

Campaigning Is Not Governing:

Bill Clinton's Rhetorical Presidency

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James David Barber has identified three political roles that all presidents must perform: rhetoric, personal relations, and homework. The habitual way of performing these roles is what he terms presidential *style*.¹ The relative emphases in a president's style reflect not only the president's strengths but also his perceptions about the requirements of effective leadership.

The Clinton presidency is the ultimate example of the rhetorical presidency - a presidency based on a perpetual campaign to obtain the public's support² and fed by public opinion polls, focus groups, and public relations memos. No president ever invested more in measuring, and attempting to mold, public opinion. The White House even polled voters on where it was best for the First Family to vacation. This is an administration that spent \$18 million on ads in 1995, a nonelection year!³ And this is an administration that repeatedly interpreted its setbacks, whether in elections or on health care reform, in terms of its failure to communicate⁴ rather than in terms of the quality of its initiatives or the strategy for governing. Reflecting his orientation in the White House, Bill Clinton declared that "the role of the President of the United States is message."⁵

To understand the first six years of the Clinton presidency, we must explore the president's leadership style and ask whether it was effective for advancing his views. The focus on governing to accomplish goals requires us to answer two central questions about the Clinton administration. First, did the president accurately identify the

possibilities in his environment for accomplishing his goals and, more specifically, the potential of his governing style? Second, was the president's strategy of emphasizing rhetoric an effective one for accomplishing his goals? These questions tap the essential aspects of the leadership challenges faced by all presidents, independent of their ideologies.

Implicit in the first question is an appreciation for the importance of the context in which the president operates. It makes little sense to fault presidents for not passing a great deal of legislation if their parties had only a modest number of seats in Congress, for example. Similarly, it is much easier to win support for bold initiatives when budgetary resources are available (as in the mid-1960s) than when they are scarce (as in the 1990s).

The first question is also premised on the view that the president will not be able to change their environments very much. I have discussed this at length elsewhere.⁶ To summarize the argument, there is little evidence that presidents can restructure the political landscape to pave the way for change. Although not prisoners of their environment, they are likely to be highly constrained by it.

A critical aspect of presidential leadership, then, is understanding the constraints and possibilities in the environment so as to exploit them most effectively. Once having evaluated the environment, an effective president must fashion a strategy to work within it to accomplish his goals.

In this essay, I explore Bill Clinton's relations with the public. Because the first two years and the following four years were so different, I discuss them separately.

1993-1994: Understanding His Strategic Position

At the core of successful political leadership in America is the ability to understand the political system in general and one's strategic position in it at any point in time so as to assess accurately the potential for policy change. A critical aspect of understanding the political environment is understanding the potential of various sources of influence.

In his first two years in office, President Clinton accentuated a problem inherent in our separation of powers system by overreaching - overestimating the extent of change that a president elected with a minority of the vote could make.⁷ Any president elected with only 43 percent of vote should not expect to pass far-reaching social legislation without involving the other party, especially when the public is dubious and well-organized interest groups are fervently opposed. So, a partisan, unitarian approach was unlikely to succeed; yet this is exactly the strategy the president adopted. For example, the “us against them” approach to policymaking encouraged the president to develop his health-care plan in Democrats-only secrecy and to pursue a left-in coalition-building strategy instead of a center-out one. Failure was inevitable.

Moreover, the greater the breadth and complexity of the policy change a president proposes, the more opposition it is likely to engender. In an era when a few opponents can effectively tie up bills, the odds are clearly against the White House. Yet when it came to health care reform, the president proposed perhaps the most sweeping, complex prescriptions for controlling the conduct of state governments, employers, drug manufacturers, doctors, hospitals, and individuals in American history.

A third important element in President Clinton's political environment was the lack of resources for policy initiatives. When resources are scarce, those proposing expensive new programs have to regulate the private sector to get things done, which inevitably unleashes a backlash. So the costs of action are more expensive politically.

In health care, the complex and coercive mechanisms created to require employers to pay for health insurance and to control costs (managed competition) were designed to avoid government responsibility for paying - but it should have come as no surprise that those who bear greater costs, face higher risks, or have their discretion constrained are likely to oppose change.

