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**DRAFT/CONFIDENTIAL**

**DATE:** April 27, 1992  
**TO:** Bill Clinton  
Mickey Kantor and David Wilhelm  
**FROM:** Stan Greenberg, James Carville and Frank Greer  
**RE:** "THE GENERAL ELECTION PROJECT"  
Interim Report

This report of the "general election project" recommends a fundamental remaking of your campaign to reflect the new political realities and new phase of the campaign and, most important, to address the debilitating image that is dragging us down. We believe the campaign must move on an urgent basis before the Perot candidacy further defines us (by contrast) and the Bush-Quayle campaign defines us by malice. This is a critical window.

The recommendations here derive from wide-ranging discussions both within and without the campaign. They are not lightly arrived at, and everyone who has participated shares the sense of urgent opportunity and the need to move boldly. The participants and memo writers included Gearan, Grunwald, Lake, Emanuel, Reed, Thomases, Linda and Harry Thomason, From, Marshall, Carter Eskew, Mark Mellman, Paul Tully, Sam Popkin, David Axelrod, Reich, Shearer, Tom Cosgrove, Pete Schenkan, Holum, Michael Donilon, David Cohen, Saul Benjamin, and others. (This report represents the synthetic judgement of the authors and is now being circulated for comment.)

The conclusions depend, as well, on the first round of focus research, the DNC national survey (conducted by Greenberg-Lake) and the Pennsylvania general election survey. (See the attached memoranda.)

These recommendations, we must emphasize, require new structures within the campaign. The current dispersed decision centers leave the campaign without a strategic center that can direct scheduling, communication, media, the candidate and spouse traveling parties. We approximated such a strategic center at the end in New Hampshire, Michigan, Illinois and New York with great success. To be effective, we recommend the immediate appointment of a strategic director, located in the Washington office, to act

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as an agent of change -- who will re-invent the campaign and ride herd over the strategic recommendations. Without such a change, we doubt that the recommendations offered below will really happen.

Strategic Assessments

Bill Clinton is viewed unfavorably by a sizeable minority of Democratic primary voters (about 30 percent) and a plurality of general election voters (about 40 percent); the situation is worse in the West and Northeast; and we are running behind by as much as 20 points in key general election states, including Ohio, Connecticut and California. We believe that these negatives (with their electoral consequences) can be greatly reduced, as they were for Reagan and Bush in previous elections. Voters are still open to a Clinton candidacy (almost 60 percent in the DNC survey). A majority wants to vote against Bush and thinks they do not know the real Bill Clinton. (They are right!) After learning more about Bill Clinton in the focus groups, our support nearly doubled.

The most fundamental problem ahead is a lack of central message; why Bill Clinton wants to be president and what he will do to change America. Voters in the focus groups rarely mention anything that Bill Clinton would do as president. Indeed, they can rarely characterize whom he would fight for or what kind of president he would be. The "character question" poses a critical threshold, blocking whatever message we choose to communicate -- reducing messages to mere manipulation. We have to cross the character threshold as soon as possible, though our goal is to have biography and message work together to tell the same story.

The character problem is rooted in Clinton's essential "political" nature. We have probed the whole issue of trust and honesty and, at the center, is the belief that Bill Clinton is a "typical politician." The two strongest negatives in the DNC national survey and the campaign Pennsylvania survey were the belief that Clinton is "a little too much of a politician" (53 percent agree) and that he will say anything to get elected (53 percent). The focus group participants spoke of Clinton as a typical politician, marketed well, but prepared to cater to any group.

For most part, people were reluctant to write him off as corrupt, dishonest or immoral, but the highly publicized "shading of the truth" has reinforced an impression that he will do what is necessary to "look good." The questions about personal morality

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certainly matter, but their larger impact is contained in the general impression that he will say what is necessary and that he does not "talk straight."

The impression of being the ultimate politician is reinforced by Clinton's presentation (evasive, no clear yes or no, handy lists, fast talking, and all that political analysis). They think of him as "wishy-washy," not as "someone who will look you straight in the eye" and tell you the truth.

The impressions of Hillary reinforce the political image. In the focus groups, people think of her as being in the race "for herself" and as "going for the power." She is not seen as particularly "family-oriented." More than Nancy Reagan, she is seen as "running the show."

Obviously, we have created many of our own problems, but it is hard to underestimate the damage created by Tsongas and Brown, particularly the former. But each, in his own way, has tried to establish his identity by painting Clinton as political. There is every danger that the emergence of Perot will reinforce the same character traits and, thus, further undermine our candidacy, even if Perot eventually slips in the polls. Perot is seen as a straight, honest talker who worked for what he got, grew up "the American way," and who won't be intimidated by the money people and the special interests.

