THE 1996 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION:
A SURVEY OF THE CANDIDATES AND THE POLITICAL PROCESS

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by

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Every four years an event occurs which involves each and every resident of the United States, whether or not one actively participates. It is an event that many nations have sought to re-create, all unsuccessfully. It is a symbol of Democracy and represents all that the forefathers of our country fought and died for. Yet this event also evokes much cynicism from the citizenry and represents to many the lack of unity in our country. This monumental event, which takes place once again in 1996, is the Presidential Election.

Far removed from the election process of decades ago, the elections of today are big business. It is a multi-million dollar affair involving hundreds of campaign managers and political consultants. Public Relations gurus and pollsters also take an active role while the media attempts to serve as the watchdog of the whole process. Journalists across the nation are busily searching out the next possible political controversy while avidly reporting the current horse race. And in the age of television, it will not be long until the general public is inundated with campaign rhetoric found on all the major stations. Politicians have even made use of the computer age as the internet has become a widely used source for election information.

But this is only the beginning. There will be plenty of mudslinging and negative campaigning to come. The personal lives of the candidates will be brought to the surface to be examined by all. Friends, associates, and acquaintances of the past will crawl out of the
woodwork to give their personal testimony concerning those seeking the presidency. And political figures, many of whom have come and gone, will step forward to give endorsements and criticisms of the candidates. Political favors will be handed out and promised by the hand fulls as the journey to the White House continues. Some will win while others will lose when this process draws to a close in November. But in the end, a new President will be elected to preside over the United States of America, the greatest country on earth.

One can only speculate who will come out the victor in the upcoming election, but there are certain aspects of the process which can almost be guaranteed. The election of 1996 will not be much different from those elections of the recent past. Low voter turnout and little political efficacy is inevitable. Few people trust the government and most people actually care very little about the outcome of the election. They see no direct effect of the election on their lives and feel as though their vote has no impact on the end result. These are feelings which will take much time to change and it will not happen in this election.

To delve into the all-encompassing process of the 1996 Presidential election, many issues must be covered. The candidates public policy initiatives must be discussed, and cannot be overshadowed the political process which often plays the bigger role. There is so much involved in the election of the President of the United States. It is an intricate puzzle of various people, feelings, and ideas which in the end creates our political process. That same process that is much envied by many around the world. So to begin, a look at the candidates in this year's
election will be most beneficial. The obvious candidate, who now serves as the President of the United States, is Bill Clinton. Although Clinton has lost much of his appeal since the presidential election of 1992, he should not be counted out as a viable candidate. In fact, it has been reported that President Clinton's approval rating now stands at 53, while the top competitor, Bob Dole, has an approval rating of only 34. If the election were to be held today, the most likely victor would be Clinton, according to the most current polls (Roberts 30).

So what has given Clinton the edge over the other likely candidates? Despite the decline in Clinton supporters, the President still possesses something that the other candidates do not, that of a sincere bond with the common man. As Governor of Arkansas, Clinton worked to improve the lives of the state's citizenry. As President, he has sought to increase attention to domestic concerns while still maintaining a strong international presence. People look to Clinton as the one person who can truly empathize with where they have been and all that they have been through.

Since winning the presidency in 1992, Clinton has accomplished much for himself and the nation as a whole. No matter how much negative publicity has arisen, one cannot deny that Clinton has achieved a great deal in the three years that he has served as President. He has given priority to domestic issues, many of which have been overlooked for several years. He has also been successful in passing much legislation that has proven beneficial to the American people. Finally, he has willingly put himself on the line by bringing to the surface the inadequacies of
such enormous programs as Medicare, Social Security, and Welfare. Clinton has many accomplishments to boast about in the upcoming election.

One of the first areas that Clinton focused on after becoming President was that of the economy. With inflation readily increasing and unemployment at high levels, it was imperative that Clinton begin his presidency by creating public policy to deal with the severe problems of the economy. Clinton fought hard against the Republican forces, including Senator Bob Dole and Senator Phil Gramm, to pass an economic plan in 1993. Clinton was determined to pass the plan and "...threw himself into the fight - meeting members of Congress in one-on-one sessions, making many phone calls to them, giving speeches meeting with opinion leaders, meeting with individual members. Shortly before the vote, there were White House dinners for undecideds" (Franklin 11). Clinton was confident that his plan was the solution to many of the country's economic woes and stopped at nothing to solidify its passage.

In the end, Clinton succeeded with the passage of the plan and the American people have reaped the benefits. By decreasing the deficit from $290 billion to $192 billion in just three years, Clinton has brought down long-term interest rates and encouraged business investment, which has stimulated extraordinary job growth. In fact, six million new jobs have been created and the unemployment rate has dropped to 5.5 percent. President Bush could only boast of the creation of one million new jobs and left office with an unemployment rate of 7.6 percent. In addition, the "misery index", which is the calculation of inflation plus unemployment, is
currently below nine; under Bush it was 11 (Franklin 11). Clinton has proven himself capable of improving the economy and has even put recent presidents to shame in this all-important category of presidential success.

