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# Bill Clinton for President

Today we endorse the re-election of President Bill Clinton. Readers of this page will know that we share many of the public's concerns about Mr. Clinton's resoluteness and sensitivity to ethical standards in government. But our endorsement is delivered in the unequivocal confidence that he is the best candidate in the field and in the belief that because he has grown in the job he can build on the successes of his first term while correcting its defects. Toward that end, our endorsement comes with a set of recommendations for how Mr. Clinton can, before Election Day, address voters' concerns about his personality and character.

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First, however, we want to outline the case for Mr. Clinton's re-election based on policy, performance and growth in office. Our view of Mr. Clinton mirrors that of millions of swing voters who are choosing him over Bob Dole and Ross Perot. He is clearly the candidate of hope and progress in this race. No one can doubt his commitment to using government to spur the economy, protect the environment, defend the cities, promote racial justice and combine compassion with fiscal prudence.

The choice of Mr. Clinton is easier because of Mr. Dole's halting campaign. Neither his 15 percent tax cut nor his wild charge that newspapers have pulled their punches on Whitewater stands the test of logic or represents Mr. Dole at his best. He is a good man whose service on behalf of the nation, in the Army and the Senate, will be well remembered. Indeed, many voters are dismayed that Mr. Dole has strayed from his moderate record and look to Mr. Clinton as a protection from Republican excess.

# A Revived Party and Presidency

But a vote for Mr. Clinton is more than a defensive measure. He is clearly the most skilled navigator of today's contrary political seas. Even his most notable defeat, on health care, arose from his correct judgment that Americans want universal, affordable coverage. Mr. Clinton understands that the electorate makes contradictory demands. Voters are sullen and suspicious about government, yet anxious that it serve them. Americans have grown conservative, yet they want their interests and values protected. Mr. Clinton's Presidency has tacked this way and that, in part because it had to. He always calculates how far he can go and at what cost. We have disagreed with some of his calculations, but over the past two years he has not only revived his Presidency, he has also refashioned the Democratic Party's approach to government.

Some argue wrongly that Mr. Clinton has had no sense of direction. In several areas, though, he has picked his destinations and risked his political interests to get there. The pattern of the last two years provides a template for success in a second term.

# The Economy

The campaign has produced no more fallacious statement than Mr. Dole's assertion that the nation has the worst economy in 100 years. The real situation is that Mr. Clinton's drive toward a balanced budget has helped keep interest rates low and promote an economic expansion now in its fifth year. Mr. Clinton stood up to the spendthrifts in his own party at the start of his term. He curbed the Federal deficits that had piled up over years of Republican Presidents proclaiming devotion to fiscal conservatism. Yet he wisely opposed a balanced-budget amendment that would tie a President's hands in a military or fiscal emergency

Mr. Clinton raised taxes primarily on those most able to pay while pushing through one of the most important initiatives of his Presidency, the earned-income tax credit, which channeled billions of dollars into the poorest segment of the work force and lifted more than three million people out of poverty.

# International Trade

Today both parties are driven by differences over trade, which accounts for a third of the economy. The temptation to demagogue about job flight is ever present. Yet Mr. Clinton has performed with a tough sense of purpose, helping to educate the public that foreign competition cannot be wished away. Although accused of unwillingness to take on his own party's interest groups, Mr. Clinton bucked the Democratic leadership to secure the free-trade agreement with Canada and Mexico. He then went on to support the global trade agreement that created the World Trade Organization. At the same time, he has been more aggressive in pressing Japan and China to open their markets.

# Foreign Policy

In 1993, Mr. Clinton lacked experience in foreign affairs, and he stumbled early by confusing consultation with leadership when it came to Bosnia. Now he is regarded internationally as a leader with a sophisticated grasp of a superpower's obligation to help the world manage its conflicts and economic

The hallmark of this new sophistication is Mr. Clinton's timing of those moments when American prestige and resources can be decisive. His decision to throw political and financial support behind the election of President Boris Yeltsin in Russia, then

mired at below 10 percent in the polls, was a successful, high-risk intervention. In applying American prestige to the Middle East process of reconciliation, Mr. Clinton was building on a bipartisan tradition. But without his intense efforts, the process would have foundered. In Bosnia, Mr. Clinton ignored persistent bad advice about how to use force, invented a peace process from the most unpromising situation and finally stabilized a war that posed a security threat to Europe and endangered NATO.

