

The Clinton Promise and Style

Art English, *University of Arkansas, Little Rock*

This article argues through an analysis of Bill Clinton's political career and rhetoric in Arkansas that Clinton is a president of much promise. Clinton's rhetoric and political skill set the stage for many of his achievements as governor. As governor Clinton tended to work slowly and carefully to build consensus before he acted. Given the many pitfalls of the modern presidency, it is argued that Clinton will have to guard against being perceived as an overcautious and indecisive president lest his rhetoric have a hollow ring. To be successful in the systemically cynical context in which modern American politics takes place, a president must convey to the citizenry a deep commitment to the principles of his program and be perceived as a strong and successful advocate for them. Modern presidents must be perceived as committed to programmatic action—otherwise they will be one term presidents.

William Jefferson Clinton has been a mystery to many. Even his closest friends and associates understand him as a deeply complex man who can be very different from his affable boy next door public image. To begin to understand Clinton is to put him within his benchmark generation as a child of the 1960s. Clinton is the first president to have been born after World War II. His father was killed in an auto accident before Clinton was born. His stepfather abused him and his mother. Clinton's values of self-reliance, independence, and accommodation were acquired as a young man desperately trying to cope with the problems that were threatening to destroy him and his family. His love of public life came from President John F. Kennedy, who lit the lamp of public service for a generation of young men and women. To understand Clinton's promise is to understand in large part the values and methods that he internalized in his struggle for survival during his troubled childhood and came to learn and apply in a public service career that has spanned almost half his life.¹

Political values often are difficult to detect, and a President's promise almost impossible to predict. Who, for example, with the exception of James D. Barber (1972), would have predicted Nixon's self-destruction through an action such as Watergate, given a successful first term of office and a looming landslide versus an overmatched opponent? Who would have thought that Jimmy Carter would be only a one term president after winning

ART ENGLISH is Professor and Chairman of the Department of Political Science at the University of Arkansas, Little Rock.

his party's nomination and the presidency itself with a brilliantly conceived campaign? Who would have predicted that George Bush, whose job approval rating after the Gulf War reached almost 90 percent, would lose his presidency to a Governor from Arkansas? The point is obvious. There are too many factors that impinge upon a presidency to assure its stability, too many things that can go wrong to assure presidential success, and too many uncontrollable variables to assume that things will go well even some of the time. A president not only must be able to use public opinion effectively and deal with Congress to be successful (Edwards 1983), he somehow must prevent his own judgment and the judgments or lack thereof of his advisors from steering him down harm's way (Reedy 1970). A president must take care to prioritize his agenda (Rockman 1984) and husband his time, realizing that the time frame to achieve an important policy goal may be short (Light 1991) and his ability to "go public" constrained by a host of unforeseen external problems (Kernell 1986). The challenges of a new president—any president—have become so complex and varied that to avoid a major economic or foreign policy problem within a president's tenure is simply implausible. Given the many inherent limitations a new president must face (Sorensen 1963) and the global context in which he must function, a president becomes beleaguered at the very start of his presidency (Wildavsky 1991). The office, in other words, is plagued with problems of enormous scope, fraught with new and old challenges, and conditioned by situations that have been defined as "no-win" for the modern occupant. A president's presidential promise, then, must be viewed within the context of a hostile environment in which the chances for long-term failure are greater than for long-term success.

Methodology

In order to analyze Clinton's values and gain insight into his promise as president, a content analysis (Carney 1972) of his inaugural addresses and state of the state speeches when he was governor is undertaken here. It is assumed that these addresses were defining moments in Clinton's public service career, and therefore are excellent documents from which to gain insight into his values. Also included is his inaugural address as president, and his 17 February 1993 speech to a joint session of congress, in which he announced his program for the nation. Before the content analysis was begun, it was assumed from observation of Clinton's career as governor and his campaign for president that there were certain ideas, themes, and values that defined his philosophy of government and agenda for the nation which were likely to be manifested in his speeches: *personal responsibility*, defined

as words describing people taking primary responsibility for their own lives rather than depending upon government; *togetherness in purpose*, as measured by words like “we,” “us,” and “our” in Clinton’s addresses; *investment in people or human development*, which were words that addressed training, jobs, children, and education; teleological words or phrases that comprised *a call to do better and meet new challenges*; words which heralded *global relationships*; a specific *issue or programmatic content* in the speeches, such as a call for a jobs training program; an affinity toward *creative, positive government*, as reflected by phrases using government in a positive way; a rhetoric that would link *Clinton’s identity with the people*; words that would convey a *distrust or disinclination for political parties*; and a populist’s *dislike for special interests*. The frequency with which a key word appeared in the speeches was tabulated to see how much of that type of rhetorical value was mentioned in any particular address and to obtain an aggregate picture of Clinton’s rhetoric as governor.²

It is hypothesized that these values make up much of Clinton’s philosophy of government, and that a content analysis of his rhetoric might shed light on whether these values were present to any degree in his spoken words, when they might have emerged, and if there was any kind of pattern, hierarchy, or emphasis to them.

