

PRESIDENTS OF THE UNITED STATES PRESIDENTS OF THE UNITED STATES PRESIDENTS OF THE UNITED STATES



Presidents of the United States

Bill Clinton

Born: August 19, 1946, Hope, Arkansas.

Occupation: Lawyer.

Wife: Hillary Rodham. Children: One girl.

President: 1993-2001. Democrat party.

Vice-President: Albert Gore, Jr.



William Jefferson Clinton, the 42nd president of the United States, held office from 1993 to 2001. He was the first Democratic president to win two terms since Franklin Roosevelt and only the second president ever to be impeached and tried by the Senate.

Born in Hope, Ark., on Aug. 19, 1946, to Virginia Dwire Blythe, and named for his father, who had recently died in an auto accident, William Jefferson Blythe was reared from age 7 in Hot Springs, Ark. He took his stepfather's last name, Clinton, after the birth of a stepbrother. After high school he went to Georgetown University (1964-68), Oxford University as a Rhodes scholar (1968-70), and Yale Law School (1970-73), where he met his future wife, Hillary Rodham. Clinton then became a law professor at the University of Arkansas. He lost a 1974 bid to unseat a Republican congressman but two years later was elected state attorney general. While serving in that office he was elected, at age 32, the youngest governor in Arkansas history. After losing a reelection bid in 1980, he came back to win four more terms as governor, gaining a reputation as a pro-business, centrist, pragmatic "New Democrat."

In October 1991, Clinton announced that he was a candidate for the Democratic nomination for president. Benefiting from the fact that the party's preeminent leaders declined to challenge George Bush in his reelection bid, Clinton weathered accusations of marital infidelity and draft evasion during the Vietnam War to come in a respectable second in the New Hampshire primary and then to sweep the contests in the South and major Eastern states. Formally nominated at the Democratic party convention in New York, Clinton defied the conventional wisdom of a balanced ticket and selected as his running mate Tennessee senator Al Gore, a fellow baby-boomer, white southern Baptist, and moderate. Outperforming Bush in three television debates and capitalizing on uncertainty about the health of the economy, Clinton emerged the victor, winning 43% of the popular vote, to 38% for Bush and 19% for independent candidate H. Ross Perot.

Taking office in January 1993 with an approval rating well over 60%, and with a dispirited Republican party torn by differences over abortion rights and other social issues, Clinton appeared poised to restore the Democrats to national dominance. Rather than making the needs of the larger national interest his top priority, however, Clinton initially devoted large amounts of time and his prestige to the divisive issue of gays in the military and to the appointment of women and African Americans to highly visible federal posts, while simultaneously appearing inexperienced and indecisive in dealing with crises in Bosnia, Haiti, and Somalia.

On other matters Clinton successfully worked with Congress in 1993 to achieve legislation making it easier to

register to vote, enabling workers with new children or sick family members to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave, providing child immunization, requiring a waiting period and background check for handgun buyers, and cutting taxes on the working poor and raising them on the wealthy.

In 1994, Clinton prodded Congress to enact an anticrime bill that banned assault weapons, provided federal funds for prison construction, and other crime-prevention measures. New legislation also made it a federal crime to intimidate women seeking abortion services. Decisive initiatives to check an Iraqi threat to Kuwait, to halt North Korea's development of nuclear weapons, to further the Middle East peace process, and to oust Haiti's military dictatorship briefly lifted Clinton's poll ratings late in the year.

The Republicans gained control of Congress for the first time since 1953-54, winning more than 50 seats in the House previously held by Democrats, as well as a net gain of 8 Senate seats, a majority of the governorships, and at least parity in the state legislatures for the first time since the onset of the Great Depression. A dispirited Clinton appeared to be a probable one-term president. But the "comeback kid" once again proved to be an adept politician. He opposed the most extreme measures passed by the Republican Congress, and when deadlock with Congress over the budget in 1995 resulted in a shutdown of government offices, Clinton successfully fixed the blame on the Republicans. At the same time Clinton shifted to the center, proposing his own more moderate measures to reform the welfare system, reduce taxes, and gradually eliminate the federal deficit. He simultaneously co-opted popular Republican causes that appealed to Americans who were upset about crime, sex and violence on TV, teen pregnancy, and smoking and the general decline in morals and values. By addressing middle-class anxieties without raising the fears of huge new deficits and bureaucracies, Clinton's favorable rating in January 1996 moved above 50% for the first time since he had taken office.

Unopposed for the Democratic nomination in 1996, Clinton ran against the former Senate majority leader, Robert Dole, whose campaign was plagued by gaffes and fumbles, disaffected Republicans, and Dole's own sudden and unconvincing conversion to a massive tax cut. The president ran a cautious campaign, taking full credit for falling unemployment and the lowest "misery index" since 1969 and repeatedly bashing the Republicans as cold, heartless champions of the rich who wanted to eliminate Medicare and school loans. Although Clinton captured a whopping electoral vote victory, 379 to 159, he won just 49% of the popular vote, doing best among racial minorities and women. The GOP, however, retained control of both the House and Senate, winning among white males, especially in the South and the Plains.

