, the reporter overheard me. He had it in for me ever since, that's the price you pay. And while he was not allowed in that session of the debate prep, he was later given a great deal of access, especially by James and by George.

Then there was the big push to allow [D. A.] Pennebaker and the documentary film crew in, and I was totally opposed to that. You will not see me in that film at all, I think. And the funny thing is, I've never seen the film. I think doing that is so destructive to a campaign. To begin with, it makes the process and the people involved in the process more important than the candidate, and they should not be. In 30 years of working on this side of campaigns, I've always tried to play a fairly—not an invisible role, but certainly not making myself more important than the candidate. Two, it creates a dynamic within the campaign where people are playing for the camera, the reporter, the promotion of it all, as opposed to what is best for the campaign. Now admittedly, we didn't get into a tight situation, but you sure as hell don't want to run that risk. It's a question of whether the campaign is about self-promotion for people or about winning for the citizens you're trying to represent, and I think it's a heck of a lot more important to work for the people and the candidate who is going to represent the people, instead of making yourself important.

The film, the *Newsweek* book, every other part of that, was all about self-promotion and it was not about promoting Bill Clinton. I think it was a culture that did not serve the President well all the way through. His first White House staff, and the way they constantly went around—Mack McLarty. It was destructive. Everybody was freelancing, everybody was promoting themselves, everybody was looking out for themselves. You look at a Bush administration, like them or not, they are loyal, they are supportive, and they do not promote themselves. They look out for the President, the candidate, the policies, and the people he's trying to represent, and that's what it is supposed to be about. We had a culture of self-promotion and freelancing and it was as destructive as could be to the President, beyond the campaign, all the way through his Presidency. You can see I feel emotional about it. I think it was a great disservice, a disservice to

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

the President and what more he could have accomplished. It's a disservice to the political process in that people think that that's what it's all about. It's not about the public and what good you could do for the country, it's about playing these games—and it was all about games.

James Carville said to me, we were going up to do a television interview and I was saying, "Hey, James, you want to wear a coat and tie?" He said, "No, no, this is part of my persona. Frank, you don't understand, I'm going to go through this campaign and I'm going to be famous, and I'm never going to have to work on another campaign after this." He set out to do it and that's exactly what he did. And George wrote a book and has his own television program, and the rest is history. I'm not saying they didn't have sincere motivations, but it became, with the film, *The War Room*, the *Newsweek* book or whatever, that became more important. And it carried over all the way through the early years of the Clinton Presidency, it's unfortunate.

[BREAK]

Greer: I should just say, "And the rest is history."

Riley: We don't know much about the story beyond this point. You didn't go into the White House—

Greer: Oh, no. Actually, having worked in the Carter administration, I had no great desire to go into the White House and wanted to stay on the outside. The other thing is that we had a growing successful concern here, and I didn't feel like I could walk away from that.

Nelson: Anything from that period that you want to talk about? Maybe an example of something you did?

Greer: Not that I can remember. I will say, I don't know how it unfolded, but I thought a really, really good choice for Chief of Staff would have been Mickey Kantor—knowledgeable, sophisticated, knew Washington, knew national politics, and had a good relationship with the President. So I was a bit dismayed. Mack McLarty, who is a very nice guy, but I had no idea where that came from. I'm not even sure I understand all the history of it, but I think there was some degree of intrigue in blocking Kantor on the part of senior advisors. There was a lot of that going on. I think the President would have been a lot better served if Mickey Kantor had become Chief of Staff.

Nelson: What were the motives behind trying to block Mickey Kantor?

Greer: Holding on to your own power. Even though you couldn't be Chief of Staff, you sure as heck didn't want anybody who was going to stand up to you.

Nelson: How about the inauguration, were you involved in the planning?

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Greer: We were to a certain extent, and I actually had been a big proponent of the visit to Monticello, having been a kind of student of [Thomas] Jefferson and liking Charlottesville. Also the curator of Monticello is an old friend, and I always thought that was a really good place to stop. The person, as far as I know, who took on and ran the whole inaugural, was Rahm Emanuel—who is now head of the DCCC [Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee] and who I said was the key person, in terms of raising the money—but Rahm took it on and I really didn't have that much to do with it.