In the end, the president was not able to cut taxes for the middle class or substantially increase spending on education, job training, public works, and health care. Nor was he able to obtain welfare reform on his terms. He could not devise strategies for moving in the context in which he found himself, partly because he misread his political environment.

Many of his most notable successes, including the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), family leave, and motor voter registration had substantial support in Congress before he arrived in Washington. In the case of NAFTA, he was able to rely on Republican support for George Bush's policy initiative. He understood that he needed to engage in a bipartisan strategy that had the additional advantage of entailing no direct budgetary implications. In the latter two cases, the bills had passed before (and been vetoed by Bush) and little leadership was required.

1993-1994: Fashioning a Strategy

To evaluate the success of the Clinton governing style of the rhetorical presidency, we can ask whether the president was able to

1. set the country's policy agenda
2. set the terms of debate over the issues on the agenda
3. increase public support for himself or his proposals

Setting the Agenda

An important element of a president's legislative strategy is to set the agenda of Congress. In the rhetorical presidency, this means setting the agenda of the public first. An important component of agenda setting is establishing priorities among legislative proposals. If the president is not able to focus attention on his priority programs, they may become lost in the complex and overloaded political environment. Setting priorities is also important because the White House can lobby effectively for only a few bills at a time. Moreover, the president's political capital is inevitably limited, and it is sensible to focus it on the issues he cares about most.

Setting the agenda requires first limiting it and then keeping a focus on priority items. From its very first week in office, the Clinton administration did a poor job at both. The president promised to have legislation ready for improving the economy at the very beginning of his term and to propose a comprehensive health care package within his first 100 days in office. Neither program was ready on time, creating a vacuum that was filled with controversies over issues of lower priority, such as gays in the military, the bungled nominations of Zoe Baird and Kimba Wood for attorney general, and public

funding for abortion. These issues left an impression of ineptitude and alienated many in the public whose support the president would need for his priority legislation.

The defining issue of the Clinton presidency was to have been health care reform. The administration set and then badly overshot its deadline for delivery of a reform plan, first arousing and then dissipating public interest. It was more than eight months after taking office before the president made a national address on health-care reform, his highest priority legislation. Even then, the pace of rhetoric was out of sync with the pace of lawmaking. The president's speech had the effect of peaking attention in a legislative battle two months prior to the introduction of the bill.

In the meantime, there were important distractions from the president's bill. Eighteen American soldiers were killed on a peace-keeping mission in Somalia, and the *U.S.S. Harlan County*, carrying U.S. troops as part of a United Nations plan to restore democracy in Haiti, was forced to turn around and leave in the face of pro-military gunmen. In addition, the president had to devote his full attention and all the White House's resources to obtaining passage of NAFTA, which was central to his foreign policy priority of increasing international trade.

Yet part of the problem was also the president himself. Clinton and his advisers understood the virtue of a clear, simple agenda, and the president knew that his defining issues had been overwhelmed as he had engaged in issue proliferation. He was not able to contain himself, however. He rarely focused on any bill for more than a few days at a time.

President Clinton has an undisciplined personal style, tremendous energy, a desire to please many sides, a mind stuffed with policy ideas, and a party of interest groups

clamoring for policy. He came into office with a large agenda, and Democrats had a laundry list of initiatives that had been blocked by George Bush, ranging from family and medical leave to motor voter registration and health-care reform.

He and his fellow partisans believe in activist government and are predisposed toward doing "good" and against husbanding leadership resources. But no good deed goes unpunished. The president's major proposals certainly obtained space on the congressional agenda in the first two years. But the more the White House tried to do, the more difficult it was to focus the country's attention on priority issues. And it was equally difficult for Clinton to receive credit for his achievements when there were so many issues that lay ahead.

Structuring Choice

Presidents not only want the country and Congress to be focused on their priority issues; they also want the debate to be on their terms. Framing issues in ways that favor the president's programs may set the terms of the debate on his proposals and thus the premises on which the public evaluates them and on which members of Congress vote on them.

One of the most serious limitations of the Clinton administration in its first two years was its lack of rhetorical definition. The administration's failure to effectively structure choice for the public and for Congress was not the result of an administration that was unaware either of the importance of projecting a strong, clear vision of its policies or of its failure to do so. Nevertheless, the administration did not clearly define what it was about. The failure to do so left the Clinton administration vulnerable to the vicissitudes of events and to the definitions of its opponents.

