

Doubts Rise on Wallace's '76 Strength; Some Pet Issues Have Lost Their Magic

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By B. DRUMMOND AYRES Jr.
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MONTGOMERY, Ala.—A few months ago, it seemed that Gov. George Corley Wallace might be headed for his strongest run ever as a Presidential candidate. He looked good in the polls, had plenty of campaign money, was well organized and was

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confident that the Democratic Party's new primary rules would assure him his share of delegates.

But now there are rising doubts about his ability to make a strong race in 1976.

His health continues to be a major issue. There is some feeling that this campaign—his fourth for the Presidency—is one campaign too many. Some of the issues that have worked well for him in the past have vanished, while others are being stolen by other candidates.

The big question now is not who can stop Mr. Wallace but whether the Alabama Governor still has the electoral potency to be a spoiler—his past role on the national political stage.

He was notable in that role in three previous campaigns, unable to win himself with his arch-conservative, often racially oriented themes and issues, but powerful enough to nudge the debate to the right and to shove some liberal candidates into electoral oblivion.

Now, as he goes after the Democratic nomination again, would-be spoilers lie in wait for him, particularly in the early Southern primaries. Some of them can match his right wing rhetoric, while others are adept at treating his anti-Establishment, anti-Washington themes.

In Florida, on March 9, he must head off a surprisingly fast-moving newcomer, former Gov. Jimmy Carter of Georgia. A few weeks later, in North Carolina, he must face Mr. Car-

ter again, as well as former Gov. Terry Sanford of North Carolina.

If Mr. Wallace fails to do well in primaries in his own region—"I'm not worried," he insists—his influence in the 1976 Presidential campaign almost certainly will be sharply diminished. Any hope of going into the New York convention next July with enough delegates to be a key convention broker would be shattered, and any thought of switching to a third party candidacy would require serious reconsideration.

None of this is to say that Mr. Wallace, now 56 years old and serving his third term as Governor of Alabama, is no longer an electoral force to be reckoned with.

A man with his uncanny knack for precisely judging—and adroitly exploiting—what aggravates the average American voter is not to be ignored, especially in the wake of Watergate, the Vietnam War and the recession.

When he announced his candidacy a few weeks ago, Mr. Wallace touched directly on the

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disillusion. The theme of his campaign, he said, would be "trust the people," while the main issue would be "the survival of the middle class, that great mass of Americans who pay their taxes, fight our wars, make our cars, grow our crops, and try to live decent, law-abiding lives."

Poll after poll indicates that Mr. Wallace, the standard-bearer of the fed-up in the 1964, 1968 and 1972 Presidential campaigns, still is the favorite of almost a fifth of the electorate.

There are other reasons Mr. Wallace should not be ignored in 1976.

For one thing, he appears to be going into this campaign with more money and better organization than ever before. For another, the election rules are on his side now.

Because of changes that he helped bring about in intra-party debate, the rules now guarantee that he will get his share of primary delegates—proportionate to his percentage of the overall vote—whether or not he wins a single primary. Previously, the winner got all delegates.

But some of the important elements that Mr. Wallace had going for him in earlier campaigns will be missing in 1976.

First—and perhaps foremost—Mr. Wallace is now a paraplegic, as well as partly deaf.

Marginal Hearing

The robust good health that once enabled him to be an energetic, bouncy campaigner was seriously affected by the bullets fired into him 3½ years ago while he was campaigning in Maryland.

He cannot move his legs and must be rolled around in a wheelchair. Pain periodically nags at the old wounds. He is subject to the brief bouts of depression and the bothersome kidney infections that frequently hit paraplegics.

His hearing, impaired by an old illness, is marginal, even though he wears an electronic aid.

"They're trying to make a lot of my health," he says, "but the only thing that's wrong with me is that I can't walk like everybody else."

The Governor's doctors, as well as his medical records, tend to support that contention. Whether the public will accept it is something else.

Mr. Wallace's political adversaries have generally steered

clear of the health issue publicly, perhaps out of fear that it might backfire. But many talk about it privately, and it is the subject of speculation at the grass-roots level and in the news media.

It is conceivable that Mr. Wallace could lose support because of doubts about his health, and it is also conceivable that he could lose support because some voters might see his fourth Presidential race as one trip to the well too many.

Governor Wallace won three Democratic primaries in 1964,

almost threw the 1968 race into the House of Representatives as a third party candidate and was running better than ever in 1972 when he was shot. But he has yet to deliver his supporters the ultimate prize.

This time around, some long-time supporters might see a vote for Wallace as a vote wasted on a quadrennial loser or, worse, as a vote wasted on a sick quadrennial loser. They might be willing to switch in 1976 to another candidate who echoes some of the old Wallace themes.



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Mr. Carter, for example, is preaching the anti-Washington, anti-Establishment theme in the crucial Florida primary. Furthermore, there is still time for disenchanted Florida Wallaceites to switch to the Republican party where they can vote for former Gov. Ronald Reagan of California, no conservative slacker.

Mr. Carter came out far ahead of Mr. Wallace in a recent straw poll of Democratic leaders in Florida.

And when Mr. Wallace spoke a few weeks ago at a highly publicized rally in support of Bible study in Florida public schools, only 2,500 people showed up, although the rally's backers had predicted that 50,000 would attend it.

Such are the early warning signals for the Wallace candidacy in 1976.

Nor can Mr. Wallace rely this time around on two other factors that were crucial to his early success in 1972.

