



news release

DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL COMMITTEE • PUBLIC AFFAIRS DIVISION • 2600 VIRGINIA AVE., N.W., WASHINGTON, D.C. 20037 • 202/333-8750

Release for Thursday AMs
October 24, 1968

For Further Information:
Ev Munsey, Ext. 201
DC-702

FUNY RECORD LEAVES NIXON UNKNOWN QUANTITY, PROFESSOR POLSBY WRITES IN NEW BOOK

Washington, D. C., October 23 -- Richard Nixon in his six years in Congress, and after he was Vice President "made little or no impact on public policy. So he is as close to an unknown quantity as we are likely ever to see as the Presidential nominee of a major American national party." That is the conclusion political science Professor Nelson W. Polsby, of the University of California at Berkeley, draws in his new book The Citizen's Choice: Humphrey or Nixon, published here today (Public Affairs Press).

Robert R. Nathan, Director of Position Papers and Task Forces for the Humphrey campaign, stated that the Polsby book candidly compares Humphrey and Richard Nixon on their records, styles and actions.

"Humphrey's record of public service ... shows him to be the most energetic, far-sighted and constructive politician to offer himself to the voters of this country ..." the California Professor writes. "Richard Nixon's record by comparison, with any reasonable norm, much less than with Humphrey's towering achievements, is puny and indistinct."

Polsby states that Nixon has "an extraordinarily barren record. Nixon's record of performance in matters of urgent concern simply does not exist."

Polsby writes, "Where Humphrey has advocated and then with consummate skill and patience accomplished worthy public goals, Nixon has merely disparaged. The main monuments to Nixon's public service

are speeches denouncing such proposals as the Peace Corps, the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, Medicare -- all of which, incidentally, Humphrey sponsored."

The author comments that "there is a kind of high school debate club quality about much of what Mr. Nixon says on questions of public policy. He seems to be unable or unconcerned to focus on whatever social problem a proposal is supposed to ameliorate ... He rivets his attention instead on what he takes to be the jugular of whoever made the proposal."

"Where Humphrey seeks solutions, Nixon seeks to allocate blame and score points," he writes.

Polsby, a Humphrey supporter, praises him for "making liberalism both respectable and effective within the Senate."

He credits Humphrey with leading civil rights legislation, introducing in the Senate the "cornerstone of the poverty program," sponsoring Medicare legislation, "investing the field of disarmament" as a topic of legislation, pioneering the Food for Peace program, initiating efforts for a treaty banning nuclear weapons testing, and sponsoring legislation to feed the hungry in the United States."

Especially revealing is Nixon's own stock-taking as published in his book Six Crises. In only one crisis does the public "get a glimpse of Nixon the public servant as opposed to the ceremonial Nixon or the political Nixon." Polsby writes that what distinguished Nixon "as a public man is precisely his involvement in situations where excitement was high and the publicity great, but where little or nothing affecting the welfare of mankind was directly at stake and no real commitments to public policy were at issue."

According to Polsby, Nixon "has been the champion of little or nothing in his public life."

Professor Polsby also examined the political situation of 1968, the arguments for non-participation in the Presidential election, and the tasks facing the next President.

Commenting on "The Republican Southern Strategy," Professor Polsby said:

"Nixon must have been aware that the best hope for any Republican presidential candidate would have been to contest the big states as fiercely as possible, leaving the south to Wallace. So his best strategy to win the election would have been to pick as his running-mate one of several very attractive young Republicans, doves or men uncommitted on Vietnam, liberal and alert to the problems of urban America.

"But instead of one of these men, Nixon picked Spiro T. Agnew, Governor of Maryland, as his running mate. Why? Apparently Senator Strom Thurmond, the man Hubert Humphrey originally drove from the Democratic Party in 1948, was as responsible as any man for this decision.

"Thurmond kept his troops in line for Nixon, but in return seems to have done some hard bargaining on the Vice Presidency.

"Unfortunately Nixon's southern strategy did not stop with the selection of Governor Agnew as his running mate. There is also the very serious matter of his repeated attacks upon the Supreme Court and the Attorney General.

"There is, so far as I know, no reputable evidence that will sustain Mr. Nixon's linkage of the Court or any decision of the Court to the incidence of serious crime in this country. Likewise it is hard to see precisely what Mr. Nixon is accusing Attorney General Clark of when he goes out of his way to attack him in speeches. This pandering to fears and prejudices, this seeking of a scapegoat,

is scarcely worthy of a schoolyard bully. In a candidate for the presidency, it is most disheartening.

"But it is consistent with Nixon's previous behavior as a campaigner and with a southern strategy. I shudder to contemplate what further rewards for J. Strom Thurmond may be in store as Mr. Nixon's career continues on its way."

Addressing himself to "liberal idealists" who are thinking of sitting out the Presidential election, Professor Polsby said:

"Earlier, I argued that the choice between two evils ("All mortal men, politicians included, are less than perfect") this year 1) was no different from the imperfect choices available to us in most -- perhaps all -- presidential elections, and 2) still provided ample room to distinguish between the records, the impulses and prospective policies of the two candidates. I now want to add two other thoughts. First, nonparticipation will not have the consequences contemplated by those attracted to the idea. Withdrawal from the election will decrease, not increase, the influence of nonparticipants in the affairs of the party and the nation. Second, even more important, their nonparticipation will harm innocent bystanders.

"Idealistic liberals are generally committed to decent, enlightened and far-sighted public policy, and so I cannot view with equanimity the medium and long-range decline of their influence within the Democratic Party. This, however, will be the likely consequence of their failure to participate. A(n) ... abdication by idealistic Democrats can only increase the probability that we will elect and maintain in office Democrats and Republicans less enlightened about public policy than we otherwise might have.

"Some Democrats may be tempted nevertheless to work for Democratic Congressional candidates this year while ignoring the top of

the ticket in the hope that they could, at least, achieve a standoff with Nixon. It is a forlorn hope. In presidential years, an average of 15 percent more people go to the polls than is the case in mid-term elections. Such voters are not very interested in politics or public affairs, and they are not well educated. Their vote is the least likely to be affected by partisan habits. They vote because their interest is stirred up by the publicity attending the Presidential election. This is the so-called 'floating vote' which blows with the winds favoring one party or another in a particular Presidential campaign. These voters also tend to favor the Congressional running mate of the national ticket they have voted for -- not by a wide margin, but by enough to make the difference in close races."

Professor Polsby pointed out that in 27 marginal Democratic Congressional seats, mostly held by liberals, "Almost all will be decided not by the individual efforts of the candidates, but by the fate of the national ticket in that area." The influence of the national ticket is especially strong in the 121 non-Southern Congressional districts where voters can vote a straight party ticket simply by pushing one lever, he said.