

Drugstore Liberal

By William Safire

WASHINGTON, March 10—Every Tuesday is another election day, which is a warning to pundits not to interpret Florida's primary vote as the certain springtime of Jimmy Carter or the unbreakable fall of Ronald Reagan.

The "real" winner in Florida, some smart money is saying, is Hubert Humphrey, ultimate inheritor of the Jackson delegates and safe haven for floundering Democratic liberals. The admirable old pro himself put out word this week that "it would only be prudent and sensible for a man of my position" to consider seeking support from still-breathing bodies on the battlefield after the primary wars end in California on June 8.

The Humphrey assets—durability, consistency, good humor, experience, heart—are well known. It is time to survey the kind of charges he will be hit with—wholly apart from foreign and domestic issues—when he becomes a candidate.

1. *He took \$100,000 in 1968 from Howard Hughes.* This charge has been made by Robert Maheu, former Hughes aide, who has sworn he handed over half the money in \$100 bills in an attaché case during a limousine ride with Humphrey to Los Angeles airport. Mr. Humphrey said on March 19, 1974, that he recalled being with Mr. Maheu in the limousine, but denied he had been given the money "personally." He added: "He may have given the money to a campaign committee supporting me." (Dick Tuck's great pun "What about the Hugh Sloan?" comes to mind here.)

2. *His former press secretary copped a plea for aiding and abetting illegal corporate donations to his campaign in 1972.* In a criminal information filed by the Watergate special prosecutor, the Humphrey aide—Norman Sherman—was charged with participating in a scheme to use \$82,000 in corporate money to buy computer lists. Mr. Sherman pleaded guilty.

3. *Humphrey's closest aide sought improper F.B.I. help in the 1968 Democratic convention.* Mr. Humphrey knew that Lyndon Johnson had used a special team of F.B.I. agents equipped with wiretaps and bugs to spy on troublemakers at the 1964 convention. According to a memo by J. Edgar Hoover dated Aug. 15, 1968: "William Connell, executive assistant to the Vice President [Humphrey] . . . had talked to the Vice President about the team I sent into the convention area in 1964 that was so helpful. He stated he was hoping perhaps I might be able to do the same thing for the Vice President out in Chicago."

Mr. Humphrey did not get "the same thing" because Attorney General Ramsey Clark, who had been willing to approve the infamous Doar Plan to spy on dissidents, was not a Humphrey man and did not authorize the requested F.B.I. convention tapping.

4. *He tried to keep valuable state gifts that lawfully belong to the Government.* In 1974, when gift-keeping became controversial, Senator Humphrey turned over to the State Department an 8-carat diamond received six years before from the President of Zaire. (Ten leopard skins from Somalia had already been sold for \$7,500 and the money given to charity.) Senator Humphrey said lamely that the diamond and skins had been given to his wife, and he had not realized that the law against keeping state gifts applied to members of his family.

5. *He nearly succeeded in obtaining a \$200,000 tax deduction by giving his Vice-Presidential papers to the Minnesota Historical Society.* After the furor over the Nixon deduction, the Internal Revenue Service took another look at the long-approved Humphrey deduction and discovered a "future interest" which caused them to disallow the \$199,153 deduction. A Humphrey aide gamely called this "a difference in the way reasonable men interpret the law."

6. *His former campaign manager is on the way to jail.* Jack Chestnut, who managed the 1970 campaign that returned Hubert Humphrey to the Senate, wisely took the Fifth Amendment when asked to testify before the Senate Watergate Committee. Twenty pages of the committee report were devoted to the milk industry's relationship with Mr. Humphrey. The Senator jokes about this—"When I started out in this hard-drinking field of politics, I never thought I'd get in trouble over milk"—but Mr. Chestnut is not laughing; his appeal has just been denied, and he is to serve a four-month sentence for accepting an illegal corporate contribution.

These charges are rehashed here to suggest that Democrats who think they can solve all problems by turning to Mr. Humphrey must accept a few vulnerabilities. The Senator may be well advised to deal with these and similar charges in a few primaries rather than face them in the fall.

Some of the problems that caused one President's downfall may well be overlooked in the making of another. If a courageous comeback politician like Hubert Humphrey—aides convicted, deductions disallowed, garlanded with illegal contributions and bedecked with belated admissions of lapses of judgment—can be nominated and elected, then the American people will have tacitly ratified the pardon of Richard Nixon.

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