

opinion

Controversy continues over Carter papers

by Helen Thomas
United Press International

WASHINGTON — Much as the White House wishes it will all go away, the furor over the purloined Carter debate briefing papers is not expected to die down immediately.

At his news conference, President Reagan was bombarded with questions about the propriety of his aides in obtaining and using documents that were prepared for President Carter for his debate with Reagan.

But he deftly sidestepped the issue of whether it was right or wrong.

At the same time, Reagan said that politics "should be above reproach."

Meanwhile, Carter aides are suggest-

ing that "dirty tricks" may have been involved.

Around Washington, speculation runs rampant on who might have passed the documents to the Reagan camp.

So far, no one has come forward to claim the honor. Nor has the White House identified, publicly at least, anyone who might have had a hand in securing the secret papers on strategy and tactics.

The mystery is how four administration officials could have received such papers without anyone recalling how they got them.

Reagan himself said that he did not know that they existed and only learned about them from reports in the press.

White House aides are chagrined. Deputy press secretary Larry Speakes first dismissed the briefing book questions, saying there was no inquiry in the White House. Then he passed off the issue as

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something that is "done in politics," and not too unusual.

But some aides wish they had never seen the papers. They insist that they did

not aid Reagan in the debate with Carter and that he would have triumphed anyway.

On that score, the president got a boost from Speaker Thomas O'Neill who agreed that Reagan would have won the election because Carter was unpopular, he said. He also seemed to agree with the president that it was "much ado about nothing."

Nevertheless, questions remain unanswered, and with the Justice Department conducting an inquiry, it appears the White House will be answering more questions as time goes on.

Carter aides are saying they believe that more than the debate books left their

campaign premises. If that is the plot will thicken.

The president, meanwhile, says an ethical question: "I think that Carter has always, in the eyes of the people, had a kind of a double standard. I have deplored it. And there are people who've said — people that are wise totally honest — have said they hear about something, they say, 'Oh well, you know, politics.'"

"Well, I don't happen to believe that there should be a double standard. No. I think it should be a broad approach. And there shouldn't be things done in campaigns, even things as accusing the other candidate of being a racist, and things like that."

Capitol Hill life differs little from state legislature

by Ira R. Allen
United Press International

WASHINGTON — Most of the old Southern power barons who made laws in back rooms over bourbon and branchwater are gone, but Capitol Hill still is a plantation.

The Greek columns, the lush greenwards swarming with plebian tourists, the patricians who orate at length on the Senate floor, the backslapping and camaraderie, the amiable way a congressman will chat with anyone who recognizes him.

Staff members are paid whatever their lords and masters want to pay. There are no equal opportunity or health and safety laws that apply, and good field hands are rewarded with comfortable, high-paying jobs close to the power.

The outward serenity of life on the Hill can mask the rampant ambition that causes each of the 100 senators to look in

either starts in Congress or finds its way there in a hurry, and most issues take at least 10 years from inception to final action, generating more accusations, hearings, debates and recriminations than can be consumed.

Ending a six-year term covering the Senate, I have been blessed with good stories — not so much the budget and tax and defense battles, nor the social issues of abortion and school prayer. But what raw meat did come from feuds between senators, or rackets committee hearings with hooded witnesses and testimony that Jimmy Hoffa was "ground into little pieces like hamburger and dumped in a swamp."

Even a story on the impeccably tended Capitol gardens produced a truism: "They spread 40 tons of fertilizer on Capitol Hill every year, and that doesn't even include what's in the Congressional Record."

Beyond the stories themselves, what will be missed is the collection of silver-tongued devils who provide the press galleries with memorable words and entertaining orations; people such as Pat Moynihan, Bob Dole, Howard Baker, Barry Goldwater, Orrin Hatch, Charles Mathias, Alan Simpson, Bill Proxmire, Ted Stevens and Paul Tsongas.

Early in my career, I was sent to cover

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the mirror each morning and see a future president of the United States. Or at least hear the staff sharecroppers tell him so.

Covering Congress is a reporter's dream — regular hours, long vacations when members leave for "district work periods" and, above all, the eagerness with which 535 lawmakers and 20,000 staff members will talk.

Since everyone has an ax to grind for his boss, the truth quotient is lower than a reporter might like, but the sheer volume of documents, press releases and leakers amounts to an embarrassment of riches — so much so that a good part of any day is spent gleefully batting information away.

The ease with which information can be obtained led to a formulation by this columnist that should be of help to newcomers in the Capitol press corps. Namely, anything newsworthy that happens in Washington or the rest of the world can be learned within 45 minutes on the Hill. If a rumor cannot be confirmed in that time span, it simply is not true.

Like any rule, there is an exception. For those not favored by the well-aimed leak, it did become impossible to confirm last fall that Sen. Edward Kennedy was indeed dropping out of the presidential race. Thus, an important corollary to the theory is that a scoop can last only 45 minutes, except when it involves Congress itself.

Capitol Hill is a breeder reactor of good stories. Every imaginable issue

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the Maryland legislature and given directions — "look for the cash register with a dome."

After reporting on these congressional creatures for precisely the length of a senator's term, I have been gradually disillusioned, mostly because things aren't all that different on Capitol Hill than in the state legislatures that are so often laughed at.

The members frequently are state-house alumni all too willing to barter their statesmanship for campaign contributions. Too many continue to indulge in petty egotism and ask, "What's in it for me?" instead of "What's good for the country?"

