

Interview with William T. (Bill) Clinton, Democratic candidate for Congress, 27 year old former Rhode scholar, former McGovern field worker, Fayetteville, Arkansas, June 15, 1974, conducted by Jack Bass and Walter De Vries, transcribed by Linda Killen.

Clinton: And that's in part the wisdom of the strategy that Hamerschmidt and the others in the primary tried to run against me. It's just that I work hard and didn't insult too many people, so they couldn't do it. But the people, the voters, haven't felt comfortable with Fulbright in years. They haven't really wanted him but they had too much integrity to throw him out for nothing. Or to substitute nothing, you know. But that's the answer to that race.

Walter De Vries: But do they really believe that anybody can change things?

Clinton: Yeah, I think a lot of them do, yeah. Look at the. . . . We had a hell of a lot bigger vote here than they have. . . in percentages.

Jack Bass: Summarize the Fulbright problems again. The tape was off.

Clinton: I think that, well, in the first place, the people just did not feel comfortable with, didn't feel close to him, they didn't feel that he cared about them. And a lot of people who thought he was all right voted against him, I think, because like they felt he had lost touch with Arkansas and all the things you hear. It's ^{ironic} [all right?] because he's had a full time staff here in this state for the last six years. For the first time I think since he's been senator. And devoted more time. But you see it's just a feeling they have about him. His manner and his age and all that. When you put this next to this

already high anti-incumbent feeling and a virulent feeling against the seniority system. It's almost impossible to except, in this district anyway.

J.B.: They understand?

Clinton: No, they do not understand. But they don't like it. And if somebody asked you. . . if you were a politician. . . . I'll give you an example of how bad it is. To come out in favor of the seniority system, whatever that is, would be almost as damaging as coming out for amnesty in this district. In terms of how many votes it costs. People wouldn't get as mad at you over it, but it politically dumb. It's an amazing thing. John McClellan couldn't get elected in this district anyway. No way this year. Against a good opponent.

J.B.: Is that going to hurt Wilbur Mills?

Clinton: The intensity and vigor of it.

J.B.: Different districts.

Clinton: Probably will not because of the electorate there is a little different. They perceive the issues there a little differently. It's mostly Little Rock and the alternative is not as strong. But anyway, let's see. Those two major things he had against him at first. And it was interesting to me that they did all the publicity in the Fulbright canvas completely backwards in order. Because at the end you had a very effective ad with about ten different people in ten different walks of life in Arkansas. Just folks off the street explaining why they were for Fulbright. After all this stuff Fulbright's done standing up to Nixon on all these issues. Well, it's just the reverse. They should have run all that for three months ahead of time trying to break into this resistance that the average Arkansan felt towards him. Because if they don't feel comfortable with you they won't vote for you. Now the

reason for Hammerschmidt's great strength is they feel comfortable with him. Because he writes them all letters. Sends these questionnaires. Answers their own letters, promptly. Calls a lot of people on the phone. Comes home a lot. And so people don't even perceive him as a Congressman. He's that fellow who handles their problems up there. They don't even think about his record. Don't even know his record exists. But running against him, you see, is a tricky deal because if I were to go out tomorrow and call a press conference and lay bare what I think is his pretty bad record for all the people. Here, in that just a sort of definite way. It would hurt me. Or it wouldn't help any. Because even though I've just won a very impressive run off victory, the numbers weren't that great. Just proves that I've got an organization that controls [voters?]. At least in part that's what you can attribute it to if you want to. And the people of this district have got to feel just as comfortable with me as they do with him. And then these other ties, the anti-incumbency and the anti-Congressional feeling, anti-Nixon feeling, which is underneath on that, will begin to take over and begin to help me in this campaign. Nixon I'd say is still fairly strong in Ft Smith which is in conventional terms supposed to be one of the most conservative towns in America. One of the three places that John Mitchell wanted his trial moved to. Ft Smith and Toopaloo and Shreveport, Louisiana. And it's been voting Republican in presidential elections at least since '52 and perhaps before.

W.D.V.: Do you think they're comfortable with you?

carried the thing.

Clinton: Well, I don't know. I ~~carried the thing~~ I got 59% of the vote in the run off. And nobody believed I could do that. And as I say, I don't who they were. I'll have to look. I haven't seen the box by box breakdown. It could be that there were just no votes in the Republican boxes, the upper middle class boxes and I got all my votes from labor. But I

believe that the thing will run consistant throughout the town. In other words, they voted for Bumpers overwhelmingly, not just against Fulbright but [for, too? for Ford, too].

W.D.V.: Do you find it strange that they felt comfortable with you? A university professor? You went to Yale, right?

J.B.: Rhode scholar and McGovern worker. Was this perceived? Do they know that or is this stuff they don't even know?

Clinton: Yeah, I would say they knew about the. . . . Well, one of my opponents ran a big, started running against me early in the primary. And he had these ads which appeared once as a quarter page ad and a couple weeks later as a third of a page ad. It said candidate profile and it had Gene Rainwater and Bill Clinton on it. He was the one that subsequently got in the run off. And it had his age and mine. His political experiences, you know, his offices, legislative offices. None by my name. Present legislative duties and his committees. And it had none by mine. It had his military record and none by mine. You know, like that. And it had his political and civic affairs and job experience. And he had deleted what he wanted to. He'd taken it from my biographical sheet. Said that I'd served 8 months as a law professor and had worked for 5 months at a time in two different periods at another college. And implied that those were the only jobs I've ever had. And then at the end it had political and civic and religious affiliations, something like that. And the thing he'd left on mine. . . . He'd left off all these Arkansas campaigns I'd worked on and, you know, people I'd been involved with. It said Texas, the chairman of McGovern campaign, or coordinator or whatever he put down, Texas coordinator of the McGovern campaign. And so he ran it in the newspaper and people read it, you know. But I . . . just for example, I got a call from a 70 year old man the next day. Who's the secretary of the county

