

Nixon an Issue in California

By Lou Cannon

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LOS ANGELES—The legacy of a deposed President and of the economy he left behind is haunting a gubernatorial campaign that in its early stages has failed to attract the interest of many Californians.

Secretary of State Edmund Gerald Brown Jr., the Democratic front-runner, and state Controller Houston Irvine Flournoy, his Republican challenger, found the crowds small and the applause restrained in the first week of formal campaigning, which traditionally begins here on Labor Day.

In a state bogged down by persistent unemployment, mounting inflation and crippling smog, Brown and Flournoy are competing to replace Gov. Ronald Reagan, who is retiring after eight years in office.

It sometimes seemed in the opening week of campaigning, however, that Brown, 36, really was running as much against the ghosts of past Republicans as against his immediate opponent.

At a San Francisco press conference he talked about the "Nixon-Agnew-Reagan-Reinecke-Flournoy administration." Later, he added Herbert Hoover to the list.

Speaking at an Alameda County labor picnic, Brown invoked the "coalition created by Franklin Roosevelt," and said that Republican philosophy since Hoover and through Mr. Nixon was based on "trickle-down economics" which benefits only the wealthy.

There are several reasons why political strategists from both camps see Mr. Nixon in particular and his administration in general as an issue in the gubernatorial campaign. Both camps see Mr. Nixon's presence at San Clemente.

"Nixon is a Californian, and he's here," said one top Republican strategist who is close to Reagan. "He is regarded as part of the political system. People want to know what he did. He remains an issue."

Brown is linked publicly



EDMUND G. BROWN JR.



HOUSTON I. FLOURNOY

... opponents in California gubernatorial campaign

Campaign

With campaign reform more than any other issue. He led the fight for the controversial and far-reaching campaign reform initiative (Proposition 9) that won approval of the voters in the primary election and will take effect next year.

"Without Nixon, you wouldn't have Jerry Brown," said former assembly Speaker Bob Moretti, who ran second to Brown in a free-for-all Democratic primary. "Nixon made campaign spending and reform the issues."

More pervasive even than

the awareness of Mr. Nixon is a concern about the economy.

Pollster Mervin D. Field points out that the economy remained the No. 1 issue in California throughout the Watergate scandal. Unemployment here is running at 7.8 per cent, more than 2 points higher than the national rate, and inflation, as everywhere, is rampant.

had disastrous consequences for the Republican Party. The GOP lost a mid-summer state senate special election by a wide margin in what was supposed to be a state Republican district in Santa Barbara.

Democrats now have more than a 1.8 million registration bulge over Republicans, compared with a 1.3 million lead when Reagan defeated Jerry Brown's father, then incumbent Gov. Edmund G.

(Pat) Brown, in his third-term bid eight years ago.

The prospects as measured by Field's poll also are gloomy for Flournoy, 44, a former college professor and ex-legislator. Flournoy trailed Brown by 8 points in a May trial heat and was 14 points back in an early August poll. Private polls taken about the same time show similar margins.

Flournoy pointed out that most of the interviewing for the recent polls took place during the week Mr. Nixon resigned, and added, "I can't imagine a worse week for a poll to be taken."

He also said he thinks he will receive a delayed and

beneficial impact from President Ford, whom he expects to campaign for him in October. And he said he believes he can convince voters that he is more qualified than Brown, if anyone is paying attention when the two men meet in a series of televised debates.

Flournoy said Brown started out his campaign trying to make the election a referendum on Watergate and that he now wants it to be referendum on Mr. Nixon's economic policies. "He was blaming me for everything from the White House 'plumbers' to the high cost of plumbing," Flournoy said. "Now, he's forgotten we have a new President."

But Brown could not be more mindful of the change in the White House. He refers to Mr. Ford only occasionally, working him cautiously into his anti-Republican litany on the economy.

"Ford's becoming President changed my election from a certainty into only a strong probability," Brown said.

Flournoy, too, attempts to turn the economic issue to his advantage, saying on a couple of occasions that the national inflation had started under President Johnson. On Labor Day, however, Flournoy was outflanked by Brown, who pledged in his campaign-opening speech that he will not increase taxes next year. It is a promise that either candidate should be able to keep, since Reagan is leaving office with a \$350 million surplus in the treasury.

