

Wash Post Oct 12, 1971

Lonely Dissent Becomes Asset

Mathias Rides Anti-Nixon Tide

By Douglas Watson

Washington Post Staff Writer

Two years ago there were widespread rumors that President Nixon might try to purge Sen. Charles McC. Mathias, the independent-minded Maryland Republican who has opposed the White House on many key votes.

Columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak wrote that not since former Sen. Charles Goodell (R-N.Y.) "was defeated with White House connivance has any Republican so outraged Mr. Nixon and his senior staff as Mathias. The senator's liberalism and tendency to bolt party lines have bred animosity in the inner sanctum."

Now, a year before Maryland's senatorial election, the talk has stopped that Mathias would face a serious primary challenge from the conservative wing of his party.

Richard Allen, the state's conservative GOP national committeeman who disagrees with Mathias on many issues, said last week; "I might like to see somebody take on Mathias if I thought it was possible, but my guess is there is not going to be any contest (in next September's Republican primary.)"

Maryland Democrats also
See MATHIAS, A18, Col. 1



CHARLES McC. MATHIAS

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Sen. Mathias Riding Anti-Nixon Crest

MATHIAS, From A1

have so far displayed a distinct lack of eagerness to run against Mathias. Several Democrats said confidentially they expect Mathias to be the favorite against whoever their party nominates, despite the Democrats' edge in voters' registration.

Mathias' friends and opponents agree that Watergate and the resulting anti-Nixon sentiment have been the big difference in the changing political prospects of Maryland's 51-year-old senior senator. An aide to a Democratic congressman said Mathias "is riding the anti-Nixon crest."

As Nixon's political stock has dropped in recent months, Mathias' has risen, political observers in both parties agreed.

Mathias' willingness to dissent from the party line was demonstrated in a December, 1971, speech in which he urged President Nixon to take "the high road" and to discard a presidential campaign strategy "which now seems destined, unnecessarily, to polarize Americans even more."

Mathias criticized presidential staffers for "divisive exploitation of the so-called social issue... the use of hard-line rhetoric on crime, civil rights, civil liberties and student unrest."

"Poll after poll shows that the voters identify our party with the vested interests which seem to profit from war, pollution, discrimination and income maldistribution," Mathias said in the Minneapolis address.

Last fall, while most Republicans still were minimizing Watergate, Mathias warmly endorsed an investigation into alleged Republican espionage then being conducted by a subcommittee headed by Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.).

"Bugging, wiretapping, breaking and entering are aggravated crimes when used to pervert a national election. I think it's important we send a message from Washington to everyone interested in clean politics around the country that these things are wrong," Mathias said then.

In April, as White House spokesmen continued to avoid answering most Watergate questions, Mathias declared in a Senate speech, "The pursuit of truth is the only direction in which we can go in search of the way to preserve our loyalty to the Constitution and the laws."

The result of this outspoken frankness has been to add further luster to Mathias' long-standing reputation for integrity. One Democrat commented, grudgingly: "If there's a straight Republican in the state of Maryland, he's really it."

This has been a rough year for many other Maryland Republicans, starting with Spiro T. Agnew, who last week went from the nation's second highest position to a "no contest" plea on a tax evasion charge. In addition:

• Sen. J. Glenn Beall Jr.,

Mathias' fellow Maryland Republican in the Senate, has had his own problems. The Washington Star-News reported this summer that Beall's 1970 campaign received \$140,000 in cash raised by Herbert W. Kalmbach, President Nixon's former lawyer, and distributed by a White House aide.

Beall thus far has acknowledged receiving substantial contributions, while maintaining that all funds contributed were properly handled.

• Rep. William O. Mills, another Maryland Republican, committed suicide this spring after the press reported that his campaign in 1971 received a \$25,000 contribution that was arranged through the White House by Interior Secretary Rogers C.B. Morton but never reported as required by law.

• Rep. Marjorie S. Holt, another Maryland Republican, also has received bad publicity by charges from her former Democratic opponent, Werner Fornos, that he was smeared by Holt supporters through the unauthorized distribution of FBI reports. Mrs. Holt has denied any involvement in the alleged activity, which is being investigated by the Anne Arundel County state's attorney.