Riley: Then characterize for us what your ongoing relationship with the President and the White House was from—

Greer: It wasn't up and down in a positive and negative sense, it was just from time to time I'd get a call and they'd want to meet and they'd want to discuss something, like the story I told you about the discussion of what happened to the healthcare initiative. I always got a call, usually from Clinton or from one of his assistants, to help on the State of the Union speeches, but more in terms of the practice and performance. So I always participated in that.

I will say this, having worked in the Carter administration, I saw unfolding the kind of self-promotion and lack of loyalty and everybody freelancing, I saw this unfolding. I remember writing—I wish I could find them now, I probably have them somewhere—several memos; first to Mack McLarty saying, "This is really a disservice to the President and you're going to cripple the administration if you don't stop this kind of freelancing and get people on board in some disciplined fashion, working together for the good of the President and the country." Then I wrote a letter, a memo, to Clinton, to which he then had a message sent back saying, "Right on target, really appreciate it," et cetera.

Every now and then we would be invited socially and that was fine. It was more—I knew I had the ability to have access any time I wanted it, didn't have a great need to. I was dismayed about both the disorganization of the White House in the first two years and the healthcare issue. He got trapped as a partisan Democrat instead of doing what was best for the country, not for party.

I guess if there was a pivotal moment, where the President's numbers were going downhill, it was '94, serious setback. I was called in on a regular basis to figure out how to improve the communication operation. I think Mark Gearan was still there.

Riley: This was after the mid-terms.

Greer: That's right. Mark Gearan was there, it was before Don Baer.

By the way, at a staff level, the President or others would often ask me to sit in on strategy meetings, or communication meetings, or State of the Union planning meetings, or whatever. Mark Gearan was a very good friend and he was Communications Director for a while, and Don Baer was a very good friend and he was Communications Director for a while, I can't even remember what years these were. But it's as if I was always on call and I would go over and, for whatever it was worth, offer my free advice and help. It was probably worth what they paid for it.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

I had a close relationship and could be candid, both with the staff and with the President, when I thought things were not going well. But if you remember this period of time, it was an awful mid-term election.

Riley: Did you see that coming?

Greer: Yes. I did because we were involved in a lot of states. I didn't know it would be that bad. I mean, in the state of Washington we lost five congressional seats. It was a big turnover. I helped figure out how to get that back on track, and provided some political advice and some message advice during that period of time. But his numbers were still going down and he was still in deep trouble. Any number of memos and political ideas and everything else later, he was still in trouble. This was '95.

Then the Oklahoma City bombing happened. That was such a disturbing experience. I thought that initially the White House reaction was not that good. So I wrote a memo about what I thought the nation needed, in terms of pulling the nation back together, and also taking on extremists and extremism, and Clinton loved it. I heard, because people called saying, "He just sent me a copy of this memo, we've got to talk about this." I don't know whether you remember this, but there was a real turning point in his administration, and it was the speech at Oklahoma City.

Nelson: Yes, I agree.

Greer: I worked on that a good bit and kind of set the tone for that. I thought that from that point forward—there was something else that happened that summer—Clinton found his voice. It came back and he really became a national leader. It was really the first time, I thought, that he had been a national leader.

Riley: Yes, Oklahoma City was April 19.

Greer: Yes, spring.

Morrisroe: Meeting with [Boris] Yeltsin?

Greer: Yes, that, too, but I don't know, it was the summer of lots of activity and lots of reaching out.

Riley: Maybe [Yitzhak] Rabin.

Greer: Yes, right, at the White House.

Riley: I don't see anything else here—

Greer: Domestically? Oh, and of course, given my background, I got deeply involved in the affirmative action battle.

Riley: Okay, I didn't know that.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Greer: How were we going to defend affirmative action, southerners, et cetera. Worked with a guy named Chris Edley, who was heading up the affirmative action task force, so got deeply immersed in that and saw the best of Clinton again. Oklahoma City was a great example, handling that issue, "mend it, don't end it," was the Clinton I had worked with and knew. He really got his voice back, he got his principles back. And it's interesting, by the end of that year he was at 56, 58 percent and going up.

