



Associated Press for The New York Times

The obstacles in his way to the Republican Presidential nomination are many, but Senator Arlen Specter endures them with relatively good humor, as on this visit last week to a high school in West Des Moines while stumping in advance of the Iowa caucuses on Feb. 12, the first contest of the 1996 campaign.

sive when it gets into people's personal lives," he continued. "The true conservative is not Pat Buchanan, who wants to bring the government into everything. The true conservative is my view: the least government is the best government."

Although he has a reputation for abrasiveness, Mr. Specter endures the humiliations of the campaign trail with relatively good humor. He shrugs off sarcastic comments about the single-bullet theory, which he still actively defends, and even managed a wan smile when a student at a West Des Moines high school offered to sell him a tape of heavy-metal rock for \$15. (He declined.)

In his campaign appearances, Mr. Specter stresses not only his stance on abortion but also his support for a flat tax to replace the graduated income tax. Wherever he goes, he carries around the post-card-sized form that he says is all a taxpayer would need to fill out if a flat tax were adopted. Under his plan, all of an individual's investment earnings would be exempt from taxation. All remaining income would be taxed at the constant rate of 20 percent, with deductions allowed only for interest on mortgages (up to \$100,000) and for charitable contributions (up to

\$2,500).

On the trail, Mr. Specter is often asked about Professor Hill, and every time he gives the same obviously rehearsed but still heartfelt-sounding answer.

"The Hill-Thomas hearings were a learning experience for me, and I think really a learning experience for the country," Mr. Specter said in response to one recent day's first question on the topic. "I personally had no idea how much sexual harassment there was until after those hearings were over and practically every woman I met told me about the time she was sexually harassed and told me how painful those hearings were, almost as if they saw themselves in Anita Hill's position."

As for Justice Thomas, Mr. Specter said he was disappointed with the performance so far, judging the Justice little more than "a clone" of Antonin Scalia, the Supreme Court's most conservative member. But, he added, "I still think there's hope."

Unlike most Presidential candidates, who rely on finance chairmen with fat Rolodexes, Mr. Specter is financing his campaign largely through direct mail solicitations, singling out groups like Jewish and abortion-rights voters. His campaign chairman, Roger Stone, a vet-

eran Republican strategist, maintains that the Senator will have "enough money to compete" in the early caucuses and primaries. But the campaign shows a net debt of almost \$500,000 at present and should receive only \$1 million or so in Federal matching funds early next year. In contrast, Senator Bob Dole's campaign has \$6 million in the bank and expects at least \$7 million in matching funds.

Because of his lack of money and of organizational support, Mr. Specter has adopted some unorthodox tactics for the early contests. Here in Iowa, for example, which will hold its caucuses on Feb. 12, he has been trying to enlist the support of labor unions.

Mr. Specter estimates that one-quarter to one-third of the state's union members are Republicans and says that of all the Republican candidates, he has the record on labor issues that should be the most attractive to them. "I'm the only one who could walk into a union hall," he said, "and walk out alive."

Mr. Specter concedes that any Republican candidate relying on the support of labor unions will have to get pretty lucky to win the nomination. But, he maintains, "a lot of unexpected things have happened in this campaign."