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# Diane D. Blair Papers (MC 1632)

## 1992 Clinton Presidential Campaign Interviews

Interview with Michael G. Gauldin

Campaign Position: Governor Clinton's Press Secretary

Little Rock, Arkansas

October 19, 1992

### Overview

Diane D. Blair was an assistant professor of political science at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, when she took a leave of absence to serve as a senior researcher in Governor Bill Clinton's presidential campaign. Approximately one month before the November election, Blair obtained permission from the governor to conduct interviews with participants in the Clinton/Gore campaign. In her own words, ". . . I had two major purposes in mind: first, simply to preserve for posterity an accomplished campaign organization that would essentially disappear on election day; and second, through discussions with campaign workers from all departments, to see what those on the inside believed to be the key ingredients of the campaign's success." She prepared a list of questions and began interviewing people as schedules allowed.

After Blair's death in 2000, her husband, Jim Blair, donated her personal and professional papers to Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries. Michael G. Gauldin reviewed this transcript and granted permission to make this interview available to scholars, students, and researchers. The final document may contain edits requested by the interviewee. This transcript was processed as part of the Diane D. Blair Papers and prepared for publication by the editorial staff of the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History.

[Beginning of Interview]

Diane Blair: How would you describe your position with the campaign?

Mike Gauldin: Well, I would describe it as not full-time—I'm attached to one office of the campaign, and I flow in and out of another office.

DB: What office is that?

MG: I'm attached to the research office, but I have a lot to do with the people in the press office, and, really, those are the two functions I know anything about. Mainly I'm at the State Capitol full-time, regular working hours. I work with the campaign after hours, on weekends, or on leave, if I'm needed. My relationship to the campaign, I guess, is an accessory or reinforcements, maybe.

DB: Well walk me through a day. On a typical day, for example, how many contacts would you have with the campaign? And about what?

MG: All my contacts with the campaign would be concerning information about Arkansas. That is, the area that I work in is what we call the Arkansas Record. And since I've worked for Clinton's press office for five and a half years, I have, first of all, memories and files and internal knowledge of both Clinton's record and state government in general. So, my contacts with the campaign are checking facts, providing facts, answering questions, helping people find things, recommending to them people to talk to. I also have a function with the campaign in which I talk to reporters who are asking about the same thing. Reporters call me up and ask me anything from Clinton's jacket size to how he dealt with the Cuban crisis at Fort Chaffee.

DB: Would you say that the interest in Governor Clinton as a person and as a politician and as a governor has increased dramatically?

MG: Oh, of course.

DB: And what percentage of the calls that you get now, the inquiries that you get, are really campaign-related?

MG: Oh, almost all. It's impossible to escape the umbrella of the campaign. It's pervasive. It makes things that you would not think of as campaign issues become campaign issues.

DB: Give me an example.

MG: Having to cut Medicaid. Strictly a state issue, in one definition. But also, because it impacts Clinton's management of the state, it becomes a campaign issue. But it is my issue to handle since it originates in state government. So if I get calls on it, those are calls that I deal with.

DB: Have you had a difficult time with people at the campaign who know little about Arkansas and nothing about Clinton trying to handle these questions on that, or have they been pretty eager to pass them on?

MG: Oh, they've been too damn eager to pass them on, frankly. No, nobody at the campaign—except in the research office, which has people in it who are familiar with the Arkansas Record—has really dared to broach into that area without knowing anything. In fact, I've had to ask the campaign not to refer their constituent calls to us. Because we get people calling from Ohio wanting to know Clinton's position on this or Clinton's position on that. Those are campaign calls. Those are not calls from Arkansans wanting to know about state government.

They're political calls, and I have to refer them back to the campaign. And it gets into this little ping-pong match of who's going to deal with the questions. That has pretty much stopped, since I complained.

DB: One of the things that has struck many observers as a rather dramatic difference between this campaign and the Dukakis campaign is the grief that was visited upon Dukakis by his own state government. At the beginning of this year, it was a situation that seemed to many observers to be fraught with similar possibilities. Could you tell me now how this was handled?