The White House allowed the Republicans to define the president's fiscal stimulus program in terms of pork barrel. On his FY 1994 budget, the president's political consultants complained that the Republicans had succeeded in focusing public debate on tax increases rather than economic growth or deficit reduction.

Regarding health-care reform, the White House was unable to keep the public's attention focused on the inadequacies of the health care system and the broad goals of reform, partially due to the bill's complexity and partially due to competing plans in Congress and myriad health care industry voices with a deluge of direct mail, radio spots, and advertising, picking out pieces of the plan to oppose. Instead of revolving around a central theme, then, public debate focused on the Clinton plan's pitfalls.

During the first two years of the Clinton administration, Republicans dominated the symbols of political discourse and set the terms of the debate over policy. In 1994 congressional elections, the Republicans framed the vote choice in national terms, making taxes, social discipline, big government, and the Clinton presidency the dominant issues. They tied congressional Democrats to Clinton, a discredited government, and a deplorable status quo. They set the terms of the debate - and won.

Obtaining Public Support

Ultimately, presidents need public support for themselves and their programs. A basic problem for Bill Clinton was his overestimation of the extent to which the public was susceptible to his appeals for support. When the president's first major economic proposal, the fiscal stimulus plan, was introduced, it ran into strong Republican opposition. During the April 1993 congressional recess, Clinton stepped up his rhetoric on his bill, counting on a groundswell of public opinion to pressure moderate

Republicans into ending the filibuster on the bill. (Republicans, meanwhile, kept up a steady flow of sound bites linking the president's package with wasteful spending and Clinton's proposed tax increase.) The groundswell never materialized, and the Republicans found little support for any new spending in their home states. Instead, they found their constituents railing against new taxes and spending. The bill never came to a vote in the Senate.⁸

The president's next major legislative battle was over the budget. On August 3, 1993, he spoke on national television on behalf of his budget proposal, and Senate Republican leader Robert Dole spoke against the plan. A CNN overnight poll following the president's speech found that support for his budget plan dropped.⁹ Several million calls were made to Congress in response to Clinton and Dole, with the callers overwhelmingly opposed the president's plan.¹⁰

When the crucial rule regarding debate on the 1994 crime bill was voted down in the House, the president immediately went public. Speaking to police officers with flags in the background, he blamed special interests (the National Rifle Association) and Republicans for a "procedural trick," but his appeal did not catch fire. Meanwhile, Republicans were talking about pork barrel spending, tapping public resentment. Clinton's public push yielded only the votes of three members of the Black Caucus. So he had to go to moderate Republicans and cut private deals.

Most painful of all to President Clinton was his inability to sustain the support of the public for health-care reform, despite substantial efforts. Nevertheless, the White House held out against compromise with the Republicans and conservative Democrats, hoping for a groundswell of public support for reform. But it never came.¹¹ Indeed, by

mid-August 1994, only 39 percent of the public favored the Democratic health-care reform proposals while 48 percent opposed them.¹² Clinton's tendency to carry the campaign mode to governance by demonizing opponents such as the medical profession and the drug and insurance industries only activated Republican counterattacks and negative advertisements only exacerbated his problem.

Despite energetic efforts, then, the White House was not able to produce groundswells of support for the economic stimulus plan, nor for the budget deal, the crime bill, or for health-care reform, and it only did a little better on NAFTA. The president's own approval levels averaged less than 50 percent for each of his first two years in office. In 1994, an association with Clinton decreased votes for Democratic candidates for Congress, and the election was widely seen as a repudiation of the president. It is difficult to conclude that the president had a successful governance style.

Governing and Campaigning

Evaluating strategic position and fashioning a strategy appropriate for governing in it can be a difficult and complex task. Moreover, the political environments of some presidents are more difficult to assess than the environments of other presidents. In addition, some administrations lend themselves to agenda setting and structuring choice better than do others. It is especially difficult to develop a clear focus and convey a consistent theme when the president has a large, diverse agenda - as Bill Clinton has, and when the president's views are a complex blend of populism and traditional values - as Clinton's are. This has made it difficult to establish a central organizing theme for the Clinton presidency. Nevertheless, the Clinton White House has also suffered from self-inflicted wounds.