committee down at Van Buren, which is the fifth biggest county in my district. Crawford county just above Ft Smith. He said "Hell, son, I think we might take him out of there without a run off since he started running that ad." He said "If I were you I'd call a press conference and tell them you're sorry he couldn't be the youngest law professor in the history of the university." I mean it's funny, you know. And people tell me it's a peculiar district in a funny year. And that McGovern thing, he was right there. It beats anything I ever saw. And I had any number of people tell me that they thought that was a political ad for me because they're sick of, you know, experience. It's a peculiar thing and it's a mystery to me. Now the McGovern thing has hurt me some, don't misunderstand me. I was down in Clark county which is , that's the fifth biggest county and Crawford is the sixth biggest county. Down the way there on the way back to Little Rock. And it's an enormous county geographically. Roscoe's the main city but north of there just no telling how many square miles of just rural area. And I went up to one of these communities to church at the end of the primary. I carried the city of Roscoe and got my brains beat out in the county. Just got obliterated in the county. And I went to this country store to see a guy who was in large part responsible for it. Just standing there talking to him and that's what he wanted to know about. He was ^{gait} [fabid] about this McGovern thing. The idea that I had been for McGovern, you see. So I took about ten minutes and told him all about it. And I told the truth. I'd worked in the Senate in '66 and seen all those guys. Most of those Senators I've been very disillusioned with. Watching their responses to the Vietnam war, whether they were for it or against it. I think they were by and large playing it to their own advantage. Scared just to do one thing

or the other. And I thought McGovern had been one of the few decent people. One of the least egotistical men I'd met. All which I thought was true. I just told him about, as long as I've known McGovern, see.

I told him the same things I told McGovern about what I didn't like about him.

And he said "Okay." I mean if I could talk to enough people about it maybe they just wouldn't care. You can't be defensive about it. You don't apologize for it. He said "Okay." I carried 80% of the guy's boxes in the run off. Just beat anything I ever saw. So, you know, it's a thing that can be dealt with. Now if Hammerschmidt does it, it he starts to jump on me about it. In the first place, nobody cares about my age, I'm convinced. Or very few do. They wouldn't vote for me anyway, the people that would use my age as a reason for voting against me. And if he starts to use all these things that he's obviously going to use. I think he's going to try to play labor and age-- W.D.V.: He's already done that with the [something about press?]. Clinton: Yes. I've gotten a very positive response to that. See, Bumpers has created a climate with his campaign in which you. . . . If the incumbent starts dumping on the challenger it hurts him. I mean Fulbright played his thing all wrong, in a way. Fulbright dumped on Bumpers. And people now, it's ironic, because of my close personal friendship with Fulbright that I would be ~~right~~ riding in the same tide that Bumpers is. To some degree. A lot of people see me in that position. And when John Paul says things like that, after I've laid bare to the whole district on television several times exactly how much money I've had from labor in that primary and in the run off. What percentage of the total it was. What percentage I will ever take from them. And made them perfectly aware of the fact that they'll always know how much money. It's just not going to be an issue. I turned down \$4,200 from

them in the run off. So I'll take some more for the general election now because I think it's a different election and I think it's a legitimate thing to do. But it is an issue, man, in this area because they don't want. . . . They want an independent Congressman. They don't want anybody that belongs to anybody. And Pryor really two years ago. One thing is he didn't play it right. You know, he spent \$400,000 on his race for Senator. And he took \$75,000 of labor money. And I never once heard him say "You think 18% of my total contributions is enough to buy me?" He didn't play it right.

W.D.V.: Of course it was also out of state money.

Clinton: Yeah. But a lot of money is. They're dumb about that. They ought to swap that around. Hammerschmidt just got \$3,000 from the AMA because of the way they do it. You know, their bank accounts [account's] in Arkansas. And labor's real dumb about that.

W.D.V.: You mean it's \$3,000 from AMPAC, their political action committee? What they do, they have a political action committee in each state. And it's funnelled through their local committee.

Clinton: Yeah. The secretary of the medical society sent a letter to every doctor in the district trying to convince them I was for socialized medicine, whatever that is. And that I was anti-physician because of the hassle I got into with some doctors in Scrumdale [?]. That cost me a few hundred votes, too.

J.B.: When did you get started in politics?

Clinton: Well, there's been a sort of residual political involvement in my family since I was a kid. As I said, my family, direct family was never involved in it. But my two uncles were always involved in local politics and in state politics to some extent. From the time I was a boy my uncle Roy was a state representative in the early '50s for

a term. And worked for the state for many years. My grandfather was a state parole officer for many years and before that had another state job. My uncle Raymond was active in the local politics in Hot Springs, Arkansas, right after World War II, when they came back and cleaned out the old Leo McLaughlin machine. Was a very interesting thing. He used to hide all the old mafioso back when Leo was the most powerful man in the state. Mayor of Hot Springs. But they cleared him out after World War II under the leadership of, among other people, a young man named Sid McMath who subsequently became governor and who was the person who brought Faubus into state politics. At least in part he was responsible for that. But anyway, so there was this interest in it but it was peripheral because my father never took an interest in it. And then when I was in school I got interested in politics and was just consumed with it from about the time I was 14 years old. And in 1966 when Faubus went out as governor there were a number of people running for re-election and running for the position. And I just got involved in one of them's campaign. I was 18 and wanted to work in campaigns. And that was the start of Frank [Culver/Culbert?] we were talking about, who was then on the supreme court and is now on the supreme court again. And had been in Arkansas politics for a long time. And a lot of the people who were for Faubus were also for him, although some were for some other people, too. And he just was, it was one of those bad years. The Democrats were being beaten in the Congress. You remember. And there was a great deal of anti-incumbent feeling there. Wallace was making great strides. The Wallace movement. And people were feeling bad about Faubus and Rockefeller was fixing to go in. And I guess Frank [Holdt?] could never shake this Faubus tag that he had. And that plus the fact that the Republicans went in and voted, the people who were for Rockefeller went in and voted for the other fellow in the run off beat him.

