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## **Producers to the President Play a Continuing Role Politics: Health ad shows the Thomasons' TV skills and connections are still available to the Clinton cause.**

ROBERT W. WELKOS  
MELISSA WYE

As President Clinton's health care plan recently foundered, sitcom producer Harry Thomason tried to come to the rescue. He created a television commercial spoofing the insurance industry's campaign against the Administration's plan. It was not the first time that Thomason had used his expertise and Hollywood contacts to help his longtime friend from Arkansas at a critical moment. During the 1992 presidential campaign, Thomason and his wife, Linda Bloodworth-Thomason, took the entertainment industry's involvement in presidential politics to a new level—and into the studio where they produced their show, "Evening Shade." The Thomasons relied on employees, equipment and facilities from their hit shows for everything from the making of campaign videos to the selection of wardrobes for Bill and Hillary Clinton. While much has been written about the Thomasons and the Clintons, little has been revealed about how two of Hollywood's most prominent TV producers harnessed the talent under their command for political purposes. Working behind the scenes, they recruited high-priced film editors, a composer, a cameraman and others to make three campaign commercials and a documentary assembled under Bloodworth-Thomason's supervision at the CBS Studio Center in Studio City, where she and her husband film "Evening Shade." The Thomasons also found grooming experts to traverse the country, coiffing the Clintons' hair, applying their TV makeup and outfitting them with clothes from high-end fashion retail outlets that supplied the Thomasons' TV shows. Although the election of Clinton could rightly be considered a crowning achievement, the Thomasons have been unwilling to detail their assistance to the 1992 campaign.

They said through their attorney that their role was a private matter. A presidential spokeswoman said the White House would have no comment beyond what is in public records. Clinton's victory gave the couple an entree to Washington, where Thomason was placed in charge of the inauguration and was given a coveted White House pass and an office. The Thomasons temporarily lowered their profile after a string of episodes that embarrassed the President. There was a flap over a Santa Barbara County beach house that the Thomasons leased and made available to the Clintons. There was Clinton's "\$200 haircut" aboard Air Force One at Los Angeles International Airport. Then it was reported that Thomason had a role in the firing of seven White House travel office employees, which prompted a federal investigation that is continuing. But Thomason re-emerged this month in the political arena. After his health care commercial was aired in Washington last week, he appeared on Cable News Network. He said he and several Hollywood associates made the ad for \$1,100 without Clinton's knowledge, hoping to temper the "strident" debate over health reform. "We thought we would just try to do something light," he said.

### **The Hollywood Role**

Since the days of the movie moguls, Hollywood celebrities have played a supporting role in national politics, helping with fund raising and making campaign appearances. From Barbra Streisand to Arnold Schwarzenegger, they have generated money and glitter for Democratic and Republican presidential candidates. With the exception of Warren Beatty, who had advisory roles in George McGovern's 1972 campaign and Gary Hart's 1984 and 1988 campaigns, few Hollywood figures have been so integrally involved in a presidential race as the Thomasons were. They became unpaid consultants to Clinton and hosted fund-raisers. Their company contributed \$60,000 to the Democratic National Committee. And to help ignite Clinton's faltering campaign, the Thomasons borrowed the magical techniques of television.

With their Arkansas backgrounds in common, the Clintons and the Thomasons became friends and confidants years ago. Theirs were extraordinary success stories-and along the way, they tried to help each other. In 1991, when the Thomasons temporarily lost control of their first hit show, "Designing Women," then-Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton placed a call to a CBS executive on their behalf. And when Clinton announced that he was running for President later that year, the Thomasons became two of his earliest and most ardent backers. "When you are from Arkansas, a little tiny state...if you're a dreamer from a place like that, you feel a bond with other dreamers from that same spot on the globe," Bloodworth-Thomason said in a 1992 interview with *The Times*. The Thomasons, who had a production deal with CBS worth up to \$50 million, worked tenaciously on two fronts: putting out their TV shows "Designing Women," "Evening Shade" and "Hearts Afire"- and assisting Clinton. Harry Thomason, 52, a private pilot, crisscrossed the country, working three days a week in Hollywood directing "Hearts Afire" and four on the campaign trail, according to present and former co-workers and campaign officials. He arranged televised town meetings in New Hampshire to help overcome two early challenges to Clinton's character-disclosure of his draft record and his alleged affair with Gennifer Flowers. "Harry did a thousand things," recalled Mandy Grunwald, who directed Clinton's media advertising. "Harry did everything from literally stapling the carpeting to the set to fixing the lights." At the Democratic National Convention, he orchestrated the Clintons' entrance-much as he might direct a television scene. Meanwhile, Bloodworth-Thomason, 45, was using her creative talents for the campaign. On occasion, she supplied Clinton with one-liners, including one he used at the convention to say he would return to accept the nomination: "Tomorrow night, I will be the 'Comeback Kid.'" Former campaign officials credit her with the idea of having Clinton appear on the cable channel MTV and on "The Arsenio Hall Show," where his saxophone performance set him apart from the staid Washington Establishment. Behind the scenes, however, Bloodworth-Thomason also marshaled resources from her own shows. After work, film editors from two of her shows went to work for the campaign, assembling three Clinton commercials in the "Evening Shade" editing trailer.

