

# "A total disorganized mess": How Duke picked Pendleton as his running mate

## AN NBS Election Special Report by Mark Bunn

Sources from within the Alan Duke Presidential campaign have described to NBS how the former Oklahoma Senator came to pick former General Lloyd Pendleton as his Vice-Presidential running-mate two weeks ago.

The information and story given to NBS paints a disorganized campaign, with the nominee himself often unsure what was going. After clinching the nomination at the end of April, Duke made what looked a smart move appointing the former Governor of Nebraska John Moore as the Chair of his VP search team, alongside George Rohr and Campaign manager, Mark Patterson.

In May, the three-man team drew up a "long list of twenty-five possible names" (Pendleton was on this list) which between them was whittled down to a shortlist of ten. These ten would go through the formal vetting procedure (filling out a questionnaire, supplying full financial records, and a search of social media etc), the ten person short-list did not include Pendleton, and this list was put to Alan Duke for his approval (we understand Duke made it very clear that he would not accept the vetting of either North Carolina Governor David McNamara or Utah Governor John Elderton).

### **The Ten person shortlist**

- Sen. Rob Buchanan (VA)
- Former sec. Stephen Kendrick (IN)
- Sen. Ruth Norton-Stewart (OH)
- Sen. Michael Rojas (NM)
- Sen. Barbara Layton (NC)
- Rep. Daniel Abend (KY)
- Rep. Patty King (GA)
- Gov. Art Scheider (OH)
- Radio host Henry Stern (AZ)
- Sen. Sorah Wheeler (AK)

After being formally notified that she was on the short-list, Norton-Stewart called Moore and said she "didn't wish to be included and was focused on winning re-election to the Senate". This led to some panic with Moore speaking to Duke asking him to reconsider vetting Governor McNamara instead of RNS, but Duke point blank refused. This led to nine being formally vetted at this point. Within days of receiving the paperwork back, and reports on the background checks, serious problems were found with Patty King, and Henry Stern. (King answered the questionnaire "like a campaign rally" one person close to the Duke campaign told us), and the fact she had several links with groups described as "conspiracy nuts and Neo-Nazis", Plus searches of Stern's bank records showed he had "gifted thousands of dollars from supporters of his radio show", plus two of his

donors to his failed 2018 Arizona Senate campaign had links to the Russian mafia. Moore attempted to remove him from consideration at this point, but Duke overruled it because he likes him "he is my kind of guy, I like him, he stays". But with King further searches found that she had several close friends who are or were members of different far-right groups, and a picture was found of her in 2014 at the Eagle's Nest, Hitler's Bavarian mountain home exclusively used by Nazi leaders during World War Two, and remarks regarding Hitler and the Nazis " They got many things right, and Hitler saw the threat of communism, a threat we still face today" was found from a search of the internet from 2015. This time, Moore was able to persuade Duke to remove her from consideration.

Then unrelated to the financing questions or past behaviour, Michael Rojas the popular governor of New Mexico was already at the edge of removing himself from consideration. He filled in the vetting paperwork, but almost didn't send it back, according to sources from the Governor's office, he disliked Duke on a personal level, and knows that becoming Duke's running mate would likely mean he would lose re-election if he's tied to Duke in a very Hispanic state. He had been kept in at this point by party loyalty and ambition, but was at the knife's edge, before deciding to call Moore to withdraw his name.

Also, with no news of further interest from the campaign, Rep. Daniel Abend pulled his name from consideration to focus on both his House race and helping the NRCC keep the House.

With all of this the list was now down to six names

- Sen. Rob Buchanan (VA)
- Former sec. Stephen Kendrick (IN)
- Sen. Barbara Layton (NC)
- Gov. Art Scheider (OH)
- Radio host Henry Stern (AZ)
- Sen. Sorah Wheeler (AK)

All six agreed to face to face interviews with Moore, Rohr, and Patterson. Kendrick like Rojas seemed to only be going through the process out of party loyalty. "His heart isn't in it" Moore remarked to Rohr afterwards. Barbara Layton, she said wanted the job "but had serious concerns of Duke previous comments about females, and especially female elected officials" adding "I don't disagree with him on a lot, I think I would be an asset to the campaign, but he (Duke) would have to "dial down" some of his comments". The stern interview was a farce, he turned up half an hour late, with Moore and Patterson believing he was drunk "I made one big mistake after my Senate defeat in 2018, I should never of conceded, I should of claimed the result was rigged or stolen, (he lost by fewer than 4,000 votes), adding that he thought Duke "should not concede the race even if he clearly lost, we could stir up a load of trouble", this was even too far for George Rohr, and he called Duke saying "Stern is out, he is nuts".

