

Viet Policy: 'Clumsy, Ill-Timed . . .' *Post 2/19/67*

Romney Blasts LBJ Handling of War, CIA Affair at Start of 5-State Tour

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ANCHORAGE, Alaska, Feb. 18—Gov. George Romney (R-Mich.) opened a five-state campaign swing through the West today with a slashing attack on the Johnson Administration handling of the Vietnam war and the Central Intelligence Agency subsidy to the National Student Association.



Romney

The prospective 1968 presidential candidate called the Administration's Vietnam policy "clumsy, ill-timed and poorly coordinated." He said the CIA subsidy of the NSA "smacks of secret government within our society."

Romney flew here from Seattle into a

driving snowstorm. But the political climate was surprisingly warm.

Alaska Gov. Walter J. Hickel (R), who had been regarded as a probable supporter of Richard M. Nixon, told reporters that Romney, more than Nixon, had the "non-political image" needed to defeat President Johnson in 1968.

"I think he (Romney) would make a great President," Hickel said. Stopping just short of a formal endorsement, he indicated that he would try to swing Alaska's 12 votes to Romney, but conceded that if the State convention were held today, "it would probably be for Nixon."

Alaska was the first stop on a tour that will carry Romney into Utah, Idaho, New Mexico and Arizona next week—the longest trip of his prepresidential campaign. Thirty newsmen and a covey of aides are with him.

At a news conference in Anchorage, the
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Governor responded willingly to a question on Vietnam.

"It was a mistake to get involved in a land war," he said, "but since we're there, we have to see it through honorably." He said he was "prayerful" that the President's sincere efforts for peace would succeed, but complained that the Johnson policy has been "clumsy, ill-timed and poorly coordinated."

Romney said there was "a serious communications gap" on Vietnam and said he was alarmed by press reports that American authorities there were considering "censoring" news dispatches.

Responding to complaints that his own stand on Vietnam has been vague, Romney declared: "The President is pretty well locked in on his course of action. Many of his options are gone. I have the opportunity, and the Republican Party has the opportunity to take a fresh look at the situation, and I'm not going to fritter it away by going off half-cocked."

Romney said he would go to Vietnam "much later" this year, but would visit other areas of the world first.

In discussing the CIA-NSA situation, the Governor said he was not blaming either group for offering or accepting financial aid.

"The situation needed attention," he said. "The people of the world had been led to believe that the leftist youth that had been attending the world youth conferences spoke for the United States. There was need for some students there who would tell our story."

"The real need war for national leadership that would

inspire private support for private groups like these students." If such private support had been forthcoming, he added, there would have no need for a CIA subsidy.

Romney aides were delighted by Hicckel's comments about his Alaska prospects. The Alaska Governor supported Nixon for the presidential nomination in 1960 and 1964 and was aided by a Nixon visit in his own campaign last fall.

But Hicckel said Romney had the right image of being "knowledgeable, competent but not too political." He said that image was needed to defeat President Johnson, whose weakness is that he is "strictly political."

In a speech prepared for a fund-raising dinner tonight, Romney said "the most important single fact in American politics today is that a new GOP is preparing to lead America into a new generation of progress."

In a brief news conference at the Seattle airport, Romney indicated, as he had before, that he had doubts about the military effectiveness of American bombing of North Vietnam. His comment on the bombings stopped well short of criticizing President Johnson's decision to resume the raids.

He left Seattle early this morning for the 1500-mile flight to Anchorage.

On Sunday, Romney will fly to Salt Lake City, and the next day he will visit David O. McKay, president of the Mormon Church, to which Romney belongs. Later on Monday, he will address a joint session of the Utah Legislature and address two fund-raising dinners.

On Tuesday, he will visit his boyhood home in Rexburg,

Idaho, and speak at Republican functions in Idaho Falls and Pocatello. On Wednesday, he will be in New Mexico and on Thursday in Arizona, where he will address the Legislature. The speech hailed Republican congressional initiatives to revamp the poverty program and give private enterprise a larger role in foreign aid. Aides said Romney would add new proposals of his own in the next few days.

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