

Bill Clinton's campaign stop: Why Elon?

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Reporter

With Obama carrying a more comfortable lead against Sen. Hillary Clinton, former President Bill Clinton's April 24 visit begs the question, why Elon?

A confluence of Elon's rural location and student population is likely to have led the Clintons to Phoenix country for a second time, and the former president's emphasis on the economic quagmire is likely to resonate with Elon and Alamance County voters still fielding their options.

"I think it was apparent on Wednesday that the economy was extremely important to folks in the audience," Daniel Shutt, president of College Democrats said. "Clinton's speech focused primarily on issues like jobs, health care and gas prices and people responded well. North Carolina has been hit hard by this recession, and Clinton spoke to our concerns very effectively."

Whether or not Clinton's visit may have influenced Elon students, who are part of a demographic largely favoring Sen. Barack Obama remains to be seen.

"It is a very heated Democratic primary and I am unsure if Clinton swayed any Elon college students to vote differently," freshman Molly Heffernan said. "But he was most definitely persuasive, a great speaker and brought up many great points that all of our nation's citizens are concerned with."

Sophomore John Hitchcock said Clinton made Hillary a more relatable figure.

Obama maintains a 13-point lead in North Carolina polls, a level of support that may be difficult for the Clintons

to upset in the two weeks leading up to the May 6 primary.

Freshman Cece Fitzgerald placed her vote for Sen. Obama in Maryland, and is unsure how Clinton's visit will affect the outcome of North Carolina's primary.

"I think students were for the most part pleased he was coming, but the speech involved the sound bites we've already been hearing on the news for months," she said. "It's a bit odd that he came to Elon since most students here are not eligible to vote in North Carolina."

Still, according to the Hillary for President headquarters in Graham, a majority of those in attendance were community members from outside the school.

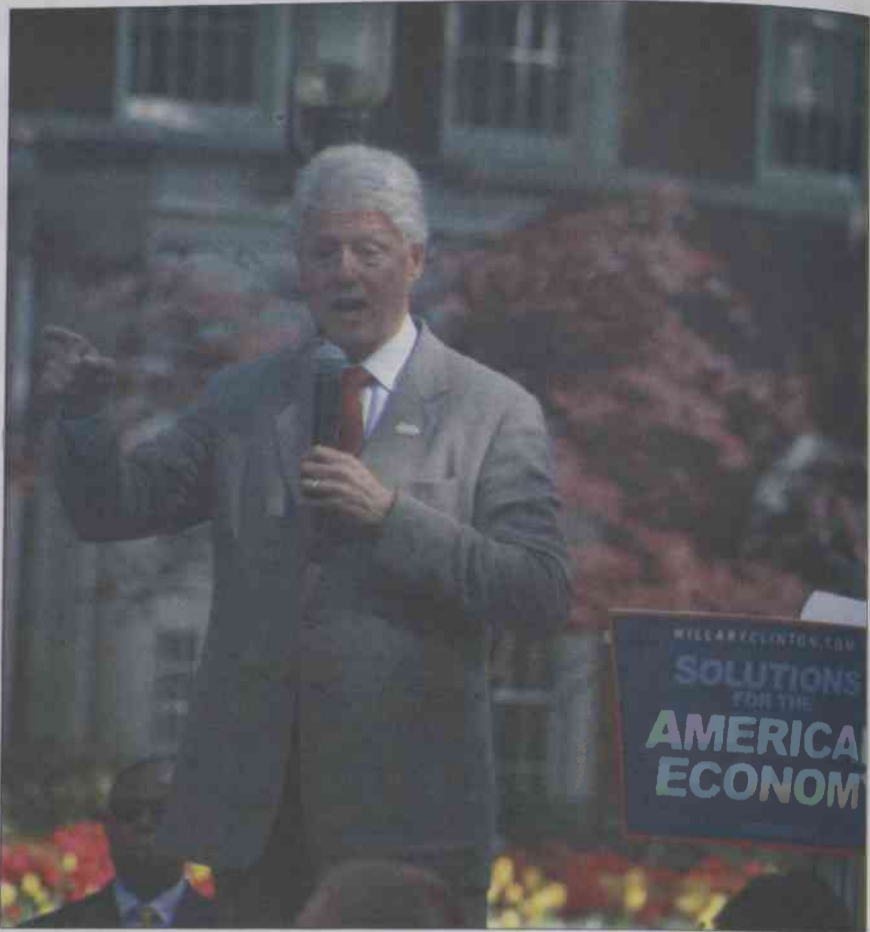
While the question of "Why Elon?" may loom over campus, the more pressing question will be if the Phoenix "rise from the ashes" distinction will translate to Sen. Clinton on May 6.

"I think it's very likely that former President Clinton changed some minds Wednesday," Shutt said. "No one else has his gifts for making a detailed, logical argument about public policy. By explaining some of Sen. Clinton's accomplishments and ideas in this area, President Clinton presented his wife, as an experienced, knowledgeable and effective leader."

Hillary Clinton is endeavoring to pervade some of Obama's support among college students as well, having visited Wake Forest University on April 18 as well as dispatching daughter Chelsea to dozens of campuses state-wide.

If nothing else, President Clinton's campaign will increase political efficacy in the Elon area.

"President Clinton's visit gives the entire campaign a shot in the arm,"



DAVID WELLS | Assistant Photo Editor
Bill Clinton reached out to students and people from rural areas last Wednesday with his speech on Elon's campus.

Shutt said. "Even if people didn't attend the event, they read about it in the paper, saw it on TV and heard about it from friends."

He said Alamance County, like most places in North Carolina, will be competitive on May 6.

"If the Clinton campaign continues to send the message that they care about people in this area, Sen. Clinton could do very well here on Primary Day," Shutt said.



DAVID WELLS | Assistant Photo Editor

A number of Hillary Clinton supporters on campus and from the local community turned to Bill Clinton's speech to voice their opinions.

"[Hillary Clinton] is the best change maker I have ever known, and if I had never been married to Hillary but had just known her, I'd still be working as hard for her. We just need a better system, and Hillary will give it to you."

— Former President Bill Clinton



BRIAN FINK | Photographer



DAVID WELLS | Assistant Photo Editor
The crowd at Bill Clinton's speech last week consisted of students, faculty, staff and community members. Some had already voted, some were already supporting a candidate and others were still undecided.