The ground rules are the same as in the state capitals. It just takes more clout to hit one out of the ballpark.

Personalities loom larger than issues, which is understandable because a politician can change his stripes but not his character.

They are, in sum, just like your town council members or delegates to your general assembly — just a little bit smarter and a whole lot luckier.



Drunk grillers present safety hazard

Council issues barbeque warning

by Dick West

United Press International

WASHINGTON — The National Safety Council recently unburdened itself of a list of tips on how to survive backyard barbecuing, cautioning, among other things, against "drunken grilling."

Here truly is a hazardous activity that cries out for accident prevention hints. I commend the safety council both for its timeliness and for having the courage to take on one of this country's greatest public menaces.

"Never use an outdoor grill indoors," the council admonishes.

That warning is particularly applicable if the grill happens to be attached to a brick patio wall.

Even if you are an experienced barbecue chef, you need professional help in moving brick grills indoors. I've seen entire patio walls collapse as a result of inept masonry work in detaching grills.

Also, setting up a grill indoors without consulting other members of the household as to location can be extremely dangerous.

It is, however, the exhortation against

drunken grilling where the council really shines.

Most states and municipalities have laws that cover the nasty situations that can arise from letting drunks have access to charcoal cookers — setting the carport afire, asphyxiating neighborhood children, etc.

These, however, are after-the-fact pieces of legislation. To my knowledge, there has never been a concerted, preventive campaign aimed at keeping drunks from getting behind the grill in the first place.

Most cookouts begin as friendly, social affairs. But how many times has the environment become ominous because the person in charge of barbecuing shish kebabs had too many gin-and-tonics before attempting to light the charcoal.

The least that can happen is a loss of coordination. The rice is done and getting cold long before the chunks of lamb are even taken out of the marinade.

By the time the meat finally has been skewered and is ready for the grill, all

sorts of disasters can have occurred:

—The drunk behind the grill attempts to prepare the charcoal by saturating briquettes with tonic water teardrops of fluid.

—The drunk behind the grill, acting as bartender, uses lighter fluid mixer, leading some guests to conclude that someone is spiking the punch.

—The drunk behind the grill climbs the carport roof upon which he insists will impart a delicious, smoky flavor to the shish kebab. He is not in the fall, but two guests who are ingesting gin and lighter faint faint prompting a quick call to the fire squad.

The worst peril of all is the prospect of dining at midnight on the remains of barbecued shish kebab that was supposed to be served at 8 p.m.

By that time, a person is hungry enough to eat anything, including ashes. I trust the Environmental Protection Agency will join the National Safety Council in this crusade.

City runners face unique problems

by Fred T. Ferguson

United Press International

NEW YORK — Harried is the heckled runner.

City running implies you puff harder than joggers. To say, "we run," is ego-inflating — until walkers pass you by.

All the world seems bound to puncture the runner's inflated ego — except runners.

There are the kibbitzers. They are concerned about you. They come in categories:

Physical — "You're going to ruin yourself."

Fitness freak — "You should lift weights, too."

Weight watchers — "You won't lose a pound."

Environmentalist — "You're filling your lungs with pollution."

Medical — "You're a sure bet for a heart attack."

Clothes conscious — "You look disgusting in that."

Speed nut — "You'll get there faster in a cab."

Many kibbitzers are derelicts. Some runners say they are all derelicts.

Derelicts have it in for runners — particularly runners who jump over sleeping derelicts.

Derelicts have been known to chase runners. They fortify themselves with nasty sayings and a gulp from a bottle in a

paper bag. Then they come at you — a step or two.

Obstructionists are another matter. Try to pass phalanxes of mailmen trundling carts or mothers pushing strollers.

Squeezing by brings imprecations from these gentle walkers. So does "par-

One thing cuts a runner to the core — when a traffic officer bawls a runner out for crossing with the light through traffic in gridlock.

don me." Some runners shout back. Walkers seldom give chase.

Cabbies and runners don't get along, either. Cabbies block crosswalks to let off passengers. Try shouting, "Why don't you learn to drive?" This brings expletives in response. Misery loves company. The cabbie's misery can be mollifying to the deflated runner.

Barking dogs plague runners. One runner I know barks back. Some dog owners don't like this infringement of barking rights. They howl.

Elated by the commotion caused, our barking runner began barking first — once to a sedate Irish Setter. Some dogs have no soul. They don't bark back.

The runner's friend, trotting somewhat behind, caught up to report the

dog's owner blamed the bark on the eyed setter. "Bad dog! Bad dog!" she said.

One thing cuts a runner to the core when a traffic officer bawls a runner out for crossing with the light through traffic in gridlock. The cut goes deeper. Drivers cheer the cop.

Running takes time — time for attention on the plight and perils of runners. Some say it could be better spent. Runners say they think deep thought the fly.

Cars that barely miss runners worthy of such thoughts. A punch fender turns thought to action. In a bang bringing a look of anger from the driver. But it takes a painful toll. Fender is harder than hand.

Another thought while running: do some women run without bras?

Women who run with bras say who don't, don't to attract attention. Subject has been surveyed by marketers. They say more study is needed.

Some runners seek escape from this thinking. They wear headphones. Absorbed in stereophonic music they have been known to run into things — things. Actually these people just joggers.

Runners' solace can be had in people watching. Some say you can do that while walking. It depends on how many people you want to see — if you are a runner.

The Battalion

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