But anyway, I was interested in that race. And worked in it very hard. Did a number of different things. Then I went to Washington and went to work for Fulbright on the Foreign Relations Committee. I had a part time job there working my way through school the last two years. They have me a job which was a good thing because my father got sick and I doubt if I could have stayed there.

J.B.: In school where there?

Clinton: Georgetown University. And then in '68 I came home and worked in Fulbright's re-election campaign. And then I went to Oxford for a couple of years and didn't do too much in politics. Had a lot of friends who were working in a lot of these, you know, legislative movements, the war movements and stuff like that. I came home to Arkansas quite a bit. My father [died?] The '70 governor's campaign was something. Did a little work in it in Hot Springs but not to any great degree.

J.B.: For Bumpers?

Clinton: Yeah, but just a little bit in the run off. You know. In and out of town. I mean I didn't have a position or anything. But I got a call from a person in Bill Fulbright's office to get on the streets for Dale Bumpers. He can be elected governor and he can be [bought??].. Before the run off. Which was one reason there's so much of a bone of contention there. But that's--

W.D.V.: When did you build this friendship with Faubus?

Clinton: Just, when I got ready to run for Congress. When. . . then I went to work for McGovern for a while, on and off for a couple years when I was in law school. Helped him set up his campaign in Connecticut. I did some things for him in the South. Then I traveled around--that's how I met Belinda. I traveled to several southern states before the convention trying to gather votes on that California question, which

was more important, less important than we thought it was. I now think we played it wrong, but that's another story. And then after that was over, I came home. . . . I came home believing it was over because of the way the convention had been handled and treated in the press and then the Eagleton thing broke. From the way that was handled I was sure it was over, but. . . . Then they asked me to go to Texas, which I thought was symptomatic of the problems we were having. You know, having to send people from other states. I didn't like that very much. I understand that's traditional in some people's presidential campaigns but I still don't think it's necessarily a good thing. Especially as many as we sent around to as many different places. But anyway, I told them I'd do whatever they wanted so I went there. And worked there. And when that was over I went back and graduated from law school and came down here. I was going home to Hot Springs to practice. Either that or work for the attorney general, who's a friend of mine. Then another bright young star, and a very good public servant, maybe you ought to see him while you're in the state.

J.B.: He's been ill.

Clinton: Yeah, he has been to the hospital. May be out now. But he's a good man. And I heard that they had some disruption here at the law school. I came down and they had some places. So I called the dean and told him if he wanted me to come teach for a year or two I would. But no more, but I would. They were sort of skeptical but they asked me to come for an interview and I did and they offered me a job. So I came here. And then in January. . . I'd been thinking--

W.D.V.: Is Hot Springs part of this district?

Clinton: Yeah.

W.D.V.: So this has been your home town ever since? The area as being your home town?

Clinton: Hot Springs is the southeastern most town in the district I'm in. And of course this is in the northwest corner. I used to spend summers up here when I was a boy in the music camp.

W.D.V.: What prompted you to run? You've only been here, what, four or five months? At the school.

Clinton: Uhhuh. In the first place, I was very much disillusioned

[with the]
~~talking~~ record of the incumbent, Hammerschmidt. I didn't, you know, I think he's got a bad record and it's bad for the people in this area. And I thought somebody ought to run. And a lot of people thought somebody ought to run. All of my friends in the state legislature and active in Democratic politics thought somebody ought to be running. But nobody was interested in it because they said either it couldn't be done or they were not in a personal position to be able to do it. Financial reasons or whatever reasons. And it just ate on me and ate on me right into this. . . . I started thinking about it pretty strongly in December. And I began to realize that a lot of them, you know, just would not go. And in January I received a call from John Dorr, who asked me at that time to take a leave of absence and come be special assistant on the committee and help him put his staff together. The Judiciary Committee. He's a friend and a fine man and it was. . . I mean I had to seriously consider, you know. This provoked me to. . . . I just sat down and I called everybody that I would like to help get elected to Congress. I just asked them outright, would they run. Would they go. And they all said no. And I really didn't want to go back to Washington to do another stint and I did think that John could find other lawyers that could do anything that I could do. And that I might be able to make some sort of a contribution by staying here and making this race. If I could raise any money to do it. So I went home to Arkansas, to Hot Springs, to see

if I could get some people to co-sign a note with me so I could borrow some money and start. I had no idea whether I could raise any money or anything. My uncle and my father's best friend said that they would do that. And so I called John and declined the job; tried to help him find a couple more people. And started running for Congress. End of January. Went around trying to raise the money and get commitments and see people.

W.D.V.: What was the conventional wisdom about that. Hammerschmidt was unbeatable but in terms of the Democratic nomination what was the conventional wisdom?

Clinton: Well, the opinion was divided. There were those who thought that it depended on who ran. But there were those who thought that no one strong would run and so I could win it. There were those who thought that even if I did win I'd be hacked up so bad. I was too young, too liberal. College professor. Never had a job. And that therefore it wouldn't be worth having if I did get it.

W.D.V.: But you have to admit, though, that if you look at this district and how conservative it is and that it's the only one sending a Republican to Congress. And you take a person of your characteristics. In terms of conventional wisdom it wouldn't make sense. That you didn't have a damn chance.

Clinton: That's right.

W.D.V.: So, what happened?

J.B.: When did you go see Faubus?

Clinton: Oh, well, so then. . . . We've been up through that. I don't have the dates here, chronology worked out in my mind. We haven't kept the record that we should have in this campaign. But anyway, I began to travel around and see people. And I suppose it must have been into February when I saw Faubus. Late January or February.

W.D.V.: What prompted you to do that?

