

Nixon's Computer Age Campaign

By Don Bacon

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WASHINGTON — Like the proverbial iceberg, only the tip of Richard Nixon's re-election campaign has been visible to the public.

Beneath the surface is the largest, richest, most highly disciplined and most centralized campaign in the history of presidential elections. For his fifth and final national political race, President Nixon has created a near masterpiece of organization and strategy that has brought him to the threshold of landslide victory.

The Nixon organization operates on several levels, ranging from public to top secret, and involves thousands of paid political workers, non-paid volunteers, consultants, outside contractors and federal employees. No Nixon Administration appointee has been exempt from political involvement this year.

**Lasting Effect**

Nixon's formal campaign organization—the Committee for the Re-Election of the President—almost certainly will have a lasting effect on the way future presidential contests are run. The committee has for the first time, brought computer-age business practices to the political arena. After ironing out some early problems, it has proved highly effective in raising funds, organizing special voters groups (such as youth), registering new voters, setting up "grass-roots" Nixon organizations, maintaining control over national and state media advertising and answering political charges by the Democratic opposition.

The committee currently is gearing up for its last major task: getting potential Nixon voters interested enough to go to the polls on election day.

Other, more subtle aspects of the re-election effort have remained under strict White House control, with Nixon's own trusted aides carrying out campaign instructions and suggestions that originate in the oval office itself.

**Decision Maker**

"The president is the decision maker in this campaign," says Presidential special counsel Harry Dent. "He's the best strategist around here. Everybody knows it. Nobody can touch him."

The basic strategy of the campaign was devised by Nixon and a small circle of political advisers more than a year ago and was refined in a series of strategy meetings involving lesser campaign officials this spring and summer.

According to those involved in the strategy's origination and execution, it has remained remarkably on course since its inception. The Nixon re-election formula contains these fundamental elements:

- Establish early a campaign and fund-raising organization, with control and a chain of command leading clearly back to the White House.
- Maintain and nurture the campaign advantage that comes from being President. The President as much as possible remains "above the battle." He is too busy running the country and its foreign policy to indulge in heavy campaigning. Advertising, slogans, even the re-election committee's name, is pitched so that the voting public sees Richard Nixon not as the Republican candidate, but as "The President."
- Send "surrogates" — mostly top Administration officials — across the country to answer Democratic charges and speak in Nixon's behalf.
- Mobilize the entire Administration to assist in the campaign—no exceptions.
- Stress the Administration's first term accomplishments and progress, and avoid, at least in the President's own utterances, direct attacks on the opposition.
- Keep close tabs on the Democratic opposition, study and exploit its weaknesses and build dossiers on its presidential aspirants.

- Go after all voting segments in all sections of the country. The Southern vote was virtually locked up by Nixon early in the term, leaving him free to bolster his support in the big electoral states, especially California, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois and Michigan.

- Tailor special appeals to ethnic groups that have grown restive in the Democratic party, including Catholics, Jews, Mexican-Americans and East European-Americans.

- Solicit support and funds from prestigious Democrats through a separate ad hoc "Democrats for Nixon" organization. Former Treasury Secretary John Connally, a Democratic protege of Lyndon B. Johnson, was available to head such a group.

Most of Nixon's campaign precepts were tested last spring in the state primaries. The notion that Nixon could remain aloof from politics and still pull a heavy vote was quickly validated.

"The primary strategy, I think, was just beautiful," said Dent, Nixon's specialist on politics who maintains White House liaison with state party chairmen. The surrogate system worked (Dent, a conservative, was himself a Nixon surrogate with special responsibility to go into cities behind Rep. John Ashbrook of Ohio, briefly a candidate for the Republican presidential nomination). We made good use of direct mail and television. . . . We didn't waste any money either.

"The President had to do nothing," he continued. "In the middle of the primaries he was off to Peking and Moscow. The plan was great; the whole thing was very carefully strategized."

The Finance Committee, headed by former Treasury Secretary Maurice Stans, has done an effective job of raising funds for the campaign—too effective, according to a lot of Republican congressional and gubernatorial candidates, who complain that contributors have been squeezed dry and

balk at giving more money to help non-presidential candidates.

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Running a campaign committee of this size and scope is expensive. Campaign

Director Clark MacGregor released figures showing the latest revised total budget: \$14 million for distribution to various state operations; \$6.5 million for media advertising; \$6 million for direct mail; \$3 million for telephone banks; up to \$3 million for surrogates and presidential campaign travel; \$2 million for appeals to ethnic groups; \$2.5 million for campaign buttons and other such materials; \$3 million for staff salaries; \$500,000 for field operations, and \$500,000 for the committee's share of national expenses.

This does not, of course, include the value of the government-paid manpower, research, travel and other campaign support that Nixon, as an incumbent president, has available. As a campaigner, Nixon pays only for the direct costs of using his official airplane, Air Force One, \$1000 per hour of flying time, and his official helicopter \$400 hour of flying time).