

Mudslinging appears early in furious race for president

Tom Raum
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP)—A slack economy, a spirited independent challenge and the lessons of 1988 are combining to turn an already nasty presidential campaign season into an earlier-than-usual three-way brawl.

The mud is flying fast and furious and in all directions. Yet the Democratic Convention doesn't begin until Monday, the Republican convention is a month and a half off and President Bush is still the only candidate with a running mate.

Vice presidential candidates usually bear "hatchet man" responsibilities — a role Dan Quayle has assumed with gusto in recent days.

With Democrat Bill Clinton zeroing in on a running mate, even prospective Democratic vice presidential nominees are facing questions on their negative-campaigning prowess.

"I'm not usually thought of as an attack dog, but I can give a pretty good partisan speech,"

Rep. Lee Hamilton, D-Ind., one short-list contender, told reporters Tuesday.

Clinton and Texan Ross Perot seem to be doing fine in slam-dunk politics without relying on running mates. And Bush isn't leaving all the dirty work to Quayle.

Here's why this year's contest is shaping up to what could be the nastiest ever:

- The failure of the economy to improve, born out by recent unemployment and other statistics, is robbing Bush of what had been his best high-road issue, forcing his campaign to put more emphasis on negative tactics.

- Perot's popularity has prompted a wave of early attacks on his character and record from both parties, especially from Republicans. Perot has shown no reluctance to strikeback.

- Clinton seems determined not to repeat the political miscalculation made in 1988 by Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis, who failed to respond quickly to charges hurled at him by the Bush campaign.

Bush senior campaign adviser Charles Black said Bush ads should start appearing

between the two conventions. Perot ads may come even sooner.

Meanwhile, Bush campaign officials will send Cabinet members, GOP governors and a variety of other prominent Republicans trooping to New York next week to provide a GOP counterpoint to the Democratic convention.

"We will be a visible presence," said Bush campaign spokeswoman Torie Clarke. "We're very well aware of the fact that Bill Clinton will get a bump out of this convention and his vice presidential nomination."

Much of the slash-and-burn skirmishing is a prelude to television ads to come, suggests Karen Johnson Cartee, a University of Alabama political scientist and a specialist in negative campaigning.

"They want to discredit their opponents before their opponents start attacking them with negative ads," she said.

When Massachusetts Gov. William Weld, a Republican, visited Arkansas on Monday to bash Clinton's record as governor, two Clinton

aides sat in the audience to immediately dispute his assault and to criticize Weld's own record.

Clinton followed his aides, blasting Weld as "one of the attack dogs for George Bush."

When reports surfaced last week that Democrats had hired investigators to research Bush's finances and the savings-and-loan dealings of son Neil, Bush grumbled: "Let them muck around in my garbage can. They aren't going to find anything."

But presidential spokesman Marlin Fitzwater took it one step further.

"The Plumbers are back," Fitzwater said.

Fitzwater later said he didn't mean to equate the Democratic opposition-research investigation and Perot's alleged inquiries with the criminal 1972 break-in of the Democratic headquarters at the Watergate Hotel by a group known as the Plumbers.

Fitzwater probably was wise not to press the point. After all, it turned out that the Plumbers were working for a Republican president's reelection committee.

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CSCE will ban Yugoslavia

HELSINKI, Finland (AP) — The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe suspended Yugoslavia Wednesday, saying it could not participate in the 52-nation group for three months.

Russia had been the main holdout in weeks of negotiations on what kind of punishment the 20-year-old organization could mete out to Serb-led Yugoslavia for violating CSCE principles.

After an all-night session, Russia agreed with 50 other states to isolate Yugoslavia for fomenting violence in the former Yugoslav republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The decision was adopted by consensus.

Yugoslavia, which now consists only of Serbia and Montenegro, had already said it would boycott the summit of national leaders here on Thursday and Friday.

The 52-member CSCE said it

would ban Yugoslavia from the summit any way, and from all meetings of the group until Oct. 14.

Vladimir Pavcevic, the head of the Yugoslav delegation, said, "We asked for 100 days," referring to a letter sent to the CSCE on Tuesday by Yugoslavia's Prime Minister Milan Panic asking for a grace period to stop the Bosnian fighting. "We will be back on Oct. 14."

In Munich, Germany, President Bush was preparing to go to Helsinki later in the day to attend the security summit, following his meeting with other leaders in the Group of Seven industrialized nations.

Bosnia's ethnic conflict is expected to dominate the session Thursday and Friday.

The CSCE will adopt a NATO proposal to establish mechanisms for dealing with such threats to Europe's post-Cold War stability, a U.S. official said in Munich.

Local suspected in murder

LINCOLN (AP) — A woman was arrested here on a murder warrant in connection with the death of her husband in Indiana 12 years ago, police said.

Rose B. Deck, 50, was arrested without incident at her home on Tuesday, Lt. David Beggs said. Deck was being held without bond on a murder warrant issued by authorities in Allen County, Ind., Beggs said.

Indiana authorities suspect Deck in the death of her husband, James M. Kurtz, formerly of Leo, Ind., Sgt. Joe Bickel of the Allen County Police Department said. Allen County is in northeast Indiana.

Kurtz had Lou Gerhig's Disease and was believed to have died from natural causes, Bickel said.

But Allen County detectives recently received information that indicated Kurtz had been smothered by Deck, who at the time was married to Kurtz, Bickel said.

Authorities exhumed Kurtz's body and performed an autopsy. The autopsy results coincided with what authorities had been told, Bickel said.

A neighbor of Deck's said Deck had moved from Indiana to Lincoln two months ago.

The Allen County police department and coroner's office reopened the case last month after Kurtz's daughter, Janet Sproat, told police she saw her mother suffocate her father.

Deck confessed to a county po-

lice officer during an interview last week that she smothered her husband with a pillow, said Phillip E. O'Shaughnessy, Allen County corner.

O'Shaughnessy said he also reviewed the March 17, 1989, drowning death of Deck's son, 4-year-old Nathan R. Kurtz, and the death of a 1-month-old boy who died of sudden infant death syndrome at Deck's house.

O'Shaughnessy said he reviewed the two deaths to determine whether Deck was involved and "to see whether we did our jobs." O'Shaughnessy said he found no evidence that she was involved.

Sproat, who was 14 when her father died, said Friday she believed his death was not a mercy killing. She said her mother was tired of taking care of Kurtz and "wanted to get him out of the way."

An autopsy showed hemorrhaging in Kurtz's trachea, indicating he was suffocated, O'Shaughnessy said.

"That wasn't conclusive, but it was consistent with what we were told," he said.

Deck was being held Tuesday in a Lincoln jail, awaiting an extradition hearing. If she waives extradition, she could be returned to Allen County this week. If she does not waive extradition, authorities in Indiana will seek legal measures to force her extradition, said Jim Schweickart, county police public information officer.

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