

McGovern's Aides Knew Medical History Of Eagleton Early

FP
11-19-72

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. George McGovern's top aides learned that Thomas F. Eagleton had been hospitalized for exhaustion even before the Missouri senator was selected as the vice presidential nominee, interviews with The Associated Press disclosed Tuesday.

Within hours of Eagleton's nomination, two top McGovern aides, Gordon Weil and Frank Mankiewicz, received confirmation from Douglas Bennett, Eagleton's administrative assistant, but failed to pass the word to McGovern until a few hours later.

At that point, "it wasn't a

serious problem," Mankiewicz said.

Mankiewicz and Bennett agree that Eagleton never mentioned that he had undergone electric shock treatments until nearly a week later, after an anonymous tipster gave that information to a Knight Newspapers executive and to two McGovern aides.

Bennett said, however, "there was never any effort to conceal the shock treatments." Eagleton, however, omitted mention of them on July 25 when he detailed his medical history for reporters, though subsequent questioning brought it out.

The interviews, conducted in the wake of McGovern's smashing election defeat, confirmed for the first time the extent to which the McGovern camp knew of Eagleton's medical history, both before and immediately after he was nominated as the No. 2 man on the Democratic ticket.

As early as the Wednesday night of the convention, before McGovern himself was even nominated, Mankiewicz and Kirby Jones, the senator's deputy press secretary, received word in the candidates' trailer of a report circulating on the convention floor that Eagleton had been in the hospital with a mental problem.

David Schoumacher, a television correspondent now with ABC, said the McGovern aides dismissed it as "one more of the nutty things you hear around the convention," but that Mankiewicz said it had better be checked.

Jones said he circulated around the hall and in the press galleries but never heard any more.

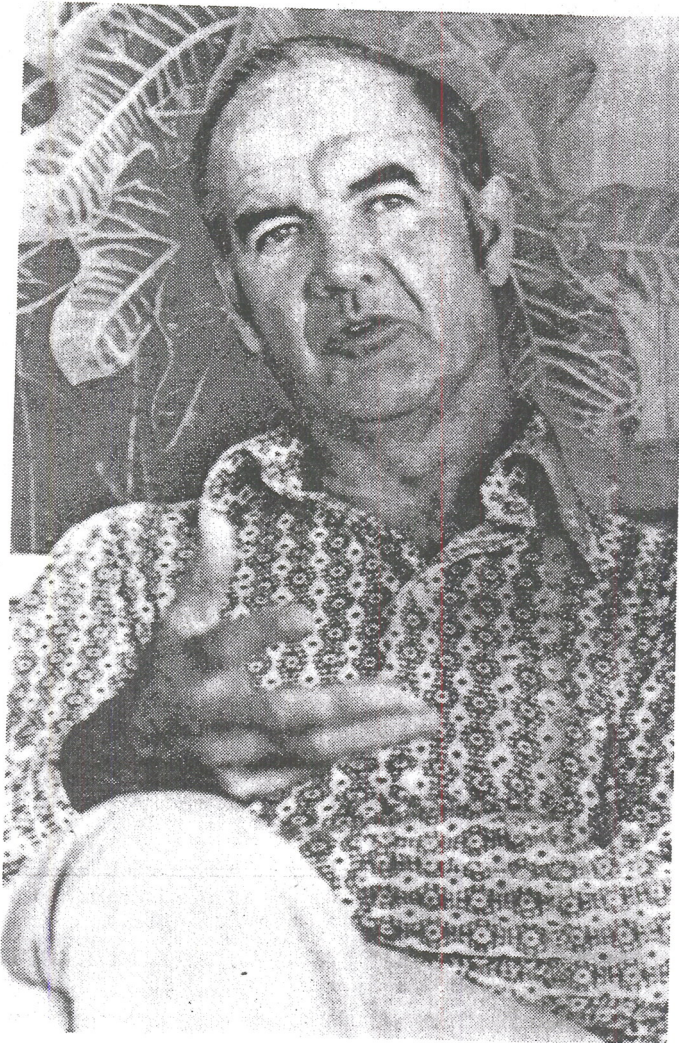
The next day, at McGovern's direction, some two dozen aides met to sift vice presidential names after Sen. Edward M. Kennedy had rejected the nomination. They narrowed the list to six — Eagleton, Wisconsin Gov. Patrick Lucey, Boston Mayor Kevin White, Democratic National Chairman Lawrence F. O'Brien, labor leader Leonard Woodcock and Sargent Shriver, the latter eventually to be named after Eagleton was dropped.

Weil, who was unavailable for questioning this week, was detailed to check reports that Eagleton had a drinking problem, and according to Mankiewicz and legislative assistant John L. Holun reported back that the Missourian had been hospitalized for exhaustion, not drinking.

"It was an answer to the alcoholism charge. That's what we were looking for," Holun recalled. "No one really thought of it on its own."

Mankiewicz said he doubts that McGovern was told. "Why shouldn't the senator go into the hospital for exhaustion?" he asked. "So have a lot of people. That's like saying he had polio when he was a kid."

Over 500 patents for windshield wipers have been granted.



A GESTURE BY GEORGE — Vacationing Sen. George McGovern gestures during news conference at the resort town of Charlotte Amalie, Virgin Islands, Tuesday. He counseled against hasty action to remove the Democratic party chairman, Jean Westwood. McGovern also said the Democratic party is an unnatural, unstable coalition and the country would benefit if his defeat for the presidency leads to broad party realignment. — (AP Wirephoto)