

Bill Johnstone - March 25, 1992

- I asked about the focus group. "We're going to have to make a decision about focus groups fairly soon. The reason I've delayed is because I've been disappointed in our fund-raising. I was happy with our position at the end of the year, but we've had a short-fall in the first three months of this year. I'm committed to saving enough (\$2 million) for the end game. Our plan has been to do our first three weeks of television just before the Republican primary. (Discussion of how that date may be pushed back because Georgia Supreme Court has rejected second redistricting plan.) That will cost \$750,000. I want the focus groups to tie into that media buy, which means that we want to do the focus groups as close to that time as we can. It doesn't do any good to have your focus groups way in advance of your media. It will take Secret three weeks to set up the focus groups; it will take Greer four weeks to produce the commercials and arrange the media buy; and then three weeks of television. We've raised about \$150,000 a month in January, February and August; and we need twice that much for our July TV. On May 1st, we will hold our big New York fund-raiser--our Broadway event. That will be the make or break time. I can afford to wait that long. If we get well in April, we can return to our game plan. But I've already had to cut-back and renegotiate our contract with one of our vendors--indirect mail. If we don't raise enough in April, we will probably give up those three weeks of TV. One thing I learned from 1986--when we did our early TV buy--was that unless you get up to 500 gross rating points, you get no benefit from it. We spent a lot on early TV, but we never bought enough to make any difference that registered in poll results or our campaign experience. This time, it will be all or nothing."
- Next most interesting thing he said came in answer to my question about Wyche and his activity in the Senate.
- "He snaps at me about the schedule, and I don't blame him. It's draining his energies. But he's the only non-renewable resource we have. We can't raise money without his presence. We can't improve our poll results unless he goes to Georgia. He's only missed one vote this year and he's held hearings on historic preservation--which we hope to pass this year--and on abuses in the peanut export program. He's been critical of the peanut industry, which is very important in Georgia. The whole burden is on his shoulders. He's being jerked around all over.

Walter
Coughlin

Now, to make matters worse, he's going to take the Senate break to travel out of the country with his close friend and mentor, Supreme Court Justice Weltner. I'm upset and yet sympathetic to that. They are both students of ancient history and they are both archeology buffs--as I am, too. They want to visit the Hittite area in Turkey. It will be an exhausting trip and even has elements of danger. But for Weltner, it is almost his last trip, his death bed wish. For Wyche, it is his last chance to help his close friend.

The trip will have absolutely no benefit for the campaign; its benefits

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are in terms of friendship. The campaign manager side of me says this is crazy, horrendous, stupid and silly. He will come back tired. We will have lost him for two weeks of valuable campaign time. But for Wyche, its more important than the campaign. It is his statement that he will not subordinate everything to the reelection chase. The non-campaign manager side of me has to admire that."

- We got to looking at the books on ancient history that Wyche has piled up on his table to read. I inquired about them; and Bill picked up each one and told me its strengths and shortcomings. He said there was one, even better book that Wyche should read and he thought he would buy that one for him (there's a Borders near-by now) as a gift.
- When I went around the day before to see if I could catch him, he told me that Barr had just left the Senate race to run for Congress and that the person he would be running against had just called "to see what we had on Barr." But the next day, when I got there, Bill said it had been a rumor and that the Democrat who had called was overly worried. Typical candidate paranoia! Bill thinks Barr is being pressured to get out.
- "Coverdell has announced, but the good news is that he doesn't seem to have raised much money. He raised about \$500,000 in all. He reported \$200,000 on hand in March, so he's spending about half of what he takes in."
- "The pace of the campaign is slow. There's been very little coverage. So there has been no damage. But the result is that our people are not paying attention. Their attitude is: 'What? You've got an election?' There is coming to be an opinion that Wyche is safer than everyone thought last year. People have seen our reports of cash on hand. There is some polling data--a Mason Dixon Poll--that shows us 30 points ahead, which is an improvement over earlier polls. The Republican candidates are held in low regard by the Georgia opinion makers. All this translates into a lack of urgency among our supporters."
- I asked if he learned anything relevant to their campaign from the Georgia presidential primary. He said no. And he made a few points.
 1. There was a low turn-out.
 2. It was a presidential race.
 3. Most of the action was on the Republican side. Bush and Buchanan spent a lot of money.
 4. Clinton had no real opposition. The Democratic candidates spent \$200,000 less, altogether, than the Dem candidates spent in 1986, when there had been a real contest. Dukakus, Jackson, Gore, Gephardt.
 5. Fowler was "scrupulously neutral."
- When I asked him what I might take a look at, he mentioned the May 1st

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fund-raiser in New York and the activities in Georgia on the weekend of April 26. The "preview parties" take place on Saturday, the 25th and he files and announces formally on Monday the 27th. I opted for the latter; and he agreed that was the best.

- The "preview parties" were done in 1986. Groups of supporters get together and play video tapes of Wyche speaking to them and of some commercials. The groups then evaluate the commercials. It gives people a chance to participate; and Bill says they are "free focus groups," except, of course, that they are not a cross section. They are supporters. They did 75 of them in 1986; they are aiming for 250 this time.
- "A weeks ago, we opened up a headquarters. We finally moved the campaign out of Harriet Muldower's basement and into (another place). We did this so we could organize the preview parties." Such as it is, therefore, the organization's current task is to set up 250 preview parties.
- Bill went into the sequence of events on qualifying announcement day, Monday the 27th. Again, they'll follow a procedure they used in 1986. He will, of course, be at the Secretary of State's office early for the photo op and presentation of his qualifying petitions. Then he goes to a TV studio filled with supporters and via satellite feed, he talks to his supporters and, I guess, to reporters around the state. Then he gives interviews to all and sundry--with special focus on the 6 o'clock news programs in Atlanta and elsewhere.
- "We got pretty good coverage around the state doing this in 1986; and we want it to be very effective."
- With respect to Wyche's "safety" at this juncture, I should note my encounter with the other side. The day before Bill and I talked, I went over to the Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee to give a copy of my Mark Andrews book to Paul Curcio, who helped me get Andrews' polls and his TV spots. (I had mentioned him in my Preface) We talked about the upcoming Senate races. I asked him who their top targets were. He answered Wirth, Glenn (!) Hollings, Sanford. Not WF. I asked, "how about Fowler?" "Less so," he answered. "Why are you more optimistic about Sanford than Fowler," I asked. "Fowler is a craftier politician. And besides, we never have had much luck in Georgia. Mattingly was the first Republican ever elected state-wide there." I did not choose to press it. But in Curcio's mind, WF is not a top target, and Republicans are pessimistic about winning there. Point is: money may not be forthcoming for Coverdell.