

Nicholas Von Hoffman

Cutting the mustard

WASHINGTON (KFS) — What metaphor do you use for the demise of Eagleton? Was he, in those last hours and days of his brief Vice Presidential existence, the terminal patient, suffering, struggling, artificially alive because no one would pull the plug? Or was he a dying game bird, fluttering, bleeding, flying a few feet, collapsing, getting up again, the victim of the hunter's botched shot, until you wanted to scream at them in the television tube, "For chrissakes, kill him, for mercy's sake, finish him off."

Two days after the joint announcement with McGovern that he had three times been hospitalized for depression, the question had ceased to be political. The politics was how the deed would be done and that had nothing to do with this erect, jerky-mannered man who flew from city to city telling audiences he had polls, independent polls and letters, and long-distance phone calls all testifying that he wasn't a nut, that he could "hack it," that he could "cut the mustard." He used those phrases—hack it, cut the mustard—those phrases that bespoke not a political struggle, not even a Missouri politician's ambitions, but Eagleton fighting for his personhood.

At the end, at the last press conference where George McGovern gently chloroformed him, Tom Eagleton, just before he went under, tried to distinguish himself from Richard Nixon. He would be around he said, alluding to Nixon's much-remembered adieu when he said we

wouldn't have him to kick anymore. But in that act of separation from Nixon, Eagleton affirmed that the two lived by the same code of cool under pressure, of mustard cutting, of toughing through, of that ceaseless, death-haunted restlessness of the white, American male striver. "Stay on, hang in there, kid," Eagleton had said earlier in the week, the week he constantly referred to as The Week That Was.

Why did he go?

Three times he had gone to the hospital for depression. That was his awful, disgraceful secret. Why did he go? The medical records aren't available, nor need they be because Eagleton told us on one of those shattering TV performances he put on during his week:

"As a young man I must say I drove myself too far and I pushed myself terribly, terribly hard . . . long hours day and night, and after the campaign was over I did experience exhaustion and fatigue . . . at the age of 42 I've learned how to pace myself."

So like Nixon. Discount the never proven, never laid to rest rumors that he also sought help in a similar hour, there is Nixon's own testimony in his book, "Six Crises." The same days and nights, the same letdowns, the same staking of one's own good opinion of one's self on cutting the mustard, fella.

So many fields of mustard to be cut with joyless, manic, controlled energy, always smiling and never a tear. Nixon did cry

once on Dwight Eisenhower's shoulder, but Sen. Muskie was ruined by a tear. Don't cry, fella, just cut the mustard, and no wonder these guys develop personalities as ill-suited to them as their capped teeth and their dye jobs. I'd be depressed, wouldn't you?

The mustard-cutter ever hacking it upward can display no outside weaknesses. They must be stuffed inside or else you get this excerpted from CBS:

George Herman: Have you recalled . . . the name of the tranquilizer?

Eagleton: No . . . it was a blue pill, but I don't remember the name.

Herman: Senator, this is a television program, and everybody watching you can see that you're perspiring considerably and that your hands have a slight shake to them.

Eagleton: Well, the lights in the studio are less than cool, and they focus in on the guy getting the third degree . . .

God, Eagleton, you didn't use the right anti-perspirant. You forgot your little blue pill. In this man's league, every dry-skinned contestant takes the saliva test. Yes, the rules are depressing, and don't excuse yourself by telling me Cicero was a senator who delivered the Cataline orations wet in the eye and wet underarm. He wore a toga, and you wear a business suit.

Then there's Anderson

Still, you did well, Eagleton. You almost made it. You escaped Jack Anderson, who

was going to cut you down for his mustard. The two of you hacking it, you toward the second highest office and he toward another scoop. He's not allowed a bad day either, and don't tell us about Dita Beard or ITT, what we want to know is what have you got for us this morning?

Yes, you did well, Eagleton. You can't be blamed for feeling depressed those times. As you said, "I pushed myself terribly, terribly hard," and maybe you snapped out of it and shouted a question at the air: Why do we do this to ourselves?

