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Counseling Dukakis



Bart Fisher

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Dukakis, With Few Promises, Recruits Diverse Trade Experts

BY GREG RUSHFORD

With the same relentless efficiency that has marked his drive for the Democratic presidential nomination, Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis has assembled a group of Washington trade gurus to supply policy advice for the fall campaign.

Although Vice President George Bush is sure to harp on Dukakis' inexperience in foreign policy, international trade is one subject Dukakis has already confronted on the campaign trail. Trade was initially the centerpiece of Rep. Richard Gephardt's campaign, and the Missourian once assailed Dukakis for vacillating on trade issues.

In the upcoming California primary on June 7, Dukakis is likely to be confronted by trade issues once again. The state's high-tech economy has been beleaguered by Japanese competition. Meanwhile, California's agricultural interests have been seeking to expand their exports and break down foreign trade barriers.

In preparation for the California primary and beyond, the Dukakis campaign has turned to a coterie of high-powered Washington lawyers and lobbyists to undertake the politically sensitive task of fleshing out the candidate's trade policy.

For general political advice, Dukakis has tapped such political stalwarts as Richard Moe, a former chief of staff to then-Vice President Walter Mondale and now managing partner of D.C. office of New York's Davis Polk & Wardwell, and Stuart Eizenstat, who directed President Jimmy Carter's domestic-policy staff and is now a partner at the D.C. office of Atlanta's Powell, Goldstein, Frazer & Murphy.

Steering Through Rice Field

Dukakis has also quietly expanded his circle of trade advisers to include some lesser-known but well-connected Washington insiders.

Bart Fisher, 45, a partner in Patton, Boggs & Blow, is helping steer Dukakis through such touchy California political issues as what to do about Japanese barriers to California-produced rice.

Dukakis has also sought out Gary Horlick, 41, an international-trade partner in



Bart Fisher of Patton, Boggs & Blow put Dukakis' aides in touch with the top Washington lobbyist for the Rice Millers' Association.

the D.C. office of Los Angeles' O'Melveny & Myers who was deputy assistant secretary of commerce for import administration from 1981 to 1983.

Horlick declines to comment on his work in the Reagan administration or on his own views on trade. But he is in a position to provide Dukakis with a wealth of information about how the administration's trade bureaucracy has functioned.

Other Dukakis trade advisers include Theodore Moran, a professor of international business at Georgetown University, and Henry Owen, a former high-ranking State Department official.

"We do try to reach out widely, and in the trade area in particular we have turned to practitioners, including lawyers, who know how things actually work," says Christopher Edley, a Harvard Law School professor who directs Dukakis' issues staff.

The trade specialists are working closely with Dukakis' chief foreign-policy adviser, Madeline Albright, 50, a professor of international relations at Georgetown University and a former aide to Carter National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski.

Helping to coordinate the activities of the trade advisers is Williams & Connolly associate Victoria Radd. Radd, 31, on leave from the firm to work for Dukakis, formerly clerked for Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and worked in the 1984 vice-presidential campaign of Geraldine Ferraro.

"It is important for people to realize Dukakis has a working network in Washington," says Frank Sieverts, a Senate Foreign Relations Committee aide who has been a friend of Dukakis since they roomed together at Swarthmore College. "He is well-wired, and unlike Jimmy Carter, Dukakis has never run against Wash-

ington," Sieverts adds.

Unlike the 1984 Democratic nominee Mondale, Dukakis has so far avoided the perception that he panders to special-interest groups on trade. Dukakis has said consistently that he sees no need for new comprehensive trade legislation.

The Dukakis trade advisers downplay their roles in the campaign. But Fisher was willing to speak about one instance in which he—and one of his clients—assisted Dukakis' staff in shaping trade policy.

The episode is revealing in two ways. First, it shows how a Washington lawyer by virtue of his access to officials or candidates, can influence public policy in a manner potentially beneficial to a client.

Second, it shows how Dukakis has tapped the resources of some special-interest groups without making explicit promises or becoming beholden to them.

Fisher says he met earlier this month in Boston with issues director Edley, who was busy preparing briefing books for Dukakis on trade issues in California.

