

EVANS AND NOVAK

Harris' Political Ambitions Face Kennedy Opposition

WASHINGTON—The remnants of the Kennedy political apparatus are determined to oppose any national political ambitions of Sen. Fred Harris of Oklahoma, Democratic national chairman, as a result of bizarre maneuverings last month over the party debt. The Kennedy men feel Harris attempted, unsuccessfully, to renege on a promise to pick up the presidential campaign debt of the late Robert F. Kennedy after Sen. Edward M. Kennedy's politically catastrophic accident. To them, Harris' actions were inexcusable and irredeemable.

The story begins in January when Robert Short, then Democratic national treasurer, proposed to a meeting of the National Committee that it assume the Kennedy campaign debt (as well as Hubert Humphrey's pre-convention debt). In return, the National Committee would get the services of the party's greatest attraction and fundraiser—Ted Kennedy—in erasing the stupendous post-convention Humphrey debt.

Kennedy emissaries readily agreed to the deal, and it was to be formally approved at the next meeting of the executive committee of the National Committee. But that meeting came on Aug. 1, two weeks after Kennedy's accident. In the minds of hardheaded politicians, Ted Kennedy's fund-raising prowess had simply disappeared.

Without notifying Sen. Kennedy's office, Harris removed the proposed assumption of the Bobby Kennedy debt from the agenda.

Kennedy partisans on the executive committee were apoplectic. They were unsatisfied by Harris' explanation that the National Committee had not pinned down arrangements with Stephen Smith, Kennedy brother-in-law and fund-raiser during nearly seven months since January's meeting of the National Committee.

Charles Evers, civil rights leader and national committeeman from Mississippi, vowed he would stage a sit-in at national party headquarters that day unless Harris changed his mind.

Alerted by their friends on the executive committee, Kennedy lieutenants frantically sought Harris on Aug. 1. Their telephone calls went unanswered. Instead, acting treasurer Pat O'Connor suggested to them that, in view of the family's latest tragedy, perhaps they might want to bypass questions of political finance. The Kennedy men replied

heatedly this was not the case.

At the luncheon break, three pro-Kennedy members of the executive committee—Evers, Stephen Reinhardt of California, and Mildred Jeffrey of Michigan—were ready to inform Harris they would not. But at that point, O'Connor averted the confrontation by announcing that details with Steve Smith had been worked out after all.

As a result, the executive committee unanimously voted to add the nearly \$1 million Kennedy debt and the over \$1 million pre-convention Humphrey debt to nearly \$6 million owed by the Humphrey general election campaign.

But bitter memories linger. Kennedy men could forgive Harris for supporting Humphrey instead of Bobby Kennedy for president but not for what they consider a low blow at a time of deep trouble for the Kennedys. He is on their black list.

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The White House's lugubrious machinery for clearing appointments reached a peak of absurdity in the case of Dr. Arthur Flemming, an esteemed Republican and educator who was President Eisenhower's secretary of Health, Education and Welfare and is now president of Macalester College (Minn.).

Although the FBI and the Internal Revenue Service claim they can clear anybody within 48 hours, it is over three weeks since Flemming's name was submitted as panelist for the December White House conference on hunger. The problem is that Flemming has belonged to so many organizations (he is currently president of the National Council of Churches) that the computer went wild spewing out cards about his associations. Doggedly, the White House insists that all be checked out.

The crowning absurdity is the identity of the White House aide in charge of the clearance process: another Flemming, named Harry, who happens to be Dr. Flemming's son.