

William J. Clinton
Presidential History Project

Briefing Materials

Melanne Verveer

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MELANNE VERVEER NEWS TIMELINE

Prepared by Jill Abraham

Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia, 1/13/2004

- 1962** Verveer enters Georgetown University. She enrolls in the School of Language to study Russian. (*The Washington Post*, 11/23/1997)
- 1964** Bill Clinton enters his freshman year at Georgetown University. He is elected freshman class president, while Phil Verveer, Melanne's future husband, serves as president of the junior class. (David Maraniss, *First in His Class: The Biography of Bill Clinton*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995, p. 61)
- 1966** Verveer earns a B.S. from Georgetown University. (Greg Rushford, *Appointments with Power: An Insider's Guide to the Clinton Administration's Top Business Policy-Makers*, Washington, D.C.: Legal Times Books, 1994, p. 400)
- 1969** Verveer earns an M.S. in Russian Studies from Georgetown University. (Rushford, p. 400)
- 1972** Verveer works for the McGovern for President campaign. (Rushford, p. 401)
- 1973-1975** Verveer is Special Assistant to Senator George McGovern. (Rushford, p. 401)
- 1975-1979** Verveer is Field Manager for Common Cause. (Rushford, p. 401)
- 1980** Verveer is Director of Cooperative Development for Voluntary Associations, National Consumer Cooperative Bank. (Jeffrey B. Trammell and Gary P. Osifchin, eds., *The Clinton 500: The New Team Running America 1994*, Washington, D.C.: Almanac Publishing, Inc., 1994, p. 78)
- 1981-1982** Verveer is Director for Civil Rights and Urban Policy for the U.S. Catholic Conference. (Rushford, p. 401)
- 1983-1984** Verveer is Legislative Director for Representative Marcy Kaptur (D-OH). She works on issues such as unemployment compensation reform, emergency jobs legislation, and child care. (Trammell and Osifchin, p. 79)
- 1985-1993** Verveer serves as Public Policy Director and then Executive Vice President of People for the American Way. She directs advocacy

work on numerous issues, including the Civil Rights Act of 1990. She is also instrumental in the effort to block Robert Bork's Supreme Court nomination and in lobbying against Clarence Thomas' nomination. (Trammell and Osifchin, p. 79; *The Washington Post*, 11/23/1997)

1992

Verveer takes a leave of absence from People for the American Way to work in the Clinton-Gore campaign. (Rushford, p. 400)

November

Bill Clinton wins the presidential election. Verveer works for the presidential transition. (Rushford, p. 402)

December

Verveer is believed to be the leading candidate to head the First Lady's staff, reportedly due to the influence of Susan Thomases, who is a close advisor to Hillary Clinton and a partner with Verveer's husband in the law firm Willkie Farr & Gallagher. (*The Washington Post*, 12/29/1992)

1993

January

Verveer is appointed Deputy Assistant to the President and Deputy Chief of Staff to the First Lady. (*U.S. Newswire*, 1/14/1993)

The President appoints Hillary Clinton to head the Task Force on Health Care Reform. (*The New York Times Abstracts*, 1/26/1993)

February

Verveer accompanies Hillary Clinton to congressional hearings, where the First Lady testifies on behalf of health care reform. (*The Washington Post*, 2/5/1993)

July

Verveer accompanies the President and First Lady to Japan. This is Hillary Clinton's first international trip as First Lady. (Patrick S. Halley, *On the Road with Hillary Clinton*, New York: Viking, 2002, p. 82)

October

Verveer is instrumental in the Clintons' decision to enlarge the National Medal of Arts and National Humanities Medal ceremony. (Hillary Rodham Clinton, *An Invitation to the White House*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000, p. 154)

President Clinton appoints Sheldon Hackney to head the National Endowment for the Humanities and Jane Alexander to head the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Verveer leads the First Lady's staff in lobbying legislators on behalf of the nominees. (*Art in America*, 2/1/1995)

1994*January*

Verveer accompanies the First Lady to Moscow. They meet up with the President on his diplomatic trip, during which he and Boris Yeltsin discuss the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (Halley, p. 94)

June

Responding to criticism that the Clinton Administration is not doing enough to support the arts, Verveer states, "The record is a strong one in terms of the level of the appointments, the collaboration with other departments, the work at the White House to support and celebrate American artistic achievement in its many manifestations. The policy has been multi-pronged. Yet we know there's always more to do." (*The Washington Post*, 6/26/1994)

