

Edwards' Patate Chaude



William J. Guste Jr.

By ALLAN KATZ

When Gov. Edwin Edwards asked Atty. Gen. William J. Guste to mount an investigation of the shooting deaths of two students at Southern University in Baton Rouge, he might well have said, "Ne laissez pas tomber la patate chaude."

In Edwards' native Cajun French, that means "Don't drop the hot potato." But there are some in Louisiana political circles who believe it won't upset the governor a bit if Guste, a potential political rival of Edwards, fumbles this particular "patate chaude."

There is no doubt that Edwards has passed Guste the hottest potato of all in the investigation of the confrontation Nov. 16 between Southern students and law officers that exploded into violence.

EDWARDS ASKED Guste to look into the violence that left the students

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dead on the Southern campus when the smoke had cleared. The investigation by Guste must determine who killed the students. Was it gunfire from other students or from officers? Were the students murdered? Was it justifiable homicide?

If the investigation finds that the officers were blameless in the killing, many blacks will be outraged. But, if the investigation finds evidence against the officers, many whites will be furious.

As one member of the legislature observes, "Edwards has put Guste, who could be his toughest potential rival in the state, in a corner. No matter

Puts Guste in Hot Seat

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how it turns out, Guste loses."

The attorney general, asked about the political ramifications of the investigation and the allegation that he has been tossed a "hot potato," seemed in agreement.

"WHEN GOV. Edwards asked me to conduct this investigation, I told him that I didn't think anyone could win politically on an assignment of this kind.

"But I also told Gov. Edwards that if it's my duty to conduct this investigation, I won't shirk my responsibility.

"We will conduct an investigation that is above criticism. We will seek

the facts and let them speak for themselves—let the chips fall where they may.

"It is possible that the public may not like what we come up with. However, we won't cover up or hide anything. We will try to dredge up the truth and let it speak for itself, regardless of who is involved."

Dale Thorn, Edwards' press secretary, denies the governor callously tossed the hot potato to Guste.

"The major factor in this request of Atty. Gen. Guste is that there is a lame duck (Sargent Pitcher) district attorney in East Baton Rouge whose credibility in the black community might be in question," Thorn said.

"Because Mr. Pitcher is a lame duck and because Mr. Guste has been very aggressive and indicated he is not afraid to handle hot potatoes, a number of governor's advisers felt that

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Gov. Edwin Edwards

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he would be the best one to handle this if he were willing.

"We recognize this will be a difficult investigation to conduct but Mr. Guste seems to feel that it can be done, and we are hoping that he is right."

Thorn said Edwards has taken political risks himself in trying to settle the problems at Southern campuses in Baton Rouge and New Orleans peaceably.

One friend of Guste's said of the entire matter: "It's true there is great political risk in this investigation, but where there is great risk, there is also great opportunity."