

## McGovern positions 'unchanged'

"The taxi driver said, 'I sure am. Anybody would be better than that guy we got in there now.'"

Although McGovern asserts he has not changed his positions since 1972, there has been a change on the question of amnesty.

### Supports conditional amnesty

In 1972, McGovern favored unconditional amnesty for Vietnam draft dodgers. A month ago, McGovern said he supports President Ford's conditional amnesty.

The question of amnesty is a presidential one, McGovern says, and should not be an issue in a Senate race.

"I really haven't had to change my positions on anything," McGovern says.

"The people of South Dakota are beginning to accept a number of positions I took in 1972.

"The majority now agree that the military budget should be slashed. They're ready for open government, the disclosure of campaign financing. A lot of the things that we did in '72 are now very acceptable in this state."

McGovern never mentions Watergate.

"I'm just letting the course of events make the point. There is an old Irish saying," McGovern says, "that time is a great storyteller. I've found that true in South Dakota.

"They feel bad about (Watergate)—they'd feel worse to have somebody telling them how wrong they were."

### Low regard for Nixon

About Nixon, he says:

"My views haven't changed. I have never had a very high regard for him. It always puzzled me how Nixon got elected. I can understand younger people supporting him when they didn't know the history of his rise to power, but people who knew that story and then thought he was competent to be president..."

McGovern's voice trails off.

"I somehow feel the people were misled in '72 of the real character of Nixon. I don't quite know how he pulled it off. I also think they got a very distorted picture of me.

"They somehow felt that I had changed dramatically from the person they sent to Washington a few years ago. That was a kind of by-product of the Nixon propaganda. They saturated this state, as they did others, with cleverly devised television commercials, direct mail, and other things, to depict me as an unstable radical, and they got away with it.

"It wasn't so much that the people were all that enthusiastic about Nixon; it's that they had frightened them about me.

### People warming to him

"But I can see the thing turning around. The people are warming up to me once again," McGovern says.

At the Elks Club in Hot Springs, a man and his wife timidly approach McGovern. The man leans forward and confides, "I didn't vote for you last time, and I am really sorry."

No comment from McGovern, just a handshake and a smile.

"An average of 10 or 12 people a day volunteer that kind of sentiment," McGovern says.

The Elks Club appearance ends a 14-hour day that included breakfast with Rapid City civic leaders, a second breakfast with builders, handshaking at a shopping center mall, lunch with senior citizens, an address to the opening of an American Legion post in Hermosa, dinner with county Democratic candidates, a public meeting on a local water controversy and a quick visit to another American Legion post.

At Hermosa, an aide parks their car on a dirt road across from a one-time storage bin, now the American Legion hall. McGovern surveys the deserted streets, looks at the closed shops on main street and shakes his head.

As he enters the building, a woman says, "Hi, Sen. McGovern. Do you

remember me? You got my son an appointment to the Air Force Academy."

"Sure I do," McGovern says. "How did he like it?"

"He never went," she says.

### Eleanor selling 'Uphill'

In his address, McGovern apologizes for the absence of his wife, Eleanor, saying she was in Pierre for a children's conference. And she has been busy selling her book, "Uphill," an autobiography.

The legionnaires seem more concerned with the presence of the state Legion commander than with McGovern's presence.

But McGovern's reception is warm. There is no mention of amnesty.

On the way out of Hermosa, McGovern asks the aide to drive past a church. The church, at the top of a hill overlooking junked cars and empty houses, has a sign in front of it that reads:

"Calvin Coolidge went to church here in 1927."

Then, heading back to Rapid City at the close of the day, McGovern stares out the window suppressing yawns. He and an aide review the day and talk about the future.

McGovern says he doesn't like to talk about the past. He has tried to put it behind him.

### No presidential plans for 1976

McGovern seems confident the future will include re-election to the Senate, but he says he has no plans for the 1976 presidential race.

"I have no intention of running again. I haven't even given it any thought.

"I have felt all along that it's a mistake for the Democrats to be in such a sweat this early about the presidential candidate.

"Everybody thought I was announcing incredibly early, when I announced in January of 1971. Now, you have people announcing right after the 1972 election."

"The least we can do is wait until the congressional and senatorial races are out of the way."

But McGovern has not closed the door to running again for the Democratic nomination in 1976.

"I certainly wouldn't run again for the exercise."

"I'd have to be convinced there was some kind of strong movement in that direction—if people wanted me to run and there wasn't some other person who could fill that bill, I could run. But at this point, I think somebody's going to emerge as a candidate."

### Future easier than past

For McGovern, discussing the future is easier than talking about 1972.

But it is hard because there are so many reminders. Reminders like the left over 1972 posters taped to storefront windows. And the stream of letters he gets from 1972 supporters.

Voters remind him, too.

Voters like the Republican rancher who said of McGovern:

"You know, I don't like a lot of his ideas, I don't always agree with him, but by God, I got to respect the guy. When I think of everything he went through in '72, the least we can do in South Dakota is send him back to Washington."

And the Rapid City woman who said, "We took a trip to California last month and when people saw our South Dakota license plates, they would honk. Everywhere we went people would say, 'That's George McGovern's state—he should have been president.' He put us on the map in '72, and we're proud of him."

With the lights of Rapid City coming into view, McGovern looks at his watch. It is 11:30 p.m. He has been meeting people since 7:30 a.m.

And the people have been responding. Maybe not all of them, and maybe not completely, but—with the pain of 1972 behind him—this land is his land again.

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