Buchanan, Schieder and Wheeler all performed well, and it was these three that the panel recommended to Duke that he met for face to face interviews.

The Duke campaign had always planned to announce the running-mate on Saturday July 2nd, nine days prior to the opening of the convention in Denver on Monday July 18th. That date had been locked in since Duke had won the nomination in April, and as the choices had narrowed down to the final three short-listed candidates, two weeks out from the deadline date, everything seemed on target.

Despite the problems already outlined in part one, in reaching the final three candidates, the three man selection team of Moore, Rohr and Patterson seemed happy, with the final three candidates of Senators Rob Buchanan of Virginia, and Sorah Wheeler (Alaska) and Governor Art Schieder of Ohio. The nominee was clearly going to be one of these three.

On Saturday June 18th, Sorah Wheeler was the first candidate to be personally interviewed by Duke along with Moore, Rohr, and Patterson. Wheeler had been in DC on Senate business, before she was driven to Baltimore and smuggled into a Hotel in Baltimore for the meeting (The rooms having been booked by a Duke donor). Duke liked Wheeler for their brief time serving together in the Senate, he asked her "can I win" she replied "yes, but we would need to make changes to the campaign" and went into a ten-minute speech now she thought Duke could win with her on the ticket. Rohr thought afterwards that based on that interview, it would be Wheeler, but Patterson had concerns "we really need someone who has been a Governor", Moore said "she could do the job, she will be a great attack dog" but a ticket from "Oklahoma and Alaska" didn't "make much sense", but she was clearly in the running. Just over twenty-four hours later, Senator Rob Buchanan of Virginia was in the same room as his Senate colleague. Buchanan according two sources was "tense", again he was asked by Duke did he think he could win "yes, but the polls had to be turned around fast, in the two weeks either side of the convention, or it was over". Buchanan said he agreed with Duke on "most things" but felt he was better "focusing on things that concerned voters, rather than cultural war issues" but said "the re-writing of history especially in Virginia, was having an effect". Moore felt Buchanan wanted to either for governor again in 2025, or the presidency himself in 2026 "he was playing a canny game by keeping himself in the game" Moore is understood to have said afterwards.

Once again just a day later, it was the turn of the third candidate Ohio Governor Art Scheider. On the Sunday evening Duke slipped out of Baltimore on a private plane and flew to Youngstown, Ohio to meet the general turned Governor. Scheider was well prepared, he said he was "ready to serve" and "wanted the job" but said he had "very serious concerns" over Duke's stated policy of withdrawing from NATO "Sir, that would be a mistake, we still need NATO, Russia is still a threat" adding that if the US withdrew it was an "open invite for Russia to invade the Baltic Republics" as well as non-NATO countries such as Finland, Sweden and Ukraine. Scheider also added that he would need some preconditions meeting, including letting Scheider assemble the administration's national defense team. Duke was surprised but said "I like his style". On the Tuesday, Scheider got a call asking him to return to the Hotel for a second meeting, Duke said he was "ready to look at the NATO policy" and would ask Scheider who should be the Secretary of Defense, he suggested Pendleton, which turned out to be a mistake. After almost four hours, Schieder left. In a following two-hour meeting, Moore, Rohr, Patterson and Duke argued it out. Duke said he was ready to offer it to him, Moore wasn't so sure, whilst Rohr sat on the fence. Duke said finally "get him back, I am going to offer him the job". An hour later Schieder returned and was verbally offered the job by Duke, he said "provisionally yes" but he wanted to "talk things through with his wife and kids". Twenty four hours was given. But within six hours Scheider called back saying he needed "some clarifications". The following day, Duke called him and offered him the job once again, but Schieder was blunt "I have changed my mind, I don't think I can do it" and ended the call.

Duke was furious, "what just happened". Moore and Rohr didn't know what to say whilst Patterson said "well we still need a running-mate" offer it to Buchanan, now, and within minutes, Duke was put on the phone with him (without the Virginia Senator knowing of what had taken place with Scheider), was offered the job. Now it was Buchanan's turn to say no "I didn't think I would get offered it, but I am going to have to turn it down". In just two hours Duke had been turned down twice. Now what was the question. Ten days from the announcement day, they still had no running-mate.

