

CAMPAIGN IN DOUGLAS COUNTY

Speech of E. Rosewater to the Eighth Ward Republican Club. MERCEUR AND HIS BACKERS ARRANGED Methods of the Men Who Support the Present Congressman from the Second Nebraska District Exposed.

Speech of Edward Rosewater Tuesday, May 5, before the Eighth Ward Republican Club. Mr. Chairman and Fellow Republicans: We are now again on the eve of a momentous political campaign—a campaign in which the destinies of the republic of Nebraska will be determined by the action of the individual members and the character of the standard-bearers of the grand organization that brought Nebraska into the union among the sisterhood of states.

Your chairman has announced that this meeting was called for the discussion of congressional candidates. It was not my intention to confine the scope of this discussion to the congressional campaign. Before entering upon that part of the program I desire to present a few reasons why republicans of Douglas county should participate actively in the preliminary work of the impending campaign.

The state convention has been called