MG: Well, interestingly, right after Clinton announced, on the date he announced, I had a long conversation with Chris Black from the *Boston Globe*, who had covered the Dukakis campaign and who gave me the phone number of Dukakis's state press secretary, whose name I've forgotten. But I called him shortly after that. The guy had been through it before. And got the skinny on this problem they had with their lieutenant governor and kind of the political context, and how things had worked. Now, he had warned me that one of the big problems with the campaign was that Dukakis's press secretary had been a little unhappy during the whole campaign because he wanted to go to the campaign. But he was real helpful. And he offered to talk to me any time I needed it. I haven't talked to him since, but I mean, the advice he gave me was pretty useful. I don't remember now the details of what their situation was.

DB: I think their legislature was in session.

MG: Their legislature is in session all the time. And he had a lot more of his political enemies were in state government, or in the legislature, than ours. We had a lot of

things that worked for us. The first was the leadership of the legislature, and most of the legislature was very supportive of Clinton. The state agencies, the governor's staff, for the most part, are led by people who have long seniority or long experience in their jobs. I mean, we have people—we have one person on staff who worked for Clinton in his first term. Most of the people in high positions on the staff have been with him since 1983. I'm kind of the new kid on the block because I didn't come around till 1987. The other people that have come later have been very quick studies—people like Ken Smith, who only came a couple of years ago, but just fit right in and knows his stuff. So we have a very experienced, capable staff, very experienced, capable agency directors, cabinet. There was friction early between the lieutenant governor and the governor's staff, which worked out. I think it was just kind of a settling in process. You have to look at it from the position of Jim Guy Tucker, who was lieutenant governor. He knew that he would be acting governor probably for a great deal of the year, and would—since he only has three or four people on his staff—have to work with the governor's staff. Now, of course, Clinton and Tucker, in one sense, are political rivals.

DB: They ran against each other.

MG: They ran against each other. Clinton beat Tucker, and Tucker has not forgotten it. And so there were kind of little political grudges there. He also had no idea if the governor's staff would accept his authority, If the legislature would. If the people of Arkansas would. I think there was a time period there where he went through a few kinds of testing his parameters. And there were disagreements among us. We

advised Tucker in the same way we would advise Clinton. However, Tucker has no idea how we advise Clinton. If I sit across the table from Tucker and say, "You should not do this," he has no idea that I would tell Clinton, "You should not do this." I mean, he does not know me, and does not know but that I may be just trying to manipulate him.

DB: Did he bring in any of his own people?

MG: Well, he has his own staff. But the lieutenant governor's staff is two advisors and a couple of secretaries. We got an extra person at some point—I think it was in the 1991 session—added to his staff. But that's basically two professionals. So he went through a period where he had to kind of do things. He had to appoint somebody, release some money, do this, do that.

DB: There was controversy over appointments at first, wasn't there?

MG: There was. He and Clinton had to work out some conditions they could live with. And I think that everybody was kind of suspicious. We were circling around each other.

DB: I thought you were highly suspicious at first.

MG: I was.

DB: And beyond suspicious, quite antagonistic.

MG: Well, I'll tell you what I told Jim Guy Tucker, was that the way I perceived my job was to serve Bill Clinton, number one. And my instructions from Bill Clinton were, number two, to serve Jim Guy Tucker in any way that did not conflict with rule number one. And he accepted that. I've gained a lot more respect for the guy than I had at first. But I think basically after he had tested the limits of the envelope

and assured himself that he was going to get cooperation, and he was going to be respected and his orders were going to be followed by the governor's staff, by the governor's cabinet, and that he was not going to be just sitting there following Bill Clinton's orders, then he was very content to approach the job in a kind of workman-like manner and consult with Clinton.

DB: How often do they consult?

MG: Well quite often. Every time Clinton is in the state.

DB: But that's not often.

MG: That's not that often, but anytime Tucker needs Clinton, he can call. He can get him. That will happen. I mean, it's kind of like me. I know that if I call Clinton, I could get him. Therefore, I don't call him.

DB: Is there any possibility that it was not just that he was testing his limits, but that at the first Clinton seemed like such a long shot, and that this was this kind of massive imposition and all kind of scenarios seem to be possible, but that as it became clear that Clinton was going to be the nominee and would probably be leaving the office, and leaving it free and clear, that it became easier for the lieutenant governor to see what he was doing as a very certain path to the office himself?

MG: I didn't sense any of that. Really. I mean there's a very definite point at which time the problems pretty much cleared up. And that was when Gloria was taken away from the staff.

DB: Now, this is Gloria Cabe, who was—what was her position?