Rohr suggested Wheeler, but then Patterson broke into the meeting to say that the Alaska Senator had just e-mailed him to say she was "withdrawing to focus on winning re-election to the Senate". All three short-listed candidates were now out of the running. Moore and Rohr again brought up Governor McNamara of North Carolina, Duke said "no, it will not be him, I don't like him, he is a weak man", they floated names from those who had not made to the original ten, what about Governors Middleton or former Governor Foley of Missouri. Duke agreed, get them to fill in the paperwork, fast, and interview them. Middleton and Foley did interviews over Teams on Thursday and Friday without Duke. Both did well, but Patterson wasn't sure about either of them. Then Duke on Friday June 24th, asked "what about General Pendleton", it seems the suggestion of Schieder that he should be the next Secretary of Defense had made an impression on him. They agreed to get him to do the same process as Middleton and Foley.

Over the weekend of June 25th, just a week to go until the planned announcement, the search team was in a panic. Moore suggested Ethan Butler to Duke on the Saturday, but like McNamara, it was a no, the same when Rohr suggested Senator Max Lobell (who had not even been on the twenty-five-person long list". On the Sunday, Moore said that if they couldn't get anyone else to do the job, he would step and do the role himself, although he felt that it would be a "mistake" and "should only be the last option". On Monday, Duke flew to Minnesota and then onto Iowa. In Minnesota he spoke with Governor Middleton for an hour, "he was unconvinced" an unnamed staffer told NBS, then hours later in Iowa City, he spoke with Lucas Foley, again Duke was not convinced. On the Monday night, Rohr spoke with former Georgia Governor Mike Schofield who had briefly ran for the 2018 nomination, he refused point blank to be vetted, but he suggested Pendleton. On the Tuesday with Duke in Iowa for a second day, a Teams meeting was sent up with Pendleton. "It was a good meeting" Moore said, but Rohr remained uncertain. "I wish he (Duke) would change his mind on McNamara" but then Patterson suggested going back to Ruth Norton-Stewart and asking her to reconsider. Duke agreed. But time was running out and on Wednesday July 29th, an e-mail headed "important announcement" was sent out to the press saying that the announcement which originally was scheduled for Saturday, July 2nd was being moved to Tuesday, July 5th citing "extenuating circumstances."

As soon as the e-mail was sent out on June 29th, moving the "important announcement" back to Tuesday July 5th, it gave the Duke camp just six days to find a running-mate, the Duke campaign was hit by a series of phone calls and texts from senior voices in the party. Chair of the RNC James Ritchie called and had a "heated" phone call with Mark Patterson "get it sorted" was Ritchie's final remark as he ended the call. It was soon followed by the Speaker of the House Mitchell Harris. Harris suggested Norton-Stewart "for fucks sake, George, make her an offer" he told George Rohr, whilst Senate Majority Leader Cody Riley suggested "Norton-Stewart or Ethan Butler, just get sorted before it impacts on the Senate races".

John Moore who had already agreed that if on-one else could be found, he would do the job himself, was still making calls. He spoke to Norton-Stewart twice on the 29th, the second time, she said clearly "I will support him (Duke), he won the nomination, I will speak at the convention, but I don't see how I can help as his running-mate". Early on the Thursday June 30th, Pendleton had formally returned his paperwork, and had a second Teams meeting with Rohr and Moore, with Patterson not present. They remained "unconvinced", "he isn't a team player" Rohr reported back to Patterson and Duke. "That's all well and good, if not him who" Rohr reported the calls from Harris for Norton-Stewart "that's going nowhere" he said, and put forward Riley's suggestion of Ethan Butler" again, Duke turned him down "that doesn't work for me" adding " he will not do it anyway". Other options were suggested, including having the delegates pick the running-mate which Moore said was "risky, who knows who we would get". Duke suggested Stern again, but Rohr made it clear, if he was picked, he would "resign", the same for Patty King who Duke said she had called him twice direct in the past two days "begging for the job". Duke suggesting "can't we overlook the Nazi thing", all three men, Moore, Rohr and Paterson said that would resign if it was her.