And rather than answer, you threw yourself at the doctors, as we are told to do, and they said modern medicine has a cure for all emotions. They tranked (cq) you and told you that you were sick, but maybe the real secret was that you never were, that you were well and depressed because you had damned good reason to be, and maybe we had to howl and drag you off the ticket because otherwise the rest of us careering males would fall into depression too.

The last thing you said on the CBS program, you said it retreating into the third person, was about that Week That Was of yours: ". . . I've weathered this week very well, and I think it's been a successful week for Tom Eagleton because he's his own man." Well, if you are, you can relax because then you don't have to cut the mustard any more.

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On the right . . . William F. Buckley Jr.

Some thoughts on abortion

Professor John Noonan of the University of California at Berkeley teaches both law and philosophy, and is among other things an authority on the history of the abortion controversy. Last week, giving his views on abortion in debate with a vigorous campaigner for abortion-on-demand, he confronted the usual question. The usual questions: "If your wife were raped and made pregnant by an insane Indian, wouldn't you desire an abortion for her?" To which Professor Noonan replied calmly that the contingency, so frequently adduced, recalls the aphorism that hard cases make bad law.

He meant by that that legislation ought not as a general rule to attempt to confront extraordinary situations. There are laws against murder, but under certain cir-

cumstances, murder is renamed, and officially excused. Those who approach human contingency with Thomistic appetites to cover every situation, either exasperate, ultimately; or they end their days in futility; or they make bad law.

The Supreme Court, confronting outrageous behavior by the police in searching the home of Mrs. Mapp, gave us: not a mere reversal of the particular conviction of Mrs. Mapp, a discrete thunderbolt of judicial indignation. No, they gave us a thing called Mapp vs. Ohio, which categorically forbids a trial court to consider any evidence that was discovered in the course of an illegal search. Thus tradition was overturned, and unconvicted crime soared—indeed, a hard case made for a bad law.

Professor Noonan and others who oppose abortion-on-demand ought not to be made to justify their opposition to abortion on what-would-you-do-if grounds. On a famous occasion, defending the cause of pacifism, Lytton Strachey was asked at the Oxford Union debate in the thirties that put Oxford down as resolved not again to fight for King or country, what would he do if he entered his house and found a burly creature attempting to rape his wife? "Why," said Strachey, "I suppose I should try to come between them." Better an ad hoc solution here, than one that seeks to incorporate universal law.

The point about abortion is whether the state should sanction routine abortion. That, at least, is essentially the point being considered in the various states where the

abortion laws are currently under review. There are laws against mercy-killing. It is, nevertheless, a well known fact, if not a highly discussed one, that doctors, in hopeless cases, occasionally pull out the tube.

Even so, we stand as a society committed to the notion that old people should be, as a general matter, secure against licentious euthanasia, and to that end there is appropriate legislation. It is Professor Noonan's feeling that the tide is slowly turning. Not towards abortion, but against it: that the moral insights of an alert community are gradually awakening to the fact that a well-developed fetus is a human being, as defenseless, as parasitic, as the nonegenarian, but like the nonegenarian, a human being nonetheless.

