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The Media Report

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INSIDE THE MEDIA

Is the role of the media already becoming a big issue in the 1976 presidential campaign? One network official suggests "there is going to be more scrutiny of the press during this campaign than any other campaign in history". Liberal columnist Joe Kraft calls presidential aspirant Jimmy Carter "the media candidate," warns that the "press and radio and television deflate rapidly what they first inflate" and suggests members of his profession are "minor poets eager to make a name by fragging the majors." Republican challenger Ronald Reagan this past Tuesday accused the press of "deliberate distortion" in covering his \$90 billion tax cut proposal and warned that "public opinion is being molded into an anti-capitalistic mentality." We're finding that the larger news organizations are beginning to recognize the increased importance of the media issue in the current campaign. The New York Times has assigned reporter Joe Lelyveld full time to covering "how the media's coverage or concentration helps define the campaign," according to Times Washington editor Bill Kovach. "It's more than reporting on spending by the candidates on the media--it's our own impact," says Kovach. "We have an early indication that television is not quite as important as we thought. We may have to take a closer look at newspapers," he suggested. Wall Street Journal Washington bureau chief Norman Miller confirmed to MR that reporter Ron Shafer has been assigned to "keep tract of the media coverage in general" during the campaign but it will not be "a full time job." "We're going at it in a more considered way than in the past," says Miller, adding his hope "that between now and the end of the campaign we'll do a half dozen to ten major features on the press and its impact on the election process." Cox newspapers have already focused on what "the networks are going to do" with the election, but according to Capital City bureau chief Dave Kraslow, "we haven't zeroed in on the print press yet." "Most of us are very sensitive to the power we may have in either helping or hurting a candidate," he acknowledged. "We're going to watch television very closely to see if it's exercising any undue influence on the election," says Kraslow. At the Los Angeles Times, we're told, covering the media during the campaign "might be a good idea", but no firm plans have been made. John Foley, assistant managing editor responsible for political coverage, says that the L. A. Times media critic David Shaw will be doing such reporting as a normal routine.

TOM JARRIEL REPORTED:

"President Ford's candidacy is threatened by internal strife among the workhorses that make a campaign go. The erosion is widespread already among the upper level professionals and it is not checked. Jobs paying 20 to 40 thousand dollars a year are being vacated and left open as qualified applicants, including some unemployed, refuse to touch them. In some cases, top talent from government or the private sector work for a few weeks, then move on. Some veteran staffers say they're leaving now because they don't think the President is going to be elected. But most contacted by ABC News are less disillusioned by political prospects than by a disintegration of morale. Some consider their superiors to be incompetent. Most feel, as one put it, that the President has not taken charge of this place. Others complain that the President has reversed himself too often on issues they've worked for. The unhappiness is reflected in many ways. Robert Hartmann, a counsellor with Cabinet rank, has threatened to fire his staff if they discuss with the press personnel changes which would put a joke writer in charge of the President's speechwriting team. About half a dozen speechwriters, unhappy about the prospect of working under a gag writer, have decided to resign. As the pace of the political campaign ^{builds} the President may find himself not only short of speechwriters, but advance men and image-shapers who can be the difference between the making and the breaking of a candidate."