

# Wallace's health is his main concern

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — Gov. George C. Wallace's slow and painful recovery has not only curtailed efforts to establish himself as a card-carrying Democrat but, more important, clouds his serious dreams of becoming the 1976 presidential nominee.

Wallace's unequivocal announcement last week which backed the entire state Democratic ticket and refused to endorse President Nixon, surprising many Alabama politicians, underlines what we have reported for over a year: his national future lies neither with the Republicans nor with his own American Independent party but as a Democrat.

## Concern for his health

However, the slow pace of Wallace's recovery from the attempted assassination May 15 has ended plans for a highly selective national campaign in behalf of Wallaceite Democrats. Moreover, Wallace's ingrained preoccupation with national politics is now eclipsed by concern for his own health. His advisers admit privately another year will pass before he knows whether he has any political future at all.

The ground rules for Wallace's 1972 course were set at the Miami Beach convention last July. He would endorse neither Mr. Nixon nor Sen. George McGovern but would actively support selected Democratic candidates, in and out of Alabama. Last week's statement did not deviate from that plan.

## His activity has changed

What has changed is the scope of his activity. Tentative travels of just a month ago were scrapped on the advice of Wallace's doctors. For example, a campaign trip for state delegate John Hargreaves, Democratic candidate for Congress on Maryland's Eastern Shore, turned into a mere letter of endorsement.

Indeed, some candidates are not even getting that. Democratic state Rep. Sam Nunn, running a close race in Georgia for the U. S. Senate, made the pilgrimage here for Wallace's support and later announced he will write in Wallace's name for President. Nunn's managers felt sure of Wallace's endorsement. At this writing, however, they are still waiting. No decision has been made

to publicly endorse Nunn or several other candidates seeking Wallace's backing.

This hesitancy is partly traced to Wallace advisers reluctant to commit his prestige to possibly losing candidates. Some even argued unsuccessfully against Wallace's vigorous endorsement last week of Sen. John Sparkman in Alabama, which almost certainly assures his victory.

Charles Snider, Wallace's aggressive young campaign manager, was ready to sign up with Democrats for Nixon but turned it down at Wallace's request. Snider is believed to have opposed the Sparkman endorsement and, generally, feels Wallace has more to lose than win by embracing hard-pressed Democratic candidates.

But more decisive than Snider in reduc-

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ing Wallace's political activity is his health. Apart from curtailing travel, it delays decisions on such questions as the Georgia Senate race.

## Wallace seemed fatigued

When we visited Wallace at the governor's mansion, he seemed fatigued and uncharacteristically reluctant to talk politics. Nursing a virus-induced fever, he had nevertheless spent a busy afternoon appearing with various groups, signing proclamations, chatting with visiting Vice President Spiro T. Agnew for nearly an hour, answering questions briefly from reporters and conferring about state politics with Snider. He told us he felt out of touch with politics and was concentrating now on trying to get well.

Wallace's bouts with depression worry close associates, who disclose both his unhappiness at being isolated and a tendency toward reclusiveness. The lust for action that is so integral to his personality is now absent.

## Has not lost interest

But he has not lost interest in presidential politics. He perceives a battle for 1976 inside the Democratic party between him and Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, telling friends that McGovern's failure to gain support after campaigning with Kennedy in Northern big cities is actually a repudiation of Kennedy.

Wallace thereby reveals he sees his future as a Democrat. His inner circle rightly believes the American Independent party is the captive of the John Birch Society. Despite his teasing remarks to newsmen last week that he might yet say more about the presidential race, there will be no Nixon endorsement. So, the remaining question is not where Wallace intends to go politically but whether he regains the strength to go anywhere.