Clinton's political nature leads voters to a number of critical and debilitating conclusions:

1. Clinton is not real. He is "packaged," created by image makers. What he says, therefore, is discounted: rhetoric tailored to sound good, intended to reflect what people want. They do not believe they are hearing the "real Bill Clinton." (It is important to emphasize that this impression precedes our paid media; people already have the idea in their heads.)

2. Clinton is privileged, like the Kennedys. Clinton's draft dealings and Ivy League/Oxford education leave voters with the impression that Clinton grew up with a "silver spoon." They think his path to high political office "was greased," requiring little effort and, therefore, little character. (Perot is, again, the looming contrast).

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3. Clinton can't stand up to the special interests. People think Washington and politics is a den of thieves. There are lots of "hands in the cookie jar" and "you've got to slap hands" if you are to lead, yet they doubt Clinton would slap anybody's hands. He wants to "appease everybody." That makes Clinton weak -- controlled by the political establishment, "the powers" and the money people. (Voters already think that of Bush.)

4. Clinton cannot be the candidate of change. It is politics and politicians who are incapable of taking this country in a different direction. Clinton, therefore, as the ultimate politician, cannot be the voice of change.

He is part of the "establishment," not a change agent. "With the current situation, one participant observed, "we can't afford another politician."

5. Clinton's for himself, not people. Voters are longing for a leader "who's going to look after us." Yet Clinton, as typical politician, is "self-centered," cares only about himself and getting elected. The unending array of character battles has left Clinton "self-absorbed," in voters' eyes. In the DNC survey, Clinton enjoys less than a 5 point advantage over Bush (the toady for the rich) on "cares about people," on being "on your side," and "representing me on the issues."

6. Clinton's message/ideas are discounted. When voters hear Bill Clinton's ideas, they are positive, but unexcited and reluctant to reassess their judgements about him. Sure he "understands" what we feel, but that is just it: "he knows what we want which is why he says it." His words are good but just political manipulation. It is hard for a politician to be heard these days, particularly one who wants to be the voice of change.

The campaign has to take radical steps to depoliticize Bill Clinton. The measures -- tentatively supported by the research -- fall in six strategic areas:

**Biography.** The "facts" of Clinton's life radically change the judgements about Bill Clinton: he is a human being who struggled, pulled his weight, showed strength of character, and fought for change.

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Commitment. People need to learn about how Clinton struggled against special interests or difficult political forces to do what he believed in and to help people. People need to learn of a Bill Clinton who is willing to challenge convention and powerful interests on behalf of people.

Transition to people. Clinton needs to go from self-absorption to caring about people.

Non-political communication. The candidate needs to communicate in ways that sound less political, and the campaign needs to use media that are counter-political in style.

A plan. The campaign needs to communicate that it has a vision and ideas about how to change the country -- not just a series of popular proposals that look political. Running against politics is also running against drift, and people are looking for a leader who knows where he is going.

Change. Clinton's candidacy will not catch fire unless voters come to understand what Bill Clinton wants to do to change America. Right now, they have no idea what he wants to do, except get elected. We have to differentiate ourselves from the other candidates and excite the voters' imagination. The change message cannot undo our current image problems, for voters now turn our ideas into self-serving rhetoric. But we must crystalize how Bill Clinton wants to change the country and begin advancing our ideas aggressively until we cross the threshold of believability.

Biography: The Real Bill Clinton

The presentation of biography, we know from the surveys and focus groups, has an extraordinary impact. In the Pennsylvania general election survey, biography produced a 19 point shift in the electorate (compared to 12 point message shift) and a significant upward assessment of Clinton's honesty. After hearing "the facts" of Clinton's biography, voters who were previously preoccupied with Clinton the politician began speaking of him in radically new terms: "down to earth," "middle class boy," "self made," "earned it," "the opposite of Bush," "has some values," "honest, hard working man," "he's a human being," "worked his way," "had to

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struggle," "no silver spoon." Indeed, after hearing "the facts," these voters felt cheated by the press, call it a "travesty," that "people are missing out." One person concluded, "it "makes you want to find out more about his policies."

