By Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward Washington Post Staff Writers

Sen. Edmund S. Muskie, identified by federal investigators as the victim of an elaborate White House hoax that apparently damaged his presidential campaign, demanded yesterday that President Nixon personally respond to information linking the President's staff to widespread acts of political spying and sabotage.

Muskie, without directly mentioning the celebrated "Canuck letter" episode that investigators say was engineered by a White House aide, also called for an independent investigation of what he called "the espionage activities of the President's staff."

The Maine senator, who apparently was victimized by an amazingly complicated chain of events that figured in his "crying speech" two weeks before the New Hampshire primary, said in a prepared statement yesterday:

"These press reports (of a massive political spying-and-sabotage campaign directed by White House and presidential re-election aides) suggest a political opposition which is ruthless and unprincipled. These reports of wrongdoing by members of the White House staff are so serious that they require a response by the President himself."

Muskie, whose standing in the New Hampshire polls began to slip immediately after the "crying speech," added: "The President should tell us if these reports are true, how he proposes to get at the facts of these charges and whether he condones this kind of political espionage operation . . What's involved here is an alleged corruption of the political process with ewhich every citizen must be concerned."

According to federal agents who investigated the Water-gate bugging incident the Canuck letter incident was engineered by a White House aide whose name has not been revealed to The Washington Post by investigative sources.

However, Washington Post staff writer Marilyn Berger has reported that Ken W.

ucks") on Americans French-Canadian descent.

Miss Berger said Clawson then told her he wrote the letter in hopes of damaging Muskie because he was the strongest potential opponent to President Nixon. At another point in the conversation, said Miss Berger, Clawson re-ferred to writing the letter and said, "That's politics."

Clawson, a former Washington Post reporter, was interviewed Monday and denied that he had claimed author-ship of the "Canuck" letter, saying Miss Berger must have misunderstood him. "I know nothing about it," Clawson said, adding that the first time he heard of the matter was when "I saw it on television" following the Muskie "crying speech."

The first "Canuck" letter—

there were three—appeared in the Manchester (N.H.) Union leader on Feb. 24. It said in

part, in these words:
"We went to Ft. Lauderdale to meet Sen. Muskie . . . one of the men asked him what did he know about blacks and the problems with them—He didn't have any in Maine a man with the senator said. No blacks but we have Capacity blacks but we have Cannocks. What did he mean? We asked —Mr. Muskie laughed and said come to New England and see..." The letter was signed "Paul Morrison, Deerfield Beach, Fla.,"

The day the letter appeared

in the Union Leader, the newspaper also ran a front-page editorial—based on the letter—under the headline: "Sen. Muskie insults Franco-Americans."

The next day, the paper ran a second anti-Muskie item, this one a reprint of an unflatter-ing article in Newsweek about the senator's wife. When Muskie arrived to speak in front of the newspaper's office on Feb. 26, he broke down and cried, calling William Loeb, Union Leader publisher, a "gutless covered" for printing Union Leader publisher, a "gutless coward" for printing an attack on his wife and a an attack on slur on himself.

The next day Muskie charged that the so-called Canuck letter was a a hoax, and that the incident mentioned in Florida had never has reported that Ken W. tioned in Florida had never Clawson, deputy director of happened. Reporters who had White House communications, been at the Senator's side in volunterered to her in a Sept. Florida said they remembered 25 conversation, "I wrote the no such incident and several letter"—in which the author newspapers including Unic said Sen. Muskie had con-Leader, according to Loeb-

doned a racial slur ("Can-|began a search for Paul Morof rison. He has never turned up.

On the Saturday before the New Hampshire primary, the Union-Leader published a second letter related to the incident.

This letter came from a man purporting to be Harold W. Eldredge of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., who—in his, letter—claimed to have been "the person who asked Mr. Muskie the question about his knowledge of the blacks."

"The young man (Morrison) . . . did not lie, he told the truth," the Eldredge letter

The Eldredge Tetter also produced an unsuccessful nationwide search for its author by reporter.

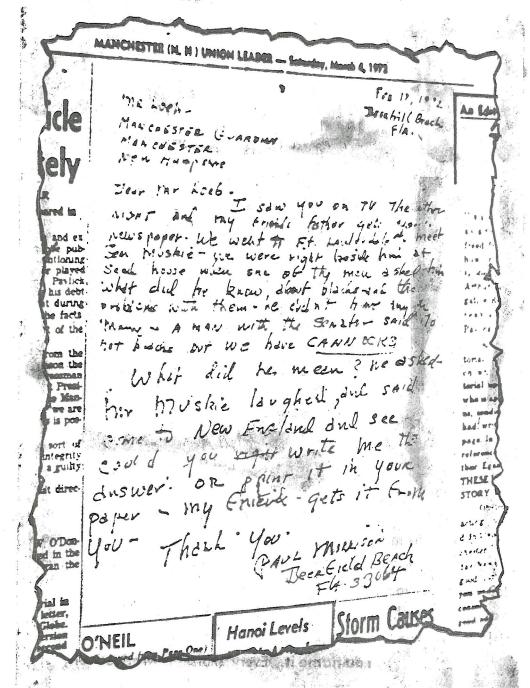
According to federal agents, the Florida "Canuck" incident mentioned in both letters never happened; both letters were part of an elaborate hoax and the whole project was en-

gineered by a White House aide, working with others. Meanwhile, the Union Lead-er received a third letter last month—this one also signed "Harold W. Eldredge."

It purports that its author was paid \$1,000 to write the original rletters, with two promises of \$2,500 more to be paid after publication.

The Union Leader has yet to run the third letter in its letter-to-the-editors columr and has assigned the whole matter to its chief investiga-tive reporter, according to publisher Loeb.

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This letter appeared in the Manchester (N.H.) Union Leader Feb. 24.