

## Bill Clinton Tries to Defend Himself on Draft Issue

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While running for president in 1992, Bill Clinton tries to counter charges that he was a draft dodger during the Vietnam War.

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## CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE

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## Transcript

Bill Clinton Tries to Defends Himself Against Draft Dodging Claims

TOM BROKAW, anchor:

It was going to be the showdown of the week in the presidential campaign--Bush and Clinton in Salt Lake City before the National Guard Convention on Clinton's draft history. Republicans have been keeping the issue alive, hoping to damage Clinton's credibility. NBC's Andrea Mitchell on today's convention; Lisa Myers has examined the Clinton record. Andrea, let's begin with you.

ANDREA MITCHELL reporting:

Tom, in back-to-back appearances, the candidates shadowboxed over the draft issue, but didn't throw any direct punches.

After sending signals that he would attack Clinton head-on, the president sideswiped him.

President GEORGE BUSH: There's been a lot of controversy swirling around about service to country, about using influence to avoid the military... But I didn't come here to attack him.

MITCHELL: Indirectly, he did try to undermine Clinton's credibility as a potential commander in chief, claiming that questions about the draft do matter.

BUSH: They matter because despite all our problems at home, we can never forget that we ask our presidents to lead the military.

MITCHELL: Underscoring his point, he read a letter from the mother of a marine killed in the Gulf War.

BUSH: (Reading Letter) "It is difficult to accept my son's death, but he's alive in my heart."

MITCHELL: Anticipating a tougher attack, Clinton had hurried to Utah to defend himself. But after Bush ducked, Clinton rewrote, crossing out all references to the draft, sticking instead to his economic message.

Governor BILL CLINTON: ...Including most of the people enrolled in National Guard units in every state in the United States are working longer wir--work weeks for lower wages than they were making 10 years ago.

MITCHELL: Clinton had hoped to put the draft issue to rest three weeks ago with what he called a final statement to the American Legion, but Republican harassment followed him from state to state--airplanes flying over his rallies; campaign faxes keeping the issue in the news. In February, Bush said pressing

Clinton on the draft would be unfair. But trailing in September, his surrogates attacked Clinton day after day.

Vice President DAN QUAYLE: Bill--Bill Clinton has a credibility problem.

MITCHELL: Do people care? Not those we questioned at the National Guards Convention.

General C.D. PAYNE (Oklahoma National Guard): I don't think that's an important issue here.

Colonel HOWARD FREELANDER (Maryland National Guard): I think the issue has been explored in depth. As far as I'm concerned, it's not going to have any impact.

MITCHELL: The Bush campaign plans to keep hitting Clinton on this issue--not to raise questions about his military service, but about his honesty. Tom:

BROKAW: Thank you, Andrea. And stand by there as we go now to Lisa Myers who will take us through the Clinton draft record--the facts, the politics, the inconsistencies. Lisa:

LISA MYERS reporting:

Tom, the issue is not that Bill Clinton didn't serve in Vietnam; the issue is whether he has played loose with the truth. Clinton maintains he has been both honest and consistent.

CLINTON: (From File Footage) The truth is that I have told the same story all along. Maybe I haven't handled it as well as I should, but I have told the same story.

MYERS: In fact, Clinton has not told the same story all along.

First, what is not in dispute: In 1969, Clinton, at the height of the Vietnam War, agreed to join an ROTC program. That temporarily exempted him from the draft. But two months later, after getting through the period when he expected to be drafted, Clinton reneged on the agreement.

CLINTON: (From File Footage) I went back into the draft; then this lottery came along. I got a high number and I wasn't called.

MYERS: Inconsistency number one: why Clinton gave up his ROTC deferment. This is what he said in February:

CLINTON: (From File Footage) I gave it up after less than two months because I didn't think it was right.

MYERS: However, a letter that Clinton wrote at the time says he put himself back into the draft "for one reason: to maintain my political viability within the system."

Inconsistency number two: the induction notice. In an interview with the Washington Post last year, Clinton said, "I expected to be called while I was over there studying in England the first year, but they never did." That statement turned out to be untrue. In April, Clinton was forced to admit that he had received an induction notice while in England, three months before he joined the ROTC program.

CLINTON: (From File Footage) I can tell you this--I have never intentionally misled anybody about this. I would gladly have told you this if it had even occurred to me that this was relevant to the story.

MYERS: Inconsistency number three: whether Clinton received special treatment. He says he never did.

CLINTON: (From File Footage) The draft board has always said they handled my case in the same way they everybody else's.

MYERS: However, this month the Los Angeles Times reported that Clinton benefited from a concerted lobbying campaign by his uncle to delay his induction, and some have concluded he did receive special treatment because his physical was delayed more than twice as long as anyone else in his area. Given the

inconsistencies and the number of times Clinton has had to amend his story, he may have a tough time getting this issue to go away.