

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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## ENTERTAINMENT

### *Political Humorists Thrive in Clinton Era*

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WASHINGTON — President Clinton may be struggling with the outcry over his appointments and his \$200 haircut, but he is generating big business for one segment of the economy—political humorists.

Political comedy, once considered too narrow to sell outside the Washington Beltway, now has Washington performers taking to the road, often performing at functions for companies and trade groups. Political humor "has never been more popular," says John Simmons of Gross National Product, a group that performs a show called "Clintoons."

Gross National Product performed for private and public groups 207 times in 1992; that number has already been surpassed this year, Mr. Simmons says. GNP does skits about whatever is in the news, and the group rewrites the jokes every weekend. "The reason I picked David Gergen as my new director of communications is we found out that George Stephanopoulos is only 13," cracks Bob Heck, the actor playing President Clinton. "We were violating child labor laws."

Gross National Product's "Clintoons" is a mock town meeting where the audience asks questions. Mr. Heck, who impersonates Mr. Clinton, responds on topics from Serbs to Socks. When asked why he put his wife in charge of health care, he answers, "because she told me to."



*Political comedy groups like Gross National Product (above) are finding an audience beyond the Washington Beltway.*

Business groups hire Mr. Heck to perform and pose for photos at corporate functions. He will custom-design the Clinton comments to fit the company, and sometimes will roast the top executive. "If people can't get the real president, they'll take me," Mr. Heck says. The full GNP show generally costs about \$6,000.

#### **Sold Out**

GNP performs "Clintoons" locally on weekends before audiences of about 300 a night. A ticket costs \$15. "It's been sold out for 12 weeks," says Mr. Simmons, who used to play President Bush and now plays Mr. Stephanopoulos.

The group also markets a bus tour of Washington called Scandal Tours, with actors playing figures involved in political scandals on board the bus. For \$27 a ticket, the bus takes tourists to sites ranging from Watergate to the Vista Hotel, where former Washington Mayor Marion Barry was arrested after smoking cocaine.