

**KEEPING SCORE IN THE RIGHT WAY: A  
SPEECH DELIVERED AT THE  
CELEBRATION OF LIFE FOR GOVERNOR  
WILLIAM WINTER AND FIRST LADY  
ELISE WINTER‡**

*President Bill Clinton\**

When I ran for Governor in the late 70s, I already knew quite a bit about Bill Winter . . . . To be a Southern governor then, it was basically about what you saw in the film<sup>1</sup>: you tried to make the schools better, rustle up a few more jobs, and do the right thing on civil rights. [You] tried to open up the doors so that we were all more or less on an even footing, and we knew there was a long way to go and that you had to start in the schools. Maybe we were even too optimistic about all the economic benefits that would flow if we could equalize educational opportunities, but we believed it. Nobody more than William Winter.

When I got elected, he was there. Then, I wasn't. (Thanks to guys like Haley [Barbour], I got beat in the Reagan landslide in 1980.) And then, I got reelected. And his last two years coincided with my term, and we were neighbors and so much more. I thought he was the luckiest guy. First of all, you couldn't exactly tell in these old pictures, but Elise Winter—if you'll forgive me God for being

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‡ The speech has been transcribed from a video recording, which can be found at MDAH Video, *Celebration of Life for Governor William Winter and First Lady Elise Winter*, YOUTUBE (May 3, 2022), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTTAIPU7RtA> [Perma.cc link unavailable]. The Celebration of Life for Governor William Winter and First Lady Elise Winter was held on May 3, 2022 at the Two Mississippi Museums in Jackson, Mississippi. *Id.* President Clinton and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History have authorized the *Mississippi Law Journal* to publish this speech.

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<sup>1</sup> President Clinton was referring to a short film, *Strong & Quiet Voices: Lives of Service*, that was shown at the Celebration of Life for Governor William Winter and First Lady Elise Winter.

incorrect—was a beautiful woman when she was here. She was so beautiful and in such a nice way. Eleanor, all the assembled spouses, children, grandchildren, you come from remarkable grandparents who had the most unusual balance. They were highly intelligent, highly energetic, and openly ambitious, and as good as gold because their ambition was for something worth being ambitious about.

I was going through this collection of Bill's writings and speeches trying to prepare for this day and say something that not everybody already knew, or at least maybe hadn't thought about, and I found these lines which he originally wrote on the back of an old envelope:

What are the rewards that are meaningful? There is no point at which any of us can say we have it made. Life is a process—a struggle—and the meaning is in the process. Life should be an unfolding of new opportunities and new goals. So long as there are areas of injustice, human lives unused, physical ills unconquered, natural resources wasted, and corruption unchallenged, there will be meaningful work to do.<sup>2</sup>

I think that's why we can all have this conversation today. They were in their late nineties, and I was twenty years younger than they were when we started doing all that stuff. (A lot of young people probably wish they could have kept up with Bill when he was jogging the streets in his eighties.) So, the ultimate lesson of their lives is that how your lives turn out—assuming you don't have a terrible piece of bad luck—is largely a function of how you decide to keep score. We're all, all the time, keeping score on ourselves, and it's not like playing golf. When nobody's looking, you can't just kick the ball back in the fairway. If you're keeping score on yourself, you know what the deal is, and they did.

It's hard for me to explain, but I was always mildly surprised and deeply grateful that they were friends and supporters of mine. I remember when I decided to run for President. Haley, one of your colleagues called me from the White House and said, "Let me tell you how Washington works." He said, "The political press has to

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<sup>2</sup> Governor William F. Winter, *Thoughts Written on the Back of an Old Envelope*, in ANDREW P. MULLINS, JR., *THE MEASURE OF OUR DAYS: WRITINGS OF WILLIAM F. WINTER* 198 (2006).

have somebody at every election, and they're really elitist. They will believe anything we tell them about Arkansas. We have decided to give them you, so you shouldn't run." And I said, "You know I really don't want to; I like President Bush very much actually. But he's got seventy-something percent approval, and he's not using his mandate to make America better." I said, "I'm perfectly happy to stay here. Just you guys get the show on the road." So then, he proceeded to tell me, "Well, that was a dumb idea." Then, he said, "Look, this is a really pretty speech you're giving. You just remember: they got to have somebody at every election. We're going to feed them you. We're going to do it early. Your life will be over. Don't do this." Nobody talked to me like that since my next-door neighbor had thrown a rope on the ground when I was ten years old, when she got a BB gun before I did, and said, "If you step over that rope, I'll shoot you." (I thought about that because she passed away just about two weeks ago, and I stepped over the rope, she shot me, and we became friends for life. Life makes funny friendships in funny ways.)

All I know is from the minute I met Bill Winter, I never had a scintilla of doubt that whatever happened in our friendship—whatever happened in his life—I was with one of the most authentic people I would ever know and that he was who he seemed to be. Then, when I met Elise, I realized how he had sustained two losses for governor and many other setbacks and still found happiness. It's really important to do the right thing, but if you reach my age, you realize it's also important, if you can, to have a good time when you're doing it.

My friend James Carville is out there. Some of you might know who he is, and we were talking the other day. He said, "When's his service?" I told him, and he drove up here from New Orleans today because he admired Bill Winter. When we were young, it was relatively rare for somebody who could actually win to stick his neck out on civil rights and have a good time doing it, so I thank all of you for that.

I got up this morning, and I was talking to Hillary on the way out the door. She said, "God, they have a beautiful Governor's Mansion." And she said, "Take them the evidence that you're not just making a speech," so I brought this [trinket box]. [It says,] "Governor and Mrs. William Winter, 1980-1984. In this limited

edition of a hundred, the number of this box is '10.'" So, how long ago was that? Almost forty years, right? I was here. It was the end of their term, and the beginning of my second go-around. And I was here. I thought I had died and gone to heaven spending the night in the Mississippi Governor's Mansion. (You know all of us hillbillies from across the river, we always felt kind of "low rent" compared to the planter class.) Anyway, I got this thirty-eight years ago, and it is in our living room with a few other things that we mark the passage of our lives with. I mark the passage of our lives with this because I was so blessed to know a person who was truly good, truly great, and truly fun.

I may have had some small role in what he later did in racial reconciliation because I asked him to join the race commission that I established in my second term.<sup>3</sup> The great Black historian from North Carolina, John Hope Franklin, was the Chairman of it (and also an amazing man), and they were great. I told Bill, "Between the two of you, you'll probably keep the younger ones [on the commission] from just gnawing each other to death," and they were great. They showed you how to do right, how to unearth the past without destroying people's feelings and dignity, and make a beginning that is new. We've got to do all that stuff today. We shouldn't have to wait until we love people and lose them to know that.

So, you guys remember what I said and go back and read what Bill Winter wrote about how he was keeping score, because we've all got to keep score and we all are keeping score whether we admit it or not: "Oh, I wish I was a little thinner. I wish I could jump a little higher. If I had LeBron James' body, I would have gone into a different line of work." All of you, we all do these things, right? You're not even thinking about it half the time. We're always constantly keeping score. So, I am honored to be here in reverence and joy to honor two people who kept score in the right way, and it left them off in a good place. That's what we have to do. Think about it for the next few days. Think about Bill and Elise Winter and keeping score in the right way.

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<sup>3</sup> See generally THE ADVISORY BOARD TO THE PRESIDENT'S INITIATIVE ON RACE, ONE AMERICA IN THE 21ST CENTURY: FORGING A NEW FUTURE (1998).