To see how essentially presidential some of these values were, and to gain perspective into the visions of previous presidents, the “Clinton model” then is applied to inaugural addresses dating back to FDR’s first inaugural, an event commonly understood as the birth of the modern presidency. Some particularly interesting questions investigated are whether Clinton has been a strong policy articulator from the beginning of his career, whether his values have been consistent across his career, how his values or vision compares with those of past presidents, and whether the values of his gubernatorial service suggest the direction that his presidency might take. All of the content analyses assumed, of course, that different speeches would have different purposes and targets, but that comparisons within categories might prove useful and that an aggregate picture of the Clinton rhetoric would be helpful in gaining insight into the values, themes, and promise of his presidency.

In order to gain insight into what methods Clinton might use to conduct his presidency, an analysis of his career as a candidate and an elected official also is undertaken using newspaper articles and academic literature. One of the interesting questions posed in this part of the analysis is, how successful was Clinton as a governor? This question, which not only was raised by the Bush campaign but long has been an issue among observers of Clinton, raises an important point in respect to Clinton’s presidential promise:

Clinton's credentials and abilities always have been rated so highly by political observers that his performance as an elected official has been held to nothing but the highest expectations and standards. Indeed, once he surfaced as a candidate for the 3rd Congressional District seat in 1974, he was anointed by political elites as a soon-to-be governor or U.S. Senator, and once he was governor—at the incredibly youthful age of 32—it simply was assumed that he was presidential timber. A story related by George Jernigan, currently Arkansas Democratic State Chair and himself once a young, rising political star who competed with Clinton during the 1976 Democratic primary for attorney general, illustrates the early promise of Clinton as a candidate. “He showed up at the Pope County Picnic in 1974—which is our traditional political kickoff—opened his mouth and everyone just knew . . .” “He just beat the hell out of me” (quoted in Klein 1992, 30).

The Emergence of Clinton's Campaign Style: His First Campaign

Clinton chose the Capitol Hill route, rather than an internal state office strategy, for his first try for elected office. His try for the Congress was dictated largely by the political environment in the state and the nation at the time. J. William Fulbright—a patron Saint for the young Clinton, who had worked as a summer intern on his Senate Foreign Relations Committee—just had been defeated by Governor Dale Bumpers for the Democratic nomination for the Senate. David Pryor was moving on to the governorship as the Democratic party's nominee, and another “young Turk” in Arkansas politics, Jim Guy Tucker, was the odds-on favorite in Republican-poor Arkansas to become the next attorney general. There simply was no office worthy of a potential heavy-weight to seek. Consequently, Clinton drew a bead on John Paul Hammerschmidt's 3rd Congressional District seat. Hammerschmidt, a Republican, had been elected to Congress in 1966, when the state elected Winthrop Rockefeller its first Republican Governor since Reconstruction, and Maurice “Footsie” Britt its first Republican Lieutenant Governor since the creation of that office in the 1920s (Bass DeVries 1976).

At the national level, Republicans were suffering through the final months of the Watergate scandal when Clinton announced his candidacy for Hammerschmidt's seat on 22 March 1974. As a professor at the University of Arkansas Law School in Fayetteville, Clinton had a natural base in Hammerschmidt's district. However, despite the Watergate problems of his party, Hammerschmidt was a four-term incumbent who represented a district known for its “Mountain Republicanism.” Moreover, he was reputed to have one of the most organized constituent home-styles in the Congress. Destined to hold onto his seat until retirement in 1992, “John Paul”—as he was

known to constituents—already had become an institution in the 3rd Congressional District.

Clinton's uphill campaign for Congress evidenced many of the campaign techniques utilized in his presidential campaign. During the primary, the subsequent run-off primary, and the general election, Clinton met voters wherever and whenever he could find them. He knew that politics, Arkansas-style, was personal politics, looking voters in the eye and shaking their hand, talking to voters in general stores, meeting them at Friday night auctions, and attending rallies where catfish and political speeches were the menu. Clinton met voters 18 hours a day; yet, he did not ignore issues, either. His prime message during the campaign was that America's political institutions could be better—including the Congress, especially the representation of Arkansas' 3rd Congressional District. He attacked Hammerschmidt incessantly for being unrepresentative of the district. During one trip he told Johnson County coal miners that while Hammerschmidt had voted for the Black Lung Benefits Act of 1972, he also had voted for two unsuccessful amendments that would have gutted the program (*Arkansas Gazette* 1 September 1974, 18A). Clinton also took Hammerschmidt to task for voting against the Head Start program, the child abuse program, and the House impeachment inquiry (*Arkansas Gazette* 1 September 1974, 3A).