In continuing with the economic initiative he began with the budget plan, Clinton continued by establishing the Earned Income Tax Credit. With this new tax program, the president guaranteed that any person working 40 hours per week at minimum wage would not fall below the poverty line. To compensate for the tax break for the poor and the decreased deficit spending inherent in the economic plan, Clinton raised taxes on the very rich (Franklin 12). Clinton's theory that those who have more money should pay more in taxes has appeared to be successful thus far in decreasing the number of poverty-stricken Americans.

But Clinton did not stop there. He continued fervently pushing much more legislation that he believed was important for the American people. Next, he focused his attention on education. Aware that the United States is the only industrialized country without a vocational apprenticeship program, Clinton enacted the Schools-to-Work program. Under this policy initiative, high school graduates who choose not to continue with higher education, have an opportunity to learn a skill, such as carpentry or plumbing, in order to secure a good job. The President realized that education is of monumental importance and that in modern society, it is almost imperative that one earn a college degree. However, it is simply not feasible to mandate higher education or make it open to every high school graduate. With this in mind, Clinton
chose to follow the lead of other industrialized nations by incorporating the Schools-to-Work program in the national education system. When the program reaches full implementation, over one-half million students will be enrolled, which ultimately leads to one-half million more skilled laborers entering the workforce each year (Franklin 12).

Clinton continued with Education policy by helping to improve access to colleges and universities. He was well aware that from 1985-1991, the size of the average college graduate's total debt had increased 150 percent. With this kind of staggering figure, the president realized how difficult it had become for students to continue their education. Under the loan programs of the past, students were granted loans from the federal government, but actually received the money from banks, which had to be repaid within ten years. However, under the new policy set forth by Clinton, students can receive money directly from the federal government and will have the option of paying it back over an extended period of time. In addition, loan repayment schedules will be based on a student's income upon graduation and will increase as their income rises. With the implementation of this program, more students are able to make a career out of low-paying, but necessary jobs, such as social work and teaching. Also, access to higher education will expand with the knowledge that loan repayment can be more easily handled after graduation (Franklin 12).

Clinton's final education initiative also deals with the funding for higher education. As promised in the campaign rhetoric of 1992, Clinton began a program which rewards students for
volunteer work by giving them money for college. The program, known as Americorps, has employed 20,000 volunteers thus far by rewarding them with vouchers worth $4,725 toward a college education. Students across the country have begun volunteering at national parks, in child immunization clinics, and teenage crisis centers, just to name a few, in order to fund higher education. There are no losers, only winners in the Americorps program. Both the students and the citizenry as a whole benefit from this most worthwhile program established by Clinton (Franklin 12).

Clinton continued to contribute to United States social policy with the passage of the Crime Bill in 1994. This single piece of legislation will help to combat crime by putting 20,000 more police officers on the streets as well as initiating community policing programs in neighborhoods across the country. In addition, the bill allows for the use of alternate sanctions within corrections to fund such programs as boot camps and electronic monitoring. Many states have already made use of the federal funds to experiment with new forms of corrections. Finally, the Clinton Crime Bill also provides for the construction of new prisons in order to house the most violent criminals (Franklin 13).

Another important policy, which Clinton succeeded in hiding in the Crime Bill, was that of gun control. Legislators of all types had avoided the issue of gun control for many years due to the powerful lobbyists on each side. The National Rifle Association (NRA), the ninth largest pac in the nation, boasts a membership of 3.3 million individuals nationwide who are willing to
stop at nothing to protect their Constitutional right to own a gun. In fact, the pac gave approximately $2 million dollars in congressional campaign contributions in 1994 to do just that. However, Clinton willingly stood up to the NRA and included a provision within the Crime Bill that bans 19 different kinds of assault weapons. Additionally, Clinton also helped to pass the Brady Bill, which requires a five-day waiting period and background check before an individual can purchase a gun. The Brady Bill had first been introduced in 1986, but it took Clinton's leadership to win its enactment. Since its passage, the bill has been responsible for preventing 44,000 convicted felons and 2,000 fugitives from purchasing guns. Although not everyone supports gun control, one cannot deny the above data, which proves the ability of the Brady Bill to curtail the sale of weapons to criminals (Franklin 13).

Next, Clinton fulfilled yet another campaign promise with the passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993. Thanks to this important piece of social policy, families can now rest assured that their jobs will remain intact while they grieve the death of a relative or take care of a sick child. Employers can no longer hire a new employee to replace the temporary vacancy created by a leave of absence due to the death or illness of a family member. Clinton was successful with the Family and Medical Leave Act by creating more job security in a time when good jobs are difficult to find and often have strict attendance policies which preclude putting one's family first (Franklin 13).

Finally, Clinton made his permanent mark on social policy by having the honor of
appointing Justices Stephen Breyer and Ruth Bader Ginsburg to the United States Supreme Court. As the highest court in the land, the Supreme Court is responsible for molding social policy for the entire nation. And with Justices serving lifetime terms, the President holds the future of Constitutional questions in balance when determining who to nominate to the prestigious positions. There is a fine line that must be drawn between those applicants labeled liberal and conservative and the President must be sure not to tip the scales too far to either side. Citizens and legislators alike have come to agree, though, that both Justice Breyer and Justice Ginsburg are "judges, intellectuals, and citizens of the highest order" who will serve the court well over the next several years (Paul 39).

