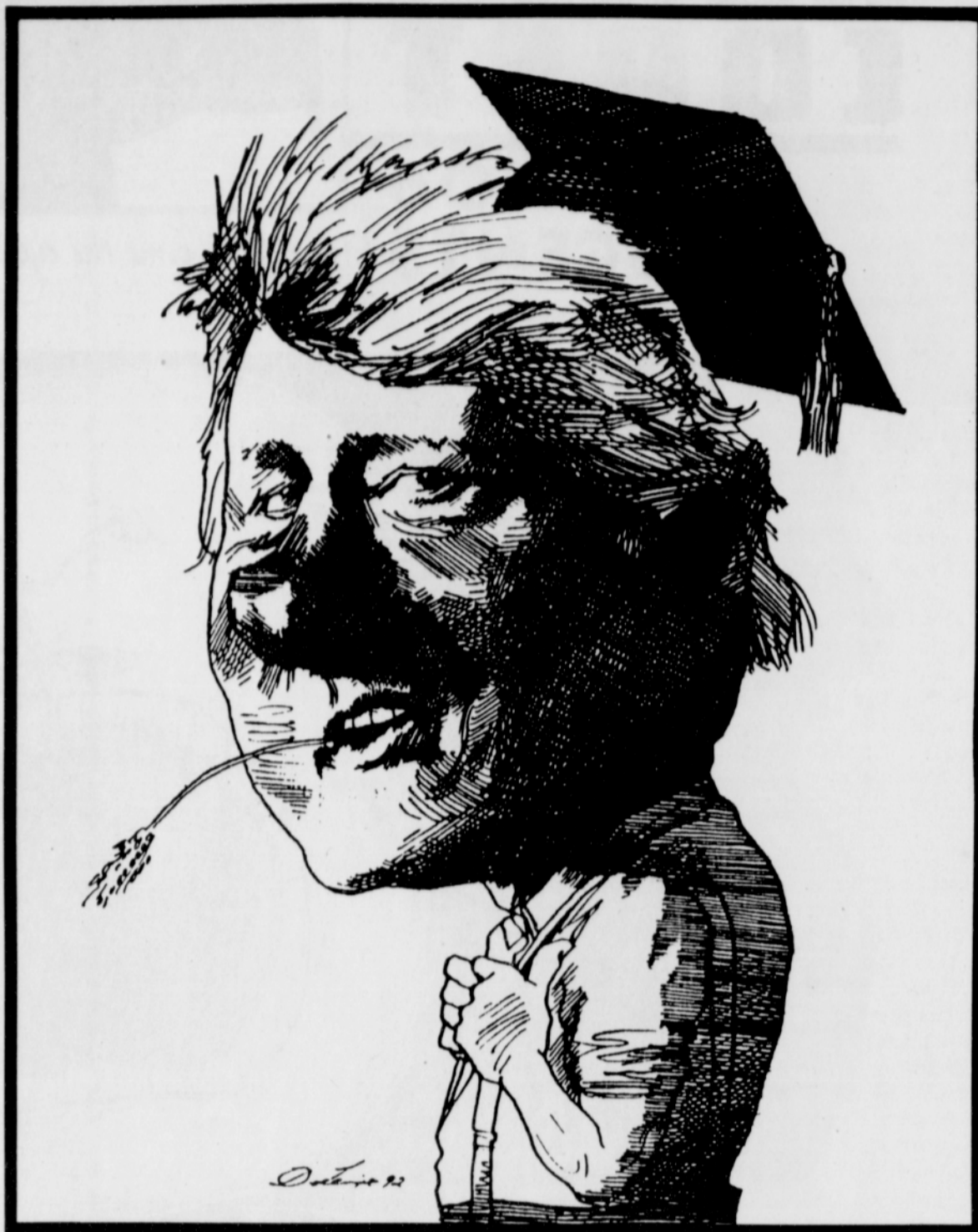


# BILL CLINTON MEETS ASTORIA

BY MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER



DAVID LEVINE

Why shouldn't Bill Clinton come out here to the Oregon coast? He wowed the crowds at a southern California mall right after his election as President and seems to have kept up the pace of his campaign, pressing flesh and rubbing up against the proletariat all over the Country. So here he is, walking with Hillary along the hilly streets of old Astoria, without entourage, hardly more noticeable than any other couple. He sees us, a small crowd on the riverfront at the Sixth Street Pier, and almost reflexively advances smiling and shaking hands. "What can I do for you?" he asks after touching everyone. We all answer at once, a loud gabble of geese. He holds up his hands. We shut up, though raggedly.

He asks me. "The Four Freedoms," I say cleverly, invoking Franklin Roosevelt's famous principles for fighting World War II.

Clinton was up to it: "Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Religion. . ."

"Freedom from Want and Freedom from Fear," Hillary concluded.

