

Assess the significance of the Clinton presidency of the Democrat Party

Clinton was the first Democrat to serve two full terms as president since Franklin D. Roosevelt. His election ended an era in which the Republican party had controlled the White House for 12 consecutive years, and for 20 of the previous 24 years. That election also brought the Democrats full control of the political branches of the federal government, including both houses of U.S. Congress as well as the presidency, for the first time since the administration of the last Democratic president, Jimmy Carter. He was a much needed charismatic and centrist leader to unite the party.

Clinton's first act as president was to sign executive order 12834 (entitled "Ethics Commitments by Executive Branch Appointees"), which placed substantial restrictions upon the ability of his senior political appointees to lobby their colleagues after they leave office. Clinton rescinded the order shortly before he left office in executive order 13184 of December 28, 2000.

Shortly after taking office, Clinton fulfilled a campaign promise by signing the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, which required large employers to allow their employees to take unpaid leave because of pregnancy or serious medical condition. While this action was popular, Clinton's initial reluctance to fulfill another campaign promise relating to the acceptance of openly homosexual members of the military garnered criticism from both the left (for being too tentative in promoting gay rights) and the right (for being too insensitive to military life). After much debate, Clinton implemented the "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, which remains official military policy.

The most important item on Clinton's legislative agenda, however, was a complex health care reform plan, the result of a taskforce headed by Hillary Clinton, aimed at achieving universal coverage. Though initially well-received, it was ultimately doomed by well-organized opposition from conservatives and the health insurance industry. It was the first major legislative defeat of Clinton's administration.

After two years of Democratic party control under Clinton's leadership, the mid-term elections in 1994 proved disastrous for the Democrats. They lost control of both houses of Congress for the first time in 40 years, in large part due to stalled legislation, including a failed attempt to create a comprehensive health care system under a plan developed by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton. After the 1994 election, the spotlight shifted to the Contract with America spearheaded by Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich. The Republican-controlled Congress and Clinton sparred over the budget. The inability of Clinton and the Republican-controlled Congress to come to an agreement resulted in the longest government shutdown to date.

In the 1996 presidential election, Clinton was re-elected receiving 49.2% of the popular vote over Republican Bob Dole (40.7% of the popular vote) and Reform candidate Ross Perot (8.4% of the popular vote), while the Republicans retained control of the Congress losing but a few seats. Clinton developed a close working relationship with Tony Blair, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, when he was elected in 1997.

In 1998, as a result of issues surrounding personal indiscretions with a young female White House intern (Monica Lewinsky), Clinton was the second U.S. president to be impeached by the House of Representatives. He was tried in the Senate and found not guilty of the charges brought against him. Clinton initially denied having any improper relationship with Lewinsky, but later admitted that it had in fact taken place. He apologized to the nation for his actions and continued to have unprecedented popular approval ratings for his job as president.

In 1999, through Clinton's and the Congress's efforts, the United States had a projected federal budget surplus for the first time since 1969. He took a personal interest in The Troubles in Northern Ireland and paid three visits there while he was president in order to encourage peace. His involvement was an important element in the peace process which set in motion the disarmament of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) on October 23, 2001.

During Clinton's tenure, the U.S. enjoyed continuous economic expansion, reductions in unemployment, and growing wealth through a massive rise in the stock market. The economic boom ended shortly after his term ended, possibly indicative of a stock market bubble; Although the reasons for the expansion are continually debated, Clinton proudly pointed to a number of economic accomplishments, including more than 22 million new jobs, homeownership rate increase from 64.0% to 67.5%, lowest unemployment rate in 30 years, higher incomes at all levels, largest budget deficit in American history converted to the largest surplus of over \$200 billion, lowest government spending as a percentage of GDP since 1974 and higher stock ownership by families than ever before.

The reasons for this growth are hotly debated, but Clinton supporters cite his 1993 tax increase as the reason that eventually led to the reduction in the annual budget deficits every year of his tenure. These deficit reductions stimulated consumption and consumer spending, and strengthening the dollar, which encouraged foreign investment in the United States economy. Alan Greenspan supported the 1993 tax increase, which was approved by Congress without a single Republican vote. His critics credit Alan Greenspan, the Republican Congress' 1995 spending cuts, the Contract with America initiatives, and even Ronald Reagan's 1981 tax cut.

Many believe he was the most skilful politician to occupy the White House since Lyndon Johnson, and one of the toughest. He remains a man of puzzling and inconsistent political principles - announcing that "the era of big government is over" even as he unveils dozens of new initiatives. And the President who promised the "most ethical administration" in history has presided over one in which resignations for ethical cause, indictments, convictions, judicial reprimands, appointments of special investigative prosecutors, and continuing questions about ethical and possibly criminal behaviour, including his own, have played a defining role.