

# “Bus Trip Phenomenon”

**Participant:** Bruce Reed

**Interview Date:** February 19–20, 2004

**Participant:** Frank Greer

**Interview Date:** October 27–28, 2005

**Participant:** Leon Panetta

**Interview Date:** January 31, 2003

**Project:** William J. Clinton Presidential History Project

After securing the Democratic presidential nomination in 1992, the Clinton campaign took its message to the people with a series of bus tours across the American heartland. The campaign stops became a popular sensation and were recalled as a critical turning point by Clinton’s domestic policy advisor Bruce Reed, media consultant Frank Greer, and chief of staff Leon Panetta, in separate interviews.

**Bruce Reed:** We had a rough patch in the first half hour because we got through the tunnel into New Jersey and realized one of the people on our bus—there were five or six buses—was actually a stowaway. I think they were homeless and just climbed on the bus. We’d been talking to the person. We just thought it was a new campaign staffer. *[laughter]* So we had to pull over and the police had to come and take this person away. Delayed the bus tour for a little bit. Our first thought was, *This is going to be a very long trip.*

*End of excerpt 1.*

**Frank Greer:** The bus trip became a phenomenon. I called the office and I talked to George and Eli, and I said, “We’ve got to film this.” It was the best footage I ever had—I met the bus with my team and crew in Kentucky and went on with them through Illinois. We got to one place in southern Illinois. It was at night, because we were late—and we were always late because it was the Bill Clinton campaign. We were probably an hour-and-a-half late—and there were ten thousand people on this square, in a town that probably didn’t have more than three thousand people. And we were filming. We had a cherrypicker, just because I wanted to get the whole sense of the crowd. All through the heartland you had all these people sitting out on the roadside in their folding chairs holding up signs for Clinton and Gore. It was phenomenal. It was really a turning point emotionally.

*End of excerpt 2.*

**Leon Panetta:** I don’t think I really thought it was possible until he got on the bus with Gore and they began those bus trips and you began to see the public’s reaction. When that happens, you know there’s something magic in the air.

*End of excerpt 3.*

Interview with Bruce Reed, February 19–20, 2004, William J. Clinton Presidential History Project, Presidential Oral History Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia. URL: <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/bruce-reed-oral-history-022004>

Interview with Frank Greer, October 27–28, 2005, William J. Clinton Presidential History Project, Presidential Oral History Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia. URL: <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/frank-greer-oral-history>

Interview with Leon Panetta, January 31, 2003, William J. Clinton Presidential History Project, Presidential Oral History Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia. URL: <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/leon-panetta-oral-history>