During that period of time we started setting up regular consultants meetings—I think this is when Erskine Bowles was Deputy Chief of Staff, and Erskine was a close friend—weekly, or every two weeks. These meetings would be with Bill and with Hillary, and we would talk about restructuring and the messaging. It was like everything came back together. It was a great time, great experience. What I didn't realize was that Erskine's real concern, getting ready for '96, was that Dick Morris had reappeared.

Riley: You didn't know Dick had reappeared.

Greer: I did not, most people didn't know. I'm not sure exactly how it happened, Clinton may have reached out to him, Dick Morris may have reached out to Clinton. But by this time Clinton had found his voice, found his feet, and was exerting real leadership. His numbers were coming up and he was doing better and better. Of course, here's the other thing, in '95 through about June, Newt Gingrich was self-destructing. By the summer of '95 Newt Gingrich was at 25 or 26 percent favorability in the country. It was like a great contrast and it was great to play off of that—remember, we're leading up to the shutdown of the government in the fall.

So I was actively involved every two weeks. There was a group of us, I'm trying to remember who were some of the others in the room. Then I realized, it is also a meeting every two weeks with Dick Morris. The President sends Dick over to my office, I think it was the summer of '95, and Dick says, "I'm going to be helping on the '96 campaign and the President really wants you involved." Well, the firm—because it takes a lot out of a firm to do a Presidential race and it had been a difficult period where the firm had to rebuild the business. I mean, we did fine out of '92, but my partners were opposed to getting involved in this again and losing so many resources in the midst of this. But Dick Morris says, "The President wants me to work with you and we're going to put the campaign together."

I was sitting in my office downstairs, I never will forget, and Dick Morris got up in the middle and made a call to Trent Lott from my phone, trying, I think, to impress me with the fact that he was talking with Trent Lott. "I'm trying to work out something with Bill and Trent and see if they can get together on this issue." I was so appalled by this, it was just against all of my beliefs and nature and ethics and everything else, I sent a message back through Harold Ickes and Erskine that I had no desire to work with Dick Morris and was not going to do it.

Here's the other thing. Dick Morris said, "Frank, I've been studying these Federal Election Commission laws and they're really restrictive, they're just terrible. There's just no money, no money to do what I do, no money for me to get paid. The media buys are too small. It's a disaster, we've got to do something about this." I said, "Well, it's enough, if you have a level playing field, to win on, and I think the President is going to be okay. As a matter of fact, his numbers are doing well." "Oh, no, he's in big trouble, Frank, he's just in really big trouble. We

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

have got to have a bigger budget, we've got to have more money. We have got to do early media. These money restrictions are just terrible." I said, "I couldn't disagree more. I think it's better to have a level playing field and for each of the campaigns to have about the same amount of money." And by the way, '92 is the last time that that happened in this county.

Dick Morris—and I will say it was because he was personally interested in making a lot of money on commissions—he kept saying, "You and I can work something out in the commission, but we've got to spend more money, we've just got to spend more money." He went in, convinced the President that he had to go on the air early, that he had to raise money, by hook or crook, from anywhere he could, put it through the national and state parties, and all of a sudden you had this escalation in fundraising. By the way, the way they raised money also did damage to the President's credibility and his image. And he didn't need to do it. Clinton's numbers, if you look at the poll numbers, his numbers were up and stayed up.

But Dick Morris went on the air in September with money they had raised through the national and state parties. They broke all the FEC limits. I said to the President at one point, "You don't need to do this, you're going to make a deal with the devil and you're going to have hell to pay." I should have said, "You made a deal with the devil and Al Gore's going to have hell to pay," because it came back with a vengeance where they out-raised Gore so tremendously because we'd broken all the rules. I mean, until '95 there had been a level playing field established under the post-Watergate rules, that basically both parties spent about the same thing, and you were careful about what the parties spent, and the parties did generic advertising, they didn't do candidate advertising.

All that got thrown out the window; and it got thrown out the window driven by one person, Dick Morris; and it was driven for one reason, he wanted to make more money. It was too restrictive for him to think that he could actually live within the limits that were prescribed and he wanted to make money from the beginning. I've had this conversation with Erskine Bowles. It was like everybody, as he said, everybody kind of drank the Kool-Aid and said, "We're going to lose unless we raise money and spend money and go on the air early." There's no evidence—you can ask any pollster, Stan, Geoff [Garin], whoever—that any of that activity had anything to do with changing the President's numbers.

