

Elephants & Donkeys by Kathleen Klenetsky

FEC gives special handling to Hart

The Federal Election Commission is once again displaying its political biases in a most blatant fashion. In a move which even FEC staffers concede was way out of line with ordinary practice, the commission on Dec. 28 declared Gary Hart's revived presidential campaign eligible for federal matching funds, with the first installment of \$100,000 dispensed Jan. 4.

Usually, the FEC takes at least three to four weeks following a submission to decide whether the campaign in question qualifies for matching funds. In the case of candidates whom the FEC doesn't approve of politically, notably Democrat Lyndon H. LaRouche, the commission has failed to act for months. But with Hart, the commission rushed through its approval in seven days—three working days—after Hart submitted his request.

The FEC's 6-0 decision in Hart's favor came "somewhat quickly," commission spokeswoman Karen Finucan admitted, but another long-time FEC observer was more blunt: "It looks like they attached a retro-rocket to the submission, and used Donna Rice as fuel."

The FEC's exceptionally speedy decision to dole out matching funds to Hart won't simply benefit him money-wise. It will also guarantee him ballot status in states where the Democratic

Party requires that a candidate be eligible for matching funds before being granted a place on the ballot. Indeed, the FEC just happened to hand down its pro-Hart ruling one day before one such state party, South Dakota's, made its final decision on who would be on the ballot in the Feb. 24 primary.

As a result of the FEC's inequitable actions, Hart now has a place on the ballot, but LaRouche does not. Making the political nature of the situation even more obvious, South Dakota party officials decided to bend their rules, and give Jesse Jackson ballot status, even though Jackson's matching-funds request was still in doubt.

Hart to open door for Cuomo?

The FEC's actions vis-à-vis Hart strongly suggest that there is a powerful faction behind his political resurrection—notwithstanding the nasty comments emanating from the media and Democratic Party officialdom.

There are several possible reasons Hart was inserted back into the race, among them, to draw votes from LaRouche. Hart's recent emphasis on the "power of ideas," and his attacks on the media and the establishment, are a rather obvious, if superficial, attempt to mimic LaRouche's appeal, and to draw the vast "undecided" vote—which is LaRouche's vote—behind him.

Another reason is to permit one or another of the major "non-candidates," e.g., New York Gov. Mario Cuomo or New Jersey Sen. Bill Bradley, to take the nomination. The idea is that Hart's presence would prevent any of the candidates from making a significant showing in the primaries, leading to a brokered convention.

This prospect was underscored by

Richard Gardner, a prominent New York lawyer who was ambassador to Italy under Jimmy Carter. Gardner also sits on the board of the Aspen Institute, the powerful think tank which played a major role in creating Hart's political career through its "Young Leaders" program.

Gardner recently told a caller that, although he was backing Al Gore's candidacy, because the Tennessee senator is "tough enough" to force through "hard choices and sacrifices" in domestic and military spending, "I'm also very close" to Cuomo, and would be "delighted" if the New York governor were to get into the race.

Hart's candidacy, he stressed, makes a brokered convention much more likely.

"The convention wouldn't have to turn to Cuomo, but they very easily might draft him, with Gore as vice president." Gardner pronounced a Cuomo-Gore ticket "fabulous . . . a dream come true."

Although Cuomo is still playing coy about his intentions, he told the Dec. 18 *New York Daily News* that in the wake of Hart's announcement, "a lot of Democrats from around the country" had been calling him to beg him to get into the race. "It's a good feeling," he gloated.

But none of this can eliminate the skeletons in Cuomo's closet—which are rattling with a vengeance. In the latest episode in the "Mafia Mario" saga, Cuomo's wife Matilda's cousin was killed Dec. 15 in Sicily, in what the Italian media called "a Mafia-style execution."

Matilda's family has been the focus of numerous probes into alleged links to organized crime, and while Cuomo has heatedly denied any such ties, the prospect of them coming to light is one of the primary reasons he has hesitated about entering the presidential race.