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### Purple Nation

September 4, 2012

## The Two Clinton Legacies that Obama Should Continue

By Lanny J. Davis

<http://thehill.com/conventions-2012/dem-convention-charlotte/247409-opinion-the-two-clinton-legacies-that-obama-should-continue>

There are many legacies of the Bill Clinton presidency, but two should influence President Obama most of all as he hits the reset button Thursday night to begin his general-election campaign.

The first is the legacy of fiscal responsibility — appealing to those voters who consider themselves conservative on debt and deficit issues.

Bill Clinton began his presidency inheriting a deficit of over \$300 billion (big number in those days). He insisted on a budget bill that raised taxes \$500 billion — bringing unanimous opposition from congressional Republicans, who predicted such a tax hike would bring about a long-term recession. He insisted on cutting spending \$500 billion, offending the liberals who wanted him to stimulate the economy with more deficit spending, not to cut spending.

Not one Republican member of Congress supported the Clinton Budget Bill of 1993. Yet eight years and 23 million new jobs later, President Clinton had converted the \$300 billion into a \$1 trillion surplus.

But in the crossfire between right and left, President Clinton created a New Center in American politics — mixing conservative principles of fiscal responsibility and liberal principles of a broad safety social safety net going back to the FDR's New Deal, Harry Truman's Fair Deal and LBJ's Great Society.

That is why I am hoping President Obama on Thursday night will announce, for the first time, his endorsement of the Simpson-Bowles Deficit Reduction Commission, supported by a bipartisan 63 percent majority of commission members — calling for spending cuts, raising revenues by closing tax loopholes, cutting corporate taxes and undertaking Medicare and Social Security reforms needed to maintain their long-term solvency.

As to President Clinton's second legacy, President Obama should re-read the comment President Clinton made to President George W. Bush in the White House in the spring of 2004 during the East Room ceremony unveiling the official portraits of himself and the first lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton.

After President Bush graciously welcomed the Clintons back to the White House, saying, "Over eight years, it was clear that Bill Clinton loved the job of the presidency. He filled this house with energy and joy," President Clinton responded by thanking Bush for his "generous words," adding:

"You know, most of the people I've known in this business, Republicans and Democrats, conservatives and liberals, were good people, honest people, and they did what they thought was right. And I hope I'll live long enough to see American politics return to vigorous debates where we argue who's right and wrong, not who's good and bad."

This is vintage Bill Clinton, no change from the man I first met in New Haven, Conn., 42 years ago — always able to disagree without demonizing, to look for the sweet spot of purple solutions to break the partisan gridlock.

When President Clinton recently expressed admiration for Mitt Romney's career as a governor and businessman, that doesn't mean that he can't strongly disagree with most of Romney's economic policies. It's no coincidence that Bill Clinton as president worked with GOP congressional leaders in his second term, including then-Speaker Newt Gingrich, to pass welfare reform, NAFTA and a balanced-budget bill, leading to the trillion-dollar surplus.

It is also no coincidence President Clinton left office with a 65 percent approval rating and today is one of the most popular political figures in America (and perhaps the world).

President Obama campaigned in 2008 as a "new politics" candidate who promised to transcend the politics of vitriol, red meat and personal attacks. Now in 2012, with a campaign slogan of going "forward," Obama can recommit to his past campaign of civility and hope and prove that Romney is wrong, but not evil.

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*Davis, the principal in the Washington law firm of Lanny J. Davis & Associates, which specializes in legal crisis management, served as President Clinton's special counsel (1996-98) and as a member of President George W. Bush's Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board (2006-07). He currently serves as special counsel to Dilworth Paxson and is a partner with former Republican National Committee Chairman Michael Steele in Purple Nation Solutions, a public affairs-strategic communications company. He is the author of the forthcoming book "Crisis Tales – Five Rules for Handling Scandal in Business, Politics and Life," to be published by Simon & Schuster. He can be followed on Twitter @LannyDavis.*

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