July

The First Lady begins a cross-country tour to garner support for the health care reform legislation. In Seattle, she encounters harsh opposition. At one point, protesters and hecklers surround her limousine. Verveer, who was in the car with her, later comments, "There must have been literally hundreds of them on either side...I have never seen such frightening faces." (Haynes Johnson and David S. Broder, *The System: The American Way of Politics at the Breaking Point*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1996, p. 462)

1995*March*

Verveer accompanies the First Lady on her extensive tour of the Middle East and Asia. (*The New York Times*, 4/2/1995)

September

Verveer works with the First Lady's and President's staffs to assemble a delegation for the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. Verveer accompanies the First Lady to the Conference, for which Hillary Clinton serves as Honorary Chair. At the Conference, Hillary Clinton delivers her most famous speech as First Lady. She calls for greater activism for women's and children's rights. Verveer assists in the drafting of the speech. (Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Living History*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003, pp. 300, 307; *The Times-London*, 9/6/1995)

1996*January*

Concerned about the impact of the Whitewater scandal on the First Lady, Verveer decides to accompany Hillary Clinton on her book tour promoting *It Takes a Village*. The First Lady would later

comment, "This act of personal friendship cost [Verveer] emotionally and financially, since she had to ride out the tough times with me and pay her own way, too." (Clinton, *Living History*, p. 334)

June In his book, *The Choice*, Bob Woodward writes that Hillary Clinton consulted with psychic researcher, Jean Houston. Verveer responds, "[Houston] is neither a spiritual adviser nor a policy adviser. Any suggestion that emerges from the book that she is a central figure in the First Lady's activities or world view is inaccurate." (*The New York Times*, 6/24/1996)

July Verveer accompanies the First Lady and Madeleine Albright, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, to Central and Eastern Europe. (Clinton, *Living History*, p. 362)

August Verveer attends the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, where the First Lady delivers a speech. Regarding the First Lady's Convention appearance, Verveer states, "I think she goes into the convention feeling a great sense of accomplishment on the part of her husband and of everybody in the Administration, realizing that the work is never done but an awfully good down payment has been made." (*The New York Times*, 8/25/1996)

September Verveer campaigns for President Clinton's reelection in an address to the Pennsylvania Federation of Democratic Women. (*The Associated Press Political Service*, 9/27/1996)

November Bill Clinton defeats Senator Bob Dole in the presidential race.

1997

January Madeleine Albright is appointed Secretary of State. After her appointment, Hillary Clinton and Verveer participate in regular lunch meetings at the State Department with Albright and her Chief of Staff, Elaine Shocas. (Clinton, *Living History*, p. 360)

March Verveer travels with the First Lady on her extensive tour of Africa. (*The Washington Post*, 3/27/1997)

May Margaret A. Williams resigns as Chief of Staff to the First Lady, and Verveer is appointed to replace her. Ellen Lovell, Executive Director of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, replaces Verveer as Deputy Chief of Staff. (*The Washington Post*, 3/17/1997)

- July* Hillary Clinton delivers the keynote address at the “Vital Voices: Women in Democracy” forum in Austria, officially launching the U.S. government’s Vital Voices Democracy Initiative. This program is “nurtured” by Verveer. (Clinton, *Living History*, p. 414)
- August* Verveer offers Texas writer Joseph Holley a job speechwriting for the First Lady. Soon thereafter, the White House rescinds the offer, after learning that Holley was the defendant seven years earlier in a sexual discrimination and harassment lawsuit. (*The Washington Post*, 9/1/1997)
- October* Verveer accompanies the First Lady on a trip to her hometown, Park Ridge, Illinois, to celebrate her fiftieth birthday. (*The Washington Post*, 10/28/1997)
- November* Verveer accompanies Hillary Clinton to Great Britain, where they are participants, along with Tony Blair and other U.S. and British officials, in the first of a series of “Third Way” meetings, designed to discuss and explore the two countries’ common domestic issues and strategies. (Clinton, *Living History*, pp. 425-426)
- Verveer accompanies the First Lady to growing democracies—Ukraine, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. They travel on behalf of the Administration to promote diplomatic ties. On their initial departure from Andrews Air Force Base, their plane is forced to turn back because of an engine fire. (Clinton, *Living History*, p. 430)
- President Clinton signs the Adoption and Safe Families Act into law. The First Lady credits her domestic policy staff with working “tirelessly with Administration officials and congressional staffers to craft the new legislation.” (Clinton, *Living History*, pp. 433-434)
- December* Verveer testifies before the grand jury investigating possible obstruction of the Whitewater probe. (*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 12/10/1997)
- 1998**
- January* The Monica Lewinsky scandal erupts. Verveer accompanies Hillary Clinton to New York City for her interview on NBC’s *Today* show, where the First Lady describes the scandals that have plagued her husband’s Administration as part of a “vast right wing

conspiracy.” Regarding the First Lady’s posture prior to the television appearance, Verveer states, “She was very relaxed on the ride over...Not uptight. Not apprehensive.” (Gail Sheehy, *Hillary’s Choice*, New York: Random House, 1999, p. 4; *The Washington Post*, 1/28/1998)

