

The Washington Merry-Go-Round

Finch Mental Illness Laid to Colson

By Jack Anderson

Outraged Republican leaders have accused Charles Colson, the former White House trouble shooter, of spreading whispers that Robert Finch suffered a mental breakdown in 1970.

The tale is disputed by no less than former Surgeon General Jesse Steinfeld who examined Finch's medical records, spoke to his doctors and told us, "They found nothing seriously wrong with him."

But a memo originating in Colson's office has been used as part of a "poison pen" campaign to discourage California Republicans from backing Finch for governor next year.

Colson, whose politics run counter to Finch's liberal Republican views, vigorously denied that he had any intention of hurting Finch. Nevertheless, an angry GOP leader, referring to Colson's former role as White House aide-in-charge-of-dirty-tricks, told us, "Now he's using his dirty tricks against us."

We have now seen the private memo out of Colson's office. Colson sent it to Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, Caspar Weinberger, whom Colson has encouraged to run for governor of California.

The memo was written by a

former White House intern who reported to Colson on California politics.

"In talking to my California friends," he wrote, "I detect increasing concern about the gubernatorial election. Nobody, but nobody, is happy about Finch; on the other hand, he is clearly the strongest right now . . ."

"Reinecke (Lt. Gov. Ed), whom Reagan (Gov. Ronald) and Nofziger (ex-White House aide Lynn) are running, is an idiot and a sure loser in the general.

"Another factor which has added to my personal concern is something which my friend (a Democrat with excellent connections on Capitol Hill) has told me. After Finch had his breakdown or whatever it was in 1970, Jesse Steinfeld, according to this guy, examined him and, apparently, had some other people look at him, too.

"Steinfeld, good administration loyalist that he was, apparently was not too fond of Finch, and so circulated the examination reports among some Demos on the Hill. This guy has no reason to lie to me . . . in any event, he tells me he saw the report, and so did more than a few others, and while it's not disastrous, he says, it would raise Eagleton-type questions about Finch's ability to handle the job . . ."

"I want to emphasize that I have no personal knowledge of this at all, but I do trust this guy and I do think it's a matter worth considering. I sure as hell would use it against Finch if I were running against him.

"If you do get interested in doing something about the California situation, there's nobody who could unite the situation out there more effectively than Cap Weinberger, who would make a damn good governor to boot—Reagan loves the guy and the northern California liberal types would be thrilled."

Steinfeld told us he never examined Finch. But with Finch's permission, Steinfeld studied his medical records and spoke to his doctors. "There was no nervous breakdown, no mental instability," said Steinfeld.

We also spoke to the author of the memo, who now has left the White House and could lose his new job if he were named. He insisted that he had merely passed on an unverified report in a memo he intended to be strictly private. His Democratic source, whom we also contacted, denied ever seeing Finch's medical records, as Colson's man had quoted him in the memo.

Colson told us he had sent the memo to Weinberger

merely "to let him know that he would be a unifying candidate if he chose to run for governor. It was not intended on my part," stressed Colson, "in any way as a reflection on Bob Finch for whom I have enormous affection and regard."

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