Clinton: Well, he's my neighbor. And he--

W.D.V.: But wouldn't he be the last guy to go see, represented the old time machine?

Clinton: No, no. See, that's why I got elected. Because I don't do things, I don't think in terms of that.

W.D.V.: But wouldn't the liberal mind, whatever it is in this district, think that way?

Clinton: Well, the liberal mind might, but I don't have a liberal mind I guess if that's the way they think. It's a matter of politics and how you get votes. This is a highly. . . it's a curious district. You have to look at it. Ft Smith you could almost characterize [as ultraconservative,
I didn't] believe I could carry Ft Smith under any circumstances at any time . But I did in the run off against Rainwater.

Because I treated them like people instead of conservatives or some other label. And because I avoided, I suppose, taking stands which would have been a total anathema to them, which I wouldn't take anyway in a race like this. Because I recognize what I'm running against, you know, and what the main issues are. But Faubus has a fine mind and a lot of influence in these hills, these people and knows things that are worth knowing. The reason that they will vote for me, if they do, the people, even if they think that I'm liberal, whatever that is, is that I'll sit down with all these people and talk to them. And it's not but 20 miles over there and I could get more knowledge there than most places I know. And I sat down with him and we talked for 8½ hours. Three hours at one stretch. I went up there to spend an hour and we went over all this ground and he really probed my stance. He's very issue oriented himself, in a way. And he wanted to find out exactly where we were crossways on the pornography and busing and integration generally and constitutional

theories and we went at it for 8 hours talking. Very interesting thing. I held my ground and needless to say he held his. But it was a good thing. Then we started talking about this race and he thought it could be won. Which was a great source of encouragement to me that as an abstract proposition he thought that the thing could be done. Unless national events altered in such a way as to totally undermine anything we might try to do.

J.B.: How did he think you could do it?

Clinton: By directly or indirectly. First of all by establishing myself as a candidate that should be in Congress, could be in Congress. And then by, directly or indirectly, demonstrating to the people that Hammerschmidt was far from an independent Congressman and was one of the people that had major responsibility for the weakness and the effectiveness of the Congress. To put him in with the national tide. But it was interesting to me, you see, that he thought it could be done where all my liberal state legislature friends did not think it could be done. And he did, I suppose in part, because when he ran for governor in '54 nobody thought he could be elected either. Ran against a reasonably popular one term incumbent. Everybody told him it's the wrong time. Well, lot of people told me this is the wrong time to run and don't run until '76 when we'll be putting a Democratic president in. I'm not sure we will be putting a Democratic president in in '76. Depends on who they put up and whether he can, you know. . . . So, that was some encouragement. Tucker, [Jim Guy] Tucker encouraged me to run.

W.D.V.: The attorney general.

Clinton: Yeah. In part I guess 'cause he's like me. He'd do it if he wanted to. If he thought it was the right thing to do. That's another thing that I think that. . . really there were the practical problems.

Just presented themselves to me as problems to be solved. Because I thought it was the right thing to do. I didn't see how we could sit around here in our drawing rooms and lambast the Congress and moan about the weakness of it and complain about this particular Congressman and then not one of us, not one, move against him. Not that. I just didn't see how that could be ever justified. And sit around

just like all the other politicians and wait 'til '76 because it might be a better year. And in all fairness, I was in the best position of all, although a very weak tactical position because this guy had just been settled in for a while. I was in the best personal position to run because I had few debts--few assets, but few debts--and no family to tie me down or to deny myself to. And my job responsibility sort of phased out at the time when I got into the general election. ^[You mean at the university?] [Unclear.] It was a powerful strain on me during this primary because I had to teach until May 6th. I still haven't graded all my exams. That was a terrific psychological strain because it just was impossible to do all the work I needed to do for my classes and run this race.

J.B.: Have you done any polling?

Clinton: No.

J.B.: Plan to do any?

Clinton: Yeah.

J.B.: Have you worked out a campaign strategy?

Clinton: That's what I'm trying to do now. Trying to take a few days off. But in my mind I know what . . . what I need to do is target the district a little better in terms of how I spend my time. That's the main thing I've got to more.

J.B.: Have you done an analysis of both primaries? In terms of voting behavior?

Clinton: Yeah. I don't have a box by box analysis of the run off yet. We're picking that up now.

W.D.V.: How about of the '72 election? General election.

Clinton: Irrelevant. Because that was a sham candidate. I mean he was so weak that you really can't tell anything about him.

J.B.: When you talked to Faubus during that 8½ hours did he discuss at all the possibility of his running against Fulbright?

Clinton: We talked about it. See, I think he would have liked to have done that because he doesn't particularly care for--I don't know whether it's personally or not but it's certainly politically--doesn't particularly care for either Fulbright or Bumpers. And he had always felt a great deal of bitterness toward Fulbright because of the help that Fulbright's people at least gave to Bumpers during the run off. And as I said, some of them before the run off. And so he was laughing about it. He said "Well, damn it [Bill's? Dale's getting ready to kill the monster];" or something like that. I've forgotten. I don't think he said that so don't you say it. But you know, that was the implication of his remarks.

J.B.: Did you get the impression that if Bumpers had not gotten in the race Faubus would have and might very well have won?

Clinton: I got the impression that if Bumpers had not gotten in the race Faubus might have gotten in to it. Whether he would have won or not I just don't know.

J.B.: Do you have any insights into whether or not that was a factor in Bumpers' decision to get in? The fact that Faubus would get in and might have won.

Clinton

~~W.D.V.~~: I understand that. . . from hearsay. . .

J.B.: . . . from Fulbright's weakness.

Clinton: I understand, just by hearsay and only that, and not very high up hearsay at that, that one of the things Bumpers said to his aides was that he was afraid that if he did not run against Fulbright some quote unquote bad person would. Would run or would be elected. But he thought Fulbright was that vulnerable that maybe--I don't know--maybe Faubus, maybe Hammerschmidt. . . . Hammerschmidt was thinking of running but when Bumpers got into it he just didn't have, he couldn't muster the moxie to do it.

