

Hill launches 'unofficial' campaign

United Press International
AUSTIN — In 1968 Texas radios aired a parrot-like jingle telling listeners "John Hill will, John Hill will," the idea being make Hill your governor and he will make your state a better place to live.

Nine years later bumper stickers and flyers are announcing, in so many words, "John Hill is."

Is what?
Is running for governor — that's what. And most likely his main opponent will be incumbent Gov. Dolph Briscoe.

When he first took office as attorney general in 1972, Hill said he was no longer interested in being governor for the sake of being governor. It will depend on the challenge at the time.

Hill now says the challenges are in the state's highest office.

He hasn't announced his intentions yet — officially — but he let reporters know last year he would make an official announcement this summer after the 65th Legislature adjourns.

Since then Hill leased a campaign headquarters within walking distance of his state office and hired John Rogers, who guided Hill's successful 1972 race for attorney general, to run it. He appointed former speaker Price Daniel Jr., who wants Hill's present job, as his treasurer.

Bob Hiller, well-known political public relations man from Houston was hired for media consultation and advertising.

Small bumper stickers have appeared asking drivers to "Elect John Hill" and three-page flyers listing Hill's virtues and accomplishments urge Democratic party leaders to

join the John Hill Advisory Committee.

The number of press conferences called by the attorney general has increased to the point of alienating capitol reporters who have begun to question the purpose of the meetings.

And, last week, Hill fired the opening salvos in the coming campaign with an attack on part of Briscoe's energy policy.

A group called Moderate Democrats of Texas formed in March and announced "we believe John Hill will be the next governor" and "getting him elected is our first objective."

Although about half of his \$100,000 campaign treasury was donated by Houston businessmen, Hill, one of the most successful trial lawyers in the state, gathers most of

his support from the influential and wealthy trail lawyers.

His courtroom experience earned the support of rank-and-file labor and Rogers formerly was legislative director of the Texas AFL-CIO. Hill also has interests and friends in oil and banking.

The attorney general said he has decided to drop his emphasis on leadership in this campaign to let others lead.

"I tried in '68 to be the organizer, the executive director, the P. R. person and all, and the result was that it hurt in being as good a candidate as I could have been," he said. "This time, I'll try to have good people, and just let them advise me."

Apart from the thrust at Briscoe's energy program last week, Hill has made vague references to the lack of leadership in the governor's office and Secretary of State Mark White,



JOHN HILL

Briscoe's protege and reportedly a candidate for Hill's job, has accused Hill of trying to establish a "police state" through his Organized Crime Strike Force.

Hill is a bit of a maverick among Texas Democrats, being more attuned to modern political trends and more associated with the new breed of left-leaning party members.

However, he has several, powerful conservative friends, including former Gov. Allan Shivers.

"It's obviously a changing picture. You don't even know what's going to happen in the governor's office after the legislature," Hill said in a recent interview.

"I do see a lot of vital programs in the state that are not receiving the forward thrust they deserve that I cannot have an impact on as attorney general, but that as governor I could."

Reform will not be one of his campaign promises, said Hill, who is confining his plans to wanting to expand the governor's control over the budget and the power to remove political appointments.

"Any chief executive ought to have more impact on the budget than the Texas governor has," he said. "And there ought to be some way out of a bad appointment — we all make mistakes."

Hill said he dislikes the word "power" used in reference to the governor's office, choosing "responsibility."

"I do not view it as a weak office but it should be limited to two four-year terms," he said.

Political observers expect nothing short of all-out war between Hill and Briscoe, both of whom are tough campaigners. The governor has not announced for reelection, but Calvin Guest, state Democratic party chairman and Briscoe's friend and political colleague, earlier this year announced for him.

Hill became a millionaire as a plaintiff's attorney in Houston and became interested in politics. He helped Harris County efforts to elect John Connally governor in 1962, and two years later managed the county reelection campaign for Connally.

When Crawford Martin retired as secretary of state to run for attorney general, Connally named Hill to succeed Martin.

Hill worked diligently for Connally in the '60s, but never gained a seat in the governor's jealously guarded inner circle.

"Connally's guys saw him coming, and they didn't want any more players, so they shut him off. John really got bitter," a friend of Hill's from his secretary of state days said.

Others said Hill was too anxious, too pushy.

"I don't think there was any anti-Hill movement, maybe I expected more than he was to receive as Connally's secretary of state," a former Connally aide said.

"I was a political novice," he said. "I knew something about government and I came to the secretary of state's office prepared to work that office, but as far as politics didn't know beans about it. It was stressful first year."

Hill entered the 1968 governor's race, finishing fifth among seven other Democratic primary candidates, including Briscoe. He was to receive Connally's endorsement but the governor's support was long-time friend and political ally Eugene Locke.

"It was a temporary disappointment," Hill said. "I don't like that at the same time, I don't like that as a sad period."

He recovered from the 1968 defeat and ran against Martin in a 1972 race for attorney general. He won the election by a handsome margin with a hard-hitting campaign linking Martin with the Sharpes scandal.

"This office fits me well and I'm well-trained for it. I was elected to this office," Hill said, slapping his hand several times on his office desk. "I was not Gov. Connally's protege, was John Hill. My platform was Hill."

Hill, who says he has accomplished his goal to make the attorney general's office "the best law office in the state," commands a highly professional and capable staff, perhaps the best in the state's history.

Hill said politics has been a satisfying way of life, adding his wife and three grown children have few complaints.

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