MG: She was one of three executive secretaries for the governor. And Tucker perceived her as opposing him and fired her. And I think this was part of the "seeing if I can

fire somebody" deal. In the end, Clinton accepted that, but basically pulled Gloria out of the fire by taking her to the campaign.

DB: Sending her to Washington.

MG: Which I thought was the best thing to do. Because it gave Jim Guy Tucker the prerogative, but did not just abandon Gloria. But after that, things seemed to settle down significantly. Gloria ran Clinton's last campaign. And I thought he saw her—well, I know he saw me as a Clinton operative. But one who, as I say, would do anything he needed as long as it did not conflict with rule number one. And I would tell him when that was.

DB: Was it difficult for you—and if so, how difficult—to move from being a governor's press secretary to being someone who on a routine basis dealt with all the national press?

MG: Oh, no, because we always dealt with national press. The first campaign press list of national press that they sent the releases to came straight out of my office. Because Clinton has always been a national figure.

DB: Through the NGA primarily?

MG: Through the NGA. Through himself. And I know E. J. Dionne and David Broder. Al Hunt. You know, all these guys. We know them. They're on my list as frequent press contacts, people that I can call.

DB: What do you mean list? What kind of list do you have?

MG: Well, just my Rolodex. My phone list. I mean, I keep lists of people's addresses. That's what a press office does. I have a book with every newspaper in the country. But I also have—

DB: I'm sorry. I thought it sounded like some kind of special contacts.

MG: Oh, it did. It was. I always kept kind of two "A" lists. I had a state "A" list and a national "A" list.

DB: Is press just press? Or is there a gulf between dealing with state press and dealing with national press?

MG: Sure. It's two different playgrounds.

DB: But how about professionally?

MG: No, there's not that much difference in the way they do things. There are standards. I mean, they have different characters. The local press went through a lot of changes.

DB: When the national press started beating up on Clinton, did the state press feel like it was an indictment of them, that they had let things slide by?

MG: Well, in many cases I think they felt like that. Of course, in the early days, in what I think of as the black period around New Hampshire—I mean, to me, I need to go back to New Hampshire in the fall sometime. Because what I remember of New Hampshire is cold, snow, and vicious, vicious stuff, which is the one weekend that I was there for a debate. And I didn't really get to know the people too much because they were all bundled up. I felt a lot better after New Hampshire because in New Hampshire I saw a very well-run, tight organization. I would say to some guy, "I would like to go down to your headquarters," and in ten minutes there would be a van out front. They had good organization. Anyway, I felt real reassured and invigorated because there were all these people who—and I was quite a celebrity in New Hampshire. I was. Because I was from Arkansas and I knew Bill Clinton.

The people on the New Hampshire staff spent all this time talking to me about Bill Clinton, wanting to know. And it was invigorating to me to go to a foreign land and meet all these people who were working their asses off for Bill Clinton without those years and years in Arkansas.

DB: No jealousy there that suddenly he belonged to so many more people?

MG: No. I saw it more as pride. And maybe a little bit of sense of ownership. Clinton was doing fine before I ever came to work for him. A lot of the dramatic events in his life had already happened by the time I got there—the comeback and the education. So I can't take any credit for the message, but in some way you can't help but have been involved in the message and how the message has evolved. And seeing those people who were so, within months—I mean, David Wilhelm comes from Chicago; and the first day he's down there, he grasps Clinton's message, he knows what Clinton is all about. And all these other people—and they've been working in Democratic politics for years.

DB: Well, there had been a yearning for a winning message and a more sensible message. Don't you think?

MG: Yes. I think it resonated, and these people felt it. I was prepared to be unimpressed with these folks, and in some cases I was. But over the large part, I was impressed with their grasp of what Clinton was all about and their ability to then articulate that. I saw George Stephanopoulos—that little guy came in out of nowhere and bang, all of a sudden he was on TV telling what Clinton is all about. And, no, I didn't feel jealous, really.

DB: Because they're good?

MG: Well, I made up my mind that this whole thing was too big and too important to Bill Clinton to be clotted up with a bunch of personal rivalries and hurt feelings. And of course, I'm used to working in a team. In the army, in a newsroom. And I don't mind that at all. I see that as a way that things work best.

DB: Who do you remember from the very beginning that you think was sort of critical to getting off to a good start?