Foreign policy has proven to be a double-edged sword for Clinton this election season. No one can dispute the important role he played in expanding the United States' role in international trade with the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the expansion of the Global Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) to include the World Trade Organization (WTO). But many also can not forget the decisions that Clinton made in dealing with the problems in the volatile countries of Somalia, Haiti and Bosnia. The other presidential contenders will no doubt find flaw in every foreign policy initiative that Clinton pursued. Foreign policy has become a point of extreme vulnerability for Clinton because of the overall negativity surrounding his role as Commander in Chief. However, not all the decisions concerning foreign policy that Clinton made were wrong and have been detrimental to the
United States. On the contrary, Clinton made many wise foreign policy decisions and did produce some new policies that may prove to be worthwhile.

Even if one does not support NAFTA, Clinton deserves much credit for pushing through such a massive, far-reaching piece of legislation. Knowing the controversy surrounding such a trade agreement with Mexico and the rest of Latin America, Clinton took a huge risk in allying his fellow Democratic legislators to pass the treaty. Clinton could almost be guaranteed a re-election defeat if the opponents of the trade agreement were correct in their speculations that NAFTA would lead to a decrease in American jobs. Clinton was confident, however, that the trade agreement would prove to be mutually beneficial to the United States and Latin America, so he pushed it forward with full force (Paul 40).

There have been mixed reactions to the passage of NAFTA. While Clinton cites data claiming that 100,000 new jobs have been created within the United States, opponents point out the current $3.6 billion trade deficit with Mexico (Judis C3). And without the establishment of labor and environmental commissions, American companies continue to relocate to Mexico to avoid the strict guidelines in existence within the United States. In fact, the Economic Committee of Congress claims that NAFTA has caused a net loss of 10,000 U.S. jobs. And to further support this notion, the Labor Department has released information which states that more than 36,000 U.S. workers have filed claims that they have lost their jobs because of NAFTA (Anderson, A25). So it remains to be seen whether NAFTA will be placed in history as
a success or failure of the Clinton Administration. Perhaps the negative effects the Unites States is now facing will turn around in upcoming years and NAFTA will be hailed as a wonderful accomplishment in expanding free trade.

The Global Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) is another example of a foreign policy objective that Clinton supported wholeheartedly in order to assure its passage. Much like NAFTA, the true effects of the agreement have not yet been realized. However, according to Clinton, GATT is an important step in "[giving] our country the boost we need to keep moving forward toward the 21st century to create more high-wage jobs for the American people. We said loud and clear that America will continue to lead the world to a more prosperous and secure place after the Cold War" (Sanger A1, A22). As one of 124 nations to have signed the agreement, the United States has emerged as an economic leader in the global marketplace.

Not everyone supports these two international trade agreements, however. And those who do not support an expanded global presence by the United States, will be sure to use NAFTA and GATT against Clinton. Without fruition of either NAFTA or GATT, it is impossible to have concrete data on the benefits and/or problems that have accrued from the adoption of the agreements. The agreements could become strong ammunition for Clinton's opponents who will certainly try to down play the enormity of such accomplishments.

With the debate over trade policies such as NAFTA and GATT, the trade imbalance with Japan also began to surface. Critics on both sides of the political aisle have become frustrated
with Japan's selfish trade laws allowing for few American imports, but plenty of exports worldwide. Clinton has responded by saying that “Japan simply cannot continue to pursue the policy that they pursued when they were a poor country growing rich ... They're now a rich country, and they can't export to the rest of the world and keep their own markets closed” (“What Leaders Say...” A5). He continued by threatening the Japanese that unless they weakened their trade barriers, the United States would impose a large tax on all imported Japanese luxury cars. However, Clinton backed down when an agreement between the Untied States and Japan could not be negotiated. Japan walked away the victor once again while the United States was virtually made a fool of.

Clinton was faced with a tough foreign policy decision early in his presidential term with Somalia. With gruesome pictures of 350,000 dead Somalis, it was difficult for the United States to turn its head on the much-needed peacekeeping mission. Bush himself had begun to send troops to Somalia, and Clinton fulfilled the wishes of the American people by extending relief efforts created to assure that the Somali civilians received aid. Clinton also ordered a Special Operations force to enter Somalia and capture Mohamed Farah Aideed, the Somali political leader, and exile him to a nearby country. The mission went awry, however, and 18 American soldiers were killed (Sloyan C3). In all, 36 U.S. military personnel died in Somalia, and many of them were seen being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu, the Somali capital. So the Clinton administration began pulling out the 30,000 American troops that had arrived in Somalia
in December of 1992 (Scroggins G1, G3). The memories of the failed peacekeeping attempt in Somalia continue to haunt Clinton, however, and have surfaced once again in the wake of the upcoming election.

As a result of the casualties in Somalia, Congressional guidelines, known as the Presidential Decision Directive 13, have been established to limit the president's ability to create peacekeeping missions. According to the Directive, before the United States will participate in any peacekeeping missions, certain requirements must be met. These provisions include: a signed peace accord between the warring factions, United Nations involvement, a clear objective of the mission, increased Congressional input, little or no front-line American soldiers. Many mistakes were made in Somalia, but Directive 13 seeks to eliminate such problems in future peacekeeping missions.