What changed the President's numbers were Oklahoma City, the foreign policy efforts, and the way he dealt with things like affirmative action. That's what changed the President's numbers. That to me, long range, is one of the most destructive things that came out of this '96 campaign. And it was totally unnecessary. Unfortunately, they sold Clinton a bill of goods.

Nelson: Frank, you describe Clinton as a political genius except when Dick Morris gets to him, and then you say all his judgment goes out the window. He believes bad polls instead of good polls in Arkansas.

Greer: He got mesmerized by Dick Morris, he really did.

Nelson: How do you account for this?

Greer: I don't know, but it went back ten years before I ever met him.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Nelson: But when you would sit in these meetings, these strategy meetings with the President and the First Lady, and eventually Dick Morris was in there—

Greer: Dick Morris had him mesmerized.

Nelson: Did you see it in those settings?

Greer: Yes! I've seen it for 12 years. I don't get it. I imagine Clinton regrets it now himself, but it was truly amazing.

Riley: He was in a vulnerable position after '94.

Greer: Yes, he was.

Riley: Everything had gone to hell and—

Greer: I imagine he thought it could go to hell again. I will say that the people closest to him did not predict the magnitude of '94, so he was shell-shocked by that, that was pretty clear, and I think he didn't want to take any chances in '96. I mean, who am I—I will say he's the first Democrat since Franklin Roosevelt to actually be reelected to a second term, thank God for that, if you look at all he accomplished. But he did not need the Dick Morris kind of manipulation of the process, and I really do believe that Dick did it for money.

Nelson: The rationale I've heard for that early advertising in '95 was to preempt any sort of opposition candidate from within the Democratic Party.

Greer: Right.

Nelson: Do you see any value in that?

Greer: No. Who do you think was going to run?

Nelson: Bush had faced a challenge in '92, so Clinton knew from his own experience that running against a wounded President was an advantage.

Greer: Right, but I didn't see anybody in the Democratic Party who was making any noises about that at all. It's just the kind of thing that Dick Morris would dream up. He probably would do it—you ought to go do this with Dick Morris.

Riley: He's on the list, we've already spoken with him.

Greer: It would be fascinating. I mean, I would then go to the library and study the project just because I'd like to see what he says. He's a character, he really is. While I've always disagreed with his ethics or morals or honesty, or whatever, you have to admire his ability to persuade or influence Clinton. It was truly astounding.

Riley: There weren't other people in the White House who were nervous about all of the fundraising activities? Clearly there are two sides to this.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Greer: There were a lot of people in the White House who were nervous about Dick Morris. As a matter of fact, Mark Gearan and maybe even his—who was the other Communications Director after Mark—

Riley: Don

Morrisroe: Baer.

Greer: I think they left over the issue of Dick Morris. There were a lot of people nervous about the fundraising and about Dick Morris. Harold Ickes and Erskine were very nervous about going on the air early and spending that much money early. In reality, they didn't have to do it. It's unfortunate because it also destroyed what had been the status quo of the campaign finance laws. All of that went out the window, and it was the impetus for [John] McCain-[Russell] Feingold, which has actually not been a very good law and has made things more complicated. It hasn't really limited outside money, it has encouraged outside money. There's less accountability for the money spent in campaigns today than before McCain-Feingold, that's unfortunate. That was the unraveling of what had been a fairly good level playing field for Democrats.

The one thing that leveled it again was the internet, with Howard Dean and Kerry. They were able to raise almost as much money this time around. I always thought that it would be a very unequal fight from that time on, because the Republicans can raise so much more money. They, of course, have now set up a lot of their 527s, they were late to do it this time, and they'll have gobs of money next time. So it does concern me.

Nelson: Did you work on State of the Union speeches all the way through the two terms?

Greer: I did. I think I worked on almost every one of them. Oh, by the way, I will tell you another Dick Morris story, a knockdown drag out, which I lost. I think it was '96. I thought about it as I watched Katrina—

Riley: Another natural disaster.