W.D.V.: We asked Hammerschmidt about that, didn't we?

J.B.: I don't recall. I think we may have.

Clinton: What did he say?

J.B.: This was back in January. I think he was indicating. . . . I don't recall. . . I really don't remember whether he told us or. . . .

W.D.V.: We should have listened to that interview again, you know. . .

Clinton: I understood he wanted to do it but. . . Hammerschmidt wanted to do it, but again just by hearsay. But that would have been a very venturesome thing for him to do.

W.D.V.: Okay, we don't have the campaign strategy worked out yet.

Let's assume that you win it. And this is the day after election.

What do you as to why you won? What do you think would be the factors that would win it for you?

Clinton: First of all, the general mood, of course. The

. Get some new faces and people who seem like they have new ideas and you can forgive them if they've got a liberal past. That kind of thing. And secondly, and more importantly, a very skillful, hard-fought campaign. There's no mystery to it. I'll just have. . . . I personally will have to, starting in about two weeks, literally walk the district. I'll have to see almost every voter individually if I can. And talk to them and ask them to help. And that works here. It

works and I need to see everybody John Paul's written a letter to.

J.B.: Does it work here because this area is really not covered by any major, dominant news press.

Clinton: It works here for that reason and because people like to be seen. It's simply . I'm not sure it wouldn't work everywhere if people would take the trouble to do it.

W.D.V.: Well, do you see it as a unique part of the state? As a unique kind of a district?

Clinton: Oh yeah, in some ways it is. It's just a feeling you have, you know, at least in the hill counties, that there's a certain sort of personalization of politics that goes on. That people perceive politicians as individuals, as people they like to be foreor who they wouldn't want to be.

W.D.V.: So what you're saying is if you won it it would be on a strictly personality basis. That is, you contacted and impressed more people than Hammerschmidt had been able to do in the last eight years.

Clinton: [Unclear.] The mood will have to hold for me, I think. And then I'll have to do . In an exhaustive way. You know, it will just be 12 or 13 hours a day every day until, from July 1 on. And then my organization will have to grow and expand to the point where I *[can be sure that]* virtually, with minor exceptions, on election day, every single registered voter in the district that wants to vote for me. And we get an inordinate percentage of them to the polls. That will be very important, because this is not a presidential election. And the big--

W.D.V.: The turn out will be effected.

Clinton: Yeah. It will be bigger than a lot of people think it would be, because this race *will engender some interest* because a lot of

people, even Democrats [something about voting in November and not in the primaries.] If you look at some of our off year election returns in general elections you can see that.

W.D.V.: Is it possible in this district to identify and get the registered voters list?

Clinton: Oh yeah. You have to do it county by county and it's a hard. . . it's a lot of effort. But it can be done. So we will do that [one day?] Those three factors are what's responsible for my winning the primary. I mean the extraordinary effort that was put in by just hundreds of people. I had more people than I ever had the right to expect.

W.D.V.: So you're looking at a personality and organization oriented campaign. It's really not going to be dominated by issues.

Clinton: No. Let me go on.

W.D.V.: I'm sorry.

Clinton: It will be because that's the way I am. In the first place. I mean, I'll show you this little brochure that I've printed up. Maybe you've seen, I don't know. But it's fairly moderate, but it's more issue oriented by far than any other candidate who ran for office this year. Fulbright had some issue stuff, quite a bit. But you know, nobody else has even approached, you know, involving issues in things. I happen to believe that the way that I can best sell myself, and the way that I can get the best organization going, is by sticking to the issues and by speaking about them in my speeches. And with more particularity than say the governor does. The governor has to. Now Bumpers, see he has a record. People know him. They feel comfortable with him. They know what he can do. So he can go a lot further without speaking about the issues than I can. And one of the ways that I demon-

strate to the people in this district that I am able to be in Congress is by having a better grasp of the issues than the people I'm running against. Knowing more about it and being able to pose constructive alternatives. Because, you see, a man like Bumpers doesn't have to do that because he's got a progressive, constructive record as governor. So he can say inflation is eating the heart out of America, or whatever, and we got to do something about it. And the average person who's voted for him and is pleased with his record can vote for him for the Senate and say Dale will do something about it because he did something about the disarray in state government. See? Well, I can't do that, you see, because I'm 27 and don't have a record and all. I also feel that people feel, inherently, more or less about me than they would him. You know, he came out of Charleston as a city attorney. Had been there 20 years. my record and his. And when I speak to their needs I think that's what makes them respond to me. So in a peculiar way and a delicate way, my campaign, which is issue oriented, is what sells me as a human being.

W.D.V.: How about the vote on impeachment?

Clinton: Ehh. It's not really an issue in the district, although I have given--

J.B.: You think it will be?

Clinton: It might. It might become one. I've given a number of speeches as a law professor. Been invited, even just two days ago. . . I gave one. On impeachment and the impeachment process. What my views are? What are impeachable offenses and all that. But I have said many times that I thought that under any sort of definition of any impeachment that [i f Nixon is] in violation of specific statutes that he was impeachable. Five months ago I said that. It hasn't been hurting me very much.

And I said yesterday, two days ago, that unless there was some reason to doubt the grand jury report that I thought that probably when the time came for the vote that every member of Congress would have a constitutional obligation to vote for it. They say there's something wrong with the grand jury report. [Unclear.]

J.B.: Hammerschmidt had what, 70% of the vote the last time?

Clinton: 77.

W.D.V.: 77. What percent of the district would you estimate as being Democratic in terms of past voting behavior in other races? Governor, Senator. Take the state wide offices.

J.B.: [Something about Rockefeller.]

Clinton: The Rockefeller race you could hardly take.

W.D.V.: No I mean attorney general, secretary of state. If you took those and averaged them out what would the district look like?

