

Clinton show stops in L.B.



Jonathan Young / For the Press-Telegram

Bill Clinton pauses during his L.B. visit to chat with, clockwise from lower left, City Council members Bonnie Lowenthal, Suja Lowenthal and Gary DeLong, Police Chief Anthony Batts, P-T sports columnist Doug Krikorian, Mayor Bob Foster and Councilwoman Tonia Reyes Uranga.



DOUG KRIKORIAN

The man who might one day become First Husband, Bill Clinton, had just finished giving a speech at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Long Beach fundraising affair late Tuesday afternoon, and he had spoken about Iraq, Social Security, medical insurance, greenhouse gases, Vladimir Putin, and various other serious matters of the planet.

And, as the 42nd president of the United States was making his way out of the 14th floor dining room of the law firm sponsor of the event, Keesal,

Young & Logan, at the Union Bank Building, he stopped and posed for pictures with gathered guests.

And, as he neared the elevators, a group consisting of the Long Beach mayor, Bob Foster, the chief of police, Anthony Batts, the city attorney, Bob Shannon, and City Council members Bonnie Lowenthal, Suja Lowenthal, Gary DeLong, Patrick O'Donnell, Gerrie Schipske, Tonia Reyes Uranga, Rae Gabelich and Val Lerch waited anxiously to shake hands with Clinton and have a

photograph taken with him.

"These are our city leaders," said Skip Keesal, whereupon William Jefferson Clinton, gray hair perfectly coiffed, stylishly attired in a dark blue suit, blue shirt, pink tie, that trademark impish smile fixed to a tanned face leaner than his White House days, walked directly toward me with his right hand extended as I stood near Foster observing the scene.

I shook it and immediately told

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Clinton, "I'm just a sportswriter."

The man who only moments earlier had been discussing the dangers of global warming and the need to help the impoverished and sick around the world suddenly turned to a slightly less important subject without any hesitation.

"Who do you think is going to win the Final Four?" he asked.

"Florida," I replied. "Who do you think is going to win?"

"I kind of like North Carolina, although the Tar Heels haven't done well in recent weeks," he responded. "I also think Kansas is a serious threat. And you have to give Ohio State and Wisconsin a chance. And I'm sure Florida could still put it all together."

"How do you know so much about college basketball?" I wondered.

"Oh, I watch the games all the time late at night when I finish up writing on my latest book," he said. "I love the sport. Eddie Sutton (one-time Arkansas coach) long has been a close buddy of mine."

We spoke a few more moments about hoops before Bill Clinton moved over to warmly embrace Foster, Batts, Shannon and the City Council representatives.

There were more than 200 people, most of whom paid \$1,000 for a ticket, who showed up for a function that in the past has attracted such personages as Margaret Thatcher, George Bush, Henry Kissinger, Rudy Giuliani,

Gerald Ford, Bill Bradley, Robert Kennedy Jr. and General Tommy Franks.

Self-deprecating

Bill Clinton was present for about two and a half hours — he took individual pictures with 50 selected people beforehand for an hour and then spoke for about 45 minutes — but he was well-indemnified for his appearance, as he received \$150,000 plus expenses.

He displayed his famous rhetorical skills, blending self-deprecating humor with interesting observations.

"I told Hillary this morning I was going to a Boys & Girls Club function, and she said to me, 'I did that for you for 20 years,'" he said, amid laughter.

Clinton's wife, Hillary Rodham Clinton, of course, is a Democratic presidential candidate.

Bill Clinton had kind remembrances of Long Beach.

"I'll always have a warm spot in my heart for Long Beach," he said. "I remember coming here in 1996, when this became the first city in America to adopt school uniforms. When I went back to Washington, D.C., the writers all made fun of the idea. Well, now 20 percent of the schools in the country have their students wearing uniforms, and statistics have shown that there is less violence and less dropouts in these schools."

He also took notice of the resurgence of Long Beach since the Navy base was closed, which came under his

watch.

"I know it was a tough transition at the start, but I think Long Beach now is stronger than ever with all the shipping going on," he said.

He spoke about the differences between headlines and "trendlines."

"Those are headlines when you talk about the death of Anna Nicole Smith and Britney Spears cutting her hair," he said. "But trendlines are when you talk about things that matter like health care and energy and getting people to work together from different communities."

He spoke about what we all face in the 21st century, and explained how globalization can be unequal, unstable and unsustainable, but how its pitfalls can be rectified by smart diplomacy, increased education and philanthropic gestures.

He spoke about how America's popularity soared when it gave aid to Indonesia, which has the world's largest Muslim population, after it was ravaged by the tsunami a few years ago.

"Our ratings went up to 65 percent and Osama Bin Laden's went down to 28 percent," he said.

He took a few light jabs at President George W. Bush, saying that the economy the past five years has been a boon to the corporations and to people like himself in the upper wage brackets.

"But there are a lot of people in this country struggling to make it, and something has to be done about this inequality," he said.

The crowd stood and cheered when he concluded, and it was a crowd overflowing with movers and shakers of the community.

L.B. representatives

Naturally, Beverly O'Neill, who worked with Clinton on several projects when she was mayor, was present, and proudly showed me afterward the photos she took with Clinton.

I also spotted, among others, Jim Hankla, Jim Gray, Bob Murphy, Greg Bombard, Larry Jackson, F. King Alexander, Carl Kemp, Michael Levy, Rocky Suarez, John Fielder, Tom McGee and the former mayor of Los Angeles, James Hahn.

Iconoclastic Pine Avenue restaurant pioneer John Morris also was there, and held the distinction of being the only male in the room who didn't wear a coat and tie. His sartorial statement was a gray Tommy Bahama shirt.

The Long Beach Boys & Girls Club president, Scott Dionne, did a terrific job as emcee, and he, the local director of the clubs, Don Rodriguez, and Nancy Gaines presented Clinton afterward with a Tiffany golf putter with his name engraved on it.

"Everything turned out great," said Don Rodriguez. "We raised a lot of money for a great cause, and Bill Clinton showed he still can entertain a crowd."

He also showed me he has a vast knowledge of college basketball.

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