Greer: Here's the reason I say that. The President had a very good speech with a lot of policy prescriptions that I totally agreed with. Don Baer was the Communications Director. Dick Morris kept insisting that he insert the line, "The era of big government is over." That was battled royally. I'm not sure the President was that comfortable with it initially, but Dick wouldn't let it go. When Dick had something—it's the one thing that Clinton put in a major address with which I've always been very uncomfortable. It's a statement that has the wrong implication and the wrong message—that government shouldn't be doing good things in the face of big problems, and that I thought was unfortunate.

I mean, you can make a rationale that the era of big government programs is over but the government still has a role to play, but you give such ammunition to the whole theory that we should dismantle government. I mean, it's the Grover Norquist, let's shrink the federal government until it's small enough that we can drown it in the bathtub. That's the philosophy. I guess it's pretty good when you've gone through eight years of a Presidency and two years of campaigning, and didn't have many other things you really quarreled with, but I thought that was an unfortunate statement.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

Nelson: What about the ’98 State of the Union, the same week as the Monica Lewinsky story broke, what was that like?

Greer: It was pretty interesting. The one thing I would say is that it does demonstrate Clinton’s incredible inner strength, because I don’t think I would have been able to do that for love nor money, even if I hadn’t been guilty. But he was dealing with this. He has this incredible inner strength that allows him to do that. The other thing that people have always said, and I think he is able to do this, he compartmentalizes very well. He says, “That’s that, and this State of the Union is what I have to worry about.”

Nelson: I would think this one might stand out, because of this. Was there any discussion that you were party to about whether to make any reference at all to this huge new story of the Monica Lewinsky charges?

Greer: Yes, and I was very opposed to it. First of all, the compartmentalization of Bill Clinton aside, it was very separate and apart from the State of the Union. I thought it should be and he thought it should be. There were a few folks who said you can’t ignore the elephant in the room, that kind of thing, but he did, and he pulled it off. And, you know, it was a damn good speech—

Nelson: Right, it was a very successful speech.

Greer: Which is a tribute to him and how he could do this. I admire him.

Riley: One of the things that we pick up out of the briefing materials and out of your own bio is that you were doing a lot of international work at this time. You’d gone over to South Africa and also to what was then still Czechoslovakia. Was any of this being coordinated, maybe that’s too strong a word, but I’m just curious about the extent to which the White House may have been taking cognizance of your assisting overseas, or whether the DNC was paying attention, whether you in any way were coordinating your activities.

Greer: No. I don’t think Clinton was aware of it, not until after the campaign was over.

Riley: Do you know how you came to the attention of these people?

Greer: I do know and actually it was long before Clinton. There’s a group called NDI, National Democratic Institute. It’s a part of the Endowment for Democracy, there’s a National Republican Institute as well, and they do good work promoting democracy around the world. Peter Hart and I were asked to go to Chile in 1987. We worked with the opposition figures in Chile to oppose [Augusto] Pinochet. There was a plebiscite that was on the ballot and we put together the media campaign and worked with folks locally. Actually we had to do a lot of the production in Argentina because everybody was under martial law and scared to death in Chile. This is an aside, but we were constantly followed by the secret police. The first thing we would do—Peter Hart is a pollster here who worked on the Mondale campaign—the first thing we would do is we would take our car and driver and we would go to the American Embassy. Sometimes we’d meet with the Ambassador, sometimes not, but we wanted them to know that we were checking in with the Embassy when we got to the country. Then the last thing we would do before we went to the airport was to stop at the Embassy and say goodbye. We figured that way if anything

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

happened they would know—what happened to those two gringo Americanos? Whether the embassy was watching over us or not, we wanted to give the impression that they were.

But anyway, I had done a lot of work with NDI and had been very active with that. They asked me to go over and do a multi-party training in elections and democracy in South Africa. Out of that, the ANC [African National Congress] and Mandela asked if I would consult on the campaign. Greenberg, who had lived in South Africa and done one of his graduate papers there, already had a relationship, so we were in close communication about doing it together, but we both ended up there by different paths. It had nothing to do with the White House.