Clinton: Oh, it would probably vote two-thirds Democratic.

W.D.V.: So it's a complete reversal then.

Clinton: Yeah, but. . . . if you asked people. A better indicator I think would be. I have a friend here named Jim Bailey who does some polling. Opinion Research Inc. Might be worth talking to him before you leave. He's just started [polling] about a year ago.

W.D.V.: Where is he?

Clinton: He's here, in town.

W.D.V.: University?

Clinton: Yeah.

W.D.V.: I've heard that name someplace.

Clinton: He did a deal on just asking people in various counties in the district--I've got the results in my office--what they thought of themselves, were they Democrats or Republicans or independent. And my memory is that 55% said they were Democrats, 17% said they were Republican,

and 28% said they were independent. No, I take it back. It's just the reverse. My memory is that 55% said they were independents, and 28-17 which is the raising Democratic families that vote Democrat.

W.D.V.: I'll send you a little book I wrote on that that might help you, called the Ticket ^{splitter} ~~sur~~. Cause what you really have to look at is voting behavior more than self perception, particularly in a place like this where you get two-thirds going Democratic--

Clinton: if you've got viable alternatives. But you see, really, we haven't had that much in the way or races except for Rockefeller's race. And then so many voted for him it's hard to tell. Especially since he was running against Jim Johnson and then that guy Marion ^{Crunk} ~~Stark~~, who was just a--

W.D.V.: No, but you do know Hammerschmidt's votes since 1966, is my point. And you need a reason. . . people generally need a reason to vote against an incumbent.

Clinton: Yeah, I think that's right. But, for example. Hammerschmidt won two to one in '68 and '70 ['72? '70, too.]

W.D.V.: That's my point.

Clinton: Now, in '68 he ran against a guy who showed, who should have been able to do better than that. Should have been able to get at least 45% of the vote. But the man came from a Republican county, the most northwestern county in the district, and was never able to get out and build an organization.

W.D.V.: Building your own personal organization? You're not relying on, was there any Democratic organization?

Clinton: Yes, well, in the early going you see I had to do that.

W.D.V.: But I'm talking about the general election now.

Clinton: In the general election I'm going to try to weld them as much

as I can. Especially where my people were good I'm going to stay with them. Hell, I had the best organization of anybody by far. It's interesting. . . you must be surprised. . . I may be kidding myself. But I really believe in organization in campaigns. And I think you can tell something from targeting and [election analyses] [electional law suits?] But in the first place, I think this is a highly unpredictable year and in the second place a lot of feeling of having elections here, over time, in Washington with an overview if you will. Is that a considerable majority of the people--enough to get elected on--are going to go out there and vote. I don't give a damn whether they thought of themselves as Republicans or Democrats or independents or however they voted before. Or who they thought was just the best man and who they identify with most.

J.B.: You going to use the Democratic ?

Clinton:--satisfy their longings. Yes. Oh yeah, I'm going to run as a Democrat. But the message that I'm trying to get across is that what we need to do is to do something about the Congress. And that in part it's not just a problem of the Republicans. It's also a problem of the Democrats.

J.B.: If you win, what do you think it's going to mean to the state Democratic party? State politics in Arkansas?

Clinton: Well, it will mean that they've got another good Congressman in Congress. It will also mean that they'll have another, you know, young, progressive politician. What that means I don't know. They're virtually lining up to run for McClellan's seat in '76 already.

I just got to be the nominee of my party three days ago and a lot of people thought I couldn't do that. It's a long way against Hammerschmidt, as you know.

J.B.: But then you would see yourself as kind of a moderate, tradition

of the '70s which the Democratic party has developed in this state.

Clinton: But I really also want to be part of the. . . . Yeah, I'm sure that I would. You can see I don't think in these terms, the way you're asking--

J.B.: What sort of black population is there in this district?

Clinton: Well, there may be 400, 500 black people in Fayetteville. Hot Springs, my home town, is about 10% black. Ft Smith is about the same. Hot Springs may be a little more. And they voted for me the first time pretty strongly. We were well organized there in Hot Springs. Somewhat less so in Ft Smith. But labor's doing a lot of work in the black community in Ft Smith.

J.B.: How effective has labor been, state wide and in this district? Especially state wide.

Clinton: They have pockets of effectiveness, you know. Where their strength is and depending on what the union is. Some of the unions are very well disciplined and very well organized. You just get the sense of it if you go in, for example, and shake hands at their plant gates. You know which ones are really working hard because they even know an unknown candidate like me. You know, when I'm a candidate. The steel workers, for example. Very good on this thing. They're just strong and well organized.

But it varies from union to union.

W.D.V.: Newspaper support?

Clinton: Yeah, some. Anyway, the unions, if they work, in this district can be very strong. I suppose they can affect, just through union members and their families, friends, you know, maybe 35- 40,000 votes.

J.B.: Out of what?

Clinton: I think 80- 85,000 union members in Arkansas. So the union movement's not very big and of course we have a right to work law here. Part of the constitution. And in this district there is this sort of individualistic mood because there are a lot of very conservative business people, too, who thought of themselves as Republicans in Ft Smith, Fayetteville and some other place. There are some anti-union people. But if they worked they could be very effective. They were certainly effective in my race. The newspapers. . . . I got the endorsement of the Baxter Bulletin, the Mountain Home and a very respected newspaper. Springdale News me and its one of the Barnwright chain, a very conservative chain of newspapers.

W.D.V.: Does the Gazette have any influence over this [district] ?

Clinton: Negative.

W.D.V.: Negative influence.

Clinton: You know, I like the newspaper. I think it's a great newspaper. But the tone there. . . . There's no telling how many votes. . . I don't know, maybe it didn't cost Fulbright any votes. But they have this arrogant, snide, condescending tone in their editorials which makes it very difficult for people [to accept]. I mean they really did. People identify Fulbright with the tone of the Gazette's editorials against Bumpers. And I think that that's true.