MG: Well, when was the start?

DB: You tell me.

MG: I'll tell you who the little group was that used to have meetings before we widened it and before we announced. That was Stan Greenberg, Frank Greer, Bruce Lindsey, Gloria Cabe, Nancy Hernreich, me, Mark Gearan, and David Watkins, and there may have been other people that came and went.

DB: What about the FOBs that we hear so much about?

MG: In the early days, the very genesis, as Clinton was kind of sorting out whether he should do this, and if so, how—those people actually did not come to Little Rock. I am sure that Clinton talked to Mickey and various other people. I don't know who he might have been talking to. Like he always does. I mean, that's a given. Is that aside from whatever group is meeting, there are the FOBs, although we've never thought to call them that. Because we never actually saw them as kind of a separate group. I mean, Cody and Derek Shearer I never met, but I know their names. I've talked to them on the phone a hundred times. They're part of the extended family. So we never saw them as FOBs, but just out there. And that is pretty much the way it was up until just before he announced—when we formed the exploratory

committee, and Bruce was treasurer and only officer of that, I think. Now we also—come to think of it, we had kind of a little separate personal group that Clinton kind of touched base with.

DB: And that was?

MG: Web Hubbell, Richard Mason, Mahlon Martin, Ark Monroe, Betsey. Then early on as we got up going, raising money for the campaign, Matt Gorman and Craig Smith went down to start running finance. Matt was probably the first national operative that we got in. He was Bob Farmer's guy and was there to help us raise money. I actually saw Bob Farmer once when we opened the storefront down on Seventh Street. In the first days down on Seventh Street. It's hard for me to remember exactly who was there because I get it mixed up with the 1990 campaign which was in the same office. I remember Nancy Hernreich and Keeley. Sarge, of course. And Merle Peterson. Miss Dorothy. Miss Dorothy was one of the first volunteers to come in.

DB: That's Dorothy Moore. How old is she now?

MG: Oh, I don't know. She's as young as she wants to be. I told her the first time I saw her that now we had a campaign. Because she's one of my favorites. But I would say the key people, of course, at that point, were Bruce, Craig—and Greenberg, Gearan, Greer. I used to call them the G-men.

DB: When did Wilhelm come in?

MG: Wilhelm came on—I was there. I'm not sure whether it was the first two weeks or the first three weeks after October 3, but during that period. Toward the end of it.

DB: There was a lot of discussion about other people at first?

MG: Well, I mean, they had to pick. They had to find those folks, so for about two weeks we coasted along there. We did a couple of campaign appearances. I went with Clinton to Iowa and to Chicago. I canceled out of a trip to California because my son hurt his neck. Clinton called my mother-in-law from the airport in California, and she was so impressed. Later on, when Arkansans were asked to write stories to people in New Hampshire about Bill Clinton, that's what she wrote, that Clinton had called all the way from California to ask about her grandson. But, I mean, that was before anything got started. We were flying commercial and were making one trip every couple of days. The rest of it was all in meetings and in getting people. I think Greenberg and Greer and Gearan, the G-men—in fact, I had a little code on the fax machine, G-men. And I used to say that between Greenberg, Greer, Gearan, Gloria, and Gauldin, Nancy Hernreich was out of luck. Wilhelm got there a few days before I went back to the State Capitol. George also arrived just as I was packing up to go back to the capitol. People kind of began filtering in. We got the scheduler, Regan, although Bev Lindsey did most of the scheduling at the time. And she was also listed as press secretary and everything I did went out under her name. There's plenty of people I'm forgetting, but those are the people I remember working with. And some people I didn't know their names. A lot of volunteers who spent a lot of time stuffing envelopes and doing all the grunt work. Not all of them I remember. But most of them are still with us. Richard Mintz, of course, just as I was leaving. And then I went back to the State Capitol to meet Jim Guy Tucker and keep things running. Basically just kind of to go back and do whatever was needed, but mainly to help keep everything running smoothly.

Anticipate problems. What I've always done. My particular instructions from Clinton was to work with Jim Guy.

DB: So in some ways you became a critical kind of rear guard to make sure that nothing happened.

MG: Well, all of us were basically implied or specifically instructed to make things work. When people used to ask me what my role was, I would say, "Well, I keep an eye on the fort, and I shoot Indians."

DB: Let me ask you something a little bit different now. And again, you're not physically in the campaign day after day.

