

Allan Secrest - March 25, 1992

- Went over to Alexandria to talk with WF's pollster - He greeted me with, "You've heard of Nixon's Six ^{cases} ~~Cases~~; well, I've got five of them right now. I'll be with you in a few minutes." I waited a good half hour while everyone ran around in a semi-frenzy. He was trying to get a poll into the field this evening, and was making corrections in the questionnaire and making sure the people on the phone bank were in place. "Can you imagine asking people these questions over and over. It's not a high interest job. And I pay them so little." In general, an air of great self-importance here.
- He began by describing the kinds of polling they do. (After a little self-advertisement about his record as a pollster--does more polling for Dems than anyone, defeated more incumbents than anyone, etc.)
- "The general election poll is like AWACs hovering over the entire landscape, providing an overview, at the beginning, of all the factors that will have to be considered. It's purpose is strategic. Tracking polls are tactical. They are done at the end of the campaign in response to a current situation. It's like one guy sitting on the top of the hill directing artillery fire first to one trouble spot then to another. One poll is carefully planned, the other is written on the back of napkin. One is an atlas, the other a road map."
- "Political research is not a magic tool. It helps a campaign to allocate its limited resources efficiently. That is what we did in 1986. Efficiency was the hallmark of that campaign. We were very disciplined."
- "A campaign is a series of disciplines--in the identification of a theme; in the identification of target groups, particularly potential switchers; in fund-raising; and in candidate activity. Putting these disciplines together is what a campaign is all about. The role of polling is one of enhancing each of these disciplines."
- He then talked about Frank Greer. "He will put on a big show, sitting in front of the flag, telling you how we did this and we decided that. You won't be able to stop him from showing his spots to you. Last week there was a big article about him the Washington Post. USA Today is doing a big story, too, going back into his childhood. I'm not interested in that. I only care if we win or lose." (Well, that isn't all he cares about, but he does seem to want to distinguish himself from the newshound, Greer. That picture dovetails with Bill's view of Greer--that he talks too much.)
- "In 1986 there was unusual collegiality among Bill Johnstone, Greer and myself. I give Bill all the credit for that. He helped us to bleed together, to work in harness, as a team. We exercised budget discipline and we made the most of our resources. In the primary for example, our tracking polls showed that we had a chance, if we acted in the last week, to avoid a run-off. We decided to put \$100,000 of our scarce resources into a particular kind of spot. And, it paid off. We avoided

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a run-off by two-tenths of a percent." (The opposite of Donald Stewart.)

- "Wyche Fowler is unsurpassed as a campaigner. One thing we know is that when the free media is very favorable to your candidate, the paid media needs to match that favorable picture. That set a very high standard for Greer. And he met it."
- He began with WF in 1985. He's from Atlanta, worked for Fowler as a student, in city council campaigns; met Bill Johnstone in the McGovern campaign. So he claims some history of a relationship with them.
- "In 1985, WF was a blank canvas for most voters. Voters in the 5th district were favorably disposed. His positives were his sensitivity, he delivers, he puts the 5th district first. He had very few negatives. Our task was to build on the favorable impressions among those who knew him and introduce him state-wide to those who didn't."
- "The idea is always to create a sense of shared values. That was the case of our early campaign. We had an excellent introductory 60-second spot-stressing values, faith, scripted so as to have the Sunday school teachers pronouncing Wyche as in church. The idea grew out of our polls... It was scripted by Matt McWilliams, and scored by him, too. The music was very appropriate to the time. It might seem outdated now--most old spots get outdated. But for its time, it was great."
- He suggested I might talk to McWilliams, who now works in own firm, Cogsgrove & McWilliams in D.C. area.
- "Wyche made the transition from congressman to state-wide office. That's been hard to do in Georgia. Our client, Bo Ginn, couldn't make the transition. He wanted to be a pork governor as he had been a pork congressman. For state-wide office, you need something more--a vision."
- "A campaign plan is a pulling together of time lines--but with some flexibility. We did nothing in our primary campaign that would not blend into the general election. We didn't rush early on to an ideology, for example, that would hurt us in the general election. We didn't want either election to boil down to ideology. We wanted to avoid that."
- "It was a brilliant campaign. Bill was awarded "Campaign Manager of the Year" by the magazine Campaigns and Elections. I'll bet he's never told you that, has he? (No) That's just like him. But I can't say enough about him. We had a great candidate. And you can only be as good as your candidate. That was Bill. He had a game plan and he was absolutely unflappable in carrying it out. The campaign was a monument to how it should be done. It was a testament to an efficient campaign. He and Frank and I did numerous seminars when it was over."
- Re primary. "Ham Jordan was still battling a perception problem stemming from his reputation as the enfant terrible of the Carter administration. We portrayed Wyche Fowler as a man of Georgia values."

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We worked to insulate Fowler, to circle him with a moat of values that Jordan could not cross."