Four years ago, court-ordered pupil busing was a boiling national issue that Mr. Wallace exploited to the fullest in the primaries. In 1976, busing is largely a subsidiary issue.

Four years ago, Mr. Wallace became an early Presidential frontrunner by coming in first in the Florida primary. He got 42 per cent of the vote, with the rest split among half a dozen or more candidates.

This year, the Florida contest will be mainly a Carter-Wallace contest, one-on-one except for a token effort by Senator Henry M. Jackson of Washington. Mr. Wallace cannot count on division within the ranks of his enemies to give him victory.

Finally, in the area of campaign drawbacks, Mr. Wallace must contend this year with detailed scrutiny of his record as Governor, something that was never much of an issue in previous campaigns.

It is more than just a record of granite-hard segregation followed by a determined effort—his enemies say an opportunistic effort—to win black votes and a more acceptable national image.

It is also a record of controversial stewardship in the everyday affairs of state, a record of consistently low national rating in education, health and other social services.

It is a record of somewhat regressive taxing of the "little people" whom Mr. Wallace purports to defend. And, it is a record of massive deficit financing by a man who claims to be a fiscal conservative.

The 'Little People'

"You could also say that it's the record of a man who has been elected Governor of Alabama more than any other man," Mr. Wallace counters.

Despite the serious problems he faces at this early stage of the campaign, the Governor remains confident. "I've got a lot of things going for me," he said.

The most important, of course, is the scrappy Wallace personality that is so adept at voicing the fears, prejudices and hopes of the "little people."

His positions tend to be visceral rather than intellectual and have changed very little over the years, except on racial

issues.

He still attacks Washington-based big government at every opportunity and blames excessive Federal spending for the inflation that now threatens the "survival" of the middle class.

He says welfare rolls are crowded with cheats, that resumption of capital punishment would restore law and order, that the work ethic and the "old moralities" must be restored to their rightful place in American life.

As for his switch on racial issues, which he has never fully explained, he now courts black votes and the imprimatur of "serious national candidate" that goes with them. However, he remains adamantly opposed to court-ordered pupil busing.

His foreign policy positions are as conservative as his positions on national issues—and every bit as general, despite a recent "fact finding" trip to Europe.

He warns of "false détente" with the Soviet Union and says that the Vietnam experience proved the need for a "complete overhaul" of basic American defense and diplomatic policies.

Mr. Wallace's political ene-

mies contend that he only talks about problems, never offers real solutions.

The Governor will have other things going for him in 1976, including the fact that this campaign is beginning like no other Wallace campaign.

This one started the day the 1972 campaign ended. The Wallace headquarters here in Montgomery was never closed.

Earlier campaigns had always been marred by sloppy, often amateurish planning. The aim was to make the 1976 run totally professional.

Bookkeeping Questioned

The election rules for all states were analyzed. A Wallace representative was ordered to keep an eye on the Democratic National Committee and any changes in party rules. Richard A. Viguerie, a sometimes controversial but always expert professional fund-raiser, was hired.

Thus far, Mr. Viguerie has sent out more than 12 million pieces of mail and claims a "hard core" list of more than 400,000 Wallace supporters, most willing to give \$10 or so more than once.

In 1975 alone, Mr. Viguerie raised \$3 million at a cost of slightly more than \$2 million, enough to make Mr. Wallace one of the wealthiest 1976 contenders. But the campaign's bookkeeping operation has been questioned by the Federal Election Commission—certain cash-flow records apparently were not kept—and some of the Governor's matching Federal funds may be delayed or withheld.

In the meantime, the Wallace campaign staff has tripled to almost 60 paid employees.

Armed with pamphlets and films, organizers have hit states from coast to coast in search of volunteers and would-be delegates.

The 30 or so states that will hold primaries are being canvassed particularly heavily because Mr. Wallace feels his chances have been strengthened by the new party rules on apportioning primary delegates. Some states that hold conventions are also being canvassed,

but Democratic regulars frequently control convention machinery, leaving little operating room for a maverick like Mr. Wallace.

At this point, the Wallace strategy is to enter all but one of the primaries. He will stay out of New Hampshire—the first—because it tends to be conducted on a time-consuming man-in-the-street basis, a manner not suited to a candidate confined to a wheelchair.

Rather, the Wallace campaign strategy calls for the use of mass rallies—14 in Florida alone—and considerable television advertising.

"I have the expertise and money to do it that way," Mr. Wallace says, "and, besides, my reputation is already established, most people know who I am and where I stand."

By the time the Democratic National Convention begins next summer, the Governor hopes to have enough delegates in his pocket to be a major broker. He says he would bargain mainly for the Presidential nomination, but more likely possibilities would seem to be changes in the party's platform or, perhaps, the Vice-Presidential nomination.

However, there is considerable feeling among the liberals who tend to control the party that to broker with Mr. Wallace, should he arrive with a large batch of delegates, would be disastrous for the party in the long run.

On the other hand, by refusing to deal, the party would chance a bolt by the Governor to a third party, a bolt that could throw the election into the House of Representatives if no candidate won a majority in the Electoral College.

Will the 1976 Wallace candidacy, under whatever banner, go anywhere?

At this early stage in the campaign, the best answer to that question may be another question.

Can a seriously crippled candidate, who has already been to the national political well three times, go a fourth time and still come up with the spoiler's role?

Tomorrow: Hubert H. Humphrey