In 1992, Clinton campaigned as a populist, economically liberal (eager for public investments to stimulate the economy) and socially conservative, and as a “New Democrat” who was cautious in domestic policy. But he governed in the first two years as an economic conservative, a social liberal, and an activist in domestic policy. As his pollster, Stan Greenberg, put it, “The mandate he ran on was not necessarily the one he executed.” “He ran as a cultural conservative and an economic populist. He was the first Democrat to talk about welfare reform and the death penalty.” But “the cultural conservative side of Bill Clinton disappeared in the first two years.”¹³

Instead, gays in the military, gun control, and abortion came to represent the administration in the minds of many in the public. His major accomplishments, and the ones where he made the crucial difference, were economically conservative policies, including deficit reduction and two free trade agreements. As Clinton himself declared sarcastically to aides, “We're Eisenhower Republicans here, and we are fighting with Reagan Republicans. We stand for lower deficits and free trade and the bond market. Isn't that great?”¹⁴ To confuse matters further, he also had an ambitious activist domestic agenda in his first two years, signaling that he was more a left-leaning than a centrist New Democrat.

It is not surprising, then, that the president found it difficult to fashion and implement a governing strategy appropriate to his goals and circumstances. His governing style undercut his campaign style. He undermined his supportive coalition and thus his ability to govern or even to receive credit for his accomplishments.

1995-1998: Understanding His Strategic Position

The dramatic Republican congressional victory in the 1994 elections forced Bill Clinton to reevaluate his strategic position. The election was a repudiation of his leadership. It was clear that his program was dead. He would not be able to build coalitions or succeed in advocating new, controversial policies in the new political environment. Yet by freeing him from the possibility, and thus the responsibility, for enacting policies, the election also provided the president a new opportunity to define his presidency.

For several months following November 1994, the White House was in the doldrums as it strove to come to terms with the new political environment. Fortunately for the Clinton administration, the opposition eased its analytical burden. The new Republican majorities overplayed their hand and refused to budge on their proposals to reverse the course of public policy, leading to government shutdowns and public perception of the culpability of the Republican Congress. Clinton (and Dick Morris) recognized and exploited the opportunity the Republicans gave him. The president could characterize them as “radicals” and present himself as a “reasonable” alternative in opposition to change.

At the same time, Clinton read his new strategic position as providing for a scaled-down presidency. In this model the president employs executive orders to promote his policy views and the veto to defend moderation. As the president said, “One of the things I have learned in the last two years is that the President can do an awful lot of things by executive action.”¹⁵ He views government as a conciliator and catalyst of private actions. This more modest conception of the presidency disappointed Democrats

desiring a more activist executive, but Clinton now saw the potential of the presidency in a new light. For example, having lost the opportunity to define the argument in 1994, Clinton did not even reintroduce his welfare bill in 1995. He could not find the funds to pay for his version, his name had become a liability, and he had more flexibility to negotiate if he did not have his own plan to defend. This was a far cry from health care reform in 1993, but it reflected the environment in which the president was operating.

1995-1998: Fashioning a Strategy

Understanding his new strategic position, Clinton's primary goal became to block the Republicans' most ambitious plans to reshape government. To accomplish this goal, he fashioned a new strategy, switching from offense to defense. By opposing the Republican majority in Congress, he was able to unify his party, which was scared of staying in the minority. His defensive strategy met with substantial success; divided government matters.¹⁶

It is ironic that following 12 years of conservative Republican presidents, the Clinton presidency's greatest success was in the realm of opposition to change. Nevertheless, Bill Clinton was more successful in defending the status quo against cuts in Medicare, Medicaid, environmental protection, and education spending than he had been in advocating policy change. In other words, he was much more effective as an obstacle to change than he was as an agent for it.

The biggest payoff for the president was reelection. The 1994 congressional elections set the terms of the debate over public policy in America so that the election of 1996 was about the excesses of the GOP as much as it was about high taxes, big

government, social decay, and intrusive public authority. This, along with a classic backdrop of peace and prosperity, enabled Clinton to win easily a second term.