Besides vigorously attacking Hammerschmidt's voting record, Clinton attacked Congress—and his own party in this regard—for being more interested in re-election than serving the voters with effective policy representation. Handling constituent inquiries was just one part of the job expected of members of Congress, Clinton told voters, and it was not a substitute for good policy. This message was aimed expressly at Hammerschmidt, who spent countless hours in constituent service. In this sense, Clinton's rhetoric at that time does seem antecedent of some of his later speeches as a presidential candidate, as well as of his first major speech to Congress. That is, Clinton was willing to blame both Democrats and Republicans for failing to deal with the deficit, for causing voters to lose faith in their political institutions, and for failing to respond to real problems (*Arkansas Gazette* 25 September 1974, 19A).

What was particularly interesting about Clinton's 1974 race for Congress was the strong emphasis he placed upon specific policy issues, beyond simply "pressing the flesh." Clinton talked about the deficit, about the need for greater levels of federal aid to education within a structure of local control, about national health insurance, about the public financing of presidential elections, about an excess profits tax on corporations, and about the need for improving the skills of teachers—many of the same sorts of issues that became his agenda as governor and president. Thus, although he could

not overcome the entrenched incumbency of Hammershmidt, Clinton did establish himself as a rising star in Arkansas politics.

Clinton as Attorney General

It was a foregone conclusion that Clinton would run for, and win, the office of attorney general. Tucker was giving it up after only two years to run for the 2nd Congressional seat that had opened up with “the Chairman’s” retirement. John McClellan and Dale Bumpers were firmly ensconced in the Senate, and the office of attorney general had been an excellent stepping-stone to bids for higher office, as evidenced by the careers of both of Clinton’s predecessors in that office, Ray Thornton and Jim Guy Tucker (both of whom moved on to Congress from the AG’s office). They had used the office as a bully pulpit from which to bash the utilities and advocate consumerism. It was a populism as natural and unabashed in Arkansas as hogs in a pen, and Clinton fit right in. Indeed, when Clinton announced his intentions for the office on 17 March 1976, with his wife looking on, he said that the office had become “the great protector of the people” in the last decade (*Arkansas Gazette* 18 March 1976, 1A).

In turn, Clinton advocated a stronger consumer investigative arm for the AG’s office, a work release program—a kind of predecessor of boot camps—to alleviate overcrowded prisons, an equalization of property assessment in the counties to support education more fairly (*Arkansas Gazette* 15 January 1978, 7A), and supported Arkansas’s capital punishment law as appropriately drawn, subject to interpretation by the United States Supreme Court—a position that later stood him in good stead in Arkansas and in the nation. However, as the second year of Clinton’s term began to wind down, it became clear that Clinton was acting more like the Democratic nominee for governor than the attorney general of Arkansas. At a hearing before a legislative subcommittee on aging, Clinton advocated federal subsidies for utility bills for the poor and a training program in home repair and insurance installation to help poor people maintain their homes and avoid institutional care (*Arkansas Gazette* 17 February 1978, 5A). Clinton also unveiled a tactic at this time that he was to repeat just before he organized his campaign for the presidency: he published, with donated funds, a document entitled “Attorney General’s Report,” which described in rapturous terms his accomplishments as attorney general (*Arkansas Gazette* 12 January 1978, 5A).

The Gubernatorial Clinton

The office of governor in Arkansas formally is not a very strong one (Blair 1988; Beyle 1989). Gubernatorial vetoes may be overturned by a simple majority of the legislature (18 in the Senate and 51 in the House), and the executive branch is fragmented among five other independently elected officials who have their own specialized, if largely unintrusive state governmental functions with respect to the governor. For years, budgeting was dominated by the powerful Legislative Council, which meets during the legislative interim, and by the equally powerful Joint Budget Committee, which writes the Revenue and Stabilization Act during the odd year sessions (Blair 1988). With two year terms until 1986 and limited patronage power in terms of either state employees (who are mostly civil service) or judges (who are elected by the people), Arkansas governors have not had an overabundance of formal or informal political resources available to them. In addition, the state constitution strengthens the hand of already powerful interest groups by requiring a three-fourths majority for the adoption of all taxes except the sales tax (English and Carroll 1983).

On the other hand, the Governor in Arkansas does have some important cards to play if he chooses. The Constitution allows the governor not only to call special sessions but also to determine the legislative agenda of such—a tactic that Clinton often used to salvage good legislative sessions following mediocre regular ones. The Constitution also allows an item veto for individual appropriation measures. Arkansas also is rife with hundreds of commissions and boards that regulate businesses and professions in the state, allowing a governor ample opportunity to use status patronage as a means to build a campaign machine of grateful recipients (Blair 1982).