The campaign needs to decide on the main elements of the Clinton biography to be emphasized in media and by Clinton himself in popular presentation. The campaign should settle on three "facts." The following scored highest and had the most meaning in the focus groups:

Father died before born, mother worked and struggled to give her son opportunity and to learn value of education. (19 of 38)

Intercaded to stop alcoholic stepfather who abused his brother and mother. (22 of 38)

Worked his way through Georgetown. (23 of 38)

Tried to make a difference in one of America's poorest states. (25 of 38)

Opposition to racism began when as a young boy in the South, was separated from black friends because of segregation. (20 of 38)

Started teacher testing, small class size and higher teacher pay. (21 of 38)

Required students finish high school or lose drivers license. (25 of 38)

One of first to introduce Welfare reform, leading country in moving people from welfare to work. (25 of 38)

Created manufacturing jobs at 10 times the national rate. (22 of 38)

(We will confirm these findings and narrow the choices further in the remaining focus groups and upcoming California survey.)

The TV clips shown to focus groups suggest the extraordinary power of Bill Clinton when he talks about his mother and alcoholic stepfather (Gabe Pressman), education (Maryland debate) and when he shows what he cares about (Act Up confrontation).

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We should think of biography in two ways -- first as personal character attributes and second as commitments. The personal character attributes include a widowed mother and standing up to alcoholic abusive stepfather, working his way through Georgetown and Yale, and returning home to one of America's poorest states. The commitments show a willingness to be tough and inventive trying to help people, specifically, teacher testing, drivers' licenses and welfare reform.

The campaign should produce a 60 second "character spot" that draws from these "facts" to present Bill Clinton, the person. The current bio spot, confined to the 30 second format and, therefore, too-quick moving, seems too political and packaged. We need to make a strong, non-political statement. (The model is Bush's 1988 "grandfather" spot which delivered a simple family, caring and values portrayal from June through October.)

- o The bio spot should be aired in California and Ohio during the primary and in the entire period up the convention; it should also be aired after the primaries in other critical markets in the industrial Midwest, border states, and New England, as indicated by polling.

The campaign should produce a 60 second or 2 minute spot introducing the real Bill Clinton, but on one issue, probably education, showing Clinton's commitment, willingness to take on special interests, his belief in opportunity and responsibility, and how we can change America. The spot would air in rotation with the full bio spot and in road-blocks in key primary states and in the period after June 2nd when public attention will focus on Bill Clinton. The format must look non-political, giving full rein to spontaneity and sincerity.

The campaign should create a 30 minute Infomercial of the "Real Bill Clinton" to be aired in low-cost time slots from mid-May until Labor Day. The show should combine the biographical facts from above with testimonials in the appropriate areas, showing the Bill Clinton who came back to do good, fought powerful forces, and helped people:

- o Head of teachers' union talking about teacher testing, the battle with the unions, and Clinton's unwavering commitment to education and raising standards;

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- o Ernest Green talking about Bill Clinton, his childhood commitment against racism, "the Arkansas 9" and the mansion, racial progress in Arkansas;
- o Somebody who went from welfare to work and others to talk about how Clinton made it happen before it was in vogue.

The infomercial must include clips of Clinton speaking with passion about education (education debate), his family (Gabe Pressman), his life's work (Act Up) and the people who have taken the lumps (New Hampshire).

Finally, we must begin immediately and aggressively scheduling the popular talk shows to introduce the real Bill Clinton. That includes the national popular culture shows and the regional radio interview and call-in shows. We should start with Johnny Carson, and move to Barbara Walters, Oprah and Donahue, Larry King and Rush Limbaugh. The state scheduling must focus on the "Irauses" of the key radio markets. These shows must introduce these elements of biography, our principal change message and the human side of Bill Clinton (e.g., humor, sax, and inhaling). Our goal is to break the political mold.

### Transition to People

To break out of the political mold, we must take the campaign to the people: that is, Bill Clinton must move from self-absorption to caring about people, and the campaign itself must show Bill Clinton empowering people.

The popular culture/talk shows is one form of accessibility that should certainly distinguish Bill Clinton from George Bush -- and perhaps Perot. We should barnstorm these shows over the next 2 months.

We need to make the "Ask Bill," Donahue format shows the signature of our campaign -- Bill Clinton, completely comfortable with himself, answering questions in an entirely spontaneous format, where ordinary people can gain access to someone running for president. They can be done as 30 minute shows and as roped off areas in malls. We should unveil the format, give it a name that suggests empowerment and accessibility, use common graphics from state-to-state, and elevate the whole concept by suggesting that the people would have access to this president every month -- through people's press conferences (perhaps organized by a university or some other independent organization). This is one

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president who will be accountable directly to the people. It is important that we create excitement about the concept before Perot's electronic democracy takes hold.