Because Brown has said he will use the surplus and unspecified other funds to provide more money for education, the environment and the unemployed, Flournoy attempts to portray him as a spender linked to inflationary national Democratic policies.

The rhetoric about the national economy aside, the campaign thus far has revealed few substantial policy differences between the two candidates.

But if their platforms are

similar—and similarly generalized and unspecific—the style and personalities of the two candidates are markedly contrasting.

The kickoff event of the campaign for Brown, as for his father before him, was the Catholic labor breakfast in Los Angeles, where he gave an award to John F. Henning, the state AFL-CIO chief. Henning staunchly opposed Brown and his campaign-reform initiative in the primary, but he has now swung behind him—reportedly after some urging from Pat Brown, who received the loudest applause at the breakfast.

Afterward on the airplane to the labor picnic in Alameda County, Jerry Brown noted that he, Henning and state assembly Speaker Leo McCarthy were all graduates of St. Ignatius High School in San Francisco. Fully 25 per cent of Californians are Roman Catholics, Brown said in a response to a question.

"We'll see whether there are more of us than the Huguenots," Brown added with a smile.

The comment was a none-too-veiled reference to the French Huguenot ancestor of Flournoy, a nominal Congregationalist who is not a church-goer.

In contrast to Brown's timely focus and increasingly self-assured manner, Flournoy is low-key and self-depreciating. He is more effective in private conversation than on the stump, where even Flournoy's aides find him soporific.

Flournoy's strategists want him to hammer hard at Brown—they have a "question a day" designed to force the Democratic candidate to discuss specifics—but Flournoy is not the hammering kind of candidate.

Recently, he ignored the advice of his strategists and

supported pending legislation that would have increased the governor's salary even though Brown made effective use of his own opposition to show he favored economy in government. Flournoy told his aides he wasn't going to be "demagogic" and speak out against a measure he favored.

Some of Flournoy's friends consider him one of the luckiest men in politics. He ran for state controller against Alan Cranston in 1960 after some legislative friends talked him into it at a free-drinking blackjack game and won by a narrow margin.

It was not the first time or the last time that Flournoy, a Ph.D. in political science formerly at Princeton and one-time aide to Sen. H. Alexander Smith (R-N.J.), did the unexpected.

He was elected to the state legislature in 1960, the year that John F. Kennedy defeated Richard M. Nixon for the presidency but narrowly lost California. Flournoy was a complete political unknown then, and he was little better known statewide last year when he announced for the governorship. Polls showed him favored by less than 5 per cent of the Republican voters.

But the other, more prominent, candidates, such as Attorney General Evelle Younger and Robert H. Finch, dropped out as Watergate cast a pall over Republican fortunes. The only remaining candidates were Flournoy and Edward Reinecke, the lieutenant governor, who was removed from contention when he was indicted for perjury.

Flournoy will need any remaining luck he can muster to make it to the governorship. His strategists, most of whom seem to have a strategy of their own, are counting on such things as a se-

ries of statewide debates, which are to begin Tuesday, and on an appearance by President Ford, whom press secretary Peter Kaye says will arouse interest in people who "don't know Houston Flournoy from Houston, Tex."

An agreement signed by Brown and Flournoy limits television and radio advertising spending to \$750,000, and gives an independent arbitrator the authority to inspect campaign records and enforce the spending limits in court. Estimates of total campaign spending on each side, which is not regulated, range from \$1.3 million to \$2 million.

The Flournoy campaign also is uniting two old political opponents within the GOP. They are Reagan, who has been stumping enthusiastically and effectively for Flournoy, and Rep. Paul N. (Pete) McCloskey, an implacable foe of Reagan and of Mr. Nixon who at last has found a major Republican candidate he can support enthusiastically.

California always has set great store by personalities, and it is the hope of the Flournoy people that the personality of their candidate will seem more pleasing than Brown's after an extended campaign. There is no showing up to now, however, that Flournoy's rather bland personality has particularly impressed Californians.

Even if Flournoy comes across, his campaign seems haunted by a deteriorating economy that is driving voters to the Democrats—as well as by the specter of a former President at San Clemente whose legacy may make it difficult for any Republican to be elected to a statewide office.