

Scalpel politics: cosmetic surgery

By Karen Feld
Special to The Sun

Washington—There's one subject on which liberal Wisconsin Senator William Proxmire and his conservative South Carolina colleague, Strom Thurmond, would agree—the benefits of cosmetic surgery. Although worlds apart politically, both had hair transplants to improve their images.

Gubernatorial, senatorial and congressional candidates are spending more than a quarter of a billion dollars to produce and purchase television spots for campaigns this year. There are more political ads on television than ever before, and costs are up 25 percent since the last national election, two years ago.

When Abraham Lincoln ran for president, only a handful of people ever saw him. Today, however, TV plays a crucial role in political campaigns, and jet aircraft shuttle candidates to several cities in a single day, allowing them to greet masses of voters.

A candidate's looks do influence voters. And in a youth-oriented culture, people want to look as young as they can for as long as they can.

Regardless of what a politician has to say, if he is physically unattractive, he has to sell a little bit harder.

"Politicians are really actors," said Clyde Litton, a plastic surgeon in Washington. "They are on a big stage up there on the Hill, and they have to look good."

Senator Henry (Scoop) Jackson of Washington, Senator Joe Biden of Delaware, Indiana Representative Andy Jacobs, former secretary of transportation Brock Adams, Arizona Representative John Rhodes, Illinois Representative Tom Railsback and Nebraska Governor Charles Thone and many of their colleagues of varying ages and political persuasion have turned to cosmetic surgery—hair transplants, eye-lifts, or face-lifts.

"Cosmetic surgery helps if it enables people to come across looking more attractive on TV, where physical abnormalities, such as windblown hair, bags under the eyes, or other prominent or

unusual features are clearly on display," said Eric Hume, ABC-TV Capitol Hill correspondent.

"It keeps the viewer from being distracted by a physical countenance, such as Jimmy Carter's teeth. Instead they listen to what you're saying."

Shortly after his 40th birthday, Representative Barry Goldwater, Jr. (R, Calif.), had his eyelids lifted surgically. "One evening I looked in the mirror, and I realized I looked like I did when I woke up that morning. Then I knew it was time," he said.

Another congressman, Representative G. V. (Sonny) Montgomery (D, Miss.), chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, also had an eye-lift. "I feel more comfortable now," Mr. Montgomery said. "It makes me look younger and more attractive. . . . I want to look neat for the people I represent in Washington."

"Cosmetic surgery is something that art and medicine has combined to help people improve the quality of their lives. For the politician to improve his life means to be reelected," said Dr. Harry C. Stein, a Washington cosmetic facial surgeon, whose patients have included high government officials.

According to Dr. Litton, who has nipped and tucked many politicians and their wives before they face cameras, "We form our impressions of what we think of people by just looking at them. Somebody who is unattractive has to overcome a barrier before we like them."

Political television consultants questioned say they have never recommended cosmetic surgery as the only panacea to a fledgling political career.

"But, if I had my choice, I would rather work with a candidate who is good looking," said Charles Black, partner in Black, Manafort and Stone, media consultants.

Bob Squier, Democratic consultant, said looks See COSMETIC, C2, Col. 3

A cosmetically assembled political face: Henry Jackson and Brock Adams eyes, Jimmy Carter teeth and nose, another nose by Joseph Biden, and pursed lips by Barry Goldwater, Sr.



Politicians turn to the scalpel to cut it as candidates

COSMETIC, from C1

don't compensate for lack of substance. "If the candidate has a choice between having an operation on his eyelids or his brain, he ought to go for the latter, rather than the former."

It was aides who urged Senator Jackson to have eyelid surgery a decade ago. In other cases, it is the candidate himself, or his family, who recognize the need. "I had terribly baggy eyes. At the suggestion of my wife and mirror, I had an eye-lift," said Representative Bob Badham (R, Calif.).

Mr. Badham's eye-lift was so subtle, however, that it went generally unnoticed by his constituents from the Newport Beach area of California. He had the surgery performed in Washington during a congressional recess, and then wore dark glasses on the House floor for two weeks to cover his black eyes until they healed. The scar is almost invisible—just a thin line across the fold of the upper lid and another under the lash line.

The results of all this are not just physical, noted plastic surgeon Dr. Diane Colgan, a former Navy commander now in private practice in suburban Washington.

"It's a great mental uplift, an ego builder, to come in and say, 'Look, I don't like these jowls. I don't like this turkey neck. I don't feel as old as I look, and I'd rather not look that way. I want to look better.'"

Dr. Colgan performed Representa-

tive Montgomery's eye-lift and has treated other Washington VIPs. One reason she left the service, she said, is that "the Navy and the U.S. government view plastic surgery as a peacetime luxury that they probably could do without."

"Considering the cost of plastic surgery, it probably is a luxury," admitted Dr. Ronald Cameron, who did Senator Proxmire's hair transplants and then crossed the aisle to do Senator Thurmond's. Male cosmetic surgery candidates seek blepharoplasty (removal of skin that droops over the eyelid) at a cost ranging from \$750 to \$2,500; and hair transplants, costing from \$15 a plug.

Dr. Colgan said many candidates for plastic surgery—particularly vote-needy politicians—consider good appearance essential to professional survival.

"I've got four young children," said Mr. Thurmond, the 80-year-old Judiciary Committee chairman. "I'm older, [getting] along in life—but actually I'm pretty young, so hair transplants add to my physical appearance."

"I think most politicians do it for personal reasons," Dr. Cameron said. "They want to look their best. They don't want to look tired; they don't want to look aged. They feel good; they feel competitive, and they want to project that image."

Aided by the media and such pub-



Bill Proxmire as hair transplant takes root (left); Bill Proxmire today.



lic figures as former first lady Betty Ford who have gone public with their face-lifts, attitudes are changing. Cosmetic surgery is becoming more acceptable to the public, whereas previously it had been restricted to the rich and to the famous—politicians included—because they could afford it and were always being caught by the camera.

Some politicians, however, including Senator Jackson, are still reluctant to discuss their cosmetic surgery openly.

"I'm not embarrassed," said Mr. Thurmond. "You buy a new suit of clothes to improve your appearance. I think this adds to your appearance as

well as protects your scalp from the weather. Now I don't have to wear a hat as often."

Just how much cosmetic surgery actually helps a politician on the campaign trail is still to be determined. "Cosmetic surgery is not the fountain of youth," said Dr. Stein. "But it reduces the effects of time."

"Most people find it's a tremendous advantage ... even if it just makes them feel better about themselves," said Dr. Cameron.

"If that happens, then they're going to project a better image to other people. If the individual himself feels good, then he's going to get the results he wants."