Obtaining Public Support

Another benefit of the Clinton public relations effort has been an increase in the president's approval rating. After three years of averaging below 50-percent job approval, he moved into the low 50s in 1996, averaged 58-percent approval in 1997, and soared to 63 percent in 1998. The 1998 figure is all the more remarkable because it was achieved in the face of a wide range of charges and revelations concerning his personal behavior, both before and after entering the White House. The most notable of these revelations was his affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky. Perhaps even more striking was the president's standing in the polls at the very time that majorities of Americans believed that he was not peculiarly trustworthy and had engaged in behavior of which they disapproved.

The public's low evaluation of the president as a person was nothing new. A mid-1994 Gallup poll found that 39 percent thought he was honest and trustworthy (56 percent did not).¹⁷ A Wirthlin poll taken at about the same time found that only 31 percent of the public responded that Clinton's moral values mirrored their own.¹⁸ What is new is the lack of weight people seem to give the president's integrity in their overall evaluations of his performance in office. As late as mid-1994, when asked to choose between a president who set a good moral example for the country and one with whose political views it generally agreed, the public chose the former by 59 percent to 32 percent.¹⁹ By 1998, things had obviously changed.

We know that when we ask people whether they like a particular president, they typically respond that they do. When we ask the same people whether they approval of the president's performance *as* president, they often respond that they do not. In other words, people frequently like the person but not the performance. Americans are quite accustomed to compartmentalizing their evaluations of the president.²⁰ In Bill Clinton's case, we see compartmentalization – but in reverse. Many seem to like the president's performance, but they do not have high regard for him as a person.

At any given time there are many issues, both policy and personal, on which the president might be evaluated. The salience of these issues is subject to change. For example, in the spring of 1991, George Bush was near 90 percent in the approval polls, because he was being evaluated for his performance as commander in chief during the Gulf War. The next year he was soundly defeated for reelection because the public was now evaluating him on his performance in handling the economy.

Bill Clinton has served in office at a time when there have been no great divisive issues dominating public discourse. He has presided over peace and prosperity and has been evaluated on the basis of these consensual issues. He had a lucky break in January 1998, when he was scheduled to deliver his State of the Union message the week after the Monica Lewinsky story broke. While ignoring the latter, he spoke to a huge audience and reminded people why they had elected him president. He was able to emphasize job performance, making it salient in the public's evaluations of him. He switched the debate on his presidency from character to leadership and performance. Moreover, his nationally televised unqualified denial of a sexual relationship with Lewinsky seemed to defuse the issue.

The scandal heated up again in the fall, as Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr issued a report to Congress accusing the president of 11 counts of impeachable offenses, including perjury, obstruction of justice, witness tampering, and abuse of power. The president's detractors used the report as a basis for charging that he had broken the law, failed in his primary constitutional duty to take care that the laws be faithfully executed, betrayed the public's trust, and dishonored the nation's highest office. As a result, they argued, the president should be impeached and removed from office. They also argued that other public officials would be removed from office for having an affair with a young intern. Why, they ask, should the president be held to lower standards?

These charges placed the president in peril, but not for long. First, the president apologized to the nation – sort of. Then he engaged in a round of expressions of remorse before a variety of audiences. At the same time, the White House accused Starr of engaging in an intrusive investigation motivated by a political vendetta against the president. The basic White House defense was that the president made a mistake in his private behavior, apologized for it, and was ready to move on to continue to do the people's business of governing the nation. Impeachment, the president's defenders said, was grossly disproportionate to the president's offense.

The president asked the public to evaluate not his character but rather that of his critics and those who report on them. By portraying himself as the victim of an intrusive and irresponsible press and an undisciplined special prosecutor, the president benefited from a backlash of public sympathy. Once again his opponents seemed to have overplayed their hand.

Costs to the Defensive Strategy

There are costs to the defensive strategy, however. Structuring the choice for voters and seeking public support as a more moderate version of the Republicans was apparently quite good for campaigning, and it lifted the president in the public opinion polls. Yet, campaigning, posturing and pronouncing, although it may have been Clinton's strength, is not governance - certainly not in the usual sense precipitating great national debates on important questions of public policy or of driving legislation through Congress.