MG: No, I don't have a desk.

DB: So you have a little bit different perspective on it. Recently, the Clinton campaign organization was described as the most effective presidential campaign organization in history. What specifically do you think has made it so effective?

MG: I don't have anything to compare it to except the state campaign, which is much smaller. In the early days, you could sit in one room and see the entire organization. Later on you could drift between two buildings, which I used to do. And walk up and down the halls, drop into Wilhelm's office, see what you were doing, and tell you, "Well, you should take that to Wilhelm." And kind of wander around. I have to think that although we have made excellent use of technology, we've broken some ground in the use of technology and the use of techniques. We have learned a lot since 1988. We being the collective we, Democratic Party. I worked with the Dukakis campaign, and now that I'm getting into this I'm realizing that I do know a little bit about it because I worked with the Dukakis campaign, but

it was because Clinton was a vice chair—co-chair, whatever they called it. And I detested those people. I mean, you never talked to the same person twice. And they lied to you. They would screw their state people in simple little things. Just not recognizing that we needed to do some things to keep from hurting ourselves in our local press. Things that meant a lot to us that meant nothing to them, they would go ahead and screw us on.

DB: You don't think we do that?

MG: I don't know. Could very well be. I don't think as much though.

DB: So what you're saying is you think we're more sensitive to regional necessity, or just we have better people?

MG: I think a big difference has been that Clinton made the decision to be based in Little Rock.

DB: Where was Dukakis's headquarters?

MG: Well, the headquarters I always dealt with was Boston, but Boston is the east coast and it's not far enough from Washington or New York to be insulated from them. But I feel, and I've heard many people say, that we have gained from that, particularly in some of the crisis periods because the people in Washington are fickle, and they scare easy, they stampede easy. So in the bad old days, in the black period, when they were stampeding to other people, our people were focused. Most of the action that was happening was happening here in Little Rock, in our home turf. The press was forced to come here to Bill Clinton's turf to do the dirty work on him, which gave us an advantage. I mean we were here with our own troops. They were surrounded. So I think it had a lot of advantages. Maybe some of this is

just psychological, having people around who had worked with Bill Clinton. There were a couple of times during the black period—I remember one day in particular, on the day *Nightline* did the draft deal. Martha Phipps called me over at the office and said, "Mike, can you come over here?" So I took the afternoon off. When I got over to the campaign headquarters, they didn't have anything for me to do. Didn't know what they wanted me to do. I had no instructions, so I sat in the hall. And as people would come by, Steve Silverman—Steve Silverman was the first scheduler we had, and for the first couple of weeks we stayed here till midnight and we claimed to have started this campaign because we were the only ones that were there.

DB: Where is he now?

MG: He was here. The last time I saw him was in New York. He did scheduling for us for a while and then he's been doing some fieldwork. He was doing—when we were in the two brick buildings, he was working in the delegate office. He had a map on the wall divided up into sections and he was doing delegate tracking. There are so many functions of the campaign, I don't even know what they are. People I've been working with for months, I don't even know what they do. But I was just thinking of Silverman because he was one of the ones on that day—and a lot of the outlanders in the campaign, and you know, these are people—I mean, Regan, I know, worked for the Gary Hart campaign. Other people have worked for Dukakis and Mondale, and they've seen everything they worked for go down the tubes. And that was a very black day to a lot of those people. They had made some investment

in Bill Clinton. They had given up, or at least suspended whatever lives they had, and a lot of them were nervous.

DB: Did you get any sense that they were angry at the Arkansas people? "What have you been hiding from us? Why didn't you tell us?"

MG: No. All I got on that day was a lot of nervousness. A lot of uneasiness. A lot of people came to me, Silverman in particular, and said, "Mike, is it all over?" And I kicked back with my cowboy hat on, and I said, "Oh, hell, you guys haven't worked with Bill Clinton long enough. This is the way he does. He'll take you to the edge of disaster and then just as you're toppling over, he'll reach out and he'll snap you back. You just watch *Nightline* tonight. He will be fantastic, and he will turn it from terrible into great." And damned if he didn't. Exactly what I said.

DB: You kind of have anticipated one of the things I wanted to ask, which is, what was your personal low point in the campaign?