Clinton saw the possibilities for strong, visionary executive leadership when he took office in 1979. While the legislature potentially was a strong stumbling block if aroused, it had no internal forces with which to start and drive itself, and was very receptive to leadership. Moreover, the intimacy of politics in Arkansas lent itself to the personal energy of a legislative leader such as Clinton. With his suite of offices just below the House, merely a short walk or “jog” from the Senate, Clinton frequently called legislators into his office for personal meetings, he testified before them at public hearings, and he lobbied them in the hallways. He even watched them—peering in from doorway windows—as legislators deliberated important administration bills in committee rooms located both adjacent to and below the governor’s office. And he learned from the pitfalls of his first legislative session, during which he employed staff assistants who did not understand legislative courtesy and pleasantries, by later employing aides

who would treat people with respect and make them feel good (Blair 1988). During the 78th General Assembly (1991), for example, this author observed a key Clinton aide (who now holds an important position in the Administration) delivering a message from the Governor to a senator. The conversation was interspersed with “Yes, Sir” and “Yes, Senator”—deference and respect that legislators expect and appreciate from executive branch staffers.

Clinton also knew that in order to accomplish what he wanted he had to provide the legislature and the people with a game plan, a direction in which he wanted to take them. Arkansas, of course, always had been a poor state and many of its citizens shared the inferiority complex that accompanied poor schools, slow economic growth, and low per capita income. But Clinton sensed that there was room for progress with the right plan and the right message. And the way in which he set the agenda for Arkansas during his long tenure as governor—and he was a more successful governor than often given credit for—suggests a substantial presidential promise for the nation (Johnston 1982). Clinton can both conceptualize and sell a program. His rhetoric, as Mary Stuckey (1991) prescribes, is deliberative and engaging, and he has the persistence and resiliency to keep working and trying until he is successful, as much of his legislative and campaign record attests.

Clinton’s Rhetoric

What shape and form does Clinton’s rhetoric take? Table 1 shows the results of the content analysis performed for his five inaugural addresses as Governor and his inaugural address as President.

Table 1. Clinton’s Inaugural Addresses

Inaugurals	The People	Human Develop	Do Better	Policy
1979 1447 wds	50 ref.	12 ref.	1 ref.	16 ref.
1983 1197 wds	58 ref.	9 ref.	0 ref.	18 ref.
1985 1996 wds	83 ref.	29 ref.	4 ref.	26 ref.
1987 1782 wds	85 ref.	54 ref.	3 ref.	26 ref.
1991 4236 wds	113 ref.	48 ref.	3 ref.	27 ref.
1993 1459 wds	112 ref.	2 ref.	2 ref.	3 ref.

The longer Clinton stayed in office, the longer and more policy-driven his inaugural addresses became. A policy was coded as such anytime there was an endorsement of a particular program by Clinton. In his first term as governor, Clinton tended to try to do too many things—a striking similarity to his first days as president, when divisive social issues such as gay rights and abortion counseling somehow appeared at the top of his agenda. Following his unexpected defeat in 1980, Clinton became more focused, pursuing primarily education and economic development. In that sense, his addresses beginning in 1985 were spiced with allusions to educational programs for children (such as applying Head Start to every primary school in the state, making sure every school could offer language, advanced math, and science courses) and upgrading job skills for workers (so that they could return to the workforce as productive employees).

Clinton's political style also underwent a transformation after his defeat for re-election. He became more cautious, more sensitive to building political consensus before acting, and more humble about his ability to govern effectively. His first term had been driven more by ideas than by a concern for how those ideas affected people. For example, one policy aimed at shoring up the state's transportation infrastructure by increasing title transfer and car tag registration fees undoubtedly did not seem politically risky to the innovative new governor, but it offended many rural constituents who simply didn't care whether the policy would benefit them in the long run if it was hurting them now (Osborne 1990). Others worried or offended by the behavior of rioting Cuban *Marielitos* housed at Fort Chaffee believed that Clinton had offered little resistance, for political reasons, to President Carter's relocation of these Cuban prison detainees to Arkansas. The result was a startling defeat for Clinton at the hands of Frank White, a virtual newcomer to politics. "Cartags and Cubans" became the alliterative explanation for why Clinton lost the 1980 election, but the deeper meaning of that defeat for Clinton is what he learned about balancing programmatic ideas with the proper political cultivation of ideas. Indeed, after this defeat Clinton became (1) much more sensitive about building consensus before he acted, as he did on the educational standards issue, on which public hearings were held in every county in the state before action was taken; (2) much less demanding in asking the legislature for tax increases, as when he took a one-half cent increase in the sales tax (for raising teachers' salaries) in the 1991 session, when he might have gotten a full penny had he pushed; and (3) much more sensitive to what the people thought, as when he took a whirlwind tour of the state to find out if Arkansans would support his run for the presidency after he had promised during the 1990 campaign that, if elected, he would serve a full four year term.