After having suffered the consequences of deploying troops to Somalia, Clinton was faced with yet another difficult decision. As more and more Haitians sought political asylum within the borders of the United States, Clinton had to decide where to draw the line on the issue of immigration, while upholding human rights. Haitians began flowing into the United States in huge numbers, but were being transported back to Guantanamo Bay and eventually, back to the country they had sought so hard to leave. The justification was that the United States simply could not take all of these immigrants. It was a no win situation for the President as the citizenry complained about insufficient programs for the American poor, but were bombarded with
pictures of the incredible human rights abuses that were taking place so near to the United States' border.

The only solution was to help the Haitians remove the military leader who had taken over and reinstall Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the democratically elected president who was forced to flee the country. With Aristide retaking his leadership role, the United States was charged with further instilling the American values of Democracy and freedom into the country. So with the use of approximately 20,000 American military personnel and other United Nations' soldiers, the task of rebuilding the country began. However, since Haiti has no real democratic foundation upon which to build, there is no guarantee that the country will not face similar problems into the future. For now, though, Clinton appears to have made a good decision by saving the lives of thousands of brutally tortured Haitians without any American bloodshed. Although according to Secretary of State Warren Christopher, "There are no - or very few - final victories in foreign policy", Clinton's policy toward Haiti appears to have been successful this far (Erlanger A3).

The role of the United States in dealing with the ongoing war in Bosnia is another area in which the President had to make a tough public policy decision. Although most agreed that the United States, as a world superpower, should take some action in Bosnia, no one wanted to see innocent American soldiers pay the price for an ephemeral truce between the Muslims, Serbs, and Croats. As many suggest, the United States has become "a country that wants to feel like a superpower but rarely any longer wants to pay the price" (Erlanger A3). This only made the
decision by Clinton to deploy troops even more difficult. However, the President has promised that the United States would play only a clear and limited role that would come to a close by November. So while 20,000 American soldiers spend time in Bosnia, hoping to solidify peace, Clinton waits to see the final result of this decision on his re-election bid.

Although there have been many complaints about the President's fulfillment of his foreign policy duties, "[there would be] much more reason to worry if Clinton continually failed to appreciate the need for action or unduly rushed to commit American forces" (Paul 39). On the contrary, he has been especially careful not to make quick foreign policy decisions which turn out to be detrimental to the United States in the future. After learning a hard lesson in Somalia, the President has sought to limit the usage of American soldiers in foreign affairs while still upholding the nation's powerful global presence. The other candidates have ridiculed Clinton time and time again for not adequately fulfilling his role as Commander in Chief of the United States military. It is a difficult position to be in, however. No one can foresee the exact consequences of any action taken by the United States in dealing with the other countries of the world.

Clinton learned a good foreign policy lesson the hard way with his mistakes in Haiti, and especially, Somalia. According to Arnold Kanter, an undersecretary of state in the Bush administration, "[One should not] base foreign policy on the fickleness of public opinion. Public opinion got us into Somalia, and public opinion forced us out. But the essence of presidential
leadership is to decide what's right and then build support behind it" (McManus A12). But without a clear foreign policy strategy, Clinton depended heavily on public opinion to guide his decisions. Whether or not Clinton let politics interfere with his own sound judgment may be debated, but it is obvious that he certainly looked toward the feelings of the general public in order to make many foreign policy decisions.

Foreign policy is not the only area where errors have come to plague Clinton's re-election bid. First, no one can seem to forget about Clinton's 1992 campaign pledge to revamp the healthcare system so that even those without insurance have access to healthcare facilities without over burdensome costs. After Clinton introduced his healthcare reform proposal early in 1993, however, opposition mounted. Representatives and Senators alike scrutinized the proposal by the Clinton Administration and many submitted their own proposals. In the end, gridlock took hold and no comprehensive plan to reform the system was passed.

Next, the Clinton administration failed to fully overhaul the Welfare system as many people would have liked. The Welfare system, which was considered to be a high priority issue, received much legislative and media attention, but was never significantly changed. Despite numerous proposals prepared by the President himself and a multitude of other legislators in both the House and Senate, no piece of Welfare reform legislation passed Congress without a presidential veto. The one bill to withstand the scrutiny of both Houses was vetoed by the President who claimed that it was "too weak on work and too tough on children". Clinton
declared that "Whether they're white or black or brown, whether they're born in or out of wedlock, every child deserves a chance to make a good life. Surely we should not punish children for the mistakes of their parents. Instead, we ought to give them a chance to become independent, full participating citizens, not part of the welfare population". In sinc with what Republicans and Democrats in both the House and Senate have said they desire, Clinton supports a two-year limit with job training so that welfare recipients can come off the dole, never to return. However, the legislators thus far have not been able to come to an agreement so the Federal Welfare system remains intact. States have been granted more rights to revamp individual welfare programs, though (Clinton A16).

As noted above, Clinton was responsible for appointing two new Justices to the United States Supreme Court. In addition, Clinton was also given the responsibility of making other prominent appointments, including Surgeon General. Unfortunately, some of these appointments were not as successful and have given the President the negative image of one who cannot choose appropriate individuals to fill the most important vacancies in the United States Federal Government. For instance, Clinton first appointed Dr. Joycelyn Elders to the position of Surgeon General. However, after serving less than a year as Surgeon General, Clinton fired Dr. Elders and named Dr. Henry W. Foster Jr. as the next nomination.

