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Maryland, Michigan and Beyond

We have this terrible confession to make: we do not know who is going to win the Democratic nomination. Indeed, having pondered the voting results in seventeen different primaries now, having added, subtracted and otherwise fiddled with various combinations of the votes already cast, and having listened to candidates and voters alike attempting to explain what it all means, we are growing increasingly less confident in predicting what any of it portends for tomorrow—let alone for next July or November. Only a very few things do seem self-evident to us in relation to the primaries so far. And we shall concentrate on these.

The first has to do with Governor Wallace's showing, and from it our other conclusions flow. It is not necessary to overstate the meaning of his victory at the polls this past Tuesday to observe that Michigan and Maryland have reconfirmed that his success has become a central fact of the 1972 campaign. Whether or not Governor Wallace has—as many were predicting he would well before Michigan and Maryland—pretty well reached the upper limit of his delegate strength with these two primaries, whether or not the savage attack on him in Laurel will prevent further campaign exertions, and whether or not his forces will have mustered sufficient strength to “broker” the Miami convention, the solid showing of Governor Wallace in primaries, North and South, will remain a matter of great consequences within the Party. It has already influenced the responses of the other candidates to the issues at hand, and neither the Michigan nor Maryland result seems likely to diminish that influence. So the candidates' response—and that of Party officialdom—to Governor Wallace's success becomes increasingly important. And it has been thus far, in our opinion, wholly inadequate.

It is appalling that the trend we noted in this space last week to deny the Governor his duly elected delegate strength proceeds apace. In Maryland, we learn, as in Tennessee, efforts are under way to figure out how to deprive the Wallace forces of the first ballot representation to which they are entitled. From Michigan comes identical news: it is already being pointed out that although Michigan state law requires that the Governor's preference vote strength be reflected in first ballot delegate support, state law does not impose penalties on those delegates who choose to defy it. Read McGovern or Humphrey for Wallace in the news accounts describing these intentions, and you will have no trouble imagining the uproar and charges of rigging and bossism that would be filling the air. More to the point is the fact that anyone who is counseling such an ethically dismal course is also demonstrating an invincible insensitivity to the

kind of grievance on which the Wallace campaign has been able to capitalize, to the issues that underlie his appeal. Never mind for the moment that to pursue these tactics would be to undermine the validity of the Democratic reforms as a whole, it would also be to confirm the belief of so many of his supporters that they have, one way and the other, been tricked and sweet-talked and cheated out of what is politically their rightful due.

The way to combat Governor Wallace's appeal is on the issues—not with backroom treachery. And this brings us to the candidates' own responses, to their way of defining themselves and one another. Governor Wallace's brutal victimization by a gunman no doubt will have its effect on the tone and tenor of the remainder of the campaign. But we see no reason why it should prevent the other candidates from challenging, in a straight-forward and tough-minded way, the kinds of solutions he has been proposing to our national ills. In fact, we fear that his being invalid is more likely to be invoked as an excuse for ducking a real confrontation on the issues with Mr. Wallace—although what has been needed all along is clarification and definition, as distinct from vagueness and obfuscation. If there was any notion hanging around that a flight from clarity and sense into enigma would be helpful on the busing issue, Michigan should have demonstrated that this is a no-win game. There is, for example, a way of defining clearly and rationally and persuasively what the meaning, limitations, advantages and disadvantages of busing may be—in fact, Chief Justice Burger, in a far from radical decision, spelled out such a position last year. We cannot help thinking that a little bravery and forthrightness in pursuing such a view on the stump would pay off far better than a run for cover.

This defining of view and stand, this sharpening of distinctions on the issues is also required of Senators Humphrey and McGovern in relation to one another. We do not have in mind the aimless and mischievous attack on Senator McGovern for holding a “radical” view on abortion, a charge that bids fair to become the Quemoy-and-Matsu of this election. There are far more central things to talk about, more central to either man's potential for conducting the office of the presidency. No doubt the pressures of the crucial California primary will draw them toward sharpened attacks on one another. Our only hope is that they will avoid the ad hominem game, and attempt to dispute each other on issues that really matter. We have a feeling that that is what their prospective electorate is waiting for. We have a profound conviction that this kind of serious and straight talking is also the only answer to Governor Wallace.