### Health Care

In the field of health care, the Clinton Administration failed through a toxic combination of hubris and secrecy. But Mr. Clinton was headed in the right direction. Americans need and want a health care system that covers everyone and keeps costs down through competition. If Mr. Clinton is elected, the journey toward this valuable goal will continue. If Mr. Dole is elected, that journey will end, and the assault on Medicaid and Medicare will continue. Instead of quality care for all, the country will move toward making Medicare a second-class program for the elderly poor and toward a health-insurance system favoring the affluent and the healthy.

#### Political Values

The last few years have seen an ugliness of tone in American politics toward the poor, minorities and immigrants. Mr. Clinton has been the most important voice for conciliation, but even he has bowed to expediency. We opposed his signing of the welfare bill, but he has promised to ease its unfair attacks on the poor and legal immigrants. His lack of backbone on this issue was at least balanced by a courageous stand in favor of affirmative action.

In sharp contrast to the two previous Administrations, Mr. Clinton has used common sense on guns. By supporting local police, he erased the Republicans' unearned copyright on the crime issue. He has defended choice on abortion, and his reelection will help produce a Supreme Court that

protects this and other freedoms.

Another value asserted by Mr. Clinton is reverence for the earth. Electing the Democratic ticket will return to office Vice President Al Gore, the most knowledgeable and consistent defender of the environment in Washington. He converted Mr. Clinton from a relaxed to a muscular guardian of clean air and water. In a second term, they can generate a new wave of sensible environmental laws.

Obviously, we could not ask our readers to vote for Mr. Clinton without addressing his most significant leadership problem. Many Americans do not trust him or believe him to be a person of character. We do not dodge that issue, nor should Mr. Clinton. Indeed, he must view it as a prime opportunity of his second term. A fraction of the electorate, of course, will never forgive his reputation for philandering. But he can reclaim the trust of the great majority by demonstrating a zeal for financial integrity and for protecting the machinery of justice from politics. Toward that end, we urge Mr. Clinton to close the campaign with a series of dramatic gestures.

First, he should accept the Republican dare and pledge not to pardon anyone convicted in prosecutions arising from Whitewater, the White House travel office firings, the mishandling of F.B.I. files, or the raising of funds for the 1996 campaign. He should promise that he, the First Lady and every member of the executive branch will cooperate with all investigations, whether they are from the Justice Department, special prosecutors or Congressional committees.

Next, Mr. Clinton should deal with his party's Indonesian fund-raising scandal by acknowledging that both parties' financial practices are wrong even if not illegal. He can then credibly pledge to recapture one of the main themes of his 1992 campaign. We saluted then and we still believe in the stirring call in his inaugural address "to reform our politics so that power and privilege no longer shout down the voice of the people."

Congressional Democratic leadership talked him into shelving campaign finance legislation because their members wanted to keep lapping up contributions from political-action committees. Now is the moment for Mr. Clinton to renew his promise by sponsoring campaign laws that end foreign donations and "soft money" dodges and that give all credible candidates a level playing field when it comes to mail and advertising.

Such dramatic pledges would do more than defuse the criticisms of Mr. Perot and Mr. Dole in the closing days of this election. They would also enlist public opinion on Mr. Clinton's side as a protection against Republican excesses in the Congressional investigations that are coming whether Mr. Clinton opts for openness or sticks to the hunker-down strategy that has done his Administra-

tion such damage.

More important, Mr. Clinton would be demonstrating that he regards winning on Nov. 5 as a necessary prelude to the important work that lies ahead. Mr. Clinton's original vision of a country where no one waits for health care, social justice and economic opportunity to trickle down is still valid. His education in the leadership burden that rests on the world's strongest nation and its President has proceeded more rapidly and successfully than anyone could have dared hope. The Presidency he once dreamed is still within his reach if he brings the requisite integrity to the next four years. By adding self discipline to vision, he can build on the achievements he has already made and make a fair bid to leave Washington in 2001 as one of the notable Presidents of the 20th century.