

Wallace Men Say GOP Tried to Block Drive

By John Hanrahan
Washington Post Staff Writer

Top-ranking Republicans made repeated efforts, including a job offer worth a large sum of money, to block a third-party draft movement for George C. Wallace after the Alabama governor was shot last year, according to two prominent Wallace supporters.

The job offer was made by Harry S. Dent, special counsel to the President, to Wallace's former national campaign director. Dent also set up a meeting of the draft-Wallace organizers with former Attorney General John N. Mitchell in an effort to stop Wallace from running, according to the organizers.

Earlier in the year, another source said, convicted Watergate conspirator G. Gordon Liddy worked to prepare a dossier on third-party candidates with an eye toward challenging Wallace's place on the ballot in several states if he ran as the American Party candidate.

Liddy turned the material over to John W. Dean III, the president's counsel, according to Thomas Lumbard, a former assistant U.S. attorney here who did volunteer work for the Committee for the Re-Election of the President.

In gathering the third-party information, one female employee of the re-election committee posed as a Georgetown University graduate student in order to hide her connection with the campaign, Lumbard said.

Using this ruse, Lumbard said, the employee was to call the secretary of state in many states and tell them she was working on her thesis and needed information on the laws pertaining to third-party candidates and how they get on the ballot, or can be taken off.

None of the Republican efforts directed at a Wallace candidacy involved any apparent violation of the law, but Wallace backers feel there was a high degree of pressure and misrepresentation used to interfere with his candidacy.

At the least, the GOP efforts reflect a behind-the-scenes concern in the highest level of the administration that a Wallace third party candidacy—even after he was shot in May, 1972 — could have hurt President Nixon's re-election bid.

Last June, two Wallace backers, Tom Turnipseed and Peter Beter, began an effort to get the American Party, on

which Wallace ran for President in 1968, to draft the Alabama governor at the party's convention in early August.

Turnipseed is a South Carolina lawyer who was Wallace's national campaign director until June, 1971. Beter, a former counsel to the Export-Import Bank of the U.S. and the American Gold Association, was an unsuccessful candidate for the Republican gubernatorial nomination in West Virginia in 1968. He has been a leading contributor to Wallace's campaigns.

After the draft effort was launched, according to Beter and Turnipseed, top-ranking Republicans and their aides began to pressure them to drop the draft-Wallace drive.

Beter, in telephone interviews from his Hyannisport, Mass., home, said that Dent called him last July 14 and said "he wanted to send John Mitchell up here to talk to me and persuade me to drop our plan to draft Gov. Wallace." Beter said he told Dent that there was no need to talk, because his mind was made up. But, Beter said, he agreed at Dent's request to meet several days later in New York with Fred LaRue, a former White House aide who worked for Mitchell at the Nixon re-election committee.

At the meeting, La Rue "just laid it on the line," Beter said. "He said that a Wallace campaign would hurt the national effort of Nixon. He said, 'Suppose we show you some polls that show how this could hurt President Nixon.'

Beter said he told LaRue that "I believe in George Wallace" and that he intended to pursue the draft campaign. A few days later, Beter said, he came to Washington and rented a suite in the Mayflower Hotel. He said Turnipseed told him Dent wanted to meet with them. Beter said he told Turnipseed he didn't need to meet Dent.

Later, Dent again called Turnipseed, Beter said, and asked if he and Mitchell could meet with Beter and Turnipseed. Beter said he and Turnipseed agreed and Mitchell and Dent came to see them in Beter's suite.

"The gist of the pitch from Mr. Dent and Mr. Mitchell was, 'Don't you know that this third-party draft movement could hurt Mr. Nixon?' They mentioned polls that would show this. They asked what they could do to stop Wallace from running. I told them the only thing would be for Mr. Nixon to go down personally

and see Gov. Wallace."

Then, Beter said, "I told them that I believed God had spared George Wallace's life so he could become President in 1972. You know, John Mitchell just sat there puffing his pipe and never said a word."

Beter and Turnipseed went to Louisville for the American Party convention in early August. Their draft-Wallace effort fizzled and the convention nominated lame-duck Rep. John Schmitz (R-Calif.) as the presidential candidate. Schmitz later charged that Beter and Turnipseed were GOP agents sent to Louisville to undermine the American Party's convention. Dent, Beter and Turnipseed all deny the charge.

