

Glowing Reports From the South

By Don Bacon

WASHINGTON — (NNS) — President Nixon has been getting glowing reports from his southern political specialist, Harry Dent.

Dent believes that even with Alabama Gov. George Wallace in the race, Nixon this fall has the potential to win every southern state from Virginia to Missouri — including Wallace's Alabama.

And Dent, whose stock in trade as a political professional is accuracy, says he is not just whistling "Dixie."

Calls It Solid

Nixon's southern support, while perhaps less than enthusiastic, is nevertheless solid, according to Dent, "The southern feeling," he said in an interview, "is that Nixon is okay."

He sees Wallace as cutting deeper into Democrats than Republican strength in the South, and hurting the Democratic Party particularly as a disruptive factor.

"I almost feel so sorry for them (the Democrats)," says Dent, "that I want to cry — but not quite."

A personable South Carolinian. Dent formerly worked as an aide to Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.) and later served as Republican chairman in his home state.

Trouble Shooter

For Nixon, Dent has served as a political trouble shooter and planner. He travels widely throughout the South, making speeches, advising and listening to the complaints of Republican leaders.

Florida's Democratic Gov. Reubin Askew said Dent's fingerprints were all over the recent Florida busing referendum, which many believe disrupted and confused the Democratic presidential primary in the state.

Dent professes innocence. He says he had "a couple of conversations" with state Democratic and Republican legislators, who were pushing the referendum proposal partly to embarrass Askew, but was not directly involved in any scheme with them.

"This," claims Dent, "was not a scheme that was hatched up here and sent down there."

Wallace Vote

In the general election, Dent believes, Nixon will get a big share of the Florida Democratic vote that went to Wallace in the primary.

Wallace's surprising strength in Florida, says Dent, may cause Wallace to take seriously his potential influence within the Democratic Party and make him attempt to play the role of kingmaker at the national convention in Miami.

Such a role could remove Wallace as a third party candidate this fall.

With Wallace in or out, Dent claims Nixon looks strong throughout Dixie. He cited these reasons, aside from the busing stand, why Nixon is "a very strong package in the South:"

- He persisted in efforts to appoint a southerner to the Supreme Court.

- "He did what he promised" in restricting Japanese textile imports, which were having an adverse economic impact in some southern areas.

- He has made concrete proposals, such as revenue sharing, to return power to the states.

- He advocates strong national security. "The South will rally around a flag-waver," says Dent.

- He is the first President the South "has perceived as not being anti-South."