

## POLITICS &amp; POLICY

# Is Virginia for Ollie-Lovers? Absolutely Not, Say Reagan Aides, Others Opposing Senate Bid

By JAMES M. PERRY

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

ARLINGTON, Va. — Ragtag forces opposed to Oliver North's U.S. Senate bid are desperately seeking a few good men, and women, to attend a convention in June that will nominate the Republican Party's candidate for the job.

The up-in-arms include:

- College kids led by the son of a former Republican governor, loaded with reprints of a damaging anti-North article from the conservative Reader's Digest. They're knocking on doors in northern Virginia, seeking support.

- Ex-Reagan administration officials, including Secretary of State George Shultz and Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci. Alarmed at the North juggernaut, they're writing checks to help Jim Miller, who was President Reagan's budget director and is Mr. North's only significant GOP opponent.

- Dan Carol, a former opposition-research specialist for the Democratic Party. He is burrowing through records and documents, looking for dirt on Mr. North, the former Marine Corps lieutenant colonel who as a National Security Council staffer helped to run a covert arms-supply operation to support anti-Sandinista guerrillas in Nicaragua that was partially funded by proceeds from the secret sale of arms to Iran. Mr. Carol has formed a committee called Operation Last Laugh Independent Expenditure, or Ollie-PAC, to spread the bad news.

- And, finally, Duke, the pill-popping, Wild Turkey-swilling character in the "Doodlesbury" comic strip. He's packing up his assault pistol and heading this way.



Oliver North

the hall won't be big enough to hold everybody. More than 10,000 people may show up, owing to a wide-open selection process and the interest stirred up by Mr. North's candidacy.

Most observers say Mr. North, a shrewd, charming performer on the stump, almost certainly will walk away with the convention's endorsement to oppose the likely winner of the Democratic Party primary, incumbent Sen. Charles S. Robb. But the forces arguing that Mr. North doesn't deserve to be a member of the Congress he admits he lied to are slowly winning some serious points. A Mason-Dixon/Media Research poll taken late last month showed Mr. Robb defeating Mr. North, 49% to 32%; in August of last year, Mr. North trailed by only nine points.

Mr. North, 50 years old, is that rare political candidate who draws either fierce loyalty or ferocious opposition, with hardly anyone in-between. "Ollie appeals to the GOP faithful," says campaign spokesman Mark Merritt. "They know Ollie is a guy who will stand up to the Washington elite and say, 'Stop.'"

But Mr. North is controversial even among GOP stalwarts. Nothing being used against him hurts more than an article by Rachel Wildavsky in the June 1993 Reader's Digest. The title was "Does Oliver North Tell the Truth?" and the answer, unequivocally, was no.

### 'A Credibility Problem'

The story was commissioned by Kenneth Y. Tomlinson, the magazine's editor-in-chief, who served in the Reagan administration as director of the Voice of America. "I'd heard over the years from people who worked with North that he was never what he appeared to be," Mr. Tomlinson says. "There was a credibility problem there. We talked to a lot of people, and they all said they felt he had a seriously flawed character." The Reader's Digest story traced a number of tales that Mr. North has told, big ones and little ones, many of them intimating a closer relationship with Mr. Reagan than loyal Reagan-

loyalist followers, he said the Reader's Digest has joined these other publications — this "pack of media jackals" — in a "vengeful effort to destroy me." He also said it was significant that these attacks had intensified following President Clinton's "plan to allow open homosexuals in our Armed Forces." (Mr. Tomlinson notes that the same edition of his magazine carried an article opposing the Clinton plan.)

The Reader's Digest article has become the principal piece of literature disseminated by door-to-door canvassers, almost all of them college students, for a group called Clean Up Congress that is run by Woody Holton, the son of Virginia's first GOP governor, Linwood Holton. "It's been a very powerful piece for us," says the younger Mr. Holton. "It's especially effective with those Republicans who believe in the Ninth Commandment." ("Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.")

Mr. Merritt, to whom the North campaign refers requests for comment on the stop-Ollie efforts, says Clean Up Congress "has no support among Republican voters. All they've ever done is try to defeat Republican candidates."

### Old Reagan Hands

But the old Reagan hands who are backing Mr. Miller can't so easily be dismissed. They are particularly troubled by his claims on Mr. Reagan's friendship and affection; he was never close to the president, they assert. "There's only one Reagan Republican in this race," says Lyn Nofziger, who was Mr. Reagan's California press secretary and White House political director, "and that's Jim Miller. The

other guy [Mr. North] is not a Reagan Republican. He was never a part of our organization." (Mr. Reagan himself is staying silent on the matter, observing the GOP "11th Commandment," "Thou shalt not speak ill of a fellow Republican.")

The 51-year-old Mr. Miller succeeded David Stockman as Mr. Reagan's budget director, and saw the power of the job diminish, though Mr. Miller, with his boisterous manner and loud whistling, was sometimes hard to ignore. In recent years, Mr. Miller has run Citizens for a Sound Economy, a lobbying group that has fought for low tariffs and low taxes but has come under criticism for some of its tactics. (When the organization claimed that local outposts of such all-American organizations as the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, March of Dimes and American Heart Association had signed on to fight Detroit's push for steep tariffs on foreign minivans, many of the local groups complained they had been misled.)

Mr. Miller's main pitch in his uphill Senate campaign is that he can win in the fall and the controversial Mr. North cannot. He generally avoids taking on Mr. North personally.

That's just what Dan Carol, the veteran opposition-research specialist, is dedicated to doing. Every month or so, his Ollie-PAC issues a new chapter of "Ollie's Follies," in which he examines Mr. North's record. He ships it off to his contributors and to members of the media. While stoutly maintaining that Mr. Carol isn't a serious threat to the campaign, Mr. North's handlers have put together a packet of their own, called "Dan Carol, Mudslinger on the Run."

Mr. Merritt, the North spokesman, says the anti-Ollie forces may make noise and gather media attention, but will be drowned by the pro-North tides that will give their man the nomination come June. "Put all those [anti-North] folks in a stretch limousine," he says, "and send them down to the convention."