Hove Considers Why Clinton Is Facing Scrutiny

Column by Anders Hove

For those readers who have just arrived at MIT, I would like to extend a two-part welcome: First, welcome to Hell. Those who modestly refer to themselves as "Members of the Prestigious MIT Community" know you will love it here. The rest of us can only hope for the best. Second, please feel free to propagate your opinions by sending them to these pages for publication. MIT really does resemble a small, diverse town, and like any other community, its members need a voice. These pages serve as one of many options students have for speaking their minds. Use them.

I have been occupying my time over the summer attempting to bring order to the piles of presidential doomsday theories. It seems every pundit has come up with a pet explanation for President Bill Clinton’s slump in stature. On the other hand, it is hardly difficult to understand the thirst for explanation. In the last quarter century we have witnessed several slumps of a similar nature. Compared to Jimmy Carter, who seemed to age two decades during his first half term, Clinton still looks downright vibrant. Lyndon Johnson’s angst over the deepening quagmire in Vietnam began its first growth spurt in 1966. Richard Nixon managed to survive one term, but then just into his second stretch he was handed a presidential pardon and exiled to San Clemente. At this time four years ago George Bush was just building up to his victory in the Gulf War. But the passage of another year would see Bush’s popularity evaporate with the onset of the multiple-dipped recession of 1991.

With so much experience tracking floundering presidencies, one might think pundits would understand the process by now. What leads to a presidential downfall? Do economic quagmires mean more than foreign policy disasters, or vice versa? Or does lack of support in Congress make the public despair of a president’s ability to lead? Perhaps political distrust is first fostered by scandal in top government. Or maybe after two years of seeing a president in action, people better know and hate his quirks and organizational failings. None of these explanations neatly squares with America’s Clinton experience. Let’s look at how closely they fit with the explanations given by other political commentators.

The "eaze/overload" theory: Clinton’s character has been hyper-analyzed. In the history of press muckraking, perhaps only Charles and Di have faced as much press scrutiny as the current president. We have heard about the marijuana, the trip to Moscow, his Vietnam dodge, the two tabloid-generated philandering stories, Hillary’s insidiously wrongheaded opinions, and the President’s preference for white gloves. The "sleaze-overload" theory suggests that Clinton’s character has been hyper-analyzed. In the history of press muckraking, perhaps only Charles and Diana have faced as much press scrutiny as the current president. We have heard about the marijuana, the trip to Moscow, his Vietnam dodge, the two tabloid-generated philandering stories, Hillary’s insidiously wrongheaded opinions, and the President’s preference for white gloves.

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