- March* Verveer is part of the official delegation accompanying the President and First Lady to Africa. (*U.S. Newswire*, 3/20/1998)
- June* Verveer is part of the Administration’s official delegation to China. (*The Washington Post*, 6/24/1998)
- August* During the height of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, Verveer states that she has not discussed the affair with the First Lady. “The reality is none of this is discussed with any of us because we’ll all be hauled before the grand jury,” says Verveer. (*The Washington Post*, 8/12/1998)
- September* Verveer is part of the official delegation for the President and First Lady’s trip to Russia, Ireland and Northern Ireland. (*U.S. Newswire*, 8/29/1998)
- December* Verveer is part of the official delegation accompanying the President and First Lady to the Middle East. (*U.S. Newswire*, 12/11/1998)

1999

- January* Speculation increases as to whether the First Lady will run for the U.S. Senate seat from New York. Hillary Clinton’s top White House staff members are opposed to her running. “They worried about the stresses I would be subjected to as a candidate and the emotional costs of a lengthy campaign,” writes Hillary Clinton. (Clinton, *Living History*, p. 496)
- February* Verveer is part of the official U.S. delegation to the funeral of King Hussein in Amman, Jordan. (*AP Online*, 2/7/1999)
- Verveer is part of the official delegation to Central America. (*U.S. Newswire*, 2/12/1999)
- March* Speculation as to whether Hillary Clinton will run for the U.S. Senate seat from New York continues to increase. She seeks guidance concerning her future from a small circle of advisors, including Verveer, Harold Ickes, and Washington lawyer Robert Barnett. (*USA Today*, 3/15/1999)

- June* Verveer is part of the official delegation for the President and First Lady's seven-day trip to Europe. (*U.S. Newswire*, 6/15/1999)
- July* Verveer is part of the official delegation to Morocco. (*U.S. Newswire*, 7/25/1999)
- August* In an interview with *Talk* magazine, Hillary Clinton discusses her husband's infidelity, saying she believes it stemmed from childhood abuse from his mother and grandmother. Verveer is quoted in the article as saying, "As the President has tried to make up for what he has done, we've slowly seen a physical passion come back into their lives. And it's not just for show. I've seen them together when no one is looking....The power of ideas positively ignites them." (*AP Online*, 8/2/1999)
- September* Commenting on the role of the First Lady's staff during her Senate campaign, Verveer tells *The Washington Post* that ethics rules about the political activities of government officials mean that "as the campaign gets underway, the role of her official staff is certainly circumscribed." She also says that her staff does not feel overshadowed by the campaign. (*The Washington Post*, 9/23/1999)
- October* Verveer gives the toast at the First Lady's fifty-second birthday party, held in the Rose Garden, wishing her "good shoes, good hair and skin as thick as a rhinoceros." (*The Washington Post*, 10/29/1999)
- November* Verveer is part of the official delegation accompanying the President and First Lady to Greece, Italy, Turkey, Bulgaria, and Kosovo. (*M2 Presswire*, 11/16/1999)
- 2000**
- June* Jane Alexander, Chairman of the NEA, publishes a book called *Command Performance*. She writes, "It took me a very long time to realize that the NEA and I had been relegated to the office of the First Lady. I was well taken care of by Melanne Verveer, who advised the President on the arts....Hillary Rodham Clinton really cared about the arts....She may not have focused on it...but she increasingly spoke out for the NEA as the years went by and the pressure on the agency mounted." (*The Washington Post*, 5/14/2000)

In Kiev, Ukraine, during her keynote address at the U.S.-Ukraine Regional Law Enforcement Workshop against Trafficking in Women and Children, Verveer announces that the United States Department of Labor will provide \$500,000 in new funding for a technical assistance program to help fight employment discrimination against women. (*Eastern Economist Daily*, 6/23/2000)

September

Verveer is part of the official delegation accompanying the President to New York for the Millennium Summit. (*U.S. Newswire*, 9/5/2000)

November

Hillary Clinton defeats Rick Lazio in the race for the U.S. Senate.