MG: Well, you'll think it's kind of strange. After dealing with Sweet Connie, who most folks have forgotten, which I take a little credit for, because at that time the office was me. But Gennifer Flowers, which I had a lot of work to do on. And all the draft stuff and all the bitter, bitter primaries—my low point was right after the convention.

DB: Why?

MG: Because the convention had been such a high point.

DB: Was that your high point?

MG: Oh, absolutely. So far. But it was coming back from New York and grasping around, dealing with a couple of things. On the one hand, dealing with the desire to

have more to do with the campaign, but bound by the strictures of my state job. And the need to fill a place in the team and not to be struggling to screw up the team to find some other place. Also, right after New York I went through a period of realization that an era in my life had passed without me knowing when that juncture was—that we went from one phase into the other. So that personal low point was then. And it took me a little while to get to feeling good about what my contribution to this effort is and that was it worth something. Because right after New York, after all that was so exciting and so fulfilling—I mean, really fulfilling—on the night that Clinton walked over to Madison Square Garden to go in and say howdy and thanks, and I went in the press pool and went, too. So I was up on the podium, which wasn't the best place to be but I didn't know that. On the other hand, I didn't care because it was so dramatic running through the hallways and up the freight elevators and then bursting out into the hall.

DB: And you were videotaping this?

MG: Videotaped the whole thing. I turned the tape on and just left it running. What I now find out is film noir. And you know, I still get the same charge when—I have a little piece on the tape where we're coming in from backstage, and then we emerge. And I'd been in Madison Square Garden before, on previous nights. And I knew that there were all these Clinton signs and all these lights and stuff, but it took on a whole new meaning that night, bursting out on that podium with the press. And just surrounded by these chants that we'd been hearing from down in the bowels of the building, "We Want Bill. We Want Bill." And all the signs, and I could not see Clinton. Didn't know where he was. I did not care. I figured,

"Wherever he is, I'll get it off of C-SPAN later." Basically, I didn't even tape much. In the final tape I made there's almost nothing that I shot from the podium because I wasn't shooting, I was enjoying. And I was looking at the lights, and I was just absorbing all these signs and thinking that for each one of those people, you can multiply them by a hundred and there's more out there that just couldn't get to Madison Square Garden that night and just the whole significance of this little thing that we had gotten started.

DB: Started in a paint store. Or before?

MG: Oh, before. From my own personal experience, it goes back to the legislative sessions and the late nights and the trips in the little airplanes around Arkansas. And NGA. And all of those things. Past, present, future all rolled into one hit me that night on that podium. And yes, it was an incredible high. And I . . .

DB: Was bound to come down after.

MG: Well, and also, I'm damned glad I had a video camera in my hand. I mean, there are very few points in your life where you can say, "This is one of the high points of my life," and you've got a video camera.

DB: And you've got the record, and a lot of other people have enjoyed it, too.

MG: Well, that's what I made it for, was for all of us. And it's a sense of family. And that now the family is—I mean like ZZ Top says, "We're nationwide." But after that, I went through this kind of confusion about, "I'm all fired up, I ought to be doing something. But what am I doing? I'm answering stupid questions." I went through that. But I'm now back on an even keel because I feel like answering those stupid questions is what I do best. And somebody's got to do it. And you know,

being there in my office for all the state agencies to call and say, "The *Washington Post* is calling," or, "What do we do about this?" "What do we do about that?" So I have a role that I'm suited for. And what I never wanted to do was get put into a role that I was not suited for simply because I was Clinton's press secretary and they had to do something with me that I would find acceptable. I vowed that I would find acceptable whatever was best for me to do. I don't know how personal you want to get in this little archive.

DB: As personal as you wish to be.

MG: But to me, I was always the one who was against running for president, until this time. And the way I looked at, and still do, is that first, on a personal level, this is something Bill Clinton wants, and he's done a thing or two for me, so if there's something I can do for him—be it standing guard outside the YMCA when he wants to dance with his daughter and get slammed in the press, or sitting at my desk and answering stupid phone calls, then that's the least I owe him.

DB: Let me go back to the campaign organization. Would you describe it as tightly organized? Loose? What?

MG: Let me tell you what I think about that. I have a role that I play in the response. But I often don't know what the response is, what happens on the other end, or how it is received. But let me tell you, half of any equation in politics is illusion. And we have talked about our quick responses. I mean, Mary Matalin the other night mentioned quick response team by the name that we call it.