We need to make the transition from our self-absorption with being attacked by the press to running for president because we want to help people. The campaign should implement the "I can take a hit" program, as suggested by Linda Bloodworth-Thomason (see appendix) as a way of closing a chapter of the campaign and making the transition to caring about others. Rather than take the idea to the convention, we should seek to close the primary season on that theme -- "the hits I've taken in this election are nothing compared to the hits the people of this state and this nation are taking every day."

- o Revisit and expand the New Hampshire speech on election night June 2nd -- thus, acknowledging all the negative stories but making them tell a story about Bill Clinton's commitment to other people. (See Sample speech)
- o Homecoming event in Arkansas after California, celebrating becoming the effective nominee. The event should show Bill Clinton's enormous popularity in Arkansas, but it should also welcome those families (e.g., Ron Michaels, etc.) who will thank Bill Clinton for caring.
- o Consider taking a film version to the convention, though we may want to close this chapter of the campaign before kicking off the fall campaign.

Brave enough to challenge America

People believe change can only be brought about by a leader who lacks strings and who is strong enough to challenge powerful interests. That is the opposite of our current style which too often suggests compromises to organize political support.

The presentation of our biography will emphasize going back to Arkansas and taking on the tough battles -- teacher testing and raising standards, from welfare to work, and perhaps health clinics in the schools (in Arkansas of all places).

Aggressive counter-scheduling and speeches are critical if we are to introduce this candidacy in a new light. The speeches

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should be presented under a common rubric, as the "new covenant" speeches at Georgetown. Perhaps we go back to Georgetown, though more likely, we go to the audiences that give power to the message. All of the speeches ought to challenge the audience and draw in the press (as Wharton did, with raising Milkin and Trump). Clinton should look unafraid and willing to brave the fire. However, our goal is not so much to antagonize as to challenge, hoping that the audience will applaud at the unexpected (as at Wharton).

The "challenge" speeches should be organized from mid-May to mid-June -- 4 speeches, one a week under a common title. For the moment, we would suggest the following topics and audiences:

- o Radically changing government to a public employees audience. (Note that Bush and Clinton are almost even on cutting waste in government and on handling taxes.) The speech could also become radically reformist in cleaning out the mess in Washington -- particularly the role of special interests.
- o Lessons of Vietnam to a Veterans organization where we subtly talk about our own biography, the wrenching experience of a generation, the coming of age (discovering limits and patriotism), the Persian Gulf War, and the role of the modern military.
- o Welfare, work, and middle class values to a black audience or audience of social workers. This is an opportunity to talk about our own biography, our values, and the willingness to fight hard for inventive programs.
- o Education reform to a meeting of teachers -- where we lay down our commitment but also our insistence on accountability, quality, curtailed bureaucracy, etc. This is also an opportunity to make education work as investment to reverse America's decline.

Obviously, there is room for further discussion on the topics, but we need to move now if these speeches are to happen. There is no room for the tentativeness of earlier speeches. These need to be billed as major addressees, and Bill Clinton needs the time to prepare for them.

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The Hillary Clinton campaign

The current presentation of Hillary Clinton and the Clinton marriage and family to the world is remarkably distorted. The absence of affection, children and family and the pre-occupation with career and power only reinforces the political problem evident from the beginning. It also allows George Bush (and probably Perot) to build up extraordinary advantages on family values -- 32 points in the DNC survey.

We suggest the following steps to improve the situation, without endangering the family's privacy or trampling on reality:

- o Hillary should have a lower profile in the immediate short-term, as we try to re-introduce Bill Clinton, as set out above. It is important to do interviews with publications that have longer lead times, but, for the most part, Bill should appear alone on the popular culture shows. After the June primary, Bill and Hillary should do some joint appearances and Hillary should take up an aggressive schedule of interviews.
- o Bill and Hillary need to talk much more of their own family, including Chelsea, and their affection for each other. If Chelsea cannot travel (which we understand) then we ought to figure out how protecting Chelsea from the press and protecting her childhood is an obsession of both parents. We need to make much more of Chelsea faxing her homework to Bill and or something that Hillary does with Chelsea.
- o The family needs to go on vacation together after the June primary, preferably in California (including Disneyland), though there is a minority for the Gulf Shores.
- o After a short pull-back period, Hillary needs to come forward in a way that is much more reflective of herself -- both her humor and her advocacy work for children. Linda Bloodworth-Thomason has suggested some joint appearances with her friends where Hillary can laugh, do her mimicry. We need to be thinking about events where Bill and Hillary

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can "go on dates with the American people." There is a suggestion that Bill and Chelsea surprise Hillary on Mother's Day.

