

Blount Resigns as Postal Chief; Alabama Senate Race Foreseen

By R. W. APPLE Jr.
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WASHINGTON, Oct. 29—Postmaster General Winton M. Blount handed President Nixon his resignation today, clearing the way for a 1972 campaign against Senator John J. Sparkman of Alabama.

Mr. Blount, a Republican, told a White House news conference that he had not yet decided to challenge Mr. Sparkman, a four-term Democrat. He said he planned to "return to Alabama to make up my mind" and would make an announcement about Jan. 1.

But Mr. Blount, who is 50 years old, has in fact been planning his campaign for more than six months. His intentions have been such an ill-kept secret that during a visit to Alabama in May, President Nixon several times referred to him as "Senator Blount."

Mr. Blount's campaign against Mr. Sparkman, a 71-year-old party loyalist who has moved toward the center from the liberalism of his early Washington years, will constitute another test of the Administration's Southern strategy.

Campaign Firm Chosen

The campaign will be managed by Allison, Treleven and Rietz, a Washington firm that worked for Mr. Nixon in 1968 and helped Senator William E. Brock 3d of Tennessee defeat Albert Gore last year.

Mr. Allison said in a telephone interview that Mr. Blount faced "an uphill road, no doubt about that," but thought he had "a fair shot."

The Presidential tactics of Gov. George C. Wallace of Alabama could have a bearing on the contest. If Mr. Wallace, as now appears likely, is listed on the Alabama ballot as a third-party candidate, rather than the nominee of the Alabama Democratic party, Mr. Blount's chances might be increased.

In that event, Mr. Wallace and Mr. Sparkman would be in different columns on the ballot. If both Mr. Wallace and Mr. Sparkman were listed as Democrats, Mr. Wallace would probably give Mr. Sparkman considerable coattail help.

Both Mr. Blount and Mr. Sparkman will face opposition from within their own parties, but both are expected to win.

Former United States Representative James D. Martin, who ran for Senator in 1962 and for Governor in 1966, and State Representative Bert Nettles have indicated that they

will oppose Mr. Blount in a primary, which would be the first for Alabama Republicans, or at the state convention.

State Auditor Melba Till Allen, a consumer-oriented political newcomer with a sizable following, and four or five other Democrats are planning to run against Mr. Sparkman in the May 2 Democratic primary. No woman has ever been defeated for statewide office in Alabama, but Mr. Sparkman will be heavily favored.

Wealth May Hurt

Mr. Blount, who built the Blount Brothers Corporation into one of the nation's largest general contractors, will have ample financing. But his wealth may be a liability in populist Alabama; in last year's race for Governor, Mr. Wallace ridiculed Mr. Blount as "the man with 26 bathrooms in that big mansion of his."

Nor will Mr. Sparkman lack money. As chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, he has worked closely with leading bankers, who find him far more congenial than Senator William Proxmire of Wisconsin, who would take over if Mr. Sparkman were defeated. In 1972, as in his 1966 race, he will get big contributions from bankers in Alabama and elsewhere.

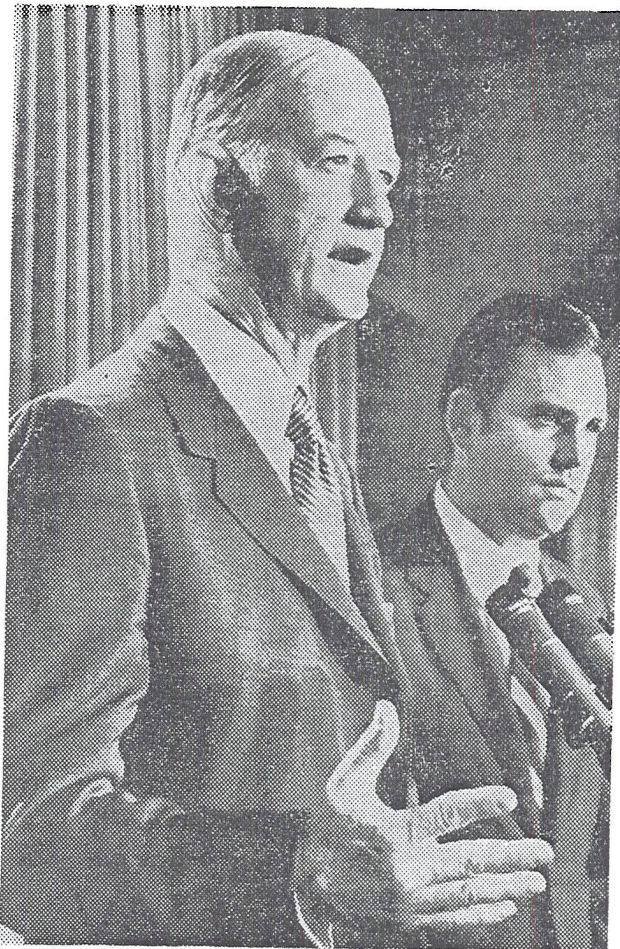
Mr. Blount presided over the transformation of the Post Office from an executive department into a semi-autonomous Federal agency.

But the Postal Service has continued to draw criticism and that may be a campaign issue. Tomorrow's Alabama Journal will carry a cartoon showing Mr. Blount walking away from a post office in shambles with the remark, "Well, now that that job is done, there are some matters in Alabama that need my touch."

Mr. Blount said that he deputy, Merrill A. Hayden, formerly an executive vice president of the Sperry Rand Corporation, would take over as acting Postmaster General until the Postal Service's board of governors selects a successor.

Another high Administration official — John H. Chafee, the Secretary of the Navy — is expected to quit to run for the Senate in 1972. Mr. Chafee is reportedly planning to challenge Senator Claiborne Pell, Democrat of Rhode Island. Early polls have shown Mr. Chafee with a strong lead.

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ANNOUNCES RESIGNATION: Winton M. Blount at news conference. At right is Ronald L. Ziegler, White House press secretary. Mr. Blount is leaving postal service.