DB: Rapid Response.

MG: Whatever. See, she knows it better than I do—that's not true. In fact, I designed a logo that says Rapid Response. It is so different from the Dukakis campaign. They were above all that. You know, nobody believes that shit. But it's strange now because we're prepared to deal with all that stuff, and this year nobody really believes that stuff. But part of it is illusion, but part of it is reality in that at critical periods we have responded quickly and effectively, and any organization from the inside appears disorganized, and from the outside can appear quite differently. I was in the army and from the inside, the army looks like hell, but it manages for the most part to do what they're supposed to do. I've never figured out how you do that. How do you move battalions of people? This is the same thing. How do you move people in New Mexico? Of course, now we have devised ways to do that with technology, going back to the very beginning when we were faxing out news releases. How they did it before, I don't know. But I think that another part of the illusion is not so much the organization. I am not sure that it is the organization that is responsible for the success as much as the message. You see what I'm saying? It's a compelling message. It's a message that overrides these mortar attacks we take on a daily basis. They can attack us, they can attack Clinton, but they cannot seem to attack the message. Now, someone says this is an excellent campaign machine. Reporters universally tend to cover politics and look at politics not as a movement, but as a mechanism. If something works, it works because of the mechanism, not because of the message or the movement. They don't believe that people actually buy political messages. They believe that people are tricked into electing people by a superior

mechanism. In 1988, the Republicans had a superior mechanism, which manipulated the minds of the great unwashed; therefore, they got elected.

DB: Which somehow doesn't exist this year.

MG: Yes. And I believe the Republican mechanism does not exist, and who knows what might happen if they could get their shit together?

DB: But you're saying that they would have to have a compelling message.

MG: No. No. I believe that a smart mechanism can override a message. And we have a good mechanism. I mean, it may not look like it works, but you've got to get some credit. We're two weeks away from the election, and we're fifteen points ahead. I think that whatever criticism I used to have of the campaign, I am demurring on. And a lot of times when we sit around and bitch about what a disorganized mess the campaign is, when you get all that said you have to conclude, "Well, but, you know, we just won Illinois." They seem to be doing okay. And you cannot argue with results. We definitely have a smart organization. I can think back a couple of strokes that probably have a lot to do with where we are now. The Comeback Kid speech in New Hampshire.

DB: Give me a couple of those genius strokes. And whose was it?

MG: Oh, I don't know whose it was. I think Carville may claim credit for it, which, to me, is stupid. I do have one fundamental problem with the campaign in that staff people are background people and not media stars. And the idea that anybody would come out and say, "Oh, yes, I gave Clinton that line to say," is incredible. And I read an article after the Democratic National Convention in which Linda Bloodworth-Thomason was telling that she gave Clinton that "Tomorrow night I

will be the comeback kid," which is a great line. But whatever lines I've ever given Clinton, and the percentage of them that was used is quite small, I would never tell anybody, "I told Bill Clinton to say that. He didn't think that up himself. I told him to say that." If I've got any problem with the campaign, it's that. Now some of the advisors being media stars does have its uses. Carville, George—these guys that are on the talk shows, you know, broaden your grasp. And Carville's becoming a celebrity probably helps.

DB: Well, it certainly takes some pressure off the candidate if people will be perfectly satisfied by getting one of these people for an interview or a show.

MG: Oh, yes, like I say, it broadens your reach. And you know, a character like Carville may actually draw people in who might not have been drawn in. Psychology is strange. When I worked for Clinton by myself, I found that to some of the reporters in Little Rock, when he selected me as press secretary, it sent them a psychological message. I know this because Pam Strickland did a report on me for one of her college classes. And she said that when Clinton had picked somebody who was so thoroughly Arkansan—and gave my boots as an example—and that I was totally dedicated to Arkansas as his press secretary, that that sent the message to the Little Rock press that Clinton was, in fact, interested in Arkansas, where he could have picked some pro from out of state that would later guide a national campaign. So, somebody like Carville—the people that the candidate picks, send their own messages. And in that way, Mandy, George—all these people who go on talk shows, can be very useful. The only problem I've got with them is when they say, "Oh, yeah, I told Clinton to say that," because you don't do that.

DB: But they're professionals.

MG: Oh, I know they're hired guns.

DB: They're establishing a stake in the future.