The connection with Vaclav Havel had this to do with the White House, and it's kind of weird: Madeleine Albright is an old friend. Before she was Secretary of State, she ran the Center for National Policy. She calls me up and she says, "Vaclav Havel is coming to the country and he's going to speak to a joint session of Congress. Would you help us prepare for that?" I said, "Sure, I've always admired Vaclav Havel, I'll be glad to." I went over to Blair House, and I'll never forget, they didn't have a podium or anything, so I took a trashcan, emptied it, put it on a table, and said, "Mr. Havel, this is our podium. Here's how you walk into this joint session of Congress," and he and I practiced his speech. We practiced all of his quotes from Jefferson, by the way. He wanted to quote Jefferson, and he wanted to do that, even though he had an interpreter, in English. So we practiced all that. So we became good friends because of Madeleine Albright. Madeleine Albright is Czech, and so they naturally asked her. And she has been, to this day, a very good friend. This is a small little footnote in her book, that she remembers this experience. So that's how I ended up there.

We have never, as a firm, really sought out a lot of international work. I have some reluctance about exporting American politics, and the worst of American politics. There was a consultant who went to South America and worked on a campaign in Peru. She came back and did an interview about how proud she was that she had taught them how to do negative campaigning. I was thinking, what a terrible thing to export, we're exporting our worst political tactics. I've always felt that countries should develop their own political cultures indigenously and you should be very sensitive to that. If you can go in and help them establish the wherewithal and the infrastructure and the capabilities and the skills to do their own politics, it's better that they do their own politics.

Nelson: Frank, I'm going to ask this question in kind of a sharp way, just to draw the issue clearly, but as a Democrat who, I gather, does most of your work in congressional races, why have you not brought up the fact that under Clinton the Democrats lost control of Congress for the first time in 40 years and were never able to get it back? In other words, why was Clinton not a disaster for the Democratic Party in your view? Now you see what I mean when I said sharp question.

Greer: That's fine. I think the first two years of Clinton's administration were a disaster for Democrats. From that point on, I thought he did a great job for the country and was probably the best President we've had since FDR. You can just go through his accomplishments, it's phenomenal. But I would say the Democratic Party failed to capitalize on it. There were a lot of factors, including demographic shifts to red states and suburban areas and the Sun Belt, et cetera,

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

that were working against Democrats that had nothing to do with Clinton. I think the first two years did not help, but I think there was also a demographic shift going on in the country.

Here's what—I can't say in terms of the House and losing the House, but I will say this, even in 2000, with a badly run campaign, Al Gore still won by 500,000 votes, and if he had a good Electoral College strategy, I think he could have won. Then you'd be sitting here saying, "Boy, Clinton started this era of Democratic resurgence." I think there were an awful lot of other factors. It could be that in a year you'll be saying, "How did Bush, who was so popular, lose the House, or lose the Senate, or lose the Governorships?" By the way, Democrats lost some Governorships, but we held our own primarily through the Clinton era. We lost the House, we lost the Senate, although the Senate when he left office was evenly divided with one independent crossing over.

Nelson: So in a sense, he was bucking long-term Republican trends?

Greer: And he was overcoming it by the strength of his political abilities at a time when it would have been very difficult for other Democrats. I think that has shifted back, that resurgence of the demographic advantage is shifting back. Unfortunately, I'm not sure we have the leadership right now—I hesitate to say that because I hope it arises—I'm not sure we have the leadership to take advantage of the advantage Democrats could have in this mid-term. The numbers are opening up, but it's still not a 60 percent favorable for Democrats. It's less than 40, or 39, or 38 for Republicans, but Democrats are at 45 and 46, and they're not moving beyond 50 percent.

The other thing about it is, given the nature of local politics and Presidential politics, and certainly the last two Presidential races, it's a very divided country. And it's not just divided, it's polarized. It's like hardcore 40 percent this side, 40 percent that side, and there's 20 percent in the middle. I think maybe we have an opportunity to win over 18 of that 20 percent, but it's not going to be a landslide either way and I think it's going to be a long time before you have that. I hope I'm wrong. I sincerely hope that I am wrong.

