

Gary Hart: 'No Glee in Watergate'

By Ruthe Stein

ACCORDING to a man who was in the position to know, there were no buggings, burglaries, or sabotage efforts carried out against presidential candidates, Republican or Democrat, by people working to elect Senator George McGovern.

Gary Hart, McGovern's presidential campaign manager, said he has been "devastated" by the common belief that the kind of tactics being uncovered by the Senate Watergate hearings is par for the course in political campaigns. (Hart is the Denver lawyer who masterminded the national organization that won McGovern the Democratic nomination against incredible odds.)

"To my knowledge, we had no sabotage operation. We didn't even have a political intelligence unit to send around to the campaign office of the President or other Democratic candidates," he stated.

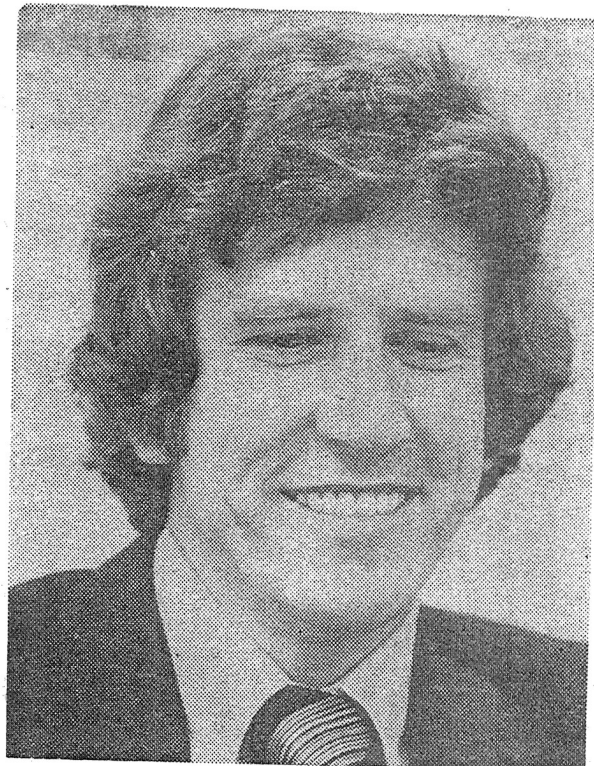
He did admit, however, that his people played "three or four tricks" during the campaign, such as writing "McGovern for President" on the bottom of coffee cups that were to be used at the party kicking off Muskie's candidacy. "That was good fun; it didn't hurt any one," Hart said.

Hart, a political novice before he joined up with McGovern in 1970, feels the candidate is the person most responsible for setting the tone of the campaign, both by the people he selects to work for him as aides and "by the continuing influence he sets by how own example."

Ironically, at the same time that Hart was in the City describing the kind of campaign he ran (as well as promoting a book he has just written "Right From the Start: A Chronicle of the McGovern Campaign"), testimony of a different sort was being given by Sally Jackson Harmony, former secretary to Watergate figure G. Gordon Liddy. She admitted to the Senate Watergate investigating committee that she helped prepare a fake letter authorizing entry to the McGovern headquarters that carried the forged signature of Gary Hart.

Hart, who had just learned of this and was trying to "get the sequence of events" clear in his mind, said that it fit into "a general pattern" of sabotage carried out by Republicans against the McGovern campaign.

This included trying to break into McGovern headquarters on May 25, 1972



Photos by William S. Young

Gary Hart: The candidate is responsible for setting the tone of a campaign

(an effort that was foiled by a guard the McGovern people had hired in the wake of the assassination attempt on Governor George Wallace) and calls impersonating McGovern aides.

Someone claiming to be Hart called labor leader George Meany demanding in "a very rude manner" that he meet with Senator McGovern. "We didn't find out about this for several weeks," said Hart.

On the basis of testimony given by Watergate conspirator James McCord, Hart learned about "Tom," a young man who infiltrated the McGovern campaign, posing as a volunteer.

Hart is not considering legal action against the Republicans over the forging of his signature. "There are enough suits already, what good would it do" said the man who once was described by columnist Joseph Alsop as "strikingly handsome (which he is), chillingly incisive (perhaps, but also warm and genial) and an obvious organizing genius."

Like others who were intimately involved in the McGovern campaign, Hart denies that he feels self-righteous about the situation the Republicans now find themselves in. "I'm taking no perverse glee or pleasure

in Mr. Nixon's problems." Senator McGovern has adopted a similar stance, his former campaign manager said. Hart, who has spoken

'A tragedy for the public'

with McGovern several times since the election, said he does "not want to make political hay" out of what is "a national tragedy."

However, Hart said McGovern is considering making a major statement on where the country goes from here.

Hart is concerned about the controversial article about the senator written by Joe McGinnis in the New York Times. McGinnis pictured McGovern as a bitter and disillusioned man who considered moving to England after the election, and his wife, Eleanor, as being so depressed over the nature

of the campaign that McGovern was quoted as saying "I have to keep taking her out to dinner and getting her loaded all the time to get her mind off of it."

McGovern has denounced the article, saying it was based on fabricated information, and Hart who is "fairly close" to the senator, is suspicious about the piece.

The quotes "didn't sound like George McGovern," he said. "He never would have said that about Eleanor."

How has McGovern responded to his monumental defeat? "I've seen him three or four times since the election, and I've been amazed at his calmness and demeanor," said Hart. He said the reason McGovern has not spoken out more on national issues is because he is concentrating on winning re-election in South Dakota. "You will see him re-emerge as a spokesman of the Democratic Party," Hart predicted.

"The really terrible thing about the Watergate scandal," said Hart, looking

grave as he spoke, "is the public attitude towards politics and politicians. It's terrible enough that these men (involved in the Watergate scandal) may have altered the election results. But it's even more disastrous that they have destroyed public confidence in politicians.

"Those who are honest will have to fight to justify that to the public," he said, adding that it "may take two or three generations before people can start believing in the political process again."

This may be a problem Hart will have to confront. Since resuming his law practice in Denver, he has been giving "very serious thought" to running for the United States Senate in 1974 against Senator Peter Dominick.

In view of this, Hart seemed concerned that his book not be thought of as politically self-serving. Its purpose, he said "is to show people what it is like inside a campaign," not to show off his own political acumen.