While Clinton's inaugural addresses do provide insight into his ideas and philosophy of government, they also shed light on many different aspects of Clinton's rhetorical leadership. Clinton, for example, always has placed great faith in engaging the people in discussions about their polity (Rosenthal 1990). In Arkansas' politics of intimacy, a typical Clinton strategy for gaining support for an important policy initiative was to take it to the people, sometimes through radio, sometimes through television, but mostly through countless individual meetings and discussions with the people themselves. It is not surprising, then, that Clinton's greatest policy triumph was the passage of the educational accountability standards for students and teachers. This landmark event in Clinton's career occurred after his wife, as head of the education task force, held public hearings in all 75 counties of the state, a method that Clinton now is employing to begin the national discussion and debate over national health care reform. It is not surprising, either, that Clinton in his rhetoric places a great deal of emphasis upon his identification with the people, as measured by the number of references to "us," "we," "our," and "the people." This aspect of his rhetoric appears to be a prime way in which he attempts to make his goals the goals of the people. And this portion of the Clinton rhetorical model does seem relevant to his presidential promise, since his inaugural address to the nation had so many references that joined Clinton and the people as one.

Clinton's rhetoric in his inaugural speeches as governor also addresses themes such as personal responsibility, the future, the need to recognize the political and economic reality of the international system, and the call "we can do better," which is reminiscent of the rhetoric of John F. Kennedy. Indeed, Clinton is an extraordinarily competent wordsmith who promises to have a great effect in terms of challenging Americans to do more for their country than they otherwise would do, and his presidential rhetoric seems to be very similar to the words of his gubernatorial addresses. Compare, for example, this phrasing from his last inaugural address as governor with the words from his presidential inaugural:

Whether we like it or not, we are a community, a community in which we will go forward together or not at all, in which we will rise together or in which none of us will ever see our beloved state come to the point to which we all want (1991).

In serving, we recognize a simple but powerful truth: we need each other. And we must care for one another. Today, we do more than celebrate America; we rededicate ourselves to the very idea of America (1993).

Another very interesting aspect of Clinton's rhetoric are his fairly frequent allusions to hardship and struggle, concepts with which he had dealt

as a young man. Compare, for example, his words from his 1979 and 1983 inaugurals with his presidential address:

We live in a world in which limited resources, limited knowledge, and limited wisdom must grapple with problems of staggering complexity and confront strong sources of power, wealth, conflict, and even destruction, over which we have no control and little influence (1979).

Today we are engaged in a new battle with an old and familiar enemy, hard times. Hard times dominate the long history of Arkansas. For generations our families have been forced to endure them and struggle to overcome them. The most moving story of my childhood was that of my grandfather coming home on Good Friday afternoon during the Depression and crying on his knees to my mother because he could not afford a \$2 Easter dress (1983).

We know we have to face hard truths and take strong steps. But we have not done so. Instead, we have drifted, and that drifting has eroded our resources, fractured our economy, and shaken our confidence. Though our challenges are fearsome, so are our strengths. Americans have ever been a restless, questioning hopeful people. We must bring to our task today the vision and will of those who came before us (1993).

Clinton's State of the State Addresses

In addition to his inaugural addresses, Clinton presented six state of the state speeches to the Arkansas General Assembly at the beginning of each regular legislative session. For the 1983 and 1985 speeches, there may not be a printed record. The 1983 speech, for example, which lasted 52 minutes, was given without prepared remarks (Brummett 19 January 1983)—not uncommon for Clinton, who delivered numerous speeches without a prepared text while stumping across the state for his educational standards package. And the 1985 speech was a 90 minute “exercise” in which Clinton went page-by-page over a 312-page legislative package not yet introduced to the Assembly (Brummett 22 January 1985). Table 2 presents the results of the content analysis on several key items for Clinton's 1979, 1987, 1989, and 1991 state of the state addresses to the Arkansas General Assembly and his 17 February 1993 call for action to the Congress and the American people.

Clinton's state of the state speeches, since they were aimed primarily at the legislature, tended to be longer and more policy-laden than his inaugural addresses. They were punctuated with frequent calls for more money for secondary and higher education, increases in teacher salaries, innovative capital investment programs, better education and health care for children, money for the state war on drugs, and so forth. As far as results, the success of these sessions tended to be mixed, with the 1987 and 1989 sessions less productive than the 1983, 1985, and 1991 sessions. Overall,

however, these sessions generally demonstrated that Clinton was an effective legislative leader who usually could get what he wanted out of often tight-fisted Assemblies.

The 1983 session was pivotal for Clinton because of his ability to get student- and teacher-accountability legislation through the Assembly, funded by a one cent increase in the sales tax. The 1985 session was marked by the passage of a bill making Arkansas the first state to reaffirm a basic skills test for its teachers, and passage of a tax increase on gasoline and diesel fuel which raised \$50 million for roads and which, ironically, was passed over Clinton's half-hearted veto—a symbolic gesture that enabled the governor to posture as the guardian of the public purse strings (Brummett 24 March 1985). The end of this session also demonstrated the kind of lobbying style that members of Congress might see, were it not for the geographic and constitutional distance between the White House and the Capitol. In a confrontation between the Senate and the House over amendments to the Revenue Stabilization Act, which sets the biennial spending priorities for the state, Clinton “jogged” from one house to the other, eating pizza for his supper while arranging a compromise between the two houses so that the session could adjourn and the legislators could go home to their districts (Brummett 24 March 1985). Interestingly, the compromise was not viewed as acceptable by either party; yet Clinton not only was able to persuade the parties to accept the “deal,” he was willing to accept it himself—suggesting perhaps that compromise may be much more in keeping with Clinton's political style than sticking to principle. Nonetheless, Clinton was viewed as so effective during the 75th General Assembly that one study of legislators and lobbyists ranked him as the most powerful actor in Arkansas politics in 1985 (English and Carroll 1992).