J.B.: The was almost the idea of anyone running against Fulbright. Does that come through?

Clinton: Yeah. And these people out here. . . . I mean I hate to sound like a redneck but my god these people out here are good. You know they work for a living and don't think about politics very often and are just kind of confused by all this Watergate business. And don't

like the prices they're having to pay and the taxes they're having to pay. And want some answers. And, you know, they think those Arkansas Gazette boys are down there having cocktails every afternoon at two or three up in the Little Rock Club overlooking the Arkansas River thinking about

[End of side of tape.]

They've had entirely too little effect on the thinking of this state because of this posturing they do. That's one reason these people like me. I don't posture to them. They have this preconception of what a college professor is going to be. And I'm really. . . in some ways I'm very sort of. . .

J.B.: How do you dress when you go out campaigning?

Clinton: Suits.

J.B.: White shirt?

Clinton: Sometimes. Mostly colored shirts. Blue shirts.

W.D.V.: Do you worry about the way they perceive your appearance?

Clinton: Not much. I just try not to let my hair get too long. But I wear it about this length all the time. I try to dress. Everywhere. Last night I gave the first talk I ever gave in a coat and collar without a tie. I went down and talked to the plumbers and pipe fitters. Council heads from all over this district. I was about half sick. It was a real hot day. And I did it in part, too. . . . I didn't think about it too consciously, but Hammerschmidt's got a lot of support among those people. They're real conservative. And they think they love the fact he writes them letters and he's helped some of their families get black lung benefits and they don't know what his vote is on most issues, you know. So I went down there and told them. I said "Well, I'm the fellow John Paul Hammerschmidt said you bought and paid for. I ~~don't feel like~~ hope you like what you got." And gave them a

little talk about it. I don't know, it's not very professional and all that, but I really do think it's those things that get you elected. How well you campaign, how well you project yourself. In this district I think it's regardless of the composition of the counties. I think if I don't carry most of the counties I can't be elected. I don't think I can. . . . I can and I will and I'll have a lot of my friends down. A lot more sophisticated analyses of the, you know, voting patterns of the precinct. We had done a lot of. . . . I myself have sat down and looked at the boxes, every box in every county, in this election. And I will get a box by box breakdown on a couple of the relevant Congressional elections in the past. And sit down there and study it. But I think the main thing is to take the tides that are flowing now and the skills that I can bring and the issues that I want to speak on, which the people respond to. And run with it just as damn hard as I can.

J.B.: You think the Republican party, both at the state and perhaps the national level, or at least the campaign committee, are going to put a lot of money against you. Hammerschmidt is THE one Republican Congressman.

Clinton: They will if he gets in tight. Now he seems to be worried. Maybe he's got some polls which indicate he's ^{vulnerable} [introuble]. Certainly I thought it was a tactical error for him to attack me on the day after I'd won the Democratic primary with 69% of the vote. Well, if I were running against me I'd say "Well, he's a nice young man but I've done a good job."

W.D.V.: Well, he not only attacked you, he tried to explain the election. Which is not only absurd but it's certainly presumptuous to say that he won because organized labor supported him. Isn't that what he said?

Clinton: Yeah. [Something about the labor input.] And I had some

Republicans vote for me in that primary. There's a young guy who, president of this northwest Arkansas underwriters association that had me there to speak yesterday. He's a Republican and never taken an active part in politics. And he's going with me all the way. And that infuriated him. He said "Hell, I had a lot of my friends tell me that they didn't give a damn for labor and they voted for you." You see, that's another peculiar thing. I can't tell you what my constituency is. If you look at my vote in Ft Smith I get the same percentage in every district. There's a few hard core Republican precincts and they voted for Rainwater in the first time and probably the second time. There's a few black precincts and they voted for me.

. And every other precinct, whether it's a lower class area or an upper middle class area, I got the same percentage of the vote, almost. With some variations for where I had friends. You know, so that they could carry the thing.

J.B.: That's why I asked you if you'd done any polling.

after elections study to find out what happened.

Clinton: Yeah. Well I had done that, studied it box by box. So the conclusion that I draw from that is that people are not all that different in the way they vote in this district. They don't align up into blocs very well. Now I think that I will get a high percentage of the labor vote. But even now, if you had the election today, a lot of people who belong to labor unions who voted for me in the primary might go for Hammerschmidt because of *the letters he sends*, you see.

J.B.: Are you saying, in so far as issues are concerned, you find that people are less concerned with specific stands on specific issues than they are on the fact that you take a stand. Or not?

Clinton: No, I didn't mean that. I didn't mean to downplay the issue

thing. I meant that they would vote for Bill Clinton. . . . If you asked somebody. . . . I sat out there and talked about issues. . . . I had a 30 minute tv program which got me a whole lot of votes and I just did it off the cuff. I sat down and talked for 30 minutes. I made notes for five minutes, ran over them in ten and then just talked off the cuff. And I talked about agriculture. And made some very specific ideas about what I thought ought to be done with the tax code. And what the government ought to do to fight inflation. And you know, just on and on. And probably took 25 stands on things. Nothing awfully liberal or even. . . except my stand on taxes and stuff like that vis-a-vis the But solid, you know, sort of progressive stands and in considerable detail. But if you asked the people who saw the damn program, who wanted to vote for me, why are you going to vote for me? "Because that Bill Clinton is going to go up there and stand up for us. Get rid of the mess in Washington. Turn the thing around." That's what I'm saying. I'm saying that my presentation of the issues is something that the voter, the average voter just distills into his general perception of me as a person. I do it because I think it's the responsible thing to do and because it's the only way I know to sell myself. I can't get up there and say a lot of general pap about how I'm an honest person. . . .

J.B.: How do you explain Dale Bumpers? As a political phenomenon.