In the period leading up to the American Party convention, Beter contended, Dent was "constantly calling Tom (Turnipseed) and offering him a job with the Nixon campaign."

Beter said Dent offered Turnipseed a job "four, five, six times" in order to stop the Wallace draft movement, and each time offered him more money. Beter said it was "up to Tom" to tell how much Dent offered, "but I'll tell you it was a fantastic sum."

Turnipseed said Dent did repeatedly offer him a job, but denied that any figure was mentioned. The nature of the job would have resulted in "a substantial salary being paid, though," Turnipseed said. Basically, he said, Dent wanted him to seek out former high-level Wallace backers and convince them to support Nixon financially and otherwise. "No one tried to buy me off or anything," Turnipseed said.

Turnipseed said Cornelia Wallace, the governor's wife, is "a distant cousin" of his and she thought the draft movement might give her husband a "psychological boost" and, if his health improved, even enable him to accept a draft and resume campaigning for the presidency.

Dent acknowledged he often talked with Turnipseed about a job and that he had set up a meeting of himself and Mitchell with Beter and Turnipseed. But, he insisted, the impetus for all of the contacts always came from Turnipseed.

"Tom didn't think all that much of the President, but he was worried that McGovern was too leftist and just might win, so he wanted to work to recruit former Wallace people for the President," Dent said.

Dent said he was anxious to hire Turnipseed because he "could have been helpful in

the campaign." But, the next thing he knew, Turnipseed called him to tell him that he and Beter were pursuing a draft-Wallace effort, Dent said.

"We were curious about what they were doing," Dent said, "because all indications we had from Wallace people in Montgomery was that the governor absolutely would not run from a wheel chair."

(Wallace repeatedly said publicly after the shooting that he was no longer a presidential candidate in 1972.)

Dent said that he did not ask Turnipseed and Beter to meet with Mitchell. Rather, he said, Turnipseed suggested the meeting "and we were curious to see what they were doing, so we agreed to meet."

At the meeting, Dent said, "Turnipseed and Beter were so inept, their whole idea of a boomlet for Wallace so ludicrous" that "we told them in no uncertain terms that this was a foolish, silly thing they were doing."

"Frankly, I lost a few points with Mr. Mitchell by allowing a couple of people like Turnipseed and Beter to make such a ludicrous presentation to him," Dent said.

Dent said that, even up to the meeting with Mitchell, Turnipseed could have had a job with the Republican campaign. But, he said, approval for the job would have had to come from Mitchell "and after that fiasco there was no way John Mitchell would hire Tom."

Dent said he did not recall sending LaRue to meet with Beter in New York, as Beter had said. LaRue could not be reached for comment.

Before the Beter-Turnipseed episode in the campaign, Watergate conspirator Liddy farmed out legal work involving third-party candidates to a number of lawyers who worked a few hours a week on a volunteer basis, Lumbard said.

Lumbard said the woman who posed as a Georgetown student did so "because there was concern that Democratic secretaries of state might not be so helpful" if the caller identified herself as being from the President's committee.

Although working for the committee, Lumbard said he always did his work from an office in the Executive Office Building where other adminis-

tration officials and staff members have their offices, rather than from re-election committee headquarters. He said he had had no contacts with Dean regarding third-party matters, but that Dean had called him once for assistance regarding primary election financial reports required by various states.

Lumbard said the third-party research effort was undertaken because "Gordon (Liddy) wanted to see if there was a possibility of blocking a third-party candidacy in any state. I can only speculate that if Wallace had run as a third-party candidate, there would have been suits filed to block his candidacy in some states."

The material on third parties was sent in a big cardboard box to Dean when he requested "information on state election laws. This was all the information we had, so Gordon sent it over," Lumbard said.

Dean was Liddy's White House counterpart in campaign work, Lumbard said. Liddy was one of seven persons who was convicted or pleaded guilty on charges stemming from the bugging of the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate last June. Dean later was assigned by the White House to conduct the administration's in-house investigation of the Watergate affair.