Although the president benefited from standing in counterpoint to the Republicans, he was forced to embrace some of their more appealing imagery in his rhetoric. He changed his rhetoric from programs and dollars to inspiration and values. He defused a host of promising Republican cultural and values issues with his symbolic stands to attract anxious parents: V-chips in television sets, school uniforms, teenage curfews, restrictions on teenage smoking, limits on Internet pornography, school competency tests, Hollywood ratings system, and increased educational programming.

But Clinton did more than simply expropriate the language of values from Republicans. He also coopted many of their issues. As a result, he had much of his agenda determined by the opposition party. He declared the era of big government to be over and signed the Republican welfare reform bill. Most important, the Republicans forced the president to deal with the budget on their terms. The issue became, first, not whether to balance the budget but when and how - and, later, just how. After submitting a budget in early 1995 that envisioned \$200 billion deficits for years to come, a few

months later he embraced the Republican orthodoxy of a balanced budget. Shortly thereafter he agreed to Newt Gingrich's timetable of balancing it within seven years.

Moreover, the president was not unable to rally the people to support his own initiatives. The two most notable Democratic successes in the 104th Congress, health insurance portability and the increase in the minimum wage, were congressional, not White House, initiatives. The overhaul of the IRS and the massive public works bill in 1998 were led by Republicans.

In 1997-1998, the president vocally supported a bill that would tax and regulate cigarettes and would reach a settlement with tobacco companies on their liability for smoking-related health problems. The president wished to portray the bill in terms of discouraging smoking, especially among teenagers, but his opponents spent millions of dollars on television ads portraying the bill as an example of big government and taxation of the working class (whose members are more likely to be smokers). In the end, the opponents prevailed in structuring the choice, and the bill died without a vote on passage. With it also died the president's plan to finance health care for uninsured children, school construction, and other social welfare initiatives.

Most of the president's other priorities met similar fates. Congress would not enact a patient's bill of rights, campaign finance reform legislation, or fast-track authority. In addition, the president desired to precipitate national debates on affirmative action and financing Social Security. Neither occurred. Aspirations are not enough for governing. Once again, the president was hindered by a full agenda, a lack of focus, competition from opponents for the public's attention and setting the terms of debate on issues, and the lack of a sustained effort on behalf of priority measures.

Aside from the essential battle for public support over impeachment, the only public relations battle over policy that the White House won was in the last days of the 105th Congress. Here the Republicans, fearful of repeat of the government shutdown in 1995-1996, gave the president a billion dollars for addition teachers. But the administration's successful efforts to place a positive spin on the results of the budget negotiations cannot hide the fact that President Clinton could not look back on 1997-1998 and claim a legacy of major legislative achievements.

Governing and Campaigning II

In the second half of his first term, Bill Clinton better understood his strategic position and rediscovered his roots as a Democratic centrist, supporting a balanced budget but fending off extreme cuts and emphasizing social conservatism and family values. By then, however, the president's strategic position was greatly weakened by the Republican victories in the congressional elections. In addition, because Clinton's new campaign style reflected a reactive agenda, it undermined his ability to govern. Although he could gain public support in opposition to the Republicans, he was not able to obtain public support for his own policy initiatives.

The Limits of the Rhetorical Presidency

The belief in the importance of rhetoric is not surprising for presidents elected in the age of mass communications or for White House political advisers who employed public relations techniques adeptly during a successful presidential campaign. Yet there are important differences between campaigning and governing, and the president must adjust if he is to succeed.

The transition is rarely smooth. As Charles O. Jones put it, "After heading a temporary, highly convergent, and concentrated organization" in a presidential campaign, the winner moves into the White House and becomes the "central figure in a permanent, divergent, and dispersed structure."²¹ As we have seen, communication becomes more difficult as the president loses control of his agenda and has to convince people not that he is superior to his opponent(s) - a relatively simple comparative judgment, but that his calls for specific change deserve support. At the same time, his opponents need only to cast doubt on the president's proposals to kill them.

