

Statement by

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1972 promises to be an unusual election year. The general election is still a year away, the primary is six months away, and already we have three announced candidates for the Democratic Gubernatorial Nomination. There may be more to come.

This activity is without precedent in modern North Carolina politics and local political leaders are showing a keen interest in the going and coming of the various candidates and their early efforts to organize for next year's election. I do not blame them, for in politics there is something to be said for being in on the ground floor. Quite frankly, though, I have felt all along that we are rushing the season.

For this reason, I personally decided not to be hurried into a decision concerning the 1972 election. I wanted to run on my own schedule and I set about doing just that.

I first discussed the possibilities of 1972 with a host of friends, acquaintances and well-wishers. We talked about whether I should seek re-election to the Office of Attorney General. We discussed the opportunities for service and personal challenge presented by the governorship and the United States Senate. We explored every possible alternative and, all in all, it has been one of the most interesting experiences of my life.

I can say with all candor that I am pleased with the results of various professional polls that have been made. Most of these have shown us leading the field of potential candidates. But nothing pleases me more than the fact that the polls show high voter approval of the job we have done as Attorney General.

Three years ago when we challenged an incumbent, promising to bring new spirit and new meaning to the Office of Attorney General and to make the Attorney General truly the "people's Attorney", we were elected by a significant vote and the polls show that the people believe we have carried out the promises we made them.

Consumer protection, coupled with fair treatment and protection of legitimate business interests in our State, received repeated favorable comments and convinced me that, without doubt, they are established in the minds of our people as indispensable functions of the Office of the Attorney General of North Carolina.

Our efforts to promote law, order and justice ranked high in public opinion. This reflects an understanding and appreciation of efforts to strengthen and modernize the State Bureau of Investigation, to deal realistically with the increasing crime rate and drug abuse, to establish a computerized criminal information system as well as efforts of hundreds of local law enforcement officials at all levels to improve the quality of the criminal justice system in North Carolina.

When we announced as a candidate for Attorney General three years ago, we promised to assure every North Carolinian equal treatment and promote the welfare and best interests of all the people. I am especially pleased with the polls that show we stand in good stead with minority citizens for this means to me that fair dealing has been perceived as fair dealing.

And, finally, the polls show that if we should determine to seek the governorship, we could win. This confirms the opinions of close friends who have met with me frequently during the last few weeks to help me survey the political scene in the State. This confirms the feeling I gathered personally as I visited throughout the State and talked to a host of voters from every walk of life.

Needless to say, I am pleased, and with encouragement from so many sources, a campaign for the governorship appears extremely tempting. But there are other considerations which I, in good conscience, cannot ignore.

I have unfinished work in the Office of Attorney General which I cannot abandon at this time and still keep faith with the people of North Carolina. The next several weeks – the next two or three months, are important ones in my office.

We have a multitude of rate cases pending before the State Utilities Commission which affect, in a very real way, almost every

citizen of this State. Our people must have maximum representation before the Commission.

Our Organized Crime Council is just beginning to function and needs direction and assistance. We cannot allow this effort to founder from indirection at this time.

The Police Information Network, after two years of planning and implementation, is just beginning to function as a system. This system is the greatest giant step forward in the history of law enforcement in North Carolina, in my opinion, and will demand constant attention during the coming weeks. It must become so efficient that there is no danger it can fail. We must make sure it does not.

In September, we hired twelve new attorneys. They are bright, energetic, enthusiastic and among the most capable in the State. They give to our Staff a whole new dimension and provide unlimited opportunities for more effective service to the people of the State. But their coming presents a major period of transition for the Staff. We must make sure that this period of transition is smooth and the talents of these people are developed and used effectively.

It is as obvious to me as it is to you that I cannot do these things and undertake at the same time a campaign for Governor of North Carolina. In this year's peculiar political climate, I cannot delay a decision until these things are accomplished, as I had once hoped I could. My first duty is to the Office to which I already have been entrusted. I will honor that trust. I shall not be a candidate for Governor of North Carolina in 1972.

My present intention is to seek re-election to the Office of Attorney General of North Carolina. I have no intention of beginning a campaign now because the affairs of my office require my undivided attention. In addition, the Holiday Season is upon us and I hope to spend some time at home with my wife and children.

I have today removed myself as a contender for the governorship. Some time early next year, I will make a formal announcement concerning re-election and then get down to the serious business of another campaign.

In the meantime, I know some speculation will continue. I cannot help that. I do think it only fair that any person who seeks the Democratic nomination for Attorney General at this early date, know there is the distinct probability that I shall be a candidate for that office also.

I realize that this decision will disappoint many of my friends, especially those who have given so generously of their time, effort, and resources to promote me as a candidate for Governor. I owe them more than I can ever repay. But because they are my friends, they know I am following my best judgment and the dictates of my conscience. I know I shall continue to have their support and interest.