Clinton was not as well organized for the 1987 session (the legislative program was not prepared before the legislators got to Little Rock), and it showed as the General Assembly rejected a one-quarter cent sales tax that was part of a \$100 million revenue program that Clinton said he needed to fund school standards and human service programs (Van Landingham 5 April 1987). The 1989 session was similarly unproductive. Arkansas legislators—who are very constituent-oriented on controversial bills (English 1992), especially when it might mean a tax hike for low income citizens in their districts—resisted Clinton's entreaties to raise money for secondary and higher education school funding by refusing to pass either an increase in the income or sales taxes. Although Clinton otherwise had a high rate of passage of bills through the 76th Assembly, modern legislative sessions usually are not considered successful unless key revenue items are adopted (Reed 2 March 1989). After this session, some observers thought Clinton

might not seek a fourth term, or at least would be markedly vulnerable to an electoral challenge. That challenge did come, but in a turn of events that only can be viewed as exceedingly lucky for Clinton, (1) his strongest potential primary opponent (incumbent Attorney General Steve Clark) self-destructed by disguising expensive personal entertainment as business expenses; (2) another formidable and experienced politician (former attorney general and congressman Jim Guy Tucker) withdrew from the gubernatorial primary to run for lieutenant governor instead; and (3) the strongest remaining primary opponent (former WinRock Foundation head Tom McRae) forgot to attend a candidate debate; while (4) two strong Republican challengers (then-Congressman Tommy Robinson and former Arkansas-Louisiana Gas CEO Sheffield Nelson) cut each other to pieces in one of the most divisive primaries in Arkansas political history.

The 1991 session gave a tremendous boost to Clinton's presidential plans. While he had a four year term, and thus a free run at the presidency, it might have been difficult to craft a strong presidential campaign coming off three lackluster legislative sessions in a row. That simply did not happen. The impending Persian Gulf War seemed to energize the legislators by making their concerns seem small in relation to the national and global consequences of war in the Middle East. Furthermore, Clinton had laid the groundwork for a successful session by holding extensive pre-session meetings with legislators before the regular session had begun. In consequence, within the first two weeks of the session the legislature had adopted a one-half cent increase in the sales tax to finance a \$4,000 increase in public school teacher salaries over the next biennium. In addition, a low cost health care program was passed, and an environmental package which included restructuring of the industry-dominated Pollution Control and Ecology Commission passed. Also adopted was an innovative bank deposit plan in which the state would deposit money in "linkage" banks, which then would loan the money to businesses at interest rates that were lower than going market rates. All in all, Clinton passed 73 out of 75 administration bills during his last session as governor (Woolsey 1 April 1991). In explaining the success of the session, Clinton observed:

The argument that I tried to make—that the legislature clearly bought—was that nothing that happens in the short term of the economy and nothing that happens in the Middle East could change the underlying reality, which was that Arkansas was not as well educated or as healthy as the rest of the country . . . and that if we really wanted to do something for our men and women in the Persian Gulf we needed to give them a better state to come home to (quoted in Woolsey 1 April 1991).

A profile of the data in Table 2 also reveals some other interesting relationships. Note, for example, the very large number of references to the people mentioned in Clinton's first major program speech to the Congress. Again, the Clinton rhetoric to legislative bodies tended to play upon policy themes, education and jobs, and upon the common identification of the goals that must be taken on and accomplished by all Americans. Since the age of television long since has eclipsed the days of an insulated speech to a sitting legislature, it is axiomatic to say that Clinton's rhetoric on 17 February 1993, like that of virtually all presidents since 1960, was aimed well beyond the halls of Congress, to the people themselves.

Table 2. Clinton's State of the State Addresses

State of the State	The People	Human Develop	Policy
1979 8822 words	85 ref.	82 ref.	47 ref.
1987 3264 words	54 ref.	55 ref.	28 ref.
1989 6655 words	156 ref.	162 ref.	25 ref.
1991 1860 words	61 ref.	29 ref.	22 ref.
1993 4200 words	160 ref.	44 ref.	38 ref.

Presidential Inaugurals

It is assumed that a presidential inaugural would be a good place to gain insight into the underlying governing values of a President, and that Clinton's rhetoric in particular—given his disposition toward policy—might reveal where he wants to take the country. In consequence, a content analysis of all presidential inaugural speeches, from FDR through Clinton, was performed to get some sense of how Clinton's rhetoric might compare or differ from that of his predecessors. Table 3 reports those data by ranking for each president the three most frequent word references in their addresses.