Criticism over this nomination erupted immediately after Clinton's announcement. Dr. Foster had less than an impeccable record from the beginning, and many legislators had
reservations about choosing an OB/GYN for the job. However, the real problem began once it
was discovered that Dr. Foster had actually performed approximately 39 abortions, instead of the
dozen that he had previously admitted to. The Republican Caucus especially opposed the
nomination and both Senator Bob Dole and Senator Phil Gramm publicly announced that they
would stop at nothing to deny Dr. Foster the appointment. In the end, despite Dr. Foster's
highly-praised "I Have A Future" program for teens, the Senate killed the nomination with a
filibuster (Lee A8).

Even before the controversial Foster nomination, Clinton had received pressure
from many due to his stance on abortion. As a clear believer in the right to choose, Clinton had
made a point of supporting a woman's right to obtain an abortion in his 1992 campaign. And
following the president's failed attempt to appointment Dr. Foster as Surgeon General, Clinton
became even more vehement on the issue. In fact, Clinton publicly condemned those
right-to-lifers who "believe that America must toe their line and that every woman must live by
their rules". Clinton also blamed the denial of the Foster nomination on the strong pro-life
activists who demand too much of the Republicans' attention and often lead their policy making
initiatives (Harris A4). In the end, though, Clinton took this defeat as an opportunity to further
pledge his support for Roe v. Wade and the legalization of abortions in the United States.

And who could forget Clinton's vehement stance on gays in the military? He promised
that as President he would ensure that those who chose to declare their homosexuality could
remain in the military. Clinton began his term by overriding Congress and allowing those who had been discharged from the Armed Services due to their sexual orientation to return to their jobs. Next, he enacted the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" Doctrine which was supposed to eliminate the military's ability to ask about one's sexual orientation. However, not long after Clinton declared the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" proposal, military personnel were still reporting that they were being asked whether or not they were homosexuals. And those who admitted to being a homosexual, were still being discharged at an alarming rate. In fact, the number of discharges due to sexual orientation increased by 17% from 1994-1995 (Shenon 7).

Clinton's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy did not withstand the scrutiny of the United States judicial system, however. Despite Clinton's altruistic attempt to fulfill an important campaign promise, the policy was deemed unconstitutional. Since the decision was made by Federal Judge Eugene Nickerson to ban the policy, Clinton has made no real effort to continue the fight for gay rights that he began in 1992 (Anderson 1). Whether or not one can deem this presidential failure as a broken promise can certainly be debated. Many have viewed this as only the beginning of a long string of broken promises to those who proclaimed their support for Clinton by voting for him in the 1992 election.

The other true contender for President is Senator Bob Dole of Kansas. Although he has not officially received the Republican nomination, Dole is by far the front-runner and now is only biding his time until the Republican National Convention takes place in San Diego. To
begin, it will be helpful to know from whence Dole came and how he emerged to the powerful position of the Majority Leader of the United States Senate.

As is commonly referred to, Dole began his political career as a State Attorney in his home state of Kansas. He is also well-known for having suffered tremendous injuries in W.W. II, but mustering the strength and determination to overcome such adversity to enter the world of politics. Although it was not always easy, Dole climbed the political ladder to be elected to the United States Senate in 1969 (Thompson 56). Over the years, he has commanded much attention from the media and his fellow legislators for taking a strong stand on various issues of public policy. Dole has also sought the presidency twice previously in 1980 and 1988, but was defeated both times. At the age of 72, Dole has declared his candidacy once again, however, and is putting forth his full effort to obtain the prestigious position of President.

Some things have changed since Dole was first elected to represent his constituency in the United States Congress. Few are aware that when Dole first decided to run for County Attorney, he had not declared allegiance to any political party. Dole was simply persuaded to endorse the Republican Party because the State of Kansas consists primarily of Republicans and he was warned that if he wanted to go anywhere in politics, he would have to join the Republican Party (Thompson 39). Surprisingly enough, after having won his first political campaign, Dole began to be associated with the staunch conservative coalition within the Republican party. In fact, it was Dole who chaired the Republican National Committee from
Since his first presidential bid in 1980, Dole has sought to re-align himself as more of a moderate Republican. The theory has been that no one too far to either the left or right would be a serious contender for the office of President. Instead, the general public seems to feel more confident electing someone "in the middle" who would be more apt to command a bipartisan Congress. As Minority and Majority Leader of the Senate, Dole has certainly tried to compromise with fellow legislators of both parties in order to have many more public policy accomplishments.

However, in the 1996 presidential campaign, the focus within the Primary has been which Republican candidate appears to be the most conservative. Perhaps this is the reason why Patrick Buchanan had such a good showing in the first few primaries. It is definitely a difficult position for Dole to be in. On the one hand, in the general election voters have a tendency to shy away from ultra conservative candidates, while on the other hand, in the primary election, Republican voters tend to prefer a more conservative representative. So Dole must continue to play his cards right to ensure that he wins the Republican nomination while looking to the long-term goal of being elected President.

