

Politicians turn to surgeons as image falls prey to age

By Karen Feld

WASHINGTON — Observed a leading Democratic speaker at a fund-raising dinner in Wisconsin, "The last time I was here in Milwaukee, Gaylord (Sen. Gaylord Nelson) had hair, and Bill (Sen. William Proxmire) didn't. Now Gaylord is balding, and Bill has hair."

Obviously, several years had passed since his last visit. A Senate veteran of 18 years, Nelson, like so many men at 64, is balding. Proxmire, a youthful 65, hasn't turned back the clock; he was one of the first in the United States Senate to seek hair transplants.

When Abraham Lincoln ran for President, few persons ever saw him. Today, TV plays a crucial role in political campaigns. So does modern technology; jet aircraft shuttle candidates to several cities in a single day, allowing them to greet masses of voters at each. Such mobility was impossible years ago.

A candidate's looks influences voters. We don't want someone who represents us in Congress or in the White House to look dissipated or tired. After all, none of us wants to look that way. Our culture is youth-oriented; people want to look as young as they can for as long as they can.

A comment often heard in this year's presidential campaign is, "You've got to be kidding — you'd vote for Ronald Reagan? He's going to be 70!"

POLITICIANS WANT to look younger and better, for personal reasons and for their constituents, and they feel the competition with younger opponents and colleagues.

Many politicians have turned to cosmetic surgery.

"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," says Rep. Barry Goldwater Jr. (R., Cal.) Shortly after his 40th birthday he had his eyelids lifted surgically. His eyelids had blurred his sight, but that was only part of the reason for the surgery.

"I'm interested in looking good for political

reasons as well as personal reasons," says the bachelor congressman.

Another bachelor, Rep. G. V. "Sonny" Montgomery (D., Miss.), also had an eyelift.

"I feel more comfortable now," he says. "It makes me look younger and more attractive. I want to look neat for the people I represent in Washington."

"We form our impressions of what we think of persons by just looking at them," says Dr. Clyde Litton, a Washington plastic surgeon. Litton has nipped and tucked many politicians, their wives, and other high government officials before they have faced the cameras.

"The better-looking we are, the more we're going to be liked by a bigger volume of people," Litton says. "Unattractive persons have to overcome a barrier before you like them."

REGARDLESS OF what a politician has to say, if he is physically unattractive, he has to sell a little bit harder. The nature of campaigning has changed. It's no longer just a matter of stumping.

"Politicians are really actors," Litton says. "They are on a big stage, up there on the Hill, and they have to look good."

Litton says one in every six of his patients is a man. Men most frequently seek eyelid surgery (removal of skin that droops over the eyelid) and hair transplants, he says.

Aside from performing surgery on many candidates, Litton has done cosmetic surgery, from eyelifts to tummy tucks, on wives of presidential and senatorial candidates.

The results are not just physical, notes plastic surgeon Diane Colgan, a former Navy commander, in private practice in suburban Washington.

She says, "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.'"

Colgan performed Montgomery's eyelift, recently removed a growth on Elizabeth Taylor's face, and has treated other Washington VIPs. One reason she left the service, she says, 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," she adds. An eyelift in the Washington area may cost \$1,200 to \$1,500; a facelift, \$1,200 to \$2,000. Hair transplants are about \$15 a plug, and several hundred plugs may be needed. However, insurance often covers the cost of the upper eyelids if the vision is partially obstructed.

MANY PERSONS, particularly vote-needy politicians, consider good appearance essential to professional survival, she says. Others see their face "as one's passport to continue their

lifestyle and do the things they always have done."

"I've got four children, and the youngest is 4," says Sen. Strom Thurmond (R., S.C.), 77. "I'm older along in life, but actually I'm pretty young, so hair transplants add to my physical appearance." He had 250 plugs transplanted during six months in 1970 by Dr. Ronald Cameron, who also did Sen. Proxmire's transplants.

"Most (politicians) do it for personal reasons," Cameron says. "These same persons, if they were in business situations or legal situations, would come to the same decision that 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."

"The level of vanity is the same whether it's someone in the public eye, Congress, the military, or a housewife," Colgan says. A housewife may not be highly visible publicly, she says, but "if she doesn't like what she sees in the mirror, then she seeks out some way to improve that. If that makes her feel better, that's the whole name of the game."

Aided by the media and such public figures as former First Lady Betty Ford who have gone public with their facelifts, attitudes are changing. Cosmetic surgery is becoming more acceptable to the public.

Initially, cosmetic surgery was restricted to the rich and celebrities, later to politicians, because they could afford it and were always being caught by the camera.

Many, such as Sen. Henry M. "Scoop" Jackson, (D., Wash.), are reluctant to discuss their cosmetic surgery openly, but some will.