The crowd grew larger as word got around that the Clintons were in town. Clinton stood in a small wooden enclosure with his back to the wide Columbia River. Hillary stood next to him. People came up to talk to them. They waited their turn on steps and against railings that surrounded the First Couple and in a narrow aisle built on pilings between old cannery offices now used for more gentrified endeavors. Each person had to reach down to grasp Clinton's hand because he stood two steps below the main deck and he had to look up at them, and though he might have been displeased it gave an illusion of empowerment to the people talking to their new President.

Old railroad tracks that once hauled fish to inland cities were thronged by people coming and going. There were hecklers, of course, but few, and silenced mostly by disapproval of the majority who had come to lay hands on Bill and Hillary and generally wish them well for the next four years — and each tried to answer his question, "What can I do for you?"

Elizabeth Baldwin was right up front. "Off the top of my head and picking from thousands of choices," she said, "I hope you do what you said about mass transit and a health care system, and you should follow your Vice President (Albert) Gore's lead on the environment." She is an attorney and the Bill of Rights are her avocation: "You should appoint judges to the federal court who will uphold the Constitution and are interested in supporting individual liberties instead of big business. I think you have the sense and the class to appoint good judges and take active steps to return the law to the people, which is where it belongs."

Fitz Randolph Moore said Clinton should "make good on your promise of national health care to cover everyone in the country. And end the war on drugs which self-perpetuates the enforcement bureaucracy, which is like keeping a crazy aunt in the cellar."

Enola Baeten, waitress, hairstylist and mother of two young daughters was also concerned about health care, and in addition thought the President should "fix the deficit without taxing us out of existence."

"Definitely health care," Rita Rupp said. "And pare the military way down."

Jim Jenkins, Vietnam veteran, truck driver and thespian who speaks sharply and forthrightly about everything, said that jobs are high priority. "I would like to see you give some hope to the people who feel they have no hope," he said. "I hope he can perpetuate the enthusiasm behind him," he said a few moments later to Rita, his fiancée. "He is the first blue sky after a long stormy season."

"I think you ought to fix the longterm problems Bush never attempted," Matt Gleason said. "Industrial policy and education — and family values. It should be okay to have a standard '50s family without anybody laughing at you for it. And I think you should give serious thought to a rational unmanned launch system for space exploration."

"Pass the Equal Rights Amendment," Charlotte Bruhn said. "Shape up the Supreme Court. Institute socialized medicine. Integrate America. I don't think your cabinet looks necessarily as we do," she said, "but it looks more like we do than any other cabinet in U.S. history. I don't want us to get into any more wars to just

flex our muscles," she continued. "I hope we change our attitude about our supposed supremacy of the world. I also think you should start smoking pot again and this time inhale."

"We might have the beginning of a new age of socialism with Clinton," Joe Maurray said to Charlotte as they climbed past several people standing on the steps of the Sixth Street viewing platform. "It's got to have a different name, though. America isn't ready," he said at the top, looking out over the river. Several large ships were parked at anchor near Tongue Point. Snow frosted mountains that walled the Washington shore. "Choosing Gore means Clinton's serious," Joe said. "Ecological and economic technology can be put into gear; give the military industrial mafia a new contract for environmental revitalization."

Joe and Charlotte heard their friend Jane Franklin, visiting from Seattle, tell Clinton, "Break the backs of the American drug czars, the pharmaceutical industry. And pass the ERA."

"You should lower taxes for poor people like me," Jesse Torres said to Clinton. "We should have better health insurance for everybody without us having to pay so much. You should fix our problems here instead of everybody's problems elsewhere."

Ray Lee Beckwith agreed. "I hope you get rid of that b.s. in Somalia and start paying attention to problems at home," he said. "We should clean our own closet instead of everyone else's. I hate seeing starving children there, but we ought to feed our own first."

"Stop worrying about other countries and start worrying about us," Ralph Parker said.

"I think your first priority should be some kind of national health care," Terry Christensen said. "Second priority is to make education affordable; perhaps in lieu of student loans they can earn tuition through national service of some kind."

Lorna Zametkin was worried about education also. "I think you should take a good look at education because our kids are not prepared for the jobs they want to do after school, or for much of anything else," she said.

"Stop subsidies," Verna Hellberg said. "Why should the government pay people to not grow food when we have starving people in this country." And an effort should be made to reduce fines against commercial fishermen so they can catch up on their taxes, she said.

"The most important thing is for you to speak out for and enforce legislation against discrimination," Carol Newman said. "Turn the tide of prejudice practiced by the previous administrations. That means homophobia, racism, sexism and all other prejudices and bigotry. That means to obliterate the concept of America as a Christian white male society and restore freedom of plurality." She turned to Hillary. "I should like to see you act as an independent human being and use your clout to promote the same thing

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