A brief look at Dole's previous policy initiatives as well as what he has to offer if elected to the office of the President will be most helpful in making a wise decision as to which candidate to vote for in November. Dole is probably best known for his work with veterans.
Because the issue is so close to his heart, he has continually worked hard to establish programs for disabled veterans so that they may lead more productive lives. Dole delivered a heartfelt speech back in 1969 which expressed how he felt about the population of disabled Americans in the United States. His address to the Senate, on the anniversary of his own injuries sustained while serving in the military, was as follows:

"My remarks today concern an exceptional group which I joined on another April 14, twenty-four years ago, during World War II. It is a group which no one joins by personal choice - a group whose requirements for membership are not based on age, sex, wealth, education, skin color, religious beliefs, political party, power or prestige. As a minority, it has always known exclusion - maybe not exclusion from the front of the bus, but perhaps from even climbing aboard it. Maybe not exclusion from pursuing advanced education, but perhaps from experiencing any formal education. Maybe not from day-to-day life itself, but perhaps from an adequate opportunity to develop and contribute to his or her fullest capacity. It is a minority, yet a group to which at least one out of every five Americans belongs.

Too many handicapped persons lead lives of loneliness and despair; too many feel and too many are cut off from our work-oriented society; too many cannot fill empty hours in a satisfying, constructive manner. 'The leisure most of us crave can and has become a curse to many of our nation's handicapped' (Thompson 56-57).

It is not often nowadays that Dole speaks of his handicap, but it is something that he must live with on a daily basis. It has enlightened him to all the disabled Americans who struggle to live a normal life. He has continuously fulfilled his pledge to help those who he can so easily empathize with.

Also, fulfilling his allegiance to his home state, Dole has worked to preserve the
importance of the agricultural industry in the United States. Kansans and farmers across the United States can be thankful that Dole has been supporting them in Congress for many years. He has made sure that farmers remain afloat in a society where industry and service-sector jobs have taken precedents over agriculture. For instance, Dole has consistently voted in favor of farm subsidies in order to compensate for the often low market value of agricultural goods. Dole also has worked to guarantee substantial tax credits to farmers who qualify. Without such subsidies and subsequent tax breaks, many farmers would have been forced to find a new career.

How has Dole, a Republican, responded to the policy initiatives of Clinton? During his reign as Minority and Majority leader of the Senate, Dole has played both the role of the fierce adversary and the willing mediator in dealing with much of Administration's proposals. Dole began doing battle with Clinton immediately after the 1992 election by fighting his economic stimulus plan. The package, which would have cost $16.3 billion, emphasized the creation of temporary government jobs and an increase in taxes to initiate deficit reduction. The bill was defeated in the Senate, however, due to a Republican filibuster led by Dole. Dole did not leave the battle over the economic stimulus unscathed, though. He angered the President and Democrat legislators as well as feeding into the "personification of gridlock or 'Dole-lock' as Dan Rostenkowski puts it" (Calmes A12). He was soon perceived by the general public as an angry republican senator seeking to obstruct Clinton and the Congressional Democrat Caucus.

Dole was aware of the negative image he had portrayed in the fight against the economic
stimulus and immediately began trying to turn it around. With the 1996 presidential election looming, Dole knew that he would have to make a conscious effort to replace his often belligerent personality with one of cooperation with Clinton and the Democrats. He at least somewhat remedied the situation with his support of NAFTA and work with the Clinton Administration on health care reform.

Dole began by effectively rallying his fellow republican legislators in support of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Many legislators on both sides of the aisle were concerned that the trade treaty would result in the loss of American jobs and would therefore, cause their constituency to harbor hard feelings against them. With the overwhelming lack of support by the Democrats, who are typically very leery about opening the United States up to any potential loss of American jobs, it was crucial that the Republicans vote in support of the bill to assure its passage. Dole publicly announced his support for NAFTA and urged others to follow suit. He even went so far as to denounce Perot for using erroneous material in trying to dissuade legislators from voting in favor of the bill (Nelson A17). In the end, Dole succeeded in this effort and helped to increase positive relations with the President.

Next, Dole took a stance of cooperation on the health care debate. Although he did not support the Clinton proposal, he drafted his own health care reform plan, with much of the same overall objectives in mind. His main objection to the Clinton plan was that it prescribed "a massive overdose of government control" ("Dole Affirms Health System Needs Reform" A13).
He is in full agreement, though, that the current health care system has serious problems and insists that universal coverage remain a primary goal of all future proposals (Nelson A17). His support for such legislation came too late, however, and a health care reform bill was never enacted. Perhaps if Dole had given more support to Clinton in the initial stages of the health care debate, a proposal would now be in effect.

Even after having worked hard to decrease tension between the President and the two parties, Dole has further been criticized. Now critics have begun challenging the Senator on his 35 year Congressional voting record. Some have even described his voting record as an "ideological blur". Take for instance, abortion. In the beginning of his Congressional stint, Dole was clearly opposed to abortion under any circumstances and even won a re-election campaign almost on this issue alone (Thompson 86-87). Over the years, however, Dole has waffled back and forth between strict adherence to pro-life beliefs and moderate acceptance of pro-choice advocates. In 1983, he voted to overturn Roe v. Wade and 1990 he voted against a bill that would allow minors to seek abortions without parental notification. However, he began taking a less conservative approach in 1989 when he called for a more moderate stance on abortion within the Republican party. He then voted in favor of lifting the ban on fetal tissue research in 1992 (Church 2015). Most recently, Dole has declared that he supports exceptions for abortion in cases of rape or incest and to protect the life of an endangered mother (Toner 18). In fact, although Dole once supported a constitutional amendment to ban abortion, he now says that "I
would not do it again" (Seelye A22).

