


Frost
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Washington Merry-Go-Round



by JACK ANDERSON

WASHINGTON — The chief target of President Nixon's political espionage before the 1972 conventions was Sen. Ed Muskie, D-Me., whose private conversations were often reported back verbatim to the White House.

The spy reports, prepared by newsmen Seymour Freidin, who was identified only as "Chapman's Friend," portrayed Muskie as a frenzied campaigner who berated his staff and bellyached to his Senate colleagues.

"He made 'herculean efforts' to control himself to avoid tantrums," stated an October 18, 1971, report. Yet the following February, Freidin reported that Muskie had to be restrained by his staff from barging into the offices of New Hampshire publisher William Loeb and "hauling him out by the scruff of the neck."

Freidin used his newspaper credentials to gain access to Democratic sources and then reported their off-the-record confidences to President Nixon's political mentor, Murray Chotiner. Confidential copies were distributed to then-Attorney General John Mitchell and White House staff chief H. R. Haldeman.

As early as April 6, 1971, Chapman's Friend reported on a stormy secret session of Muskie's planning staff. "Muskie was in foul temper. . .," declared the spy report. "He kicked things off by charging that his special entourage 'didn't know a g-d— thing about politics. . . .'"

The report quoted Muskie as complaining: "All I get from you people are excuses! You're not on the ball!" He questioned which team his advisers were on — "mine or someone else's?"

This brought a sharp rejoinder from his top adviser, Berl Bernhard. "Ed," he asked, "do you want me to turn in my suit? If that's your intention, say so."

The report claimed Muskie dismissed talk of resignation but added plaintively: "You know how edgy a man in this situation

can get. . . ."

A few days later, Senate Democratic leader Mike Mansfield was quoted in the press as saying Muskie was "slipping" in the presidential standings. Freidin gave the White House a report on Muskie's subsequent encounter with Mansfield.

"Mike, it seemed to us," complained Muskie, "that you were cutting ground from under me. This isn't being equal to everyone; I come out less equal."

Mansfield, according to Freidin, responded: "I'm neutral in this business. Everything that comes up shouldn't get under your skin, Ed. There's a long way to go."

Freidin quoted Muskie's press aide, Dick Stewart, as telling him on April 21, 1971: "This setup, as I find it now, is a can of worms. Everybody seems to be doing his own thing. . . Muskie makes a date with someone. He either forgets it, doesn't tell anybody else and someone gets damned mad, cooling his heels."

This was confirmed by Sen. Hubert Humphrey, D-Minn., who told Freidin: "Ed's got all kinds of problems. Staff is a big one for him. . . I guess that one of Ed's biggest worries is who is really working for him or against him in his own staff."

Chapman's Friend also reported that the AFL-CIO had turned against Muskie. The spy reports contain this contemptuous comment from the AFL-CIO's Jay Lovestone:

"Shmuskie finished himself for good with the Old Man (George Meany). Meany never cared for him anyway. . . Muskie got high and mighty. He'd make his own decisions and choices, he told our people. So we know what that meant. We took off all the wraps. . . Shmuskie got what was coming to him."

The reports depict Muskie as growing increasingly frustrated over his political misfortunes until he finally exploded. The cause was a derogatory item about his wife, Jane, in William Loeb's Manchester, N.H., Union Leader. Afterward, Freidin relayed these off-the-record

comments from Berl Bernhard:

"Ed blew his stack. He called Loeb every name under the sun. He was all for going into the office and hauling him out by the scruff of the neck. There had to be lots of talking to get him to simmer down. . . ."

"Even after he was convinced he could not roar into the Union Leader offices, he stewed and stormed. We decided after lots of phone talks that it was best for him to do the outside-the-building thing. But I don't believe any of us foresaw that he would become as emotional as he did."

Freidin flew to Maine in May 1971 to dig up possible dirt on

Muskie from his four married sisters. "They live in a close radius near Mama Muskie," Freidin reported to Chotiner. "They are devoted to her and, in the course of their meal, spoke much more of Mama than they did of their famous brother."

One of the sisters, apparently, could use financial help. Chapman's Friend talked to Muskie's mother about it. "I wouldn't think of asking nor would my children. . .," she said. "My other daughters and I suggest to the whole family that if anyone should ever need help, we all pitch in. That doesn't single out anybody. Nobody has ever asked."

Concluded Freidin: "It was quite clear to me from Mama that the senator never gave any of them a quarter and they never asked him."

FOOTNOTE: Muskie told us that the White House spies had taken information out of context, distorted it and disseminated it as part of their 1971-72 campaign to eliminate him from the presidential race. "The pattern was clear," he said. "The White House spread distortions that gave a false picture of me." No one on his staff, he added, could remember Freidin.