Clinton: Well, in part it's because he's been in the right place at the right time. Circumstance always plays a part, just as it will in this. It's a gamble. Am I in the right place at the right time or not? We don't know, yet, I don't think. In part it's because he's a damn good campaigner. He works his butt off. At least he used to. And he's good at it. And that makes a difference, in this state anyway. And

that's why I beat those other guys. Thoroughly impresses. . . .

Most importantly it's because he's really much shrewder than a lot of people give him credit for. He knows exactly what he's doing. He's a clever, canny man who has a sense, an uncanny sense of how to get votes and what to sell and what wont. He doesn't have the same kind of mind that Fulbright does. So he doesn't think about it. He doesn't focus clearly, you know, in on issues. He doesn't think in that rigorous way the way that Fulbright does. It's just not the way his mind works. He has a sort of. . . instead of an analytic mind he has a sort of synthetic--he's always trying to bring everything together and still sort of spew something out that, you know, will appeal to everybody but will also get something done. But he's an extraordinary man. Don't ever kid yourself. It's very easy for them. . . . And Fulbright's a friend of mine and it broke my heart to see what happened to him, you know, in that way. Just for personal friendship and because he's a very great man. But it's a mistake for people to underrate Bumpers as a person and as a political animal, political mind. He's very very clever.

J.B.: From observing him and from having had a close view of the Senate, how do you think he's going to function in a legislative role?

Clinton: I don't know. I haven't thought about it very much, 'cause I think he'll spend a lot of his time running for national office once he gets. . . .

J.B.: He's going to have to take votes on issues.

Clinton: Yeah, well I think he'll vote. . . I think he'll have a pretty progressive voting record. I think he's voting record will be as progressive as Fulbright's.

W.D.V.: What is he running for, nationally?

Clinton: I don't know. I don't think he's quite made up his mind.

J.B.: There aren't but two offices.

Clinton: My feeling is that he could. . .

J.B.: A or B.

Clinton: My feeling is that he's got a good chance at A if he handles it right. If he gets some people in there who know how to get those convention votes, know how to organize the thing. And if he can get together a sort of national posture on some of these issues, I think he can go.

W.D.V.: Are you getting any national press attention?

Clinton: Oh, a little bit. I think it's because I got a bunch of friends. But the Washington Post wrote up my primary victory, run off victory. On page 7, I think. And gave it about five paragraphs.

W.D.V.: And the wire service piece?

Clinton: [?] I think it said special to the Washington Post on it.

W.D.V.: Does that hurt you or help you back here?

Clinton: Well it was so insignificant by that time that they don't know about it. The national Democratic party I think is very interested in it. I have friends in the party, national party people who have worked there and things like that. And I'm going up there this week to talk to them.

[Interruption in tape.]

J.B.: How much does a Congressional campaign cost in Arkansas?

Clinton: Well, I spent over \$50,000 on the primary and the run off. And I think the race against Hammerschmidt will probably cost 150. If we can raise it. If we can't, it won't cost that.

W.D.V.: What kind of media did you use?

Clinton: Well, it's impossible to cover this area with television, you know, unless you get on five or six stations and spend a fortune. So

what I did was just to use, in the early going the first time, the only thing I had was tv spots, 30 second spots, on the 6 and 10 o'clock news out of Ft Smith. The Ft Smith stations not all that much watched except at news time, at which time you can get up to 60% of the vote, your constituents, if you're elected. And if it's a good day. And that's the closest you can come to covering the district with one station. Now. . . I mean we looked at all the media flow charts and all that and I had an agency placing the stuff.

just economically unfeasible at the time to try to advertise on many others. I did put one 30 second spot on the Little Rock tv, which reaches about 35% of my constituents, during the Bumpers-Fulbright deal. On issues and answers. That's the only time I advertised at all.

J.B.: How about radio?

Clinton: Radio. You can use it a lot and it can be effective. It's more effective for unknown candidates than it is for known candidates.

W.D.V.: Are newspaper ads considered effective in this area?

Clinton: They are considered effective.

Because it's such a rural area. 42 weeklies and 8 dailies in the Congressional district. There are a lot of people. . . course most of them have tv's and a lot of them have radios. But a lot of people just read their newspaper, their rural weekly newspapers from cover to cover and read every word.

W.D.V.: Placing ads in the weeklies, do you get an endorsement?

Clinton: No. But failure to give your attention to the weekly newspaper editors will get an endorsement for your opponent.

W.D.V.: What about direct mail?

Clinton: It can be very effective [unclear].

It's a problem of targeting to figure out who to mail to. Now the only

direct mail I did was. . . . I did some mailing to every teacher in my district in the run off after I received the endorsement of the PACE committee. There's a group in this state called Demographics. Are you familiar with it?

J.B.: Yeah.

Clinton: They do mass mailing all over the country. They're an interesting group. [Discussion on this group is unclear. Names thrown around.] They have a fairly good list and try to keep them updated. And they can give you spot mailings. You know, I talked to George , he's his main assistant on the thing, about doing a spot mailing in the five most urban areas in the district to 5,500 influential people of various kinds. But I didn't do it because we didn't have the time.

[Interruption from phone call.]

And you had Sheriff ~~Sherriff~~ Martin Hawkins come up here and give a speech about what it means to be a yellow dog. Always beat the Democrat. start with Gov Jim Johnson. And why was it important. And he had all these college kids, you know, they were just wanting to beat his brains out because they'd always heard about what a thug he was when Faubus was governor and all this thing. And by god he walked out of there with them in the palm of his hand. He got a standing ovation. He's one-eyed, got warts on his face, he's ugly as holy sin. And he went out after the convention in Miama--he was a delegate. And when George McGovern was nominated he put on this hat that he had. It said Reformed Old Pro for McGovern. And by god he went up there and he couldn't carry this county for McGovern because he just refused to actually shoot people who wouldn't vote for him. But McGovern got the highest percentage in Calloway county of any county in Arkansas in the election.

[End of interview.]