Many question why Dole has come to change how he feels about abortion over the past few years. Has he genuinely realigned himself as a moderate Republican who would support abortion in some instances or is this just another political maneuver created to obtain more votes in the upcoming election? There is certainly doubt as to how the Senator really feels on the issue. During a debate preceding the South Carolina primary, Dole was asked by a female reporter if he would support a first-trimester abortion for a woman who had been raped and would suffer increased mental anguish from carrying the child to term. Dole responded by referring to his pro-life Congressional record and said that he would not support such an abortion. However, after having learned that two of his opponents, Steve Forbes and Lamar Alexander, would make such an exception, Dole changed his response (Seelye A1). One has to wonder how Dole would actually respond if as President he were presented with the issue? The pro-lifers cannot depend on him to fully oppose abortion, while the pro-choice advocates cannot rely on him to totally support abortion rights.

Gun control is yet another issue which Dole seems to lack real conviction either for or against. Initially, in line with his Republican counterparts, Dole opposed any infringement upon the Second Amendment right to bear arms. But it was not long before Dole voted in favor of the Gun Control Act of 1968. But in the 1980's, he began to revert back to his original stance and began supporting efforts to weaken the 1968 Act. Then during the Bush Administration, Dole
supported a bill mandating a three-year ban on the production, sale and possession of semiautomatic assault weapons as well as a version of the Brady Bill. During the Clinton Administration, though, Dole voted against the Crime Bill, which placed a ban on 19 semiautomatic weapons, and the Brady Bill. Although there is no clear-cut answer as to why Dole has waffled back and forth on the issue of gun control, many look to the National Rifle Association (NRA) for an explanation. Keeping in mind that an estimated 48% of the Republican Primary vote consists of gun owners, it seems evident why Dole would uphold the Second Amendment and vote against any gun control measures (Church 2014). Again, is politics playing a decisive role in Dole's philosophical beliefs on various issues in social policy?

Foreign policy is the next area upon which Dole has made some contradictory decisions over recent years. Although one of his greatest assets thus far may well be his service in W.W. II, this must be combined with other foreign policy considerations in order to build a strong enough foundation upon which to be elected to the presidency. He certainly outdoes his eventual opponent, since Clinton did not serve in the military. However, Dole's previous military service does not adequately reflect how he will act as Commander in Chief. This is role that all previous president's have had difficulty in managing effectively.

The first foreign policy test Dole faced was Somalia, which was closely followed by Haiti and Bosnia. Advocating the President's right to make crucial foreign policy decisions without Congressional approval, Dole initially supported the use of American troops in Somalia
to preserve the peace. He was even only one of 16 Republicans who opposed an amendment to immediately end funding for the operation. Soon afterward, however, Dole posed opposition to the deployment of troops to either Haiti or Bosnia. Dole explained that "I don't believe we should tie the president's hands, but I don't think Congress should sit on its hands either". According to Dole, the situation changed because troops were already present in Somalia, but not in Haiti or Bosnia (Hook 2899).

After some initial confusion on Dole's beliefs, he made some foreign policy "promises" to guide his presidential bid. First, Dole has said that he would try to solidify the President's authority under the War Powers Resolution by eliminating certain provisions of the act. Next, he has pledged to limit the amount of money the United States would contribute to United Nations' peacekeeping operations. In addition, he would place strict limits on the ability of the United Nations to command U.S. troops engaged in such efforts (Sciolino A3). According to Dole, "We must stop placing the agenda of the United Nations before the interests of the United States. We will vow that American policies will be determined by us, not the United Nations" (Dole 451).

With the Republican Presidential nomination under his belt, Dole has begun focusing his efforts on the distinctions between himself and Clinton. There are many issues with which to compare the two candidates before the November election. After 35 years of Congressional service, Dole certainly has the experience and leadership abilities to serve as the President of the United States. He epitomizes the "American Dream" with a story of a poor boy from Kansas
who has climbed the political ladder to get where he is today. As Dole stated in his 1996 Presidential announcement "My friends, I have the experience, I've been tested, tested in many ways. I am not afraid to lead, and I know the way. Let us rein in our government to set the spirit of the American people free. Let us renew our moral convictions and strengthen our families by returning to fundamental values. Together, let us assert our rightful place as a great nation" (Dole 452). Time will only tell whether the American people will choose to put their faith in Dole and elect him to the presidency in 1996.

Dole did not win the Republican nomination without a fight. There have been numerous candidates entering the field at different times since early 1995. Once the primary season began, however, the real contest was between Pat Buchanan and Robert Dole. It did not take long for Richard Lugar, Steve Forbes, and Lamar Alexander to realize their defeat, drop out of the running and pledge their allegiance to another candidate. But Buchanan has refused to give up the fight even though defeat is all but certain. He has vowed to finish the primaries and appear at the Republican National Convention in San Diego despite Dole's victory.

So what did Buchanan have to offer as a presidential candidate? More than anything, the "Go Pat Go" campaign has focused on electing someone who is not a career politician. According to Buchanan, there needs to be a cleansing of Washington bureaucrats in order to revamp the United States' government. Initially, this campaign strategy worked well and produced a Primary win in New Hampshire (Eddings 41). It was not long, however, before
Buchanan was stigmatized as a radical and a Socialist who sought to change the United States for the worse, not the better.

