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'Pandering' may hurt Mondale

dictionary.

One of the great delights of the quadrennial intellectual experience we call the presidential campaign is the way it enlarges our vocabulary. There was "window of vulnerability" and "wimp" in 1980, and now in 1984 a new and delicious entry: "pander."

Ellen Goodman

Pander, for those of you who have been on vacation the past two weeks, is not the name of a rare black-and-white bear living in the mountains of China. Not unless you say it with a Boston accent.

Pander is a political name - as in "sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will hurt my image." It has stuck for the moment to the personage of one Walter F. Mondale.

In the process of choosing a running mate out of the Democratic rainbow coalition, Mondale has been accused of "pandering" to blacks, women and Hispanics. Mondale was "accused" of this crime, first by a candidate for the job (Hart) and then by opponents (Republicans) and finally by analysts (the media). When a candidate is "accused" of

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Oaks, Minn. It's safe to assume that he was not trying to gratify a public "weakness" for blacks and women in high places. Equal opportunity is, not strictly speaking, a weakness or a vulgar taste. But, in slang terms, the issue is whether Mondale

was trying to flatter and please women, blacks and Hispanics - in short, huge groups of voters. This leaves open some intriguing questins about the linguistic relationship between politicking and

something, you know he is in trouble. On to the

meaning "to gratify a person's weakness or vulgar

tastes." As a noun, panderer is the word for a pimp

or, more benignly, a go-between in an illicit love

assume that Mondale was trying to pick, rather than

procure, a vice presidential nominee up in North

Of course, this literal definition of pandering doesn't fit the current political scene. It is safe to

The Oxford American defines "pander" as a verb

pandering. Interviewing Wilson Goode, Dianne Feinstein, and Henry Cisneros for vice president is not exactly the same as kissing babies. But politicking is, by another sort of definition, the business of wooing, listening and responding. It's not for nothing that candidates eat kielbasa in Hamtramck, bagels in the Bronx and ribs in Dallas. It's not for nothing that they bowl, chop wood, ride horseback and shake hands.

Candidates have to prove that they are one of us while also proving they are better than us. Each candidate walks the line between seeming aloof from voters and groveling for votes.

The process gets pretty sticky. Pols can win the outrage of groups who are ignored and the scorn of groups who are courted too ardently. In Mondale's case, the dilemma is expressed in another 1984 political wordset: "special interests," as in "pandering to the special interests."

The recent Minnesota parade admittedly looked a bit like a First, Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth and Sixth of July parade. But the current notion that blacks, women, Hispanics, unions, teachers, etc., are special interests is weird. If you want to see a special interest, I suggest you check out the oil lobby, the Tobacco Institute and defense contractors.

There is something peculiar going on when Mondale's supporters are considered a special-interest conglomerate, while Ronald Reagan's Three R coalition - the rich, the right-wing and the red-baiting - are considered all-American. What's peculiar is American politics, especially presidential politics.

American Presidents, it's been said, are both kings and prime ministers. They represent the flag and a delicate coalition of voters. The most successful candidates simultaneously appeal to their constituencies while aiming above them. They make some ideological link between self-interest and the public interest. Those are the candidates we call leaders. They're the winners.

Mondale's problem isn't that he's raching out too hard for voters. Not at all. The problem is that he hasn't yet reached above the voters. He's been a

better prime minister than king.

In San Francisco he'll need the right words - not to appease the delegates but to lead them, not to play to the voters but to act for them. Words are always tricky in politics. But if you're looking for one that's absolutely lethal, then this is the year that "pander" bears watching.

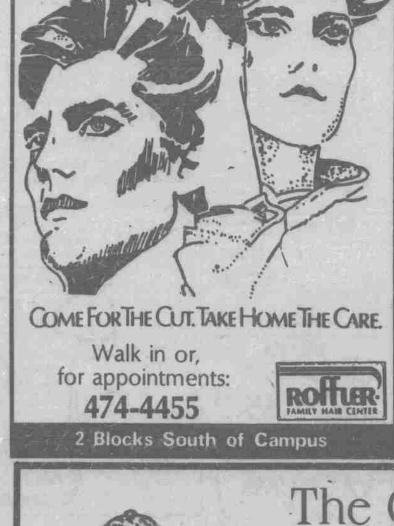
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n or lose.

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Therefore, the way it appears, either Mondale and the Democratic Party will reap the benefits now, or they'll reap them later. Only if the Democrats win the November general election will white women reap the benefits; blacks and other colored people probably will reap no benefits at all. These people will have to chose between a man who is blatantly against their interests, and one who may hand out a few tokens of appeasement should he win in November. I'll let the reader decide which is whom.

Walter, you are to be congratulated. You've saved the American two-party system for at least a few more years. You've ensured the future of our "democracy" and kept the White House just that.





Editorial Policy

Unsigned editorials represent official policy of the summer 1984 Daily Nebraskan. They are written by this summer's editor in chief, Lauri Hopple.

According to the policy set by the regents, responsibility for the content of the newspaper lies solely in the hands of its student editors.