Riley: Is there then, from your perspective, a distinctive Clinton legacy? Something that survives him that we can—

Greer: I actually think that there are an incredible number of good programs and policies that were put in place, beginning with Family and Medical Leave, which makes a big difference in a lot of people's lives. I think there is an issue agenda in terms of the economy and deficit reduction and raising incomes and low-income tax cuts and education reform. There's just a lot that he accomplished. He did a lot for the environment and left an amazing legacy on the environment. He devoted a lot of public land to the public, which was kind of unexpected. He put in, in effect, roadless wilderness area rules, et cetera, that are still being—they're trying to overturn them, but at least we have the advantage in the courts for saving a lot of that.

I thought he also had the right approach on Bosnia and the Balkans. If anything, he was a little timid on this for me, and I had these conversations with him a few times. Yet he set in place a way to intervene but not to risk a lot of lives and not create a lot of death, which I thought was a pretty good policy. And he got very close to actually bringing about peace in the Middle East. It fell apart because of Yasser Arafat at the last minute, and I'm not sure that he was dealing with a

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

rational person in that situation. So he got close, I think he accomplished a lot programmatically. He defended affirmative action.

He did things that were inspirational for the country and some of them have withstood the assault by George W. I actually think he was a great President, I felt really good about looking through all of those materials and thinking about all that was accomplished. I think that this is such a dynamic, political country right now, that everything is going to shift back and forth a lot. It's kind of like, it's not the era of Roosevelt where you put in place Social Security, or Lyndon Johnson, where you put in place Medicare, and it goes on from this time forward. But he certainly gave us a benchmark.

I was in Pittsburgh yesterday and there was this young man from Oklahoma. I said I was coming down to do this interview, and he says, "You know, most of the time he was in office I really didn't like Clinton. I was really troubled by his personal failings, I just didn't like him. I look upon him now and I think, he was a great President."

Riley: Your response, when I ask about legacy, is very much policy-oriented, which was not exactly what I was expecting.

Nelson: He set a standard politically that, unfortunately, is hard to meet and may diminish other candidates as they come down the pike, with the exception of Hillary. He—you miss him. I mean, my wife and I say, "Boy, do we miss Clinton." He established a high standard that makes it difficult for other Democrats, I think, because he was so good. He was a superb communicator, a great leader, understood policy, and he had a big heart. So all those things were commendable.

Riley: If the 22nd Amendment hadn't existed, would there have been a third term, do you think?

Greer: I'm absolutely certain there would have been. This is kind of emotional, but my oldest daughter, I wish I had a picture of her in the airport in Seattle, it was on his last trip through. It was in the midst of the Gore campaign. She is whispering in his ear. I didn't know what she was saying. She was 8 years old, 9 years old, and she was saying, "Please, Mr. President, won't you run for President again? We don't want to lose you." I didn't put her up to it. He stands up and says, "It's the Constitution." And she's like, "What?" He's saying, "I really can't, because it's against the law." We were thinking, *Let's change the damn law*. I think an awful lot of Democrats are saying, *Let's change the law*. Clinton, if he were here, would remember. She was pleading with him, "Please run for President again."

Riley: Frank, we—

Greer: I hope this has been helpful. You guys have been wonderful to work with. Here's the one think I would offer, really. When you figure out what we didn't cover or something that you have a big question about, call me and I don't mind recording anything over the phone.

Riley: I want to, on behalf—

Greer: You've been such a joy to work with. Sorry I got choked up. We truly loved the guy, as angry as we got with him over his personal failings, he never disappointed in terms of public

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

policy. I can't think of a time when I thought, *Boy, he really took the wrong tack on that*, or *Boy, he was fundamentally wrong about that*—other than listening to Dick Morris.

Nelson: Were you able to go to the opening of the Clinton Library?

Greer: Yes, in the pouring rain. Here's the deal. Don't ever tell him this. First of all, what were they thinking, we've had the best advance people in the world for eight years and he's always done every event superbly, and he's there with five Presidents and no awning. They could have imagined, if you looked at the weather report, it might rain. It is Arkansas.

Nelson: To me, that was wonderful, that's one of my great memories, that those Presidents and their wives sat up there, suffering through the same weather we were. I thought that was a great democratic event.

Greer: Some of them didn't seem too happy.

© 2014 The Miller Center Foundation and The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History