

How GOP Schemed in Wisconsin Primary

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Exclusive Report

MADISON (Wis.) — Early in 1972 — at the time the Watergate was being planned — Republican strategists schemed to upset the Democratic primary in Wisconsin, expected to be a critical test in the selection of President Nixon's challenger.

The Wisconsin strategy was, according to investigators, part of the same pattern revealed in the New Hampshire and Florida primaries — an effort to sabotage the leading Democrats, particularly Sen. Edmund Muskie, in hopes of providing Nixon a weak opponent.

At one point the political espionage activity became so confused in the Badger state that apparently not even Republicans knew who was sabotaging whom.

After receiving reports from Wisconsin, the White House — possibly John

Ehrlichman or John W. Dean III — dispatched one of its private eyes, ex-New York detective Anthony Ulasewicz, to investigate the mysterious activities of a baby-faced hustler by the name of "Simmons."

Dirty Tricks Network

Ulasewicz, who also carried out other "discreet investigations" for the White House, learned that "Simmons" was the nom de guerre of Donald T. Segretti, hired by Nixon aide Dwight Chapin allegedly to establish a dirty-tricks network against Democrats in major primary states. He was indicted this year in the distribution during the Florida primary of a bogus letter charging Sens. Hubert Hum-

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phrey and Henry Jackson with sexual misconduct.

The anti-Democratic planning included high level brainstorming sessions in the White House, the Justice Department and the Committee to Re-elect the President, according to investigators.

Nixon strategists considered encouraging Republicans to make use of Wisconsin's open primary law and cross-over to vote for George McGovern or George Wallace on the Democratic ballot, according to a former GOP official.

"There were also a lot of rumors," the official said, "about secretly inserting money into the Wallace and McGovern campaigns, particularly the Wallace campaign. There was enough money available. But I don't know that it happened."

Humphrey Comments

Sen. Humphrey, a Democratic contender in the 1972 primary, said in an inter-

view he was told by an outspoken Wisconsin GOP official during a visit to Madison that Republicans had a cross-over strategy to vote for McGovern. Humphrey recalled:

"I was visiting the Capitol Times newspaper, and he was introduced to me as a Republican leader, I think from the legislature and I asked him how things were going, how people were going to vote, and he said 'You are going to see plenty; we are going to vote for McGovern.' He said they had a program and everything." Humphrey said he doesn't recall the Republican's name.

How effectual were the Republican espionage efforts no one is certain. Regular Republican and Democratic politicians tend to discount their importance in the final Wisconsin results despite a massive crossover vote, which catapulted McGovern to the front and speeded

ocratic Politicians, as they are now looking at campaign troubles once dismissed as confusion in a new light and half-suspecting they were the products of sabotage.

"We may have buried a couple Watergates in the confusion of our campaigns," said a Humphrey adviser, William Connell.

Fromstein, Muskie's media director, acknowledged "it's difficult to discriminate between normal campaign confusion and what may have been induced by sabotage."

"I can't say the primary here was obviously sabotaged, that we should have won it but the Committee to Re-elect the President took it away from us," he said. "But there were too many things that caused discomfiture to be coincidence."

He recalled phony telephone calls to newsmen announcing falsely that a Muskie event had been canceled or the location changed.

In Fromstein's view what personally hurt Muskie most were vicious mailings in Milwaukee's Polish wards, areas that he was expected to carry but didn't.

The mailings, Fromstein said, accused Muskie's grandfather of fleeing Poland to avoid military service and then adding in so many words, "no wonder Muskie's against the war, he comes from a long line of draft dodgers." "They were skillfully dropped in areas where Polish nationalism or American patriotism would be aroused," he said.

Regis Goyke, a Humphrey campaign official in Wisconsin, recalled that three days before the primary about 20,000 bogus circulars went out in Milwaukee's black section announcing that the Senator and Mrs. Martin Luther King would hold a reception with free beer and lunch. A lot of disappointed and angry people showed up.

Intercepted Letter

Goyke also claims that he intercepted a letter "from a Republican chairman in one of the suburbs" urging party

members to cross-over and vote for McGovern "as the weakest Democrat." Goyke said he no longer has the letter which he said disappeared from his desk primary night.