In such an environment, it is important for the White House to have a clear understanding of the potential of governing through the rhetorical presidency. To start, there are very real limits to what public support can do for the president. The impact of public approval or disapproval on the support the president receives in Congress occurs at the margins of the effort to build coalitions behind proposed policies. No matter how low presidential standing dips, the president still receives support from a substantial number of senators and representatives. Similarly, no matter how high approval levels climb, a significant portion of the Congress will still oppose certain presidential policies. Members of Congress are unlikely to vote against the clear interests of their constituencies or the firm tenets of their ideology out of deference to a widely supported chief executive. Public approval gives the president leverage, not control.²²

Yet despite the history of failures and frustrations of the emphasis on rhetoric, the Clinton White House continued to assign strategic primacy to communications. In a discussion of his problems in his first year in office, the president declared that he needed to do a better job of communicating. "There have been times when I've been surprised by

my inability to shape the agenda on a daily basis or to shape the message that's going out to the folks. . . . it's always frustrating to feel that you're misunderstood. . . . and you can't quite get through."²³ A year later the president sounded the same theme as the solution to his political problems: "What I've got to do is to spend more time communicating with the American people about what we've done and where we're going."²⁴ Four years later things had not changed. The president's legislative program was largely dead, and the White House was embattled, fighting charges that the president had committed impeachable offenses. Once again, the White House employed the rhetoric of campaigning in the hopes of surviving to govern for two more years. The question remains whether the president can successfully employ his leadership style to leave his mark on public policy.

Notes

¹ See James David Barber, *The Presidential Character*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992).

² See Samuel Kernell, *Going Public*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1997).

³ Bob Woodward, *The Choice* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), p. 344.

⁴ Woodward, *The Choice*, pp. 54, 126.

⁵ Elizabeth Drew, *Showdown: The Struggle between the Gingrich Congress and the Clinton White House* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), p. 19.

⁶ See, for example, George C. Edwards III, *At the Margins* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); and George C. Edwards III and Stephen J. Wayne, *Presidential Leadership*, 5th ed. (New York: St. Martin's, 1999).

⁷ "Interview with Clinton: Political Landscape," *New York Times*, July 28, 1996, p. 11.

⁸ "Democrats Look to Salvage Part of Stimulus Plan," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, April 24, 1993, pp. 1002-1003.

⁹ Bob Woodward, *The Agenda: Inside the Clinton White House* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), p. 285. A CBS News/*New York Times* poll with before-and-after samples on August 2 and 3 found that support for the president's budget remained unchanged even in the immediate aftermath of the speech, but that opposition weakened.

¹⁰ "Switchboards Swamped with Calls over Tax Plan," *New York Times*, August 5, 1993, p. A18.

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- ¹¹ “Health Care Reform: The Lost Chance,” *Newsweek* September 19, 1994, p. 32.
- ¹² Gallup poll of August 15-16, 1994.
- ¹³ Quoted in Mitchell, “Despite His Reversals, Clinton Stays Centered,” p. 10.
- ¹⁴ Woodward, *The Agenda*, p. 165.
- ¹⁵ Quoted in Alison Mitchell, “Despite His Reversals, Clinton Stays Centered,” *New York Times*, July 28, 1996, p. 10.
- ¹⁶ George C. Edwards III, Andrew Barrett, and Jeffrey Peake, “The Legislative Impact of Divided Government,” *American Journal of Political Science* 41 (April 1997): 545-563.
- ¹⁷ CNN\USA Today Gallup poll of July 15-17, 1994.
- ¹⁸ Cited in the Wirthlin Quorum, 5 (June 1994), p. 2.
- ¹⁹ Gallup poll of 3-6 June, 1994.
- ²⁰ See George C. Edwards III, *Presidential Approval* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 130-134.
- ²¹ Charles O. Jones, *The Presidency in a Separated System* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1994), p. 294.
- ²² George C. Edwards III, *At the Margins: Presidential Influence in Congress* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), chaps. 6-7.
- ²³ Quoted in Jack Nelson and Robert J. Donovan, “The Education of a President,” *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, August 1, 1993, p. 14. See also “The President at Midterm,” *USA Weekend*, November 4-6, 1994, p. 4.
- ²⁴ White House transcript of interview of President Clinton by WWWE Radio, Cleveland, October 24, 1994.