

Haldeman's Story on McGovern

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As a counter-move to the Senate Watergate hearings, H. R. Haldeman, while White House chief of staff earlier this year, proposed leaking a story to the press that Senator George S. McGovern (Dem.-S.D.) was the father of an illegitimate child.

Haldeman made the proposal in a February 10 memo in which he said: "There's also the question of whether we could let out the Fort Wayne story now" as part of "a very hard game . . . a countermove" to the Senate Watergate committee.

The memo was discussed at the Senate Watergate hearings yesterday but no mention of McGovern was made publicly.

Under questioning, Haldeman said the President had refused to let out the Fort Wayne story but did not specify whether the refusal came during the 1972 campaign or in February, when the Haldeman memo was written.

McGovern, the Democratic presidential candidate in 1972, said in an interview Tuesday that the Fort Wayne story is a reference to a birth certificate in the city records division of Fort Wayne, Ind., that lists "George S. McGovern of Mitchell, S.D." (McGovern's home town) as the father of a child born out of wedlock in the early 1940s. He denied that he was the father of the child.

The Washington Post has confirmed the existence of such a birth certificate and contacted the child's moth-

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er, who also denied that McGovern was the father.

The woman, reached by telephone in another part of the country yesterday, said she knew McGovern in the 1940s but did not list his name on the birth certificate as the father.

The woman, a widow in her early 50s, said that her late husband was the father of the child.

In the memo proposing the leak of the Fort Wayne story, Haldeman suggested that it could be put out discreetly through syndicated columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak.

The purpose, Haldeman said in the memo, would be to show that the White House "ran a clean campaign compared to theirs (the Democrats) of libel and slander . . ."

Putting the story out after the presidential election, Haldeman reasoned, would show previous restraint on the part of the White House because presidential aides would "make the point that we knew and the President said it was not to be used under any circumstances."

QUESTIONING

In his testimony before the Senate committee yesterday, Haldeman was not asked for any details about the so-called Fort Wayne Story. Under questioning by Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr. (Dem.-N.C.), the committee chairman, Haldeman indicated that the story was not manufactured.

The following exchange also took place:

Ervin: So the President knew about it?

Haldeman: The President knew about this particular story, yes.

Ervin: And he told you not to use it under any circumstances?

Haldeman: That is correct. And it wasn't.

The memo was given to the Senate Watergate committee in June by former presidential counsel John W. Dean III, to whom the memo was addressed. In testimony before the Senate Watergate committee yesterday, Haldeman said the

memo was his, but that the specific language was that of one of his assistants.

Dean testified before the committee in June that the February 10 memo was generated after meetings in La Costa, Calif., attended by Haldeman and other White House aides. The purpose of the meetings was to develop a strategy to counter the Senate Watergate hearings, Dean said.

Yesterday in testimony before the committee, Haldeman called the memo part of "counterattack" on the Senate committee.

Reached yesterday, syndicated columnist Novak said he received a tip on the Fort Wayne story from a Democratic source in the summer of 1972. Novak said that he and Evans gathered information on the story but decided not to write the story "because it was not relevant to the campaign." He declined to say what the subject matter of the story was.

McGovern said that he first became aware of his name on the birth certificate in the spring of 1972, before he became the Democratic presidential nominee. He said he got a call from a government source in Fort Wayne saying that two men with identification from the U.S. senate had visited the city birth records division and obtained a copy of the birth certificate.

Soon thereafter, McGovern said, he had a copy of the birth certificate read to him over the telephone.

McGovern said that the woman told him in a telephone conversation last year that FBI agents had visited her in 1961, when the FBI were conducting a background check on McGovern before his nomination to head of the Food for Peace office under President Kennedy.

In that 1961 interview, McGovern said that the woman acknowledged that McGovern had been listed on a Fort Wayne birth certificate as the father of one of her children.

McGovern said it was possible the White House learned of the birth certificate from his FBI file.