

# Hysteria may sink North's Senate bid

by Nancy Spannaus

"Loose lips sink ships," used to be a cautionary motto for the U.S. Navy, but it looks as though it might be required at the Oliver North for Senate campaign in Virginia. The candidate's statements in early October have increasingly gotten him into such hot water, including with his traditional constituency, that some pundits are beginning to say that he's on the way down. The more frenzied North gets, the more trouble he creates for himself.

The biggest error North made, began with his initial comment about President Clinton's military deployment to the Persian Gulf. "The hollow military that Bill Clinton has created with the help of [Senate incumbent] Chuck Robb has tempted despots like Saddam Hussein to go beyond where they know they should go," North said on Oct. 9. When Robb, Sen. John Warner (R-Va.), who is supporting North's independent opponent, and others challenged North's implication that the U.S. military had been so damaged that it couldn't stand up to the Iraqi military, North compounded the error. "Clinton is not my commander-in-chief," the Republican candidate quipped.

That comment brought down editorial attacks from all the major newspapers in the Norfolk and Richmond areas. Even the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, the voice of the Virginia families who support North, criticized their hero. Their most trenchant prose went as follows:

"Some of Clinton's critics behave as though they would prefer that he fail when defending the country's vital interests. The administration's defense policies remain open to vigorous debate. But allowing rank partisanship and personal animosity to undermine any President's constitutional authority serves the nation ill."

Message delivered? It's hard to say whether anything is getting through to the high command of the North campaign at this point.

## Thin-skinned, and then some

North was treated for psychiatric problems in 1974, after his return from Vietnam, and he refuses to release his medical records. Various military spokesmen familiar with his career have implied that those problems were responsible for his failure to be promoted to the rank of general.

Others, such as his Democratic opponent Sen. Charles Robb, have simply emphasized North's apparent inability to tell fact from fiction. Robb has referred to North's statements as belonging to the realm of "Ollie's world," but has stated that he is not speaking "clinically."

It is indeed the case that North lies almost compulsively, not only about major issues, such as his role in cocaine trafficking with the Contras, but also on the smallest of personal matters—like the history of his immigrant grandfather. Whether North is consciously lying about all these things is not known.

But what is clear is that North does not react well to being caught in his lies. He has been increasingly fumbling since an Oct. 4 appearance at a Northern Virginia high school, when he contradicted his own sworn testimony by saying he never lied to Congress. Chastised by his handlers, who told him only to answer questions on the subjects specified in advance, North took to flailing rhetorically against the President.

Unstated, but obviously related to North's hysteria, is the wide circulation of material on his Contras' cocaine trafficking, and other crimes, by the Defeat That Son-of-a-Bush Committee. The SOB Committee has been running up to 200 sixty-second spots per week exposing North's role with cocaine, and has circulated more than 500,000 pieces of literature on the subject. North's base is beginning to ask questions, and the former lieutenant colonel is trying to dismiss them. So far, only the protection racket being run by the major TV networks and other media outlets—which have suppressed the cocaine story—has prevented North from having to publicly face the music.

## It won't work

Some strategists at the North campaign apparently think that they can evade the serious charges against their candidate as a liar and organizer of cocaine trafficking by the Contras, by simply identifying the charges as coming from Lyndon LaRouche. This is not likely to help him. Many populists in North's base actually support LaRouche's anti-establishment fight, but have been conned by North's slick and very well-financed propaganda barrage.

His press secretary Mark Merritt even went on Washington radio on Oct. 9 to claim that the political committee founded by opposition Republicans is run by LaRouche. "Quite simply, Woody Holton is a frontman for the Lyndon LaRouche political operation. I think it's time he owned up to it.

"There have been reports of Woody Holton and Clean Up Congress getting substantial funds from the Lyndon LaRouche organization, although it's not reported on their federal reports."

This is an absurd lie, but then, that's nothing new for the North campaign. What is new, is just how nervous the North camp has become.