- "Our targeting on both primary and general, was centered down-state where he had no exposure."
- Re their decision to wait till the end to spend their money. "We discussed it constantly. The conventional wisdom is that you don't want to leave a negative unanswered, that a negative unanswered is a negative confirmed. Again, I give credit to Bill for the end game. He had a game plan; and he was absolutely unflappable. We had to take on some water during that period. We had to play rope-a-dope like Ali did against Foreman in Zaire. Ali laid on the ropes, Foreman punched himself out and Ali came off the ropes and destroyed him. We knew that if we were going to win, we would win it in the last three weeks. But the period when we went dark was excruciating. It was like the period when the astronauts flew around the moon and we lost all communication when they were on the dark side of the moon."
- "When you beat an incumbent, it boils down to this. There are four groups: strong incumbent supporters, weak incumbent supporters, strong challenger supporters, undecided. The challenger will get between 85% and 100% of the undecideds. That's a law of politics, a law of nature; its like the law of gravity. The strong supporters will remain strong. The battleground is the weak incumbent supporters. In our case, they were the weak Mattingly supporters. In order to find out who they are, you have to get to the big book (of polling results). That's where we kept our eye on the Mattingly supporters—who could be switched. Especially since Mattingly's support was so close to 50%. And that's when you do your autopsy." (He was trying to tell me that my marginals data was limited.)
- "The twin towers of Georgia politics are region and race."
- He really wasn't good on any of the details of 1986. He did say that Wyche got 90% of black vote and 40% of the white vote.
- He said that his firm "discovered" the anti-incumbent mood in the electorate in 1990 and that nobody believed him. He said that 1990—if you really looked at comparative incumbent defeats and lower incumbent margins—bore out his prediction. The two bases of the mood were voter perception that incumbents lacked common sense and lacked accountability. He said a strategy of accomplishment and a distancing from the institution were "imperatives" for this year, that the need was to "bring integrity to the table." In this regard, he said that a keen eye for context is critical. The mood of the electorate is characteristic of our winners. ?
- I asked about connection between governing and campaigning. "In a typical year, there is almost a one-to-one correlation between an incumbent's job rating and his support among the voters. But there is an analytical dissonance at work now. The numbers are breaking down. A one-dimensional look no longer does it. Barring scandal, accomplishment

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normally works. Now, you need to make a broader case to deal with the infection in the system. You need a broad antidote to secure reelection."

- "For every incumbent, the first reelection is the most vulnerable time. Wyche is a first term; and he beat an incumbent. When an incumbent is beaten, it means the incumbent has been fired. The challenger didn't win; the incumbent was fired. But challengers hate to admit that. They like to think that there were two equally shiny apples on the shelf and the voters picked one of them. Actually, however, their first reelection will be the first substantive introduction of the challenger to most of the electorate."
- The idea was that Wyche might underestimate the magnitude of his reelection task by thinking that he got a full evaluation last time.
- I asked him my Glenn and the consultants problem, that they didn't know what they had, etc. and how could he handle so many clients.
- He began by saying that he was from Atlanta so he had a good feel in Wyche's case. But I said it was a general question.
- "We have enjoyed tremendous success the first time we have gone into a race. We take great care to reinvent the wheel everytime we go in. We don't have to know where everybody is buried. We don't need to know the anecdotal folkways of every state in order to succeed. There is a threshold; we take it on ourselves to meet it; and it is easily done. Again and again, I come back to discipline."
- "Our job is to make the strongest effort to communicate as evocative a message as possible."
- After I had put my notebook away, he talked more frankly about Wyche. But he was still afraid to talk too freely.
- "I'm fearful of my long-term relationship. Wyche is holding me within very tight parameters."
- "In 1986, Wyche delegated through Bill to us, and that permitted a seamless relationship among the consultants. We were just beginning and we were cheap. Greer was not well established. Six years later, it's not yet clear how it will work. I have less personal contact with WF than I have with any of my other clients. That's the way he wants it. Last time he was engaged, focussed, less imperial. He now has a highly skewed vision of what happened. Most of the decisions--how many grp's, how many buys--were made in conference calls among Bill, Frank and myself, and occasionally one or two others. (He couldn't remember who did the national fund-raising.) Wyche thinks he made these decisions. He didn't. He can't tell you how he made those decisions, because he doesn't know."
- Main point is that Wyche doesn't give enough credit to his support teams.

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- He's very concerned that candidates give credit to their supporting efforts of consultants.
- Re Slaughter: "She's a piece of work. She has no concept of loyalty. But we were there when it counted."
- When I mentioned the C&E article written by Jordan's campaign manager, which argued that the Jordan campaign didn't have enough money, he said, "That's what they all say when they lose--'we ran out of money.' They made several major tactical errors."
- He didn't elaborate.
- Re Wyche: "Will he move about the state this time? (as he did last time) We'll see."