After the meeting broke up, Fisher was stopped by one of Edley's deputies, Thomas Kalil. The Dukakis staffer wanted to know whether Fisher could provide the campaign with some help on trade policy involving rice.

'Get It From Gabbert'

Fisher knew the ideal contact for Kalil: Stephen Gabbert, the chief Washington lobbyist for the Rice Millers' Association who happens to be a longtime Fisher client. His other clients include the American International Automobile Dealers Association and Ralston Purina Inc.

"I made it clear I hadn't come to Boston to push any client's interest," says Fisher. "I said I have represented these guys for 15 years. Don't get it from me, get it from [Gabbert]."

Relates Gabbert: "I was called by the Dukakis campaign staff, and I promptly sent up our file."

California is one of the world's largest rice producers, and the state's rice farmers are eager to export to Japan. But Japan's rice lobby is among that nation's most powerful, and Japan allows virtually no imports of rice.

In 1986, Gabbert and Fisher made front-page headlines in Japan when the Rice Millers' Association asked the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) to investigate Japanese market barriers to U.S. rice exports. Although sympathetic to the pleas of Fisher and Gabbert, U.S. Trade Representative Clayton Yeutter declined to

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launch a probe. Instead, Yeutter decided to pursue negotiations on rice in multilateral trade talks.

"Japanese housewives are now beginning to realize it is not in their interests to pay up to 10 times the world market price to protect their rice lobby," says Gabbert. "This is information the Dukakis campaign should have."

Gabbert was not the only rice expert consulted by the Dukakis campaign. A Dukakis aide says the campaign also got in touch with the California State World Trade Commission and with the state's congressional delegation.

No Wild Rice Promises

True to his cautious political instincts, Dukakis has avoided a firm promise to do anything in particular on rice. Issues director Edley sidesteps the question.

"I think he would be more aggressive as president with respect to rice while recognizing that rice provides special political problems for the Japanese," Edley says.

But Rep. Robert Matsui (D-Calif.), the first Congress member outside Massachusetts to endorse Dukakis and the co-chair of Dukakis' California campaign, is more direct.

"I have talked to him on rice, and I can speak for him on this issue," says Matsui.

"He believes Japan has to open their markets, and there is no question he will move aggressively on rice."

Matsui's confidence notwithstanding, a Dukakis adviser says the candidate has made no binding commitments to take up the Rice Millers' unfair-trade petition or to



Michael Dukakis is getting advice from free-trade advocates as well as from supporters of retaliation against foreign nations.

Last November, Fisher won a favorable ruling from an International Trade Commission administrative law judge in a dispute involving allegations of unfair trade practices against Japanese electronics giant Canon Inc.

But Fisher's client, a Massachusetts-based maker of ink-toner for office copying machines, lost the fight when the Reagan-appointed ITC overturned the decision this February.

"This is one more illustration that the Reagan trade policy is a total failure," Fisher complains.

Issues director Edley cautions against "having people infer what the governor's positions will be based on who the advisers are." But it is clear that the campaign has recruited a savvy, experienced group of trade experts.

"He has the right instincts on trade issues," says conservative Republican political consultant David Keene, who was ousted from the presidential campaign of Sen. Robert Dole (D-Kan.). "But trade can be a double-edged sword for the Democrats, as Richard Gephardt found out," Keene warns.

A Dukakis adviser says the candidate has made no binding commitments on the rice issue.

say what diplomatic pressure he would exercise.

"The best thing of all is that the candidate hasn't actually promised to do anything that will close his options if he is elected. That's smart," says this adviser.

Favoring Free Trade?

Eisenstat, Fisher, Horlick, and other Dukakis trade advisers decline to reveal much about what they are telling the candidate. But their recent experiences as lawyers suggest that they are free-trade oriented.

For instance, Eisenstat and Horlick together lobbied successfully earlier this year to knock an anti-dumping provision aimed at Japanese exporters—but potentially affecting every dumping case—out of the omnibus trade bill. Eisenstat's client was Hitachi Ltd. and Horlick represented the Emergency Committee for American Trade, a group of large U.S. exporters.

At the same time, some Dukakis advisers, including Fisher, are highly critical of what they view as the Reagan administration's unwillingness to be tough in enforcing existing laws against unfair foreign practices.

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