

*Is Alabama Governor Physically Able to Serve?***Wallace's Health Destined to Be**

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — A Pulitzer Prize-winning newsman's statement that Gov. George C. Wallace is physically unable to govern Alabama has touched off a sometimes-angry controversy over Wallace's health.

An effort may be made in the legislature this summer to make the governor eligible for a pension while still in office. It could be a major issue in the 1974 governor's race, with Wallace likely to run for a third term.

The governor is eligible to succeed himself in Alabama under a constitutional amendment adopted in 1967. Wallace tried to get the amendment through the legislature earlier, during his first term, but failed and his first wife, the late Lurleen Wallace, was elected in his place.

Harold E. Martin, publisher-editor of The Montgomery Advertiser-Alabama Journal, said in a speech three weeks ago that the governor "is physically unable to serve" and, for his own good as well as the state's, he should retire.

"Or, short of that," he said, Wallace should appoint a select committee of businessmen "to share the burden of state government for the duration of his term."

Actually, Alabama has no law permitting a governor to retire from office; he would have to resign outright. Martin acknowledged that and recommended passage of legislation providing a lifetime pension at full salary for any governor disabled in service to the state.

Wallace has been paralyzed in both legs since he was wounded in an assassination attempt at Laurel, Md., last May 15 while campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination.

"ALABAMA CITIZENS are crushed emotionally by the appearance of the once-vivacious Wallace in a wheelchair, suffering constant pain," the newspaper publisher said.

"But more and more Alabamians are facing up to the reality that the state can't continue without leadership. . . ."

Wallace, who was in a Birmingham hospital recovering from surgery when Martin spoke Jan. 31, has had nothing to say about it publicly.

However, when he returned home Wednesday, the governor told newsmen he was "feeling fine." And a hospital spokesman said he was in good condition.

The operation, the sixth since he was wounded, was performed to improve Wal-

lace's bladder function.

Martin, who won the Pulitzer Prize in 1970 for his expose of a prison drug-testing program later abandoned, also said in the speech that, because of the governor's condition, "a group of bickering parasites" is running the state. He did not identify them, nor did he elaborate.

But he expressed apprehension that they will "drag Wallace into disgrace in their own grab for power."

THE SPEECH brought hostile letters to the editors of the two newspapers. But the publisher says it brought even more letters of approval.

One writer who commended Martin was state Sen. Richard C. Shelby of Tuscaloosa, who said: "It has been obvious to thousands of people for some time that this state is leaderless."

But, he said, "no one, including myself, spoke out and said so."

Another legislator, House Speaker Pro Tem Joe McCorquodale of Clarke County, defended the governor. McCorquodale said shortly after Martin's speech that the governor still is alert mentally and knows what is going on.

Even before Martin's speech, there was talk of leg-

islation which would enable Wallace to step aside and draw a pension immediately. Alabama now pays former governors \$750 a month after they have reached 60. Wallace is 53.

"I think probably someone ought to do it," says Sen. George Lewis Bailes of Birmingham. "We have talked about it, but we haven't drawn a bill yet. We ought to provide some means where the governor will not have to want for anything."

CLOSE FRIENDS say Wallace probably would veto such a bill with the explanation that he doesn't expect the

NEW ORLEANS

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people of Alabama to support him. He expressed the same feeling last summer in asking well-wishers to stop raising money to help pay his medical expenses.

But there are political considerations, too.

If the governor runs again next year, some, if not all, of the other candidates almost certainly will question his ability to serve. Passage of a pension law wouldn't require Wallace to retire, but it might persuade some voters that the state had fulfilled any obligation they might feel it owed the disabled governor.

Except while he was in the

hospital, Wallace has made somewhat regular appearances at the state capitol, usually two or three afternoons a week. At other times, he works at the executive mansion in an office built for him after he was wounded.

If he seeks a third term next year, his health will be an issue. The impact will depend in large measure on whether Wallace is able to campaign actively.

If he is, that will be his answer. But a limited campaign might convince many voters that he isn't physically able to govern the state.