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

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

THE BEST eyelift is a subtle one.

"I had terribly baggy eyes," says Rep. Bob Badham (R., Cal.) "At the suggestion of my wife and mirror, I had an eyelift." The surgery, common in the Newport Beach, Cal., area, which Badham represents, went unnoticed by his constituents. The scar is almost invisible — a thin line across the fold of the upper lid and another under the lash line. The surgery was performed in Washington during the congressional recess, then Badham wore dark glasses on the House floor for two weeks until his black eyes healed.

Eyelifts often go unnoticed. But some congressmen and senators who have no intention of telling persons about their surgery, forget while making a point during speech and take off their dark glasses. Then colleagues notice and ask the origin of the black eyes.

Hair transplants are not so easily concealed; it usually takes a year for the hair to grow to the desired length.

THE PLASTIC SURGEONS interviewed handle most of the politicians who seek cosmetic surgery in Washington. More and more, not only politicians but also persons in all other walks of life will seek these procedures, they say.

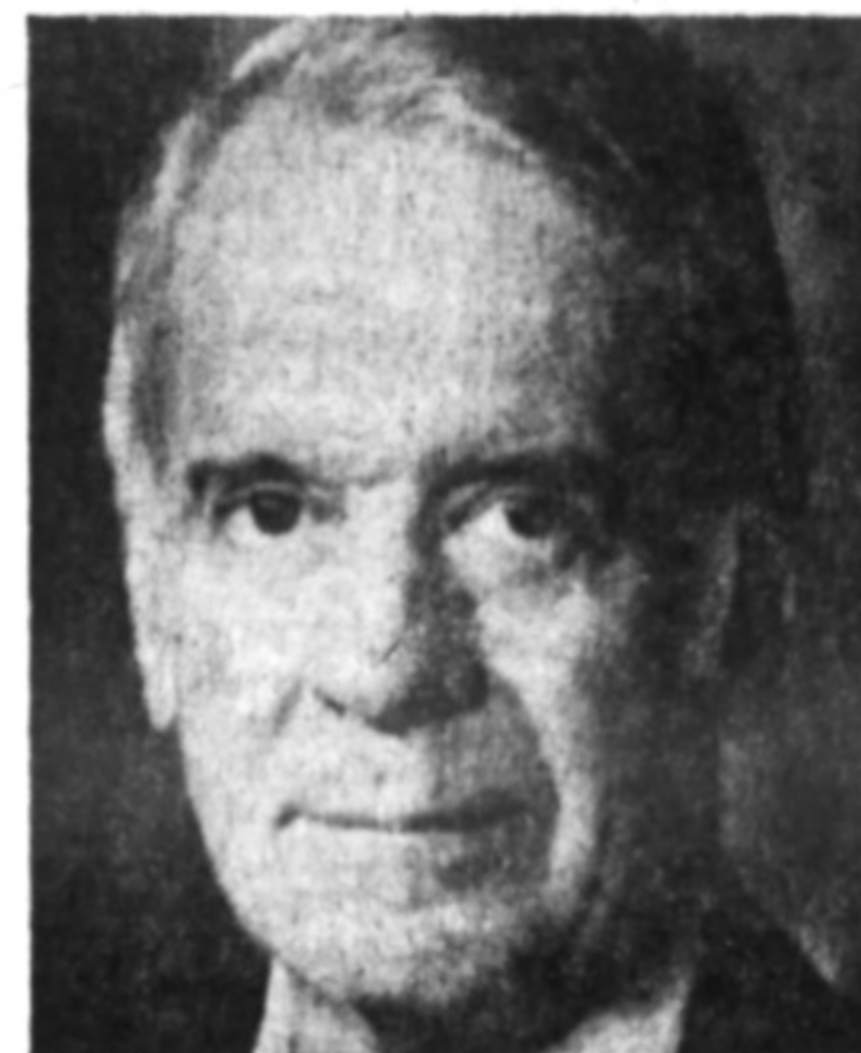
But any surgical procedure has an element of risk. No one can wave a magic wand and have beautiful results a few days later.

How much cosmetic surgery helps a politician on the campaign trail still is to be determined. But, Cameron says, "Most persons will find it will be a tremendous advantage, even if it just makes them feel better about themselves. That's what you really want."

"I want them to come out just feeling better because of the way they look," he says. "If that happens, then they'll project a better image to others. If the individual himself feels good, then he'll get the results he wants."

That result might just be a ticket to Washington.

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The story of roots: "Before" photos of senators Thurmond (far left) and Proxmire (far right) with their transplanted selves (insets). Above, U.S. Rep. "Sonny" Montgomery in his baggy-eyelid days (top) and after surgery.