

WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY NEWS SERVICE

lexington, virginia 24450

robert s. keefe

[703] 463-9111, ext. 317

[703] 463-3015

May 3, 1976

LEXINGTON ---- Washington and Lee University's traditional Presidential election-year "political laboratory for the nation," its 16th Mock Convention, gets underway here Friday.

The Mock Convention, always held for the party out of White House power, will seek this year to predict whom the Democratic party's real delegates will nominate in the actual convention this summer in Madison Square Garden.

Put another way, the W&L students -- backed up by an uncanny record for accuracy and massive state-by-state research -- will gauge whether Jimmy Carter has in fact now picked up the momentum to carry him over the top in New York.

There will be a number of nationally prominent authentic Democrats here to watch and participate in the Mock Convention. U.S. Sen. William Proxmire of Wisconsin will deliver the keynote address to the student delegates Friday night; his remarks will be followed by a party platform address by Rep. Donald Riegle Jr. of Michigan.

Sen. Dale Bumpers of Arkansas will speak to the convention Saturday morning, just before Presidential balloting begins. His address is being billed as a "unity" talk.

Both Virginia Democrats who are campaigning for the party's nomination to run for governor in 1977 will also take part in the Mock Convention -- Atty. Gen. Andrew P. Miller and former Lieut. Gov. Henry Howell.

Though the business of the Presidential nomination itself is utterly serious, the W&L extravaganza will, as usual, have all the pomp and glamour of a real national convention as well.

---more---

Proxmire follows a distinguished line of keynote speakers -- including the 1976 front runner, Jimmy Carter, who addressed the Mock Convention four years ago when he was governor of Georgia. Before 1972, Democratic Mock Convention keynoters included former President Harry S Truman and Truman's Vice President, Alben Barkley.

The Washington and Lee Mock Convention has a record of predicting the nominee for the out-of-power party correctly in 10 of its 15 previous efforts -- making it the most accurate college convention in the United States.

The Mock Convention has been wrong in predicting the Democratic nominee only twice in its history -- in 1912 (when it chose Gov. Judson Harmon of Ohio instead of Woodrow Wilson) and in 1972, its most recent outing (when it tapped Sen. Edward M. Kennedy instead of George McGovern).

The Washington and Lee convention operates under exactly the same rules as its national counterpart. Student delegations are bound by primary results to the same extent the real delegations are. In the 15 states which will not have held primaries by the time of the Mock Convention, the students rely on party and media contacts in the states themselves for information about the probable outcomes.

For uncommitted delegates and for later ballots when primary results are no longer binding, the students judge shifts in delegate votes on the basis of their own intense pre-convention research.

It was after the students made their most remarkable right prediction, in 1924, that newspaper pundits labeled the Washington and Lee affair "the political laboratory of the nation." In that year, the collegians deadlocked for 23 ballots, and then compromised on John W. Davis, the former ambassador to Great Britain, president of the American Bar Association and solicitor general of the United States.

Many observers chalked that W&L prediction up to the fact that Davis was a graduate of Washington and Lee and a popular campus figure. They guessed the students were simply tired and wanted the Mock Convention to be over.

But that summer, in New York City, the real delegates deadlocked almost exactly along the lines the students had. And, after a marathon 102 ballots, the weary Democrats did just what the students had prophesied -- they turned to the dark horse non-candidate from West

A gala parade -- with more than 50 floats and six marching bands -- will kick off the convention events Friday. The parade will leave the Lexington High School field at 11:30 and wind its way through the downtown area on Main Street to Washington Street, where it will turn west and proceed to the W&L campus.

Former Lt. Gov. Howell will be the grand parade marshall.

The "convention hall" -- the new basketball arena in Doremus Gymnasium -- will once again be decorated literally to the rafters with bunting, balloons, banners, posters, bunting, flags and the other trappings that uniquely characterize a real political convention.

The first formal session of the convention will begin at 2:30 Friday afternoon, with greetings and welcoming remarks to be extended by Atty. Gen. Miller, currently the highest-ranking elected Democrat in Virginia; W&L President Robert E. R. Huntley; Lexington Mayor Charles F. Phillips Jr., and others.

The Friday afternoon session will also take up matters of credentials, rules and internal convention organization (which, exactly as in a real convention, will in truth have been arranged long in advance, and will simply be officially ratified Friday).

The keynote session which Sen. Proxmire and Congressman Riegle will address is scheduled to begin at 7:30 that evening. During that session the W&L students will also adopt a platform -- though, unlike the nomination itself, no meticulous effort is made to predict what the real party delegates will eventually decide.

Sen. Bumpers will speak to the convention at 9:30 Saturday morning, after which nominations for President will be made and roll-call votes begun. If several ballots are necessary, as they usually have been in W&L Mock Conventions, recesses for lunch and, if necessary, dinner will be taken.

Following the Presidential nomination, the students will pick a Vice Presidential candidate, though accuracy is not the single-minded goal for the Number Two spot as it is with the standard bearer.

All the Mock Convention events are open to the public.

---more---