Inspection of the table reveals several patterns. First, the speeches, as expected, are relatively short and do not have many references to policy endorsements or commitments. Inaugural addresses are speeches in which new presidents outline their vision for the nation, rather than their specific agenda. Second is the large number of references that all of the Presidents made identifying themselves with the people and the nation, the rhetoric of "we," "us," or "our." A President who wishes to share his/her vision with

Table 3. Presidential Inaugurals

Inaugurals		The People	Priority 1	Priority 2
FDR	2000 words	33 ref.	Foreign	God
FDR	2000 words	71 ref.	Creat-Gov	None
FDR	1350 words	47 ref.	Creat-Gov	Foreign
FDR	600 words	38 ref.	God	Together
HST	2400 words	96 ref.	Foreign	Together
DDE	2500 words	110 ref.	Foreign	God
DDE	1500 words	67 ref.	Foreign	Policy
JFK	1300 words	43 ref.	Foreign	Policy
LBJ	1400 words	50 ref.	Policy	God
RMN	2000 words	112 ref.	Foreign	Future
RMN	2400 words	69 ref.	Foreign	Personal Rep
JC	1200 words	62 ref.	Foreign	God
RR	2500 words	96 ref.	Foreign	God
RR	2500 words	100 ref.	God	Foreign
GB	2100 words	80 ref.	God	Foreign
BC	1600 words	112 ref.	Foreign	Future

the nation and move it in that direction of course will attempt to identify his/her goals as the goals of the American people. Presidential inaugurals, at least since the advent of the modern presidency, have this common thread. A third pattern is that the second and third most frequently used words in modern presidential addresses—at least in terms of the model that was utilized here—refer to the international system and God. References to the international system particularly seem to pick up with Truman’s 1948 inaugural address, which coincides with the beginning of the Cold War. And if post-World War II Presidents have any policy orientation in their inaugural speeches, it is directed to the international system.

It is not unexpected to find references to God in these presidential addresses. Washington, in his first inaugural, made a number of references to religious symbols such as “. . . that Almighty Being who rules over the universe, who presides in the council of nations . . .,” and “. . . the Great Author of every public and private good . . .” (*Inaugural Addresses* 1989). Modern Presidents have continued this religious deference. Eisenhower began both of his inaugural addresses with a prayer, as did Bush, and Clinton ended his inaugural address with the words, “We have heard the trumpets. We have changed the guard. And now each in our own way, and

with God's help—we must answer the call.” References to God thus seem to be another common thread of inaugural rhetoric.

Clinton's inaugural is at once similar to and different from previous presidential inaugural addresses. While it is similar in its general profile of words, it differs in the sheer repetition of its attempts to state identification with the people and the nation. Although Clinton's inaugural address is considerably shorter than both of Reagan's addresses and the first inaugural addresses of Eisenhower and of Nixon, all of which sought to identify their vision with that of the American people, Clinton's speech proportionately seeks such linkage with much greater frequency. Clinton's speech also differs, of course, in his conception of the role and mission of government. Whereas many of the presidents of the last 50 years were Republicans who spoke of limited and even negative government, Clinton's conception of government, which provides insight into his agenda for the nation, speaks of government as an innovator and catalyst for change—not as a paternalistic father, but more like an encouraging older sibling who gets the younger children going by helping when help is needed, expecting independence in return. This theme is the essence of Clinton's rhetoric and agenda for the nation, and was strongly stated in his inaugural address:

It is time to break the bad habit of expecting something for nothing from our government or from each other. Let us take more responsibility, not only for ourselves and our families but for our communities and our country.

Let us resolve to make our government a place for what Franklin D. Roosevelt called “bold, persistent experimentation,” a government for our tomorrows, not our yesterdays.

Discussion

Bill Clinton enters the presidential stage with tremendous promise. He brings as much if not more political skill to the office than any president in memory. In Arkansas, a difficult state to govern, Clinton showed a facility to make his agenda the state's agenda. He suffered defeats and setbacks, but demonstrated a remarkable resiliency and persistence of commitment to his agenda, and an ability to learn and adapt to political realities. The political skills learned in the rough and tumble world of Arkansas politics should serve him well in the nation's capital, where politics is a bloodsport. Clinton has a personal warmth that he conveys readily to all he meets. He is able to impart an intimacy to people that few politicians have had the ability to do, as demonstrated by the hundreds, if not thousands, of “FOBs” (friends of Bill) and Arkansas Travellers who flew out of Little Rock at their own expense to campaign for him. Clinton also is multi-faceted in the kinds of

political skills he brings to the presidency. He can make the inspiring speech, he enjoys personally lobbying legislators, he likes making phone calls to line up support, and his energy for meeting the people directly, as demonstrated during the campaign, already is the stuff of political legend.