Verveer is part of the official delegation accompanying the President and First Lady to Vietnam and Brunei. (*U.S. Newswire*, 11/13/2000)

December

Verveer is part of the official delegation accompanying the President to Ireland, Northern Ireland, and England. (*U.S. Newswire*, 12/11/2000)

At the annual “Hillaryland” holiday party hosted by Verveer, President Clinton presents “survivor” medals to Verveer and seven other of the First Lady’s staffers who have lasted all eight years at the White House. (*The Washington Post*, 12/21/2000)

2001

The New York Daily News reports that Verveer will not be joining Hillary Clinton’s Senate staff. (*The New York Daily News*, 1/5/2001)

Verveer is appointed Chair of the Vital Voices Global Partnership, which is a non-governmental organization and an outgrowth of the U.S. government’s Vital Voices Democracy Initiative, started and developed by Hillary Clinton and Verveer. (*Vital Voices Global Partnership Website*, http://vitalvoices.org/about/who_we_are)

Vital Voices Global Partnership brings together eleven Afghan refugees, who, led by Verveer, meet with First Lady Laura Bush to discuss the fate of Afghanistan, post-September 11th. (*The New York Times*, 11/30/2001; *The Washington Post*, 11/28/2001)

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MELANNE VERVEER SUGGESTED TOPICS

Prepared by Jill Abraham

Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia, 1/15/2004

Joining the Clinton Administration

- How did you meet Bill and Hillary Clinton? Characterize your initial impressions of them.
- Discuss your involvement in the 1992 campaign. What did you see as Hillary Clinton's primary roles in the campaign?
- What was your role in the transition? How did you come to be selected as Deputy Assistant to the President and Deputy Chief of Staff to the First Lady? Did you have any discussions with the President or First Lady about your specific roles and responsibilities?

Deputy Assistant to the President and Deputy Chief of Staff to the First Lady

- What were your primary responsibilities as Deputy Assistant to the President and Deputy Chief of Staff to the First Lady? What issues and activities occupied most of your time? How thoroughly integrated were you into the President's staff?
- What did you see as Hillary Clinton's primary roles and responsibilities within the Administration?
- Discuss your role as an issues advisor to the First Lady. What was your involvement in health care reform, women's and children's issues, education, welfare reform, the arts, and foreign policy? Discuss your part in or observations about the major policy initiatives and events of the Clinton presidency. Did you have a role in deciding which issue areas the First Lady was going to pay attention to? If so, what considerations informed these decisions?
- Characterize your responsibilities on diplomatic trips abroad with the President and First Lady. What were Hillary Clinton's duties on foreign trips? Discuss your involvement with the First Lady's appearance at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing, China.
- Describe the staff structure of the First Lady's office. Characterize your working relationships with the First Lady, Chief of Staff Margaret Williams, Social Secretary Ann Stock, Press Secretary Lisa Caputo, and Director of Scheduling Patricia Solis.
- With whom in the West Wing did you work most closely? Characterize your working relationships with the President, Chiefs of Staff Thomas "Mack" McLarty and Leon Panetta, and other members of the President's staff. Can you recall any situations in which there were divergences between the President and First Lady's offices concerning a particular policy or course of action?
- Did you work closely with members of Congress? If so, with whom and on what issues?
- How did the Whitewater investigation affect you, Hillary Clinton, the First Lady's staff, and the Executive Office in general?

Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff to the First Lady

- How did you come to be selected as Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff to the First Lady? Characterize your responsibilities in this role. How did your working relationship with the First Lady and her staff change? Did your working relationship with the President or his staff change?
- Discuss your role in formulating the Vital Voices Democracy Initiative.
- Discuss how the unfolding of the Lewinsky scandal affected the First Lady and the White House staff in general. Describe the atmosphere in the White House during this period. Were you involved in the internal efforts to craft a response to the movement to impeach the President?
- How, if at all, did your role change during Hillary Clinton's Senate campaign? How did the duties and activities of the Office of the First Lady change during the Senate campaign?

The Clinton Presidency in Retrospect

- Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the Clinton presidency.
- How did Hillary Clinton figure into the Administration's plans for success? What were Hillary Clinton's greatest strengths and weaknesses as First Lady?
- Assess the partnership between the President and the First Lady. In what ways was she an asset to him, as a candidate and officeholder, and to the Administration?
- What do you see as your greatest achievements during your service within the Administration?
- What features of the Clinton presidency were overlooked or misunderstood by the press?
- Did you recognize any changes in Bill and Hillary Clinton over the course of their White House years? If so, what were the most important ones?
- How did Hillary Clinton change the office of First Lady?
- How should the Clinton presidency be viewed in history? How should Hillary Clinton's role within the Administration be viewed in history?