

A Conversation with PAUL BEGALA

Paul Begala is a political adviser, commentator, and former Counselor to President Bill Clinton. In this conversation, Begala gives an inside account of the 1992 campaign and tells the story of how the Arkansas governor won the Democratic nomination and the presidency. Begala also looks back on key moments in the Clinton White House and shares his experiences working with the president. Finally, Kristol and Begala consider the 2016 field of Republican candidates.

On Clinton's 1992 campaign, Begala says: [Because of George H.W. Bush's popularity,] the thought in '91 was somebody's going to be a sacrificial lamb. Clinton's gift was to be able to see around corners... Go back to [his] announcement speech and you see the whole animating vision of his presidency. More domestic than foreign, more populist, middle-class based economics, but also a deep skepticism of too much bureaucracy, too much deficit. It was really exactly what he believed in.

On Clinton's response to scandal, Begala says: Clinton decided to make it "about you, not me." And because he came into the race steeped in a bunch of ideas, he didn't have to create stuff on the fly; there was a kind of staying power to his ideas. And that's what he clung to, that was our life raft. And that's what got us through it. And then we would start to hear voters say that. It was like: "Okay he's had his problems." But they also said: "He's a young guy with a head full of good ideas."

On 2016 Republican candidates, Begala says: The three governors in the Midwest I think are really impressive: Scott Walker, John Kasich, Mike Pence. Really impressive. And, with the exception of Pence, from blue states and having to govern successfully and campaign successfully in blue states. That always gets my attention. I would not count out Ted Cruz...He has Barack Obama's education and Sarah Palin's politics, so nobody can say "oh, he's stupid."

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