

SUNDAY GLOBE • MARCH 18, 1990

Flynn's image in news media cultivated by selective access

By Steve Marantz
GLOBE STAFF

Day or night, Boston's peripatetic mayor, Raymond L. Flynn, may be found in any of Boston's far-flung neighborhoods, inside coffee shops, fire stations and taverns, or on basketball courts tossing up feathered jump shots.

He may be in his City Hall office downtown or at the city-owned Parkman House on Beacon Hill. He may be in his South Boston home, or in the nation's capital, or on the West Coast. He may be in Ireland or Poland.

Wherever the mayor is, the reporters who attempt to cover him or a regular basis are unlikely to know. Much of the time, Flynn's whereabouts are a mystery to those whose job is to know where he is, and what he is doing.

As a result, there is a Keystone Kops-like aspect to covering the mayor, some reporters say. At critical times, mayoral sightings can be like nine-alarm fires: setting off wild excursions through city traffic or madcap scrambles for the next flight out of Logan Airport.

"We don't know where he is 80 percent of the time," said Joe Sciaffo, the Boston Herald's City Hall bureau chief. "People call us and tell us they saw the mayor here and they saw the mayor there. All I can say is, 'When, where, what did he say?' It's a little embarrassing."

No general news conferences

Flynn is one of the few big-city mayors who does not regularly provide the media with an advance copy of his daily schedule, possibly the only one who does not announce all of his public appearances. In his 1½ terms at City Hall, Flynn has never, in anybody's memory, scheduled a general news conference to address a range of questions.

Flynn's approach is to make himself available on his own terms, which entails taking questions on one or two topics, following public events that occur away from City Hall. But reporters are given no guarantee that Flynn will be avail-



MAYOR FLYNN
"Doing well on his terms"

wagon.

"It is inaccurate to say the media does not have access to the mayor — it would be a disservice to portray that particular notion to the public," Jones said. "Is his style the formal version? No. But it's certainly one that allows for that access."

Jones said the news media are not advanced Flynn's schedule because it changes so frequently, and because any last-minute changes might alert reporters to nonpublic business whose handling may require that it be kept out of the public eye. Jones noted that on most mornings reporters are informed of one or two of the mayor's public appearances for that day.

Raymond C. Dooley, Flynn's administrative services director who plays a key role in media strategy, said that City Hall reporters who complain about Flynn's accessibility are unhappy about having to leave the building and follow Flynn to the neighborhood events for comment.

"For those who go to the events, it's very infrequent they come up with a 'no comment' or no response," Dooley said.

WEEI news editor Phil Sirkin said, "Sometimes they call us two minutes ahead of the event ... I don't understand the rationale behind the lack of a daily schedule. It makes our job more difficult."

Sirkin said that he finds Flynn to be more accessible on a daily basis than Mayor White was but that White compensated by holding periodic news conferences that were wide open.

White's former press secretary, George Regan, recalled that White would sit down occasionally with the entire City Hall press corps and take all questions. But no matter how much White gave them, the reporters wanted more, Regan said.

Insatiable appetite for news

"A lot has to do with the relationship between the City Hall press and the press secretary," Regan said. "Arthur Jones is a very good press secretary. But the job is a no-winner. Because you've got to print every day, and this city has an insatiable appetite for news. The attitude is 'Don't tell me you gave me Kevin and Ray yesterday.'"

A Globe survey of six cities found that the mayors of New York, St. Louis, Atlanta, Chicago and Los Angeles release their entire public schedules to the media a day in advance if possible, and at the least, on the morning of the events. Of the mayors surveyed, only San Francisco's Art Agnos does not release a daily schedule in advance. But Agnos' press office releases his full schedule of public events to reporters requesting it on the morning of the events.

The mayoral offices contacted said that out-of-town travel is announced several days in advance. Flynn, on the other hand, often gives no more than a few hours' notice, as was the case prior to traveling to the West Coast to study crime-related issues last month. Both newspapers were alerted on a Saturday morning of Flynn's imminent afternoon departure, along with Police Commissioner Francis M. Rathe.

Flynn's media style, combining elusiveness and selective availability, has created a widely held perception of him as a publicity hound, a politician who will elbow the next person to get in front of a camera. Flynn fosters this perception by accommodating the print and electronic media on his pet issues.

But on issues that Flynn may consider uncomfortable, such as abortion or his political future, he is likely to, in the sporting argot, run for daylight. Up to now, at least, he has proven to be agile.

"Look at the amount of press he gets," said Martin Linsky, a specialist on press and public policy at the Kennedy School of Government. "It seems like he is doing well on his terms without going through the rituals of press conferences and advance schedules that most politicians have to do."

Event

ch 18th



Y FOR IN. AVAILABLE IN BLACK AND TAUPE.

