

Dick Hughes and the 1968 Vice Presidency

In 1968, Governor Richard J. Hughes was being talked about as potential vice-presidential candidate. He was garnering national press attention from media heavyweights like David Broder of the Washington Post who in July 1967 wrote:

Until last month, when millions of Americans became at least dimly aware of Hughes as the kewpie doll-looking man who welcomed the President (Lyndon Johnson) and Soviet Premier (Aleksei Kosygin) to Glassboro, he was known outside his own state only to that small circle of men to whom government and politics are a full-time concern. But within that circle, Dick Hughes has a reputation that is 10-feet tall.

Terry Sanford, the former Governor of North Carolina who has just completed a massive two year study of the states, remarked recently that, 'Dick Hughes is running the best state government in the country.' That judgment is echoed by Johnson administration officials.

What is particularly impressive about Hughes' record in New Jersey is his effort to focus state government concern on the two major domestic problems of our time, urban life and education.

Those who remember Hughes' bid for the vice presidency include Joe Katz, a former special assistant to the governor. The following is an excerpt from an interview with Katz, who served in 1968 as a public relations director for the Democratic State Committee. He was also Hughes' press secretary during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

At the convention, Hughes served as Chairman of the Credentials Committee. The Committee was presented with two delegations from both Mississippi and Georgia - one from the regular Democratic organization that was all white and one that was all black. The Committee, led by Hughes refused to seat the regular Democrats and instead credentialed the black delegation. It caused a furor and resentment from Southern governors.

At the 1968 Convention in Chicago, Governor Hughes was on the short list to be Hubert Humphrey's running mate.

Q. Take us back to 1968. Give us a sense of what the factors were, and who the players were, that put Dick Hughes into play as a vice presidential candidate.

A. Well, he was very close to Lyndon Johnson and I don't know if the president called him, or somebody very close to him, and they made him chairman of the Credentials Committee, which was a tough job because you had all these disputes. Blacks were

trying to gain access, or better access - and they were entitled to it - than they had in the past. In 1964, when the convention was in Atlantic City, we had the first real effort in that direction. There was Aaron Henry, who was the leader of an all-black delegation from Mississippi. He couldn't get into that convention. And Hughes met with him and seemingly placated him a little bit. But in '68 this thing was much enlarged. In fact, before the convention started a black dele-

gation replaced an all-white delegation in Mississippi. Again, I don't know if the Credentials Committee that did it or it was decided before. That was a given. The big fight was, I believe, over the Georgia delegation. And there was a lot of back and forth on that. The Credentials Committee under Hughes achieved some sort of Solomon-like balance. They broke up the duly elected delegation — duly elected in a discriminatory primary. I remember Julian Bond who is still a figure — he's now the chairman of the NAACP — he was then a young state senator, he was among those seated. Ironically, when he got up on the floor, he gave great credit to Gov. Harold Hughes of Iowa. (Laughs.) We were a little upset about that. He got a little mixed up. So Hughes was a factor because the Credentials Committee went out about a week before the other committees. It was tough going — a lot of debates, a lot of arguments. Hughes presided with his geniality, wit and ability. He got the party through a tough process like that.

Q. So was that what put him into play as one of the vice presidential contenders?

A. I think so. Hughes was a big factor. About a week before everything else started, a week before the convention got going he was the center of all the attention because of all the debates were about credentials. ...Humphrey was by that time the preordained candidate and he and Hughes had some discussions, whether via telephone or otherwise. And we were in constant touch through (Bob) Burkhardt and through Humphrey's people. I remember one was Dave Pryor of Arkansas, he later became a senator. He was then a young Congressman there. He was the key liaison between Humphrey and Hughes, mainly through Bob Burkhardt.

Q. Who was Bob Burkhardt?

A. Bob Burkhardt was the Democratic State Chairman, Secretary of State, and had been used as campaign manager. He was the best



Governor Richard J. Hughes

and best-known political operative in New Jersey.

Q. Had Hughes gained a national reputation prior to the Credentials Committee?

A. Oh yeah, we were shooting for the vice presidency. I prepared a little brochure. It was pretty amateurishly done, considering what you see today, about Hughes. He was a highly regarded governor. David Broder, who was already established, called Hughes '10-feet tall.' When Hughes ran in '63 he was an unknown. *Time Magazine* had said, 'Who's Hughes?' But we got elected. He ran against a nationally famous Republican. He was elected a year after Kennedy and it was a big upset too. He defeated Eisenhower's Secretary of Labor James Mitchell, heavily favored. He became a pretty big figure nationally in the Democratic party. He was always a loyalist. He was loyal to Kennedy. He was loyal to Johnson.

Q. Did he ruffle some feathers with his Credentials Committee?

A. Absolutely. That's what cost him the vice

presidency. I had heard, Hughes told me, I think he got it from Humphrey, that Gov. John Connally of Texas — Johnson's right hand man — represented a delegation of Southern governors who went to Humphrey and vetoed Hughes. We thought it was in the bag the day of the nomination when Humphrey called him up and asked him to come over to his suite. I forget what hotel he was in. We were in the Palmer House. We were exalting. I had visions of traveling around on the vice-presidential train. And it was to tell him he wasn't going to get it. It was going to go to (Edmund) Muskie.

Q. How did he react?

A. He didn't weep or anything, he didn't moan, it wasn't his style. ...

This interview is part of the New Jersey Governmental and Political Oral History Project, a joint venture of the Center for Analysis of Public Issues (CAPI), the Richard J. Hughes Foundation, Inc., and the New Jersey Historical Commission.



A brochure distributed at the 1968 convention introducing Gov. Richard Hughes. The brochure can be found in its entirety on our web site at njreporter.org.