

San Francisco Chronicle - November 12, 1991

POLITICIAN TESTS WATERS, GETS COLD / TIDE TAKES A TOLL ON MARIN DEMO

Susan Yoachim, Chronicle Political Writer

But the story that began as "Rice takes the plunge" swiftly became "Is Rice all wet?" as the high tides and chilly water combined to keep Rice away from shore.

The first sign of trouble came when he jumped into the 57-degree water --feet first -- from a boat off East Fort Baker in Marin County.

The second came an hour later. He was less than 200 yards from San Francisco's Fort Point when the tide became too much for him. He took stroke after stroke but got nowhere. A kayaker had paddled along with him, and an exhausted Rice eventually clung to the kayak, which carried him back to the boat, which had trailed him throughout the swim. The boat took him back to Marin, where the trembling Democrat headed for a hot shower.

WISECRACKS

Once his coterie of supporters -- who were nice and dry -- ascertained that Rice, a San Francisco attorney and former Marin County supervisor, was all right, the wisecracks abounded. "I hope the campaign is easier than this," said one Rice backer. A worker for the 1992 campaign quickly shot back, "There will be more sharks in the water then." "It was a gimmick," said campaign manager Paul Kinney, as he watched his candidate struggle to reach the San Francisco shore. Rice, 59, who often swims in the bay, risked hypothermia. His problems started with poor planning when -- it seems -- he consulted a tide book but forgot to figure in the change back to standard time from daylight-saving time. "What this means is that we should watch our timing better in the future",said Kinney. "We just forgot daylight savings time."

Rice was shivering but recovering as he reached the San Francisco Yacht Club in Belvedere, where he was met by supporter Bonnie Winn, who had swum alongside Rice and made it all the way to San Francisco. Rice, in his royal blue Speedo swimsuit, refused to regard his aborted finish as a metaphor for the campaign.

AGAINST THE TIDE

"My theory is that you can go against the tides, and that you can take on all the elements," said Rice, who is trying to succeed representative Barbara Boxer, D-San Francisco/Marin, who is running for U.S. Senate. "And we'll do it again," Rice said, alluding to another attempt at swimming the bay. Kinney also sought to put a good spin on the 1 1/4-mile swim gone awry. "His campaign is about change, and there will be a

change in the way we're going to conduct everything,” Kinney said. “We'll always do things a little differently.”

By announcing for Congress in the Sixth District, Rice joins a crowded field of candidates, none of whom knows where the lines of the district will be because reapportionment has not been settled. The Democrats include San Francisco City Attorney Louise Renne and Mill Valley City Councilman Dick Spotswood. The chief Republican contender is assemblyman Bill Filante of Greenbrae. Although those three have thrown their hats into the ring, no one but Rice has thrown his into the water.