On the Friday, (July 1st) Patterson's deputy, Carl Brett, had an idea what about offering it to Jasper Irving in exchange for him withdrawing from the race ahead of the convention. Patterson said it wasn't "the worse idea going" but "Irving would reject it". Brett who went to University with Irving's son from his first marriage, Tim, said he would use him as a "back channel". After calling him, he was told by Tim Irving, he put it to his father but he made it clear "I know what the answer will be". Twenty minutes later, he called Brett back "sorry, Brett, I have nothing against you, mate, but to be honest, I can't even repeat my dad's answer", and that was that. Patterson suggested Congressman Will Durham (who had been on the list of twenty-five", but Brett said Durham's Chief of Staff had already made it clear that he wasn't interested.

On the Saturday, it was clear to everyone that the new date of July 5th was not going to be reached. Duke was campaigning in Pennsylvania, but he joined in on a conference call around 4.PM between events. Duke said that Wesley Burke, the former Governor of Alabama, a big backer of Duke was with him, and had two suggestions, Patterson is said to have mouthed "oh god", he suggested Katie Hodder-Shaw and former Florida Congressman Tom Riddle, Moore replied "no way to either of them" adding that "neither of them had even been on the twenty five person long-list", "it's got to be someone we have had least done some background on", Burke then brought up Pendleton " I like him, he isn't a politician, he has a great military record, he is loved on Fox News". After Burke had left the call, Duke said what about Pendleton "none of us three are convinced, he would be a massive risk". Duke suggested another Teams meeting this time with all three of the search team. On Saturday night Moore called Pendleton and agreed it for the Sunday.

This time it went better, Moore said he "was far better this time", and we need a "face to face meeting" before we put in the room with the Senator. Late on Sunday evening, it was agreed that Pendleton would meet them at a hotel in Columbus, Ohio the following day. Then came a twist, within two hours of the agreement with Pendleton, Ohio Governor Art Schieder called Moore, he had clearly been tipped off by the hotel, he was furious "I suggested Pendleton for Defense, now you want him for Vice-President" Moore reminded him that he turned the job down, Schieder said he "was now 100% prepared to take the job", because I can do a far better job than him", Rohr entered the call saying "Are you now saying, you are now willing to be the running mate again", "yes" was the reply. Rohr and Moore spoke to Duke "are you kidding me, how can this happen to me twice". Duke was clear "no way now, let's see how Pendleton does tomorrow".

Just minutes after that call, Duke took a call from Texas Governor Adam De Haan offering his own services saying that "he would stop Long's campaign in its tracks", Duke said he wasn't against it, and put it to Moore and the others. The answer back was "no" from all three of them. On Monday morning with the trio heading to Columbus, the campaign team put out an e-mail announcing a second delay to the "important announcement".

On Monday, Pendleton did well again, after a two-hour meeting. Moore called Duke saying, "I think you should sit down with him on Wednesday". It was agreed, this time Pendleton agreed to a meeting in Little Rock, Arkansas. Duke agreed but once again try to bring up "King and Stern" again the trio said that they would resign. "Ok what about Tom Riddle" again it was "no, no, the Democrats would have a field day" said Rohr, with Moore adding "he is an awful campaigner", again adding that they had done no real background checks on him.

On Wednesday, Duke slipped away from the press using a dummy motorcade and was smuggled into Little Rock, Arkansas. It had been agreed that it would be a "long interview", but Duke just walked in, shock Pendleton's hand and said "General, you fancy being my Vice-President" at which Pendleton replied "yes, sir I am ready to serve", and that was that. Moore was furious with Duke, he asked to speak to him alone in the bathroom of the hotel suite, "what the hell, you just offered it to him, like that", Duke replying "yes, otherwise we never get anyone". Then Rohr started bagging on the bathroom door "let me in". A staffer who saw the whole incident said "you had the Republican nominee for President, locked in the bathroom with a former governor, and his chief advisor, trying to get in" it was "farcical".

Finally, with Pendleton waiting Duke went back into the main suite and said once again if Pendleton wanted the job it was his, adding after what had taken place with Schieder "if you say, yes, now, that is we are not going back, we will announce on Sunday".

And so that was how it played out, Ritchie, Harris and Riley didn't find out until the announcement was made public, although Wesley Burke was told on the Saturday evening. A staffer on the Duke campaign told us "it was a total disorganized mess, that is the best way I can describe it".