- o Bill and Hillary need to clarify Hillary's role as First Lady. Ambiguity looks like a power game. It is very important that voters feel comfortable with Hillary's role and not see her as an empowered Nancy Reagan.

The Hillary Clinton campaign needs to be organized and integrated into the overall campaign. What Hillary communicates is as important as what Bill communicates. Up until now, Hillary has had to devise the proper message or strategy. We think there ought to be a campaign manager for the Hillary Clinton effort, and that person ought to be a part of the message/strategy group of the campaign. It is time the campaign took this role seriously and recognized the central importance of Hillary's communication to what people believe about Bill Clinton as a prospective president.

Surrogates

Because Clinton is particularly exposed at this point, it is important that we develop a well-organized and aggressive surrogate program right now. This is not substitute speaker program, as developed by most presidential campaigns, usually in the fall; this is an identifiable cabinet of substantial and outspoken leaders. We would identify 4 or 5 people who would consistently praise or defend Clinton, attack Bush initiatives, and generally suggest a government in waiting. Clinton should not be hanging out there by himself, seeming vulnerable, isolated and weak; the president should not be allowed to use cabinet members to attack, unanswered, Clinton's environmental or education record.

Possible surrogates could include Jimmy Carter, Jay Rockefeller, Bill Gray, Steve Solarz, Sam Nunn or Les Aspin, Dick Gephardt, Roy Roemer, Mark Green, and Ann Richards. The surrogate program needs to be organized as part of the general communication's strategy of the campaign; someone will have to be appointed to take responsibility for the effort.

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Change: the Bush Stage

We will have to begin unveiling our change message in the weeks ahead. It will compete for schedule with our efforts to introduce the challenge-America message, though the two strands will have to work together. Probably the most powerful vehicle is a candidate Bush tour -- going to George Bush's famous speech sites in the period immediately after the Democratic convention in July (Boston Harbor, flag factory, school site, and some other location) to highlight the failed rhetoric of the Bush presidency and Clinton's message of change.

Campaign of Ideas

Part of the public's aversion to politics is an aversion to slogans and promises. In the focus groups, people responded very favorably to the Clinton 60 second spot, eschewing 30 sec. commercials and offering a plan for change. Throughout the groups -- most recently, but since New Hampshire -- people yearned for a leader with a plan -- concrete and well-formulated ideas on how to change the direction of the country. With Perot possibly emerging as quirky, it is critical that Clinton re-emerge as substantive, with ideas on how to change America.

The plan needs to be re-examined, repackaged and prepared for a higher profile role. The plan should be re-issued, with a broad array of university validation, including people who could emerge in important roles in a Clinton administration -- from Reich to ?

The schedule needs to be radically changed to allow the emergence of this type of candidacy. After Pennsylvania -- with the nomination assured -- we should move toward a controlled press event each day (in perhaps a number of markets); we should use our popular culture appearances, our mall/Donahue-type events, and speeches to communicate our ideas. At the same time, the schedule should allow Clinton more time to work on speeches, work through daily messages, communicate with campaign principals, read and work through ideas.

The candidate of change

The Clinton campaign will remain marginalized -- no matter what we do to reduce Clinton's political image -- if it does not present a compelling idea for change. That is our primary, immediate task. Our research in the next 2 weeks will continue to

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explore the character question and confirm our interim recommendations; but it will also examine a range of options for the core Clinton change message.

The message group is meeting on an on-going basis, focusing on three prospective areas for the central change message:

- o Radically changing government ("no more something for nothing"). This issue cluster includes a Clinton attack on special interest politics (abolishing PACs, taxing lobbyists, opening up the air waves); an attack on programs without responsibility and proper values (teacher testing, welfare, bureaucracy); attacking the failure of law enforcement to stop crime, schools to educate, and welfare to bring people back to the mainstream. (The making government work alternative)
- o Fighting for the forgotten middle class (middle class populism). The issue cluster could include reformulation of our tax proposals, health care reform (focused on insurance companies), middle class college loans, tax breaks for corporations, tax subsidies for foreign entities. (The redistribution alternative)
- o Investing in people (education). This cluster involves making our education commitment and policies into a much larger message about the economy and America's economic future; this involves investment in the American people (at all levels) as a way to take our country back. (The growth alternative)

When we are comfortable with our central message, we must be prepared to unveil the key concepts in speeches and in our media for the June 2nd primary. The California, Ohio and New Jersey campaigns constitute the first battle of the general election and our best opportunity to identify ourselves with a message to change America.

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