With less than half of those eligible to vote in 1996 having done so, and the government again divided, both Clinton and the Republican Congress began the president's second term with chastened vows. Both exercised moderation throughout 1997, cutting taxes for the middle class as well as the wealthy, modifying the welfare system, and further reducing the budget deficit. Although Clinton continued to be plagued by old charges of sexual and financial wrongdoings, and both parties by new allegations of illegal campaign contributions, most Americans in December 1997 seemed content with the status quo. The United States was prosperous and at peace, and little else mattered much.

Then came one of the most topsy-turvy years in American politics that would end with Clinton becoming the first elected president to be impeached. It began with the president announcing that the budget would be balanced for the first time in years and girding for a military confrontation with Iraq over the latter's efforts to thwart UN weapons inspections. (The latter



President Clinton's birthplace

was averted, temporarily, by the diplomacy of UN secretary general Kofi Annan, but by the summer Iraq was again testing UN resolved over the weapons inspections.) Hanging over Clinton were new allegations of sexual impropriety. In January Whitewater prosecutor Kenneth Starr charged that Clinton had carried on a sexual affair from 1995 to 1997 with Monica Lewinsky, a young White House intern just out of college, and had lied about it and urged others to lie about it in the sexual harassment case brought against him by Paula Jones. The



Hillary Clinton

president publicly denied all the allegations; White House aides demeaned the integrity and undermined the credibility of his accusers, and Clinton's approval rating started to rise. Seven months later Lewinsky, after being granted immunity, revised her earlier testimony and admitted to a grand jury that she and the president had carried on a sexual affair in the White House. Clinton also changed his story in testimony to the grand jury

in August. He now admitted that he did have an intimate relationship with Lewinsky that was not appropriate, but denied that it had been a "sexual" relationship. He said that he had misled, but not that he had lied. He expressed regret but did not apologize.

Public opinion polls indicated that although a clear majority deplored the president's personal conduct and believed that he had lied and obstructed justice, they did not think his actions constituted "high crimes and misdemeanors" and did not want him removed from office. Indeed, with the economy doing better than at any time since the 1950s, the crime rate falling, and the stock market soaring, some two-thirds of those polled consistently rated Clinton's moderate-centrist presidency highly. On December 12, while he was in Israel trying to shore up that fragile accord, the Republican-controlled House Judiciary Committee submitted four charges of impeachment for a vote by the full House. Two days earlier Clinton had ordered air attacks against Iraq, which had again thwarted the UN weapons inspections. His critics believed that the four-day operation, called Desert Fox and conducted by U.S. and British planes and cruise missiles, was timed to distract attention from the impeachment.

Nevertheless, the committee's vote was confirmed by the full House on December 19. The articles of impeachment alleged that Clinton had lied under oath before the grand jury and that he had obstructed justice in a federal civil rights action by seeking to cover up evidence of his affair with Lewinsky. A dispirited Senate, knowing full well that the Republicans could not muster the two-thirds vote necessary to convict the president and remove him from office, went through the motions of a trial. The anticlimax came on Feb. 12, 1999: with all 45 Democrats supporting the president, the Senate voted 50-50 on the count of obstruction of justice and 55-45 against the charge of perjury.

With the impeachment issue out of the way, Clinton focused on the crisis in Yugoslavia, where the Serb government of President Slobodan Milošević was massacring civilians in an attempt to suppress a nationalist revolt among ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. When diplomacy failed to resolve the issue, Clinton, backed by the Senate, took the lead in organizing NATO air strikes against the Serbs, which began on Mar. 24, 1999. In the end the gamble paid off. Milošević finally accepted a peace plan in early June, agreeing to evacuate Kosovo. The NATO objectives were achieved without any loss of life on the allied side due to enemy action.

Clinton spent much of his final months in office negotiating an arrangement with Robert W. Ray, who had succeeded Kenneth Starr as independent counsel. In exchange for avoiding prosecution, the president admitted making false and misleading statements while testifying under oath, and agreed to pay a fine and have his license to practice law in Arkansas suspended. Yet, just as controversy had plagued Clinton's first days in the White House, so it would his final days.

Clinton's autobiography, *My Life*, was published in 2004. In early 2005, Clinton and his predecessor, George H. W. Bush, were chosen by President George W. Bush to lead a nationwide fundraising drive to help victims of devastating Indian Ocean tsunamis that had occurred in South and Southeast Asia in the last week of 2004.



PRESIDENTS OF THE UNITED STATES PRESIDENTS OF THE UNITED STATES PRESIDENTS OF THE UNITED STATES