

SF Examiner APR 23 1973

Alioto Election Hopes Ride Watergate Tide

By Harry Johanesen
Examiner Political Writer

Big waves kicked up by Watergate are steadily rolling through the Golden Gate, bringing political benefit to Mayor Alioto in his quest for the governorship of California.

This remarkable effect of the Watergate scandal on California politics began to become apparent March 31 at the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles.

On that day, Terry Matthews, a wealthy Southern California businessman, introduced Alioto at a meeting of the United Democratic Finance Committee of the State Democratic Central Committee with these words:

"I don't know this gentleman personally. But I do admire him for the way he stood up to (former Attorney General) John Mitchell and the Department of Justice."

On April 6, at a meeting of the San Fernando Valley Labor Council, the chairman introduced Alioto as "the man who has beaten John Mitchell."

Speakers at more recent meetings of the Santa Clara County Labor Council in San Jose and of the California Federated Young Democrats in San Francisco used the same theme in their introductions of the Mayor.

These references to Mitchell whenever Alioto took the platform came at a time when the impact of Watergate in California clearly manifested itself in the ruling Republican camp, but in a different way.

Gov. Reagan abruptly dropped Watergate jokes from his speeches to Republican audiences.

Reagan explained that his listeners had stopped laughing as they had been doing when he told them: "The Democrats should have been happy that SOMEONE wanted to listen to them!" — meaning the Republican buggers of Democratic Par-

News Analysis

ty, headquarters at Watergate.

Alioto's noticeably increasing appeal to political audiences corresponded with increasing reports linking Mitchell to the Watergate affair — an act of political sabotage in the eyes of Democrats and many Republicans as well. His stock went up as Mitchell's went down.

Alioto had accused the Justice Department of political espionage of a different type while Mitchell was Attorney General. He charged the department had conspired with others outside the department to destroy his chances of running against Gov. Reagan in 1970.

Alioto saw the beginnings of a political plot hatched not only to destroy him politically for all time but also as a lawyer in the release of confidential Justice Department documents to a couple of special writers for Look Magazine in 1969.

The writers used the documents for part of a highly qualified article they wrote in an attempt to link Alioto with the Mafia. Look published the article in September, 1969.

The pile of documents contained a few dealing with Alioto. These were of the raw, unedited, unsubstantiated variety. Most of the documents deal with hoodlums the writers wanted to attach to Alioto.

Alioto obtained the documents by court order during preparation of his \$13 million libel suit against the magazine. Executive privilege invoked by the government prevented him from ever finding out who in high echelons of the Justice Department knew about release of the documents.

The plot to get him, as Alioto saw it, thickened when the State of Washington sued him for \$2.3 million, claim-

ing he had illegally split legal fees with state attorneys in an anti-trust case; and it thickened even further when a federal grand jury in Seattle indicted him.

The Seattle indictment, alleging criminal mail fraud in connection with the fee-splitting case, was announced by Mitchell himself at the Justice Department in Washington in March, 1971.

Alioto eventually put Mitchell in the center of what he insisted was a plot to destroy him. He said he had always known he had political enemies high in the Republican Party because of his successful anti-trust suit against major U.S. corporations. Many dismissed his views as "just politics."

Those who took a dim view of Alioto's protests looked upon Mitchell at that time as a man who couldn't possibly treat a fellow American unfairly for political or any other reasons. He was the Attorney General of the United States and a close friend of the President.

Mitchell never responded to Alioto's charges. But a jury, after a lengthy trial and brief deliberation, found that Alioto had done nothing illegal by splitting fees with state attorneys who had assisted him in the anti-trust case.

Then a federal judge threw out the mail fraud indictment, saying the government had no case and criticizing the Justice Department for instituting one.

Throngs of well wishers greeted Alioto at San Francisco International Airport when he returned from those complete court victories in Washington State.

A sign carried by one greeter proclaimed:

"Alioto 12 — Mitchell 0" — a score the Mayor hopes to report when the jury comes in with a verdict on the winner of the Democratic gubernatorial primary in June next year.