Some Democrats think Nixon strategists, no longer worried about primary challenges from liberal Paul McCloskey or conservative John Ashbrook, encouraged a massive Wisconsin cross-over vote by suddenly shutting off the Nixon television advertising.

On March 14, Milwaukee adman Charles Davis, Nixon campaign director in the state, explained an early rush of TV commercials for the President by saying "our objective is to keep a Nixon presence throughout the entire campaign... there are going to be six guys on the other side knocking hell out of the President."

But a week later, the Nixon committee announced it was halting the TV campaign.

Democrats immediately seized on the change of tactic as an effort to build a crossover vote that would hurt Muskie and Humphrey. The Republicans said they were just saving money.

When the vote came in, McGovern finished first (30 percent); Wallace second (22 percent); Humphrey third (21 percent); Muskie fourth (10 percent) and the others trailed out behind.

Analysts estimated that almost one-third of the votes in the Democratic primary had been cast by Republicans.

One of them, Louis Bean, wrote "If... Republicans are put on their own side of the fence" Humphrey would have won with 21 percent followed by McGovern with 20 percent and Wallace and Muskie with 11 percent each.

Muskie's end.

Look in Wonder

And many doubt that the Wisconsin grand strategy got very far beyond the drawing boards in conferences between Jeb S. Magruder, the No. 2 man in the re-election committee, and his chief of research, Robert Marick, as well as others, possibly former Atty. Gen. John Mitchell, according to a former Republican party official.

But Humphrey and Mus-

kie supporters look back in wonder at the chaos of their campaigns: leaked secrets, phony telephone calls, twisted schedules, thousands of Humphrey campaign leaflets left to rot in a Milwaukee post office, stolen stationary, circulars slandering Muskie's patriotism and forebearers.

"There was such unbelievable confusion and it was so successful that it had to be more than confusion," said Mitchell Fromstein, a Milwaukee advertising official who was media director for Muskie's Wisconsin campaign. "It looked to me like someone was picking the weak spots in our line and sending in their toughest back with the ball."

Eric Wuennenberg, a junior at the University of Wisconsin, was approached early in 1972 by another Young Republican. He said he was asked "If I would be interested in doing any espionage work such as disturbing public appearances and planting people in the offices of Democratic candidates" in the primary campaign.

Wuennenberg identified his contact as Charles Svihlik, an Indianapolis college student and part-time gun dealer active in Young Republican affairs.

Spy Agent

Government investigators say they believe Svihlik was a Midwest spy agent for the Nixon campaign strategists.

Svihlik, in turn, had been approached by "a guy named Simmons" — Segretti; the little agent provocateur and college friend of Nixon Administration stalwarts Dwight Chapin and Presidential News Secretary Ronald Ziegler.

"Muskie was a prime target" of the espionage efforts, Wuennenberg recalled in an interview.

At this stage of 1972, before Muskie's disastrous primary showings, the Maine Senator was the Democratic front runner and led Nixon in public opinion polls. Thus he was considered a threatening figure by Nixon strategists.

Although the University of Wisconsin had the reputation for having some of the most rabid anti-war and anti-establishment students in the country — and thus had been avoided by national politicians — Muskie decided to brave a visit.

In a sweaty Loraine Hotel hall, a few blocks from the campus, Muskie faced a packed house the evening of Feb. 4. He was jeered, heckled and offered a marijuana cigarette. Most of the disturbances came from a group that others in the audience said were not students.

Sent Clips

Wuennenberg sent clippings of news reports of these demonstrations to Svihlik, as if to gain credit for creating the disturbances. Wuennenberg said he received \$25 from Svihlik.

But Wuennenberg now claims that it was all a joke — "a chance to rip off" the Nixon campaign. He said he was not responsible for the disruptions but told Svihlik they were "something we could take credit for."

Wuennenberg said he contributed the \$25 to Democratic candidates and later went to work for McGovern in Illinois. He denies he was acting as a Nixon undercover agent in the McGovern campaign.

Svihlik refused in a telephone interview to discuss his role "on the advice of my lawyers."

Both he and Wuennenberg refused to say or insisted they didn't know how many Republican spies, if any, were infiltrated into Democratic campaigns in Wisconsin.

"Ask Segretti," Wuennenberg said.

Watergate Backlash

Part of the Watergate backlash, according to Dem-