MOVIE – "1996 ELECTIONS: BRIDGE TO THE 21ST CENTURY"
(28 minutes/color)

SYNOPSIS

President Bill Clinton was elected in the 1992 three-way race in which the majority of the nation did not vote for him. The 1994 mid-term elections resulted in Republican control of both houses of Congress. This set up a 1996 election primary season that began very early, and ended up with 9 Republicans vying for a shot to go against President Clinton, who was nominated without significant opposition. The frontrunner for the Republicans was Senator Bob Dole, who won the nomination over a strong conservative challenge by Pat Buchanan. The Buchanan campaign drew blood on a candidate that was already considered weak by some Republicans, and left Dole to run against an increasingly popular President. To make matters better for the President, any anti-Clinton vote would again be diluted by Reform Party candidate Ross Perot.

Dole's message was anchored in the idea of bridging America to its past, a time of alleged tranquility and prosperity. Clinton effectively countered by envisioning a "bridge to the 21st Century" instead of a bridge to the past. During a period of strong economic growth, the Republican campaign built around repealing the Clinton tax increases fell short of defeating the Democratic message of leaving no Americans behind. Bill Clinton was reelected with almost half of the vote (49.23% - although the film rounds up to 50%). Dole, Perot and other candidates collected the other half of the vote. With more than half of registered voters abstaining and the lack of Clinton's coattails, the Republicans maintained control of Congress.

OBJECTIVES

1. According the evidence presented in the film, evaluate the 1996 elections in terms of being :

    a. "status quo" elections in which the public endorsed the nation's direction.

    b. indicative of overall voter dissatisfaction with both major parties.

2. Identify the challenges facing Robert Dole to unseat President Clinton.

3. Identify the advantages and disadvantages an incumbent President enjoys when running for reelection.

4. Compare and contrast the campaign themes of the two major political parties.

    a. Bob Dole's "Bridge to the past"

    b. Bill Clinton's "Bridge to the 21st Century"

5. Describe the attempt by Democrats to retake Congress by targeting vulnerable Republican Congressmen.

6. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages associated with lengthy primary battles for a Presidential candidate.

7. Estimate the impact of the Ross Perot campaign on the outcome of the 1996 elections.

8. Based on the clips provided in the film of each candidate, evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of President Bill Clinton and Senator Bob Dole as candidates.

QUESTIONS

1. How do the primary and general elections of 1996 compare to and contrast with the 2008 elections?

2. Considering that national party conventions now only symbolically choose Presidential candidates, what are the reasons for continuing their usage?

3. What advantages and disadvantages were experienced by Congressman Michael Flanagan and challenger Rod Blagojevich in their campaigns for Illinois' Fifth District?

4. What effects did the budget crisis have on the 1996 elections?

5. What were the effects of the Pat Buchanan candidacy on the Dole campaign?

6. What factors contributed to the lack of Clinton "coattails" and the resulting return of Republican control of Congress?

7. How can President Clinton's reelection with a plurality of votes from a plurality of eligible voters be both an endorsement of his message AND an indication of overall voter dissatisfaction with both parties?

8. What factors might have increased Bob Dole's chances of winning?

9. What factors made it likely for Bill Clinton to be reelected?

10. What was the relationship between Bill Clinton's popularity and his lack of significant opposition in the primary election season?