Then, when Clinton clinched the nomination, Bloodworth-Thomason went back into an editing room to put together a 13 1/2-minute biographical film for the Democratic National Convention. In both cases, she used studio facilities and equipment leased for the shows by the Thomasons' company, Mozark Productions Inc., according to former and present employees. Several professionals who worked on the campaign commercials and documentary said they volunteered their time as a favor to the producers. Others said they were paid by the campaign or did not recall how they were paid. Judith Burke, a co-producer/editor on "Designing Women," said she worked on two of the commercials. "Linda said . . . this was something that she and Harry were doing on their own because they wanted to help (Clinton)," Burke said. After late-night editing sessions, the tapes were taken to a Burbank post-production facility called Laser Pacific Corp. to prepare them for TV airing, according to former Thomason employees. Laser Pacific provides post-production editing for the Thomasons' TV shows. The Thomasons called in Bruce Miller, who wrote music for "Designing Women," and asked him to score one of the commercials. "I did the music at my house," Miller said. "The dubbing was done at the studio here." Burke said her night of work normally would be worth \$1,100 to \$1,500. But she said Bloodworth-Thomason later gave her a Mozark check for \$500, which she returned, saying she did not expect payment. Miller said he donated his time, too. Tony Hayman, former tape editor for "Evening Shade," said he edited one of the Clinton commercials for \$500. He could not recall how he was paid, but believed it was through one of the Thomasons' shows. Joe Glass, a Little Rock cameraman who frequently did work for "Designing Women," shot footage for the three Clinton commercials and sent his film to Los Angeles, where Bloodworth-Thomason oversaw the editing. Glass said Bloodworth-Thomason paid for the commercials, but he declined to say exactly how much he was paid. "We are not talking even fives of thousands (of dollars)," he said. "It wasn't any massive deal." Former campaign officials recalled that at least one commercial produced at Mozark facilities was aired in New Hampshire.

### **Enlisting Skills and Services**

Although federal election law provides wide latitude for individuals to volunteer their professional services to campaigns, corporations are prohibited from making campaign contributions or providing facilities, labor or equipment for free. Citing policy, Federal Election Commission officials declined to comment on the Thomasons' campaign-related activities. In general, a commission spokesman said, "The way the law reads, anybody can volunteer his or her services. That is not a contribution. An artist can sit down and do a painting and sell it for a candidate. The artist's time is volunteered, but the paint, brushes and the canvas are contributory. The value of those are contributions." Records reviewed by The Times show that the Clinton campaign paid Mozark \$14,019 for unspecified "media" and "events" expenses in August, 1992, seven months after the commercials were made. But the records did not specify whether the money reimbursed Mozark for making campaign films. A spokesman for the Democratic National Committee said campaign chairman David Wilhelm could not recall the specific payments and referred The Times to a campaign attorney, who did not return calls. Through their Los Angeles attorney, Michael J. Plonsker, the Thomasons declined Times requests for interviews, made over several months, and said they would not answer questions submitted in writing. "They are not willing, nor do they have the time, to conduct an interview or to answer a barrage of questions regarding what they consider personal and private information," Plonsker said in a letter. After the primaries, Bloodworth-Thomason went to work on "The Man From Hope," a film that chronicled Clinton's life, from his youth in Hope, Ark. The Clinton campaign hired Jeffrey Tuchman of New York to direct the film, which was financed with campaign funds and produced by Bloodworth-Thomason. Once again, "Designing Women" composer Miller was enlisted. "I was called into the editing room and told, 'Can we put an orchestra together in three days?' " recalled Miller. Tuchman said Bloodworth-Thomason was the driving force behind the film: She conducted the key interviews with the Clintons and, without compensation, spent 18 hours a day for more than a week in an editing room at CBS Studio Center assembling the final product.