A quick synopsis of the Buchanan campaign starts with his position on the highly controversial issues of the day. First, Buchanan has made a point of declaring himself to be an avid right-to-lifer who opposes abortion for any reason. If elected, he promised to stop at nothing to overturn Roe v. Wade and make abortion illegal in the United States. He has even gone so far as to support defunding Planned Parenthood. Finally, Buchanan pledged to Repeal the Brady Bill and give the citizenry absolute rights to own all types of firearms.

Buchanan also criticized both Clinton and Dole for their support of NAFTA and GATT. He vowed to take a protectionist approach to foreign trade and close American borders to imports. Targeting East Asia, Buchanan had said that he would impose a 10% tariff on every Japanese import and a 20% tariff on goods imported from China. And to punish Mexico, he would place a five-year suspension on all immigration (Sanger). According to Buchanan, he would "retake America" by limiting the role of the United States within the global arena. The United States would virtually close its borders to foreign trade, not grant aid to needy countries, and not engage in foreign peacekeeping missions under the Buchanan initiative.

Voters soon realized how radical Buchanan's proposals were and began endorsing Dole instead. Buchanan is still threatening to run as an Independent in the General Election in November, though. He has pledged that if Dole does not keep certain planks of the Republican
Party intact, he would publicly denounce him and run as a third party candidate (Dunham 36). Although the threat may appear absurd, Buchanan seems determined to make his point known. Buchanan is not out of the picture yet and should be watched carefully. No one knows what role he may ultimately play in the final outcome of the 1996 Presidential Election.

Ross Perot is another potential candidate who may effect the election. After receiving 19% of the vote in 1992, Perot has remained active in politics and still has a large coalition of supporters across the nation. What had once been known as the United We Stand America political alliance has recently turned into the Reform Party. Although Perot has not officially entered the election at this point, he has announced that he is prepared to run if he is called to service by this new party. In fact, supporters are currently working to get the Reform Party on the ballot for the November election and are planning a convention for Labor Day (Starobin 759).

With the knowledge that Perot probably cost Bush the presidency in 1992, many wonder if he will have the same effect on Dole in 1996. Recent polls show that Perot supporters prefer Dole over Clinton. This means that if the Reform Party is placed on the ballot, those who would have voted for Dole will now most likely vote for Perot (Starobin 756). Dole does appear to be worried about the effect another third party run will have on his presidential bid. In fact, when Perot said that he would "give it everything" if the Reform Party nominates him to run, Dole responded by saying that he would try to persuade him otherwise (Dunham 43). Dole and the Republicans may suffer defeat again in 1996 if Perot makes another run for the President.
However, no one can be certain as to how the Reform Party will effect either the Democrats or the Republicans.

Now that all the possible candidates have been reviewed, the role of other forces within the world of politics needs to be examined. The media contributes significantly to elections and the political process on the whole. Many blame the media for the negative image of American politics nowadays. Leave it to the media to dig up all the political scandals in Washington and across the country in various state governments. What the American citizenry forgets, however, is that this is what sells. The media exists to make money and it succeeds at this goal by fulfilling the thrill-seeking desires of the populous. There are plenty of stories playing out in the world of politics everyday, but they are not covered in the National newspapers or on the Nightly News because they would not sell.

The media cannot be released of all blame for the cynicism that has become part of the American electorate, though. One of the major functions of media is to be the watchdog over the political process. This is why the Supreme Court has not overly imposed restrictions on the media's First Amendment rights. The media has taken the easy approach to this job, however, by producing horse races and soundbites rather than stories of substance. The media is not all to blame for this phenomena, though. The American people have become lazy sensationalists who crave excitement not substance.

The outcome of the 1996 Election has yet to be seen although the politics behind the
whole event are definitely upon us. Candidates have begun altering their positions in order to appease the electorate and retrieve more votes. Presidential hopefuls have come and gone. More and more campaign promises have been uttered. And candidates have begun criticizing one another with the blink of an eye. All this and more is to be expected in a typical presidential election.

Each voter must rely upon his/her own judgment of a candidate's character and abilities in order to make an informed choice at the polls in November. Only those who have researched the candidates fully can rest assured that they used their vote wisely. The democratic process is a wonderful thing, not to be taken lightly. The right to vote is just that, a right, and not a privilege. And when individuals make the conscious decision to vote, they take it upon themselves to act responsibly. Too many people do not take the whole process seriously, however. Low political efficacy is inherent in today's system. Few truly understand politics and even fewer make the effort to try and improve their knowledge of the process.

Low voter turnout is also a serious problem in today's society. How can so many people claim to cherish America and the freedoms bestowed upon its citizens and not take the time to vote? Why do people who do not vote feel that they have a right to complain about the job an elected official is doing? There are certainly no definitive answers to these questions, nor will there ever be such explanations. It is a true shame, however, that people can respond so negatively to the work of our country's "public servants" while not contributing anything
themselves.

Remember this November as the election unfolds that there is no place in the world like the United States. Democracy is a sacred thing that the American people are fortunate enough to be a part of. Exercise the right to vote and make a wise choice. It is one of the few opportunities one has to mold the future of the United States.
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