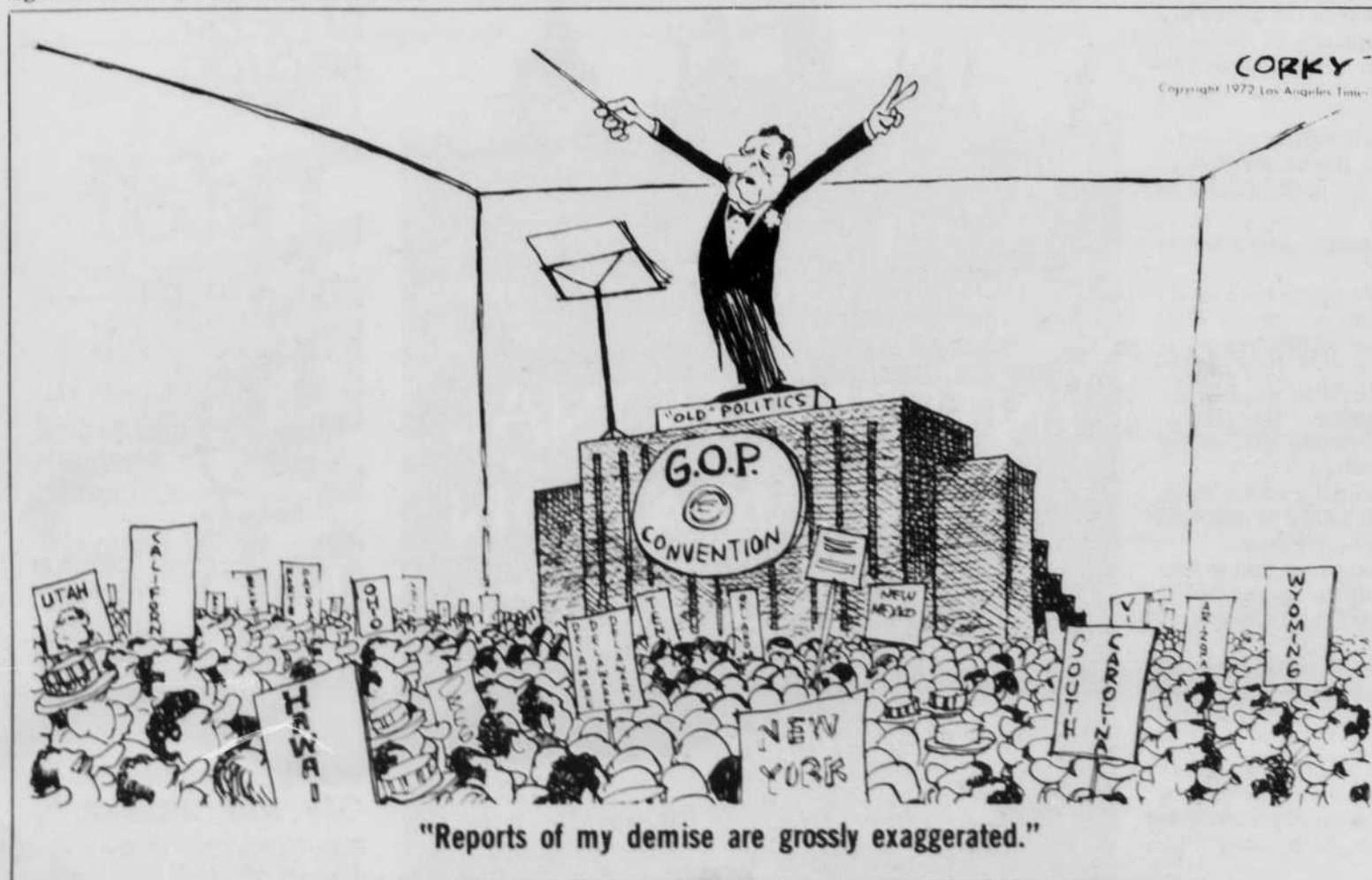
Granted the biological debate will continue, on the question of at exactly what point is it reasonable to assume that life has entered the fetus ("ensoulment," they used to call it). About this matter there is disagreement, though continuing research seems to point to earlier "life" rather than later life. Here again we must consider the matter whole. The case against the human-ness of old people who have lost their power to think, to control their movements, to experience pain except nervously, could be made if one disdains the central assumption which is that we deal with human life. A fetus is a human life, Professor Noonan contends.

And he reminds us of the very distinguished Americans who not much more than one hundred years ago quite literally believed that the Negro people were not human. That they were therefore a species apart, to be bought and sold, separate or bred, for the convenience of their owners.

The mother is nowadays thought of, by the modernists, as the owner of the fetus in the sense that a slavemaster was the owner of a slave. Wrong both times. There is no reason, Professor Noonan believes, to be pessimistic about the discovery of the rights of a fetus. We are, after all, only one hundred or so years from discovering the rights of Black men.

It is an eloquent insight.

Monday August



"Reports of my demise are grossly exaggerated."