• Alexander Lancker, the former Republican state chairman, resigned this year after acknowledging that reporting of contributions to an Agnew fund-raiser last year was deliberately falsified.

(This recitation of the GOP's problems does not mean the Democrats do not have their own. With the federal prosecutors in Baltimore intending to continue the probe that brought Agnew to court, Baltimore County Executive Dale Anderson may not be the only prominent Democrat to be indicted.)

Mathias' "Mr. Clean" image has made him, thus far at least, an exception to the conclusion of many political pros that all incumbent officeholders, regardless of party, have been hurt by the public cynicism generated by the Watergate and Agnew scandals.

The political advantages of Mathias' previous outspokenness were demonstrated at a fund-raiser last May attended by more than 1,000 Mathias supporters who raised \$115,000 for his reelection campaign. President Nixon sent a message praising Mathias and saying, "I am pleased to share Sen. Mathias' same strong commitment to the cause of good government."

Agnew, who reportedly had been even more displeased with Mathias than was the President, sent words praising Mathias for his "honesty, dedication and willingness to stand up for his beliefs."

Whatever had been the likelihood of a White House-promoted purge, it seems that the changing political realities have ended any such thoughts.

Mathias has not announced his candidacy for re-election, but he does not

deny reports from his staff that he intends to run for a second six-year term.

Despite their general respect for him, Democrats do not think Mathias is unbeatable. They point out that in his 1968 election to the Senate — after four terms in the U.S. House — Mathias got only 48 per cent of the vote, with 39 per cent going to former Sen. Daniel B. Brewster, the Democratic candidate, and 13 per cent to perennial loser George P. Mahoney.

The Democrats also have the advantage of a 70 per cent to 27 per cent edge in voter registration over Republicans in Maryland, and stronger party machinery, particularly in the populous Baltimore area. Moreover, one Democrat suggests, the primary is a year away — enough time for new issues to arise that could hurt Mathias politically.

Mathias had not been invited to a single White House function for more than two years, but on Friday night he was among other senators and congressmen on hand for President Nixon's announcement that Rep. Gerald Ford (R-Mich.) would be nominated for Vice President.

"Things do have a habit of changing in politics," Mathias said afterwards.

Mathias stressed in an interview this weekend that he's not overconfident about being re-elected. "Elections aren't won a year ahead.

The bag you put elections in hasn't been made yet. I have no illusions that this is a foregone conclusion. It's going to take a lot of hard work."

Mathias has many potential Democratic opponents, though none has stepped forward so far. Lt. Gov. Blair Lee III, Maryland Comptroller Louis Goldstein and Maryland Attorney General Francis Burch each is a possibility. In order to challenge MATHIAS, each would have to give up running for re-election in his present position and risk ending up with nothing.

Democratic Reps. Paul Sarbanes of Baltimore and Goodloe E. Byron of Frederick County have been mentioned as potential opponents, but their aides say they are not at all interested in taking on Mathias. "You can forget that," said a Byron staffer.

Former Democratic Sen. Joseph D. Tydings, beaten by Republican J. Glenn Beall Jr. in 1970, reportedly has considered trying for a comeback against Mathias. Now practicing law, Tydings would not be giving up an elected office to run. Many suspect Tydings, as well as a number of other Democrats, might rather wait to challenge Beall, whom they consider more vulnerable.

The situation would be much different if there were a conservative Republican who appeared to be a strong primary challenger to Mat-

thias. The Democrats would be much more confident about running against a more conservative Republican than Mathias, who has always won with considerable support from Democratic voters.

Mathias likes to point out that he frequently has supported the Nixon administration, but that he gets most of the publicity on the times when he has not. In 1970 Mathias opposed the President on such hot issues as the Supreme Court nomination of Harold Carswell, the Cambodia invasion and the administration's response to the Kent State slayings.

Mathias seems to have done well at keeping the bridges open, even with his political enemies. At the lowest point in his relations with the Nixon administration, he and former Attorney General John Mitchell remained on speaking terms, a former aide recalled.

"His reaction to most types of hostility is to sit down and talk with the people who are mad at him," she said.

Mathias' improved political prospects do not seem to have gone to his head. He still often drives his two children to school from the family's Chevy Chase home, and he goes to his Capitol Hill office accompanied by Chammy, his 13-year-old Chesapeake Bay retriever.

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