On the other hand, Clinton also has a reputation for indecisiveness and caution, either of which may not serve him well in a Washington environment that treats wavering presidents with disdain. Clinton's rhetoric is world class, but his willingness to compromise sometimes has been seen as a weakness rather than a strength. A president has to project a strong image to the nation. He has to stand up for his program and work tirelessly for it. It is not enough to talk the game, a president must live it and convey that passion and commitment to the nation. For Clinton to succeed as president, he must meld the rhetoric with action and he must engage the problems and those who oppose him directly, rather than play the political game at the margins, as he often did in Arkansas.

Clinton's agenda for the nation is very much like his agenda for Arkansas when he first became governor: better jobs, better schools, better health care, and better lives for everyone—and greater responsibility and sacrifice to achieve it. In Arkansas, Clinton did have a strong, positive effect upon the state, even though the infamous “state rankings” did not climb dramatically. Clinton, in this sense, may have achieved substantial incremental policy reform rather than comprehensive reform in Arkansas, a pattern that also may be true in the presidency, where comprehensive or revolutionary change is the exception, rather than the rule. In truth, in Arkansas public education appears dramatically better, the tax base is a little broader, employment is generally better, and Arkansans appear to feel much better about their state and their future. Yet, few would say that after 12 years of Clinton there isn't a lot left to do to make life better for many citizens in the state.

With his keen rhetorical ability and greater resources at his disposal, Clinton as president has the opportunity to achieve greater change at a quicker rate than he did in Arkansas—however, the pitfalls of the presidency also are greater. A new president must capture the public's imagination fairly quickly. A president must remain focused on the major principles of his agenda. And a president must demonstrate courage and character in his political battles—as Kennedy, Roosevelt, Wilson, and Reagan did. A president also must be able to walk the domestic and foreign tight rope. Will the Bosnian situation, for example, be a springboard to domestic reform for Clinton, or a precipice from which his presidency may free fall?

Whether Clinton will be a president of *preparation* or of *achievement* (Hargrove and Nelson 1984; Nelson 1993), or merely a one-term deviation from Republican domination of the office, is a fascinating question for

students of the presidency. Some observers of the office have put the question in more direct and personal terms: will Clinton be a Kennedy or a Carter? Ironically, Clinton resembles both. He has the look and rhetoric of Kennedy, but at times displays the indecisiveness and caution characteristic of President Carter's decision-making style. As governor, Clinton exhibited both forcefulness and indecisiveness. His leadership and boldness in taking on the Arkansas Educational Association—often singled out as the strongest interest group in Arkansas, and a strong ally in his first two races—over teacher testing bodes well for his tenure as president, in that he kept his commitment in that instance to the fundamental principle of educational change in the face of great political risk. His penchant for political compromise may harm him less on prominent issues such as health care, jobs, and deficit reduction—indeed, it usually is a strength to work out the problems in proposed legislation with impacted parties before it hits the Congress and the media, as long as the public believes that he has not abandoned his commitment to real change. But the perception of weakness of commitment to the principles so eloquently expressed in Clinton's rhetoric could wreck his presidency even before it starts. After all, slogans such as “Why not the Best” (Carter) or “We can do better” (Clinton) may become lightning rods for distrust and cynicism, if actions do not seem to match words. Clinton's promise as President, then, seems to hang in delicate balance. He must keep his message of fundamental change intact by underscoring his commanding words with personal toughness and an ability to pass the basics of his program under fire. A perception by the public that he lacks the political will, the “fire in the belly” to fight hard for his program, or prefers compromise to principle, could make Clinton a one term president.

Clinton has the political skill to succeed, he has claimed a mandate for change, and he has the rhetoric to lead. He will need to translate words into bold actions if he is to realize the promise that is explicit in the vision stated in his first inaugural address as governor:

For as long as I can remember, I have believed passionately in the cause of equal opportunity, and I will do what I can to advance it . . . For as long as I can remember, I have wished to ease the burdens of life for those who, through no fault of their own, are old or weak or needy, and I will try to help them. For as long as I can remember, I have been saddened by the sight of so many of our independent, industrious, people working too hard for too little because of inadequate economic opportunities, and I will do what I can to enhance them. Today, we begin anew the people's business in a time that is confusing, uncertain, and sometimes difficult to understand . . . We live in a world in which limited resources, limited knowledge, limited wisdom must grapple with problems of staggering complexity and confront strong sources of power, wealth, conflict, and even destruction, over which we have no control and little influence . . . (1979).

NOTES

¹If you count Clinton's career in "public office" at Boys State (a state sponsored program for high school leaders), class president at Hot Springs High School and Georgetown University, his political career takes up 30 of his 46 years.

²The words in Clinton's inaugural addresses, including his presidential address, his state of the state addresses, and his 17 February 1993 address on his agenda for the nation, were counted word for word. The number of words shown in Table III was reached according to the following method: an "average" number of words per line was taken by scanning the address skipping lines with less than half the words of what the average appeared to be. The average number of words per line then was multiplied by the number of lines and rounded to the nearest 100 words. For example, if an address contained seven words at 152 full lines, the total number of words in the table for that address would be 1100.

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