

# Presidential campaign flies too high

Have you noticed anything different about Walter Mondale in the past week or so? The black circles under the eyes have faded to gray. The tense vocal chords that only emitted the reediest of sounds have opened. The thought passages which could only handle items from the memory bank — Here comes Answer 246B — are actually formulating ideas and completing paragraphs.

## Ellen Goodman

This is not merely a relaxation response to winning the nomination. What has happened is that Mondale pursued a flight pattern that might have been his feet. And I mean that literally.

It wasn't the emotional ups and downs of the primary season that wore and tore the men who would be President. It was, I am absolutely convinced, the grueling takeoffs and landings of air travel.

For about four months, Jackson, Hart and Mondale pursued a flight pattern that might have painted by Jackson Pollack. They did not run for the presidency. They flew for it. The frequent-flyer campaign of 1984 was conducted at 30,000 feet. If the men appeared to have their heads in the air half the time, it was merely because their heads were attached to their bodies.

On one day (not the worst of the lot), the Hart campaign left Texas in the morning, touched down in five states, logged six hours and 15 minutes of air time, spent three hours and 45 minutes on buses — all to attend four campaign events that totaled 60 minutes — and then returned to Texas. In the bi-coastal week of primaries in California and New Jersey, the candidates and entourage broke the union rules for flight attendants.

The press people accompanying these men — paying 150 percent of first-class fare for the privilege — could barely formulate a question at the end of their airplane-seat confinement. The men running for President of the United States certainly couldn't formulate policy. The worst gaffes of the campaign came in the twilight zone of time zones.

The insanity of this body-wrenching fly-by-night-and-day operation was that the candidates were not actually trying to meet the people. Surrounded by cameras and Secret Service security, they pressed less flesh than a candidate for state representative. They were flying to media markets, TV cameras.

In lieu of all this, I have a plan for the 1988 campaign — a campaign which will begin Wednesday, Nov. 7, 1984. I propose that any candidate who announces a wish to be President be immediately grounded.

Instead of bringing the candidates to the cameras, in the public interest we would bring the cameras to the candidates. The campaign of 1988 would be conducted exclusively from a studio.

This would create a few problems, I grant you, but nothing insurmountable. The candidate could be seen against a stage backdrop of Fort Wayne, Ind., and before you could say, "fasten your seatbelts," change clothes and scenery and be filmed in Tallahassee. Few viewer-voters would know the difference.

Some props would be needed. A Mondale campaign would need a generic factory gate. A Jackson campaign would have to commandeer a single church pulpit. A Hart campaign would be a challenge what with the river-rafting, horse-riding and all. Animals are a disaster in the studio, but they are doing wonderful things with mirrors and water tanks these days.

They would, of course, need at least a few voters for handshaking and local color. But for the same

cost as a plane charter — roughly \$30,000 a day — they can buy a lot of AFTRA types. Actors have to vote too, you know.

The prissiest of television reporters might protest this new proof of their power, but they would be quieted by the possibility of "visuals." Any print reporters who got feisty could fly from one city to another to watch the candidates on local stations.

The beauty of this idea is that it preserves the product. Under the current procedure, a multi-million-dollar business resting on the energy of a single candidate is allowed to dissipate into the jet stream. His body is airlifted from stop to stop as if it were his arm waves, not his brainwaves, that made the difference. Inevitably, he starts to circle issues like landing fields, his vision gets obscured by fog, and finally one wing or another explodes.

The studio campaign sounds like a lofty ideal, I know, but it is the only way to keep the future Presidents doing what they should do. They should move less and think more. So, if you want a slogan for the 1988 campaign, here it is: Bring the Presidency Down to Earth.

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## Saving U.S. money . . .

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With federal and corporate funding, NED can do such things as: aid political prisoners and their families in places like Poland; assist harassed and fragile embodiments of democratic values, such as the "flying universities" (maintained by dissident intellectuals) in Poland; assist the organization of Cuba Committees in Europe, where there are many Cuban democrats in exile; support a magazine run by and for the thousands of Chinese students studying abroad, a magazine devoted to discussion of peaceful liberalization of China; send to places like South Africa and Chile law students skilled at litigation on behalf of human rights; assist the Democratic and Republican Parties in sharing the skills of democracy. (Democracy is, after all, a learned art — with parties trying to take root in the stony soil of less fortunate countries.)

Now, what is there about such activities that causes a congressman — a conservative Republican — to describe NED as an "endowment for mischief"? If the U.S. government is to be forbidden, in the name of moral fastidiousness, from lending aid and comfort to freedom's brave and isolated friends, the U.S. policy amounts to unilateral moral disarmament.

The effectiveness of some things NED may do would be reduced by publicity. One advantage of its independent status is that it would not come under the Freedom of Information Act. This displeases those legislators who are eager to please those journalists who think that if Aristotle had been a clear thinker he would have said that the great goal of government is not justice but happy journalists.

NED has brought about another outburst of philistine moralizing of the "Grenada-was-as-bad-as-Afghanistan" sort. The anti-NED argument is: We would disapprove of foreign interventions in our democracy, therefore . . .

Therefore nothing. The moral status of an action is conditioned by the actor's intentions and results. We are a good nation interested in nurturing good things in nations afflicted with bad regimes. Besides, we tolerate all sorts of foreign attempts to shape opinion in our open society.

But in Washington in the sleepy summer season, occasions for indignation are distressingly scarce. Hence they are valued almost as much as air conditioning, and other necessary comfort. Many opponents have used NED's little appropriation as an excuse for preemptive indignation about imaginable violations of the ever-stricter rules of political hygiene that are binding only on the United States.

There is a moral failing that theologians call "scrupulosity." It involves seeing moral fault where there is none, or fanatically seeking perfect purity when that is not desirable or even possible. The

assault on NED is, in part, another excuse or scrupulosity regarding foreign policy.

Congress, it sometimes seems, would like a foreign policy conducted by Emily Post with the Warren Court squinting over her shoulder lest there be any violation of procedural niceties. NED is not perfect. The controversy about it illustrates how pursuit of the perfect injures the good.

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