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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 which every citizen must be concerned."

According to federal agents who investigated the Watergate 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. Clawson, deputy director of White House communications, volunteered to her in a Sept. 25 conversation, "I wrote the letter"—in which the author said Sen. Muskie had con-

doned a racial slur ("Canucks") on Americans of 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 referred to writing the letter and said, "That's politics."

Clawson, a former Washington Post reporter, was interviewed Monday and denied that he had claimed authorship 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 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 unflattering 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 coward" for printing an attack on his wife and a slur on himself.

The next day Muskie charged that the so-called Canuck letter was a hoax, and that the incident mentioned in Florida had never happened. Reporters who had been at the Senator's side in Florida said they remembered no such incident and several newspapers including Union Leader, according to Loeb—

began a search for Paul Morrison. 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 said.

The Eldredge letter 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 engineered by a White House aide, working with others.

Meanwhile, the Union Leader 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 two original letters, with 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 column and has assigned the whole matter to its chief investigative reporter, according to publisher Loeb.