MG: They're writing their resumes, so I guess I answered your question about the machine.

DB: What would you most want the future to know about this campaign?

MG: Bill Clinton always says that you have to be able to be for something bigger than yourself, and I think that this campaign, for a lot of people, is not just Bill Clinton. Not just Bill Clinton's message. But it is the coming together of a lot of hopes and dreams that the people who have loosely joined ourselves together as Democrats have held near to our hearts for a long time waiting for a voice. And I think that what I would like people to remember about this campaign is that this is the time that we set aside some of those differences and those pettinesses that kept us in the past from uniting, that made us insist on candidates meeting our agenda jot and tittle every step of the way. Committing this, committing that, committing themselves so far up the creek that they could not get elected, or if they ever got elected, could not see the country. That this was the time that we finally laid some of that aside and staked ourselves to something larger than ourselves. Larger than getting into power. Larger than—this may sound like ideological crap, and I have never in my life been an ideologue until now, but staked ourselves to something larger than ourselves and larger than Bill Clinton and larger than our organization, and finally found the formula that makes it work. And I hope that it has been a precursor that is, that it not only becomes the formula to get elected, but the formula

to actually make a difference. I've sold out. I've become a Clintonian, haven't I? It also occurs to me that when I came to work for Clinton, I had this idea in the back of my head of what I wanted to be on the other end. And it was just the idea that someday years from now, after whatever this involved was over with, one of my kids would come home from school with an Arkansas history book, and I would be able to open it up and say, "You see that? I was there. I had something to do with that." It now occurs to me that I think I am virtually assured of being able to do that.

DB: When did you become personally convinced that Bill Clinton was going to get the nomination?

MG: Oh, that's easy. I know when I told him he was going to win. Which was crossing a street in Des Moines. The first week after he announced, we went to a health conference in Iowa, Des Moines, in Harkin country. He did his speech and we fooled around in the hall and did press and then we went and had a cheeseburger at a little 1950s place. I had to pay. A little Bobbisox place. And when we were leaving—and we were driving around with some friend of his—and when we left the restaurant, we were crossing the street back to the car to go to the airport and he said, "What do you think?" And I said, "I think you'll win." And he said, "You mean the nomination?" I said, "No, I think you're going to be president of the United States." He said, "What makes you think that?" I said, "The time is right. It just feels right. I feel it in my gut." You asked me when I realized that. I don't know. Just from the time we started it just felt right in my guts.

DB: And you never lost that feeling? New Hampshire? New York? Unending series of negative stories?

MG: No, I've never really dwelt on—intellectually I know all of the risks and all the doubts and the percentages and how truly unlikely all this is, but it's totally subjective. I believed that the time was right for Bill Clinton. It seemed to me that all of the pieces were falling into place. You ever bowl? There are some things in life where you're playing a piece of music or doing something that takes a certain amount of skill, and there are times when you can feel in your bones, before seeing the result—when you send the ball down the alley, you can feel in your bones that it is right, and that maybe it has never been right before in your life, and maybe you'll never duplicate it, but for that split second—for that moment when you're shooting that pool ball, and you know that it's going to bounce off that bumper and hit that pocket, and you're going to pretend that that is exactly the way you wanted to do it. And that's just the way it always felt to me. After Cleveland. After the DLC speech. That was the best speech I ever heard him give. And maybe that's when I got to thinking along those lines.

DB: Who wrote that speech?

MG: He wrote it. I transcribed it. Greer helped him with it, but he wrote it. I mean, that DLC speech is Clinton. You've reminded me of something. I think when I became a true believer—the moment. What do you call it—is it "the defining moment"? And I think it was just before we went to Cleveland—Channel 4 came over to shoot a piece of tape for the *Today Show* that they could run just before the Cleveland speech. And he did the interview. And basically the interview that he did that day

was a miniversion of the speech he then gave in Cleveland. I swear to God, it was all stuff I had heard in different ways. I mean, I've been listening to Clinton for five years. I have written some for him. I have read thousands of words that he's written, and I've heard all of it before. But in his living room at the mansion, doing that interview with Channel 4—which I have on tape—it all came together for me. After the interview was over, he asked me how he did and I said, "Governor, I've been waiting all my life for a Democrat to say words like that." And that may be where I became a true believer. That's where I was seduced.

[End of Interview]

[Reviewed and edited by Pryor Center staff]