

Leak Involving McGovern Proposed

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As a counter-move to the Senate Watergate hearings, H. R. Haldeman, while White House chief of staff earlier this year, proposed leaking a story to the press that Sen. George McGovern (D-S.D.) was the father of an illegitimate child.

The idea behind the move, Haldeman suggested in a memorandum, would be to foster the impression that President Nixon and his White House staff had known about the McGovern story but had refused to use it during the 1972 presidential campaign — thus demonstrating

“that we ran a clean campaign . . .”

Haldeman made the proposal in a Feb. 10 memo in which he said: “There’s also the question of whether we should let out the Fort Wayne story now” as part of “a very hard game . . . a counter-move” to the Senate Watergate committee.

The memo was discussed at the Senate Watergate hearings yesterday but no mention of McGovern was made publicly. Under questioning, Haldeman said that the President had refused to let out the Fort Wayne story but did not specify whether the refusal came during the 1972 campaign

or in February, when the Haldeman memo was written.

McGovern, the Democratic presidential candidate in 1972, said in an interview Tuesday that the Fort Wayne story is a reference to a birth certificate in the city records division of Fort Wayne, Ind., that lists “George S. McGovern of Mitchell, S.D.” (McGovern’s hometown) as the father of a child born out of wedlock in the early 1940s. He denied that he was the father of the child.

The Washington Post has confirmed the existence of such a birth certificate, and contacted the child’s

mother, who also denied that McGovern was the father. The woman, reached by telephone in another part of the country yesterday, said she knew McGovern in the 1940s, but did not list his name on the birth certificate as the father.

“I don’t know who listed his name on the birth certificate,” she said. The woman, a widow in her early 50s, said that her late husband was the father of the child.

In the memo proposing the leak of the Fort Wayne story, Haldeman suggested that it could be put out discreetly through syndicated

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columnists Rowland Evans
and Robert Novak.

The purpose, Haldeman said in the memo, would be to show that the White House “ran a clean campaign compared to theirs (the Democrats) of libel and slander . . .”

Putting the story out after the presidential election, Haldeman reasoned, would show previous restraint on the part of the White House because presidential aides would “make the point that we knew and the President said it was not to be used under any circumstances.”

The memo was given to the Senate Watergate committee in June by former presidential counsel John W. Dean III, to whom the memo was addressed. In testimony before the Senate Watergate committee yesterday, Haldeman said the memo was his, but the specific language was that of one of his assistants.

Dean testified in June before the committee that the Feb. 10 memo was generated after meetings in La Costa, Calif., attended by Haldeman and other White House aides. The purpose of the meeting was to develop a strategy to counter the Senate Watergate hearings, Dean said.

Yesterday in testimony before the committee, Haldeman called the memo part of a “counterattack” on the Senate committee.

Reached yesterday, syndicated columnist Novak said he received a tip on the Fort Wayne story from a Democratic source in the summer of 1972. Novak said that he and Evans gathered information on the story but decided not to write the story “because it was not relevant to the campaign.” He declined to say what the subject matter of the story was.

McGovern said that he first became aware of his name on the birth certificate in the spring of 1972, before he became the Demo-

cratic presidential nominee.

He said he got a call from a government source in Fort Wayne saying that two men with identification from the U.S. Senate had visited the city birth records division and obtained a copy of the birth certificate.

Soon thereafter, McGovern said, he had a copy of the birth certificate read to him over the telephone.

About three or four weeks before the Nov. 7 election, McGovern said one of his aides received two or three anonymous telephone calls saying that a Midwest newspaper was going to run the

story. The story never ran.

McGovern said that the woman told him in a telephone conversation last year that FBI agents had visited her in 1961 when the FBI was conducting a background check on McGovern before his nomination to head the Food for Peace Office under President Kennedy.

In that 1961 FBI interview, McGovern said that the woman acknowledged that McGovern was listed on a Fort Wayne birth certificate as the father of one of her children.

McGovern said it was possible that the White House learned of the birth certificate from his FBI file.

In his testimony before the Senate committee yesterday, Haldeman was not asked for any details about the so-called Fort Wayne story. Under questioning by Sen. Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.), the committee chairman, Haldeman indicated that the story was not manufactured.

The following exchange also took place:

Ervin: So the President knew about it?

Haldeman: The President knew about this particular story, yes.

Ervin: And he told you not to use it under any circumstances?

Haldeman: That is correct. And it wasn’t.