In 1992, Bloodworth-Thomason told The Times that she oversaw the editing of 10 hours of footage shot in Arkansas and of 1,000 pages of interview transcripts. "I was given no instruction on how to do this film," she said. "We just sat in the editing room looking at film, and we started slapping it together." The post-production work for the documentary and the commercials was done at Laser Pacific, which, records show, was paid about \$4,000 by the 1992 Democratic National Convention Committee for unspecified "video production." Laser Pacific officials said they were not paid anything by the Clinton campaign. Former "Designing Women" editor Roger Bondelli, who spent "eight to 10 days" assembling the documentary, said he had his "own arrangement" with Thomason. "Whether I was paid at all, I did it as a favor," Bondelli said. "I was not paid through their payroll company. It was an arrangement that Harry and I made. These are big producers in Hollywood. Friends of mine. I want to work with them again." The Washington consulting firm of Greer-Margolis handled up to \$30 million in Clinton campaign advertising through Great American Media Inc., but president Frank Greer said that neither the Thomasons nor Mozark were reimbursed for work on the documentary by that company. "We paid the film crew. . . . Not Linda and Harry," Greer said. He declined to make the records available, saying that revealing advertising strategies might aid his competitors.

### **Looking Presidential**

It was during filming of "The Man From Hope" that the Thomasons first turned to Cristophe, the Beverly Hills hairdresser who gave President Clinton his famous "\$200 haircut." Cristophe said he met Hillary Clinton in June, 1992, at the home of actress Markie Post, who co-stars in "Hearts Afire." He said he had been invited there by the actress and Bloodworth-Thomason. Post did not return calls seeking her comment. "They both called me and said, 'We have a girlfriend and we're playing around with hair and things. Could you come over and give your input?'" he recalled. Soon, Cristophe was jetting around the country, one of three Hollywood grooming consultants paid a few thousand dollars each by the campaign. He was in New York doing the Clintons' hair during the Democratic National Convention.

He flew to Michigan and Virginia for presidential debates. He was in Little Rock for election night and in Washington for inaugural week. Cristophe said his work for the Clintons happened to coincide with his own business trips. "I'm working (on) opening salons in different parts of this country," he said. "The Clintons never asked me to be there on specific dates or times." Also part of the entourage was Post's makeup artist on "Hearts Afire," Bruce Grayson. He was on the campaign trail for the three debates, election night and inaugural week.

"Markie called me and said that Harry asked if I would be available the next day (for the first debate) and I said yes," Grayson recalled. He said he accepted as a favor to Thomason and charged less than his normal rate. When he was needed on the campaign trail, Grayson said, he would get calls on a moment's notice and airline tickets would be waiting for him at the counter. The calls would come from either Harry Thomason's office or the campaign, he said. The final member of the traveling trio was Clifford Challey, the costume designer on the Thomasons' three shows. The Thomasons asked Challey to outfit the Clintons for key events, including "The Man From Hope," the Democratic convention, the televised debates, election night and inaugural week, he said.

Challey transported clothes from Los Angeles-area stores to Hillary Clinton in Little Rock and elsewhere. "I would shop here for her, and then take the stuff back and then what would work she would pay for, and what didn't work, we would send back to the store," he said. Annette Gagnon, who said she worked on Challey's staff, recalled that he shopped for the Clintons at Ron Ross in Reseda and I. Magnin, stores that supplied clothing for the Thomasons' TV shows. Neither Challey nor store officials would discuss details of the purchases. Challey's job on the campaign trail entailed organizing the Clintons' clothing according to their schedules. "The jewelry, the shoes, the purse, (were) bagged and tagged, labeled for that event and then hung up in the closet, so she could run upstairs and all of the pieces were there," he said. Bloodworth-Thomason had a role in selecting the Clintons' wardrobe, Challey said. "The image thing was partially up to me, but it was her too," he said. "She was the one who said, 'We want them to look presidential.' "

Times staff writer Diane Haithman contributed to this story.