

Wyche Fowler

Kim Haddow - December 8, 1992

- We had lunch at the Hunan across from her office. She talked a blue streak and I can only get snippets of what she said.
- In general, she was angry, wiped out, upset--never had one like this. "I've been in 17 campaigns, and I've never been in one before where the candidate did not want to win, did not bust his balls to win, did not have the fire in the belly it takes to win. Wyche Fowler is a great guy, but he was a terrible candidate--undisciplined, arrogant and lazy. I have a four and a seven y/o and I thought I was equipped to handle anything. But I wasn't."
- "In 1986 he was a great candidate. He won that election because he was such a great candidate. He worked hard and he went everywhere. From the beginning, we thought that he was the one thing we could count on, the one sure arrow in our quiver. But it wasn't there when we needed it. Our slogan should have been: 'Where is Wyche Fowler?'"
- "From the beginning, Frank and Alan knew we could never get more than 51%. We knew from the start that we were in trouble. Do you know what Wyche said when we told him that 51% was the best he could expect? 'That's all I need.' Do you know any candidate who would react like that? He thought he could come in under the radar."
- "His basic problem was that nobody knew who he was. He had no record. We crawled through his record looking for things to write about. We even went back to his City Council record to look at Marta. He had plucked at things here and there--historic preservation, model math programs, energy--but they were isolated small things. The environment? It's one of the least important issues in Georgia. There were strands of a record, but nothing you could weave into whole cloth--nothing people could recognize. This showed up in all our focus groups. People simply did not know who he was or what he had done. I couldn't believe what the focus groups told us, that after years in the Senate, he would be so little known to his constituents--nothing. I couldn't believe it."
- "An incumbent can run on a record or on personality. In 1986 we had the personality. In 1992 we didn't have either the record or the personality. Wyche wouldn't go around to all parts of the state and show people who he was and what he stood for. In the end, there's only one thing a campaign is all about. You have to go to people, let them see you and put out your hand to ask for votes." That's the connect. Wyche didn't do it--In our 'let me give it to you straight' ad, he did. But it was too late.
- She was very big on the integration of free media with paid media, and the fact that they didn't do that. "Paid media can only take you so far. When we first went on the air, it took Wyche up to 43% (?). But once the attacks started, he began to slip. We had expected the free

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media to help us to rebut the attacks by showing that they were lies. Some were shaded, but some were straight out lies. But Wyche was in a pissing match with the media--with the Mark Shermans and the Bill Niguts of the world. They may not be the best, but they can help you. You can't treat the media the way that Wyche did and expect them to help you. Instead, the media was portraying his prickly side and it contrasted with the paid media. People did not believe the paid media and he began to sink. Our bottom line problem always was that he was not known to the people of Georgia. And he did not want to work to get known all over again. His opponents were able to paint their picture of him; and we were not able to paint our picture. He had to get reintroduced to the public. And when he did, the people did not like him anymore."

- "When the free media reenforces the paid media, the positive effect is exponential. When the free media conflicts with the paid media, the negative effect is even more devastating. It's almost a mathematical formula."
- "In this election year, people are serious. The funny ads of 1986 would not work this time--talking to a donkey or holding a puppy. People were desperate to hear specifics--what is your record, what are your plans for the future. We thought we did this well in our positive ads. But the picture in the positive ads--education, health--was not the picture the people had of Wyche."
- "We thought PC would go ideological against Wyche--that we would have a campaign that was Fowler vs. Coverdell. But he stayed away from the ideological and stayed with the personal, trying to expose Fowler's weaknesses. So we had a campaign Fowler vs. Fowler. That's the one campaign we did not want--Fowler vs. Fowler--and it's the campaign we got."
- She, too, called WF disdainful of Coverdell and thought the debates were a disaster in that sense. The baseball question she called "a typical male response," and said women picked up the arrogance more than men did. She called the response about his daughter "pathetic."
- Bill stressed that he didn't prepare for debates, except for Thomasville. Said Bill, "That was the time I felt the best about the campaign, that we had a real fired up candidate."
- She, like Bill, thought that Nov. 3 was the ball game and that they did as well as they could on Nov. 24.
- "Ten days out, we were still ahead by 17 points. Then it started slipping fast as a result of his attack. His negatives were sticking. That's what people remembered about Fowler. Voters began making up their minds and they were all going against us. We reached a crisis about three to seven days out. I thought we might end up at 46%. That's when we should have put our negative crime spot on. We were running a positive spot, but we needed a negative one. Alan had been arguing since summer that we should have gone negative early. I had

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been arguing that we needed something positive first. And I think we were successful before he went on TV. But I also think we made a mistake by not answering back as soon as he did go on TV. We didn't. And at the end of the campaign, we didn't go with our crime spot. All our research told us it was our most effective ad. But Wyche would not use it. His advisors argued with him about it. But he did not like it and, if the truth be known, he did not believe he needed it. That was our biggest mistake of the campaign. If we had put it on, we would have won (Nov.3)." Bill agreed.



- "Mark Sherman's articles about the campaign were about a campaign I never recognized."
- (M) - "Biggest paper in state, covering 60% of the state, devoted two paragraphs of their endorsement calling him a Vidalia onion. It was not a help. It dove-tailed perfectly with Coverdell's attacks, not with the picture of Wyche we were trying to present."
- She also thinks, as Bill does, that if they had gotten their "response" ad (Nov. 24) on earlier, they might have won. The picture of Wyche is that he was slow to react--that when they tried to reach him re that last ad, they "couldn't reach him and had to go without him."
- She mentioned like Bill how he cancelled trip to Savannah three days before 24th election and missed 200-300 people. Bill also mentioned cancellations of trip to Columbus and press conference with mayor of Macon. (I remember this last one and maybe the first one.) Only reason, says Bill, for Savannah decision: "He just didn't want to do it."
- She says Bill has been with W too long - "babysitter," she calls him, says he has to fight Wyche on nearly everything. She calls them "two parts of the same person," and she agrees that it hurts the organization. She thinks Bill is great--one of best election people she's ever seen, that he is blaming himself for the defeat too much, when it's really Wyche's loss--all by himself.
- - Frank Greer to Kim at one point, "I don't know this man at all." Greer to Bill, "Does this man really want to win?" (We never discussed out-state operations.)
- - She talked about his refusal to use his wife in campaign--that most people didn't know he's married and that she would have softened him. He needed her; but either didn't see that or was just stubborn.
- In this, as in other things, she sees WF as a very difficult candidate! He won't take advice and was often not even available when they wanted to give him advice or have him make a decision. When I noted that he was reluctant to use a car phone she said, "What does that tell you? Did you ever see a candidate who wasn't working the phones like crazy morning and night?"
- She agreed that Coverdell campaigned as "Mr. X" (my term) and was so

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disciplined that she often wondered "Did he ever fight with his advisors, jump up and down and say, 'I want to be in the next ad?'" We agreed he probably never did. We agreed that he was tough in the debates, that he carried the debates, that F thought he could shoot PC down easily.

- [Bill's off-the-record assessment was "Wyche did not have his heart in it. I don't think he really wanted it. I wanted to tell him he should not run for reelection, but I never could." Bill said--when I raised the question that Weltner's death hit him hard--that he devoted much of the last two years to Weltner.]
- I asked her if they had a slogan. She said yes, "Working for Georgia." But I didn't see it! She said Sam Nunn used it. He did. But that's not much help!
- I pushed her hard on the "I'm one of you," theme and why they didn't push it. She said they did, but not the way I thought they should. She said they considered spots in different parts of the state, but didn't do it. People don't like pork, she said. But she did note that values are what is involved in the "I'm one of you" stuff, and she faulted Wyche for not conveying his values to people in Georgia--personally.
- - "I don't ever want to be connected again with a campaign where the candidate can't be reached for hours at a time."
- Over and over, she said that the image of WF that PC wanted to impart and did was that WF had "gone Washington." "You don't know what he's been doing up there. I'm going to tell you. He's been raising your taxes and his pay and he's not looking out for you. He's 'gone Washington.'" The insider image was not only not good, it was positively bad.
- She painted W as not a "change agent." "Off the record, he sent us a copy of the Clinton health plan and the Rochester plan and asked us what one he should be for. WF a change agent! Are you kidding. If you look at the record, you'll find that he took very few stands in Congress. On education, he has a good record. But on other issues he also opposed the people who were with him last time, who expected him to take a stand. Where was he for the gays? Sam Nunn had a better record on gays, than he did. Where was he for the women who worked for him. After the vote on Clarence Thomas, a lot of women wanted to punish him and they said, after Nov. 3, that they hoped he learned a lesson. What was worse, he never came back to them to talk to them and to ask for their support. Not until the run-off did he say to the voters, 'I need your support.'"
- I say the only thing about Coverdell was that he was not Wyche Fowler. His entire campaign was anti-Fowler. It wasn't even that he was liberal. It was just anti-Fowler. Any candidate could have done what he did. His background, his personality, his philosophy--all were irrelevant. "As I say, Mr. X."



- She calls Wyche "an anomaly in Georgia--that's a given." (Bill says Republicans are growing so fast that he would not advise Wyche to run again in Georgia. I said to Bill and Kim that I thought if he'd won one more time, he'd have been well set. Bill agreed readily, Kim less readily.)
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 - Both Bill and Kim mentioned, as evidence of both Wyche's desire for control and his lack of fire that he ~~didn't set-up a full-time press~~ operation in Georgia till mid-October. Kim spoke often of "Wyche's terrible, disastrous relations with the press."
- Kim: "If Wyche heard me talk this way, he'd jump across the table and choke me."
- Could it be that Wyche did do his best and that it just wasn't there and that campaigners have to blame the candidate?
- Both Kim and Bill said, "We were in the position of the 1986 Mattingly campaign," except that Mattingly started out attacking WF. Kim called Wyche's campaign "the Bush campaign" in sense that Bush's negatives didn't work and Bush had no theme. She thinks Wyche believed he could win on the basis of his personality, but then didn't think he had to work hard at showing people his personality. She tended to mock the description of Wyche as smart, charming, delightful, witty, learned, well-read, etc. as if Wyche thought these characteristics would be self evident to voters without him proving himself to them all over again.
- When I said why didn't you mention Wyche's 200 town meetings, she shot back, "We did--on radio. Radio is a very important medium." But it seemed a little defensive, and we didn't go back to that. I meant as a major theme, on TV. Bill was a good deal more willing to entertain that idea. (But as Kim said, he was too self-flagellating.)
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 - "Media is like a big balloon--you blow it up and it expands until someone starts to poke holes in it. Then you run around trying to plug the holes and keep the balloon in the air." (Something like that!) Her view of paid and free media is like this: that they reenforce each other, and grow together. When they conflict, you are in big trouble.
- I asked her about the narrowing options idea, but it didn't register.
- "It was a classic case of hubris--a Greek tragedy. He had the seeds of his own success and the seeds of his own destruction inside of him."
- "All states are schizophrenic. Campaigns are much easier to run in congressional districts. At least people are close to each other."
- She talked about PC's exploitation of specific issues in specific places--especially the inheritance issues in South Georgia, and the race issue in North Georgia. Especially outraged at inheritance issue.
- Kim noted that PC opened with Margie Lott stuff and that they were not alarming. Indeed, then focus groups told them that people were insulted

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by the ad and didn't like it. The idea was, I think, that the WF people didn't see it as a threat. But it may well have gotten people's attention--which is what PC needed.