

Rowland Evans and Robert Novak *Post*  
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# The Sorensen Crisis

Discovery of Theodore Sorensen's crippling affidavit in the 1973 Ellsberg trial has now brought Jimmy Carter face to face with the first crisis of his presidency. But, in fact, the nomination of Sorensen was verging on crisis long before the affidavit surfaced.

The fact that Carter did not perceive this impending crisis before the Ellsberg affidavit exploded has astonished such strong Carter Democrats as Sen. Joseph Biden of Delaware, the first Democratic senator publicly to endorse his presidential candidacy, and Sen. Adlai Stevenson III of Illinois. Both are members of the Senate Intelligence Committee, which begins its confirmation hearings today on the nomination of Sorensen to run the CIA.

Both might have ended up voting for Sorensen—and, indeed, still may—but along with at least half dozen others on the 15-member committee, both were deeply worried that Sorensen might never win the confidence of the CIA or other U.S. intelligence units.

That factor of confidence has all along been the real source of doubt about Sorensen as intelligence chief. Indeed, one former officer of the CIA—now retired—told us that foreign allied intelligence agencies, notably the British MI-6 and the highly resourceful Israeli Intelligence Service, would find it difficult to place full trust in the CIA under Sorensen.

This view of John F. Kennedy's White House counsel may be unfair to Sorensen, but it is widely held both by discerning Democrats on the intelligence committee and by U.S. intelligence specialists. One committee Democrat, for example, told us he was astonished that, when Sorensen came to see him last week, it was Sorensen who asked the questions, not the senator.

"Ted was taking notes from me on

the operation of U.S. intelligence," this liberal Democrat told us, "instead of my taking notes from him."

Likewise, conservative Republican Sen. Jake Garn of Utah, a formal naval pilot, told Sorensen he would have no objection to him as Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare or Housing and Urban Development—but could never support him for CIA.

The Ellsberg affidavit immediately makes Sorensen far more vulnerable on this critical question of confidence. In the affidavit, Sorensen freely acknowledged that he went off with seven "boxes" of White House documents given a "secret" or other security classification; used them during research on his book, "Kennedy"; then gave them, along with 62 other boxes of White House documents, to the U.S. Archives (and took a legal tax deduction for the gift).

Taking classified documents, under normal circumstances, is at the least a violation of government regulations, and in certain cases could be a criminal offense. But that is not what makes Sorensen—and Jimmy Carter—so vulnerable. The legal aspect of the affidavit is secondary to the confidence factor: The Director of Central Intelligence is the one official of government not permitted national security short-cuts.

In addition, politicians cite Sorensen's long public record against clandestine operations abroad—the CIA's so-called "department of dirty tricks"—as revealing a state of mind that has its place in the political community but is dangerously misplaced in a Director of Central Intelligence.

In "Watchmen in the Night," Sorensen's 1975 book about presidential "accountability" after Watergate, he suggests that the United States should "start erring on the side of overdisclosure instead of overconcealment." He also questions covert operations abroad, saying that their "continuing value" should be "critically reexamined" and that no secret operations can succeed "which are not backed by a broad national consensus."

Criticizing those words, a high former intelligence official told us that if a "national consensus" is needed as backing for a secret operation, then there can by definition be no such operations.

Sorensen has said he would not rule

out all clandestine operations if he is confirmed as boss of the CIA. Yet, his outspoken condemnation of that part of the U.S. intelligence apparatus (minor compared to Soviet operations) has put the intelligence community here not only on guard but in genuine consternation about his inner convictions.

Hence, the dilemma of Carter, whose reputation for stubbornness will now be tested: Should he insist on pushing the nomination through a worried Senate and risk exposing the beleaguered CIA to another savage round of political battle? Or should he find a more hospitable perch to repay the first prominent New York Democrat to help his presidential campaign? The affidavit to the 1973 Ellsberg trial and its damaging effect on Sorensen's credibility as intelligence chief now makes that a most pressing question, the answer to which will reveal much about Jimmy Carter's crisis management.

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