

It Rains, but 'Watergate Weicker' Shines As Crowd at Parade Pours on the Praise

By MARTIN TOLCHIN

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BRIDGEPORT, Conn., July 4—Perched atop the back seat of a Buick convertible, Senator Lowell P. Weicker Jr., who became an instant celebrity during the Watergate hearings, proved to be the major attraction today at the sodden 25th annual P. T. Barnum Festival rain-or-shine parade.

Mr. Weicker, a Republican and the only Senator from the tristate area on the Senate's Watergate committee, received a tumultuous reception in the drizzly weather from the crowds that lined the sidewalks along the three-mile parade route. He easily drew more interest than not only all of the other politicians, but also the clowns, Indians, soldiers, beauty queens, 33 floats and 37 marching bands and combos.

The Senator was cheered from the porticos of Victorian mansions, from the weather-beaten balconies of two-family houses near the railroad tracks, from the steps of Bridgeport University and from folding chairs outside a city hospital and a housing project.

"Go get 'em, Lowell," the crowds cried, as if encouraging a star quarterback. "Give 'em hell, Lowell," they shouted. "Watergate Weicker—give it to Nixon."

The Senator's automobile was repeatedly approached by well-wishers who sought to take his picture, shake his hand and, in one case, hand him a written message. He removed his blue blazer midway in the parade and greeted the crowd in shirt sleeves.

Family With Him

Mr. Weicker, a low-key man flanked by his family, seemed interested in every comment directed his way. "It's good to be back with normal people."

When he heard a solitary "boo," Mr. Weicker good-naturedly told the offender, "I want to be able to do that."

"He's sure the best-known man in the state of Connecticut," said Gov. Thomas J. Meskill, another Republican, who rode two cars ahead of Mr. Weicker and received a fraction of the applause.

How did the state's Republicans feel about Mr. Weicker's early and emphatic criticism of the White House?

"Some people are very happy about what the Senator is doing, and some people aren't," Governor Meskill said.

Which side was he on? The Governor parried the question by saying: "I think the Senator knows more about what's going on than the Republicans here." However, a steely smile indicated that he was not a total supporter.

Senator Abraham A. Ribicoff, a Democrat who rode directly in front of Mr. Weicker and who received a moderately enthusiastic reception, said that "Lowell Weicker and who received a moderately has general and deep approval from the people of Connecticut."

'Made Great Gains'

"The average Republican approves," Mr. Ribicoff continued, "and he's made great gains among the independent and Democrats."

This opinion was shared by Bridgeport Mayor Nicholas A. Panuzio, a Republican who was elected by a nine-vote margin out of 50,000 votes cast.

"His standing is higher than ever," Mayor Panuzio said. "Nobody's happy about Watergate, but the Republican party is clear on the issue. We always point to Weicker as a man who is leading the fight."

"The folks like him real good," said William J. Bray, a duPont laboratory technician who was in charge of festival

arrangements. "We think he's trying to get it all into the open."

John Doyle, sales manager for a food brokerage concern and another parade official, said: "He's coming back as a national figure of prominence."

Senator Weicker recalled today that his appearance at the annual parade had not always been welcome. Five years ago, when he was running for Congress, he was denied permission to participate. He was told the event was reserved for incumbents. Undeterred, Mr. Weicker walked along the sidelines the length of the parade route.

But today was different. What was the significance of the event?

"This shows the people still believe in America," Senator Weicker said. "They still believe in the Constitution. A few things went wrong, but its responsibility we all share."

Mr. Weicker, who is 42 years old and a Yale graduate, has never been a favorite of the conservative Republican establishment in Connecticut. He arrived on the political scene in 1962 when he became First Selectman of Greenwich—the equivalent of Mayor—and at the same time won election to the Connecticut House of Representatives.

Six years later he was sent to Washington as a member of the House of Representatives, and two years later he was elected Senator after defeating a conservative Republican, John M. Lupton, in a primary.

The Senator, asked about a report made by three Yale University law professors who said that, despite Mr. Weicker's birth in Paris, he was not disqualified to be President, disclaimed all interest.

"The Presidency is not something a man should attain by way of Watergate," the Senator said.