

Media Expert on TV

By Jules Witcover
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For more than four years now, Pat Buchanan has been telling President Nixon and Company how to cope with national television. Yesterday the White House media expert went before the Senate Watergate committee and showed how it's done.

He was called as a key witness in the "dirty tricks" phase of the Watergate hearings. For more than four hours he played the dirtiest trick a witness can

Commentary

perpetrate on televised senators—he made them look like a bunch of nit-pickers.

For every supposed political dirty trick they asked him about, he had either an explanation, a denial or involvement, or a similar example from the lore of Democratic politics.

When Samuel Dash, the Georgetown University law professor and chief committee counsel, asked him what tactics he'd have been willing to use to knock then frontrunning Sen. Edmund S. Muskie from the 1972 presidential race, Buchanan, the Georgetown graduate, replied:

"Anything that was not immoral, unethical, illegal—or unprecedented in previous Democratic campaigns."

As if he were the teacher and Dash the student, Buchanan led the chief coun-

See SCENE, A12, Col. 1

SCENE, From A1

sel and the senators—all of whom have been in a campaign or two — through a lively course on the practical side of politics.

He reminded them that a Democrat named Dick Tuck—who looks like Harpo Marx and has just as lively an imagination — has been the reigning king in the field of political sleight-of-hand for years.

The difference, he said, was that Tuck's capers are called pranks, and when Republicans do them they're dirty tricks.

Confronted with a stack of his memos to the President and other high administration officials dealing with tactics he recommended for tracking and combatting Muskie and other Democratic hopefuls in 1972, Buchanan served up memories of Tuck to bal-



Minority counsel Fred D. Thompson (right) receives information from presidential aide Patrick J. Buchanan.

By James K. W. Atherton—The Washington Post

ance things out. The senators seemed non-plussed, but the Caucus Room audience loved it.

There was the time in the 1962 gubernatorial campaign in California, Buchanan recalled, when Tuck "put on an engineer's cap and signaled the engineer to drive off, leaving Mr. Nixon standing" on the back of his whistlestop train, in mid-speech.

There was the time Tuck dropped a fire escape beside a speaker as he reached his denouement, and finally the time in Miami Beach in 1968 when a group said to be welfare mothers demonstrated against Mr. Nixon. "They were all black, they were all pregnant," Buchanan said, "and they were all carrying placards that said, 'Nixon's the One'."

Buchanan volunteered that he had attended a meeting with presidential aide Dwight Chapin and others at which it was discussed that it was "about time we had ourselves a political Dick Tuck" and "how the Dick Tuck should be structured."

But that discussion proposed "that it should be a small operation," and that was the last he ever heard of it. "I do not know if Donald Segretti (confessed hired hand of the Nixon re-election dirty tricks operation) turned out to be the Dick Tuck gone awry or not," Buchanan said.

One senator, Lowell P.

Weicker (R-Conn.) expressed unhappiness that Buchanan seemed to be lumping such pranks in with the Watergate break-in, as if there were no difference. Buchanan quickly assured him that "I did not consider Watergate a prank; it was a crime." Weicker, the wind out of his inquisitorial sails, meekly thanked Buchanan for saying so in public.

Before he was through, the methodical, rapid-talking Buchanan had provided the senators with a handy guide for rating political antics. He listed four categories: (1) utterly outrageous, (2) dirty tricks, (3) political hardball and (4) pranks."

In the first he put the Watergate break-in and the circulation of a scurrilous letter imputing sexual misconduct to Sens. Hubert H. Humphrey and Henry M. Jackson on Muskie stationery in the 1972 Florida primary, for which Segretti already has been indicted.

In the second he put the "Canuck" letter which led to Muskie's emotional speech during the New Hampshire primary, which he won, unimpressively.

He didn't spell out political hardball, which in political circles usually means playing tough but legal.

And pranks, as he emphasized earlier, are acts of political sabotage performed by Democrats—or so, he

complained, the press always said.

About the only thing hard the committee got on Buchanan was confirmation of the broadly held suspicion that he is now, and always has been, a card-carrying conservative who not only preaches conservatism but wants to implant its principles into the very fiber of national policy.

To this, Buchanan cheerfully, enthusiastically and zestfully pleaded guilty on all counts. He allowed that he would have been "less apprehensive" about the future of the country had Senator Jackson been the Democratic nominee, and he said he once recommended the creation of a conservative-oriented tax-exempt institution as a counter to the Brookings Institution to receive federal grants from the Nixon administration.

Buchanan, who looks like an ex-FBI agent who has taken a desk job, did the cause of the administration another favor: his TV appearance shattered the image of button-down, unthinking conformity constructed by the other young fogeys out of the Nixon ranks who preceded him in the Caucus Room. He confessed that on occasion he said "No."

When White House superiors H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, John D. Ehrlichman and Charles W. Colson asked him to head up an investigation of Daniel Ellsberg for

political purposes, Buchanan said, he turned them down flat and recommended that the idea be dropped.

Nor would he personally engage in political spying within an opponent's campaign, he said, though he would not pass judgment on those who had agreed to do so for the Nixon campaign—without his knowledge, he emphasizes.

Of those who did, and of all those implicated in Watergate, Buchanan said near the close of his testimony, "men are responsible for what they do themselves." The remark seemed to pass by the senators unnoticed, but it was the antithesis of the theme of "I was just following orders" that has accosted their ears since last May.

Though like those others he expressed eternal loyalty to Richard Nixon and said his defeat would have been "catastrophic," Buchanan demonstrated through the long day that his own loyalty still left room for him to be his own man.

It was, in all, a believable, confident performance for a man who, though he has been a long-time student of television and a critic of its impact, has been a very rare performer on it.

Last spring, Buchanan ventured out of his White House sanctuary and went on the Dick Cavett nighttime talk show. In a lively discussion, he got so carried

away in debate that in the view of many he nearly gave away the family jewels.

There were those who said after that night that Buchanan, the White House TV expert, was a prime example of the old adage that those who can, do, and those can't tell others how. But after yesterday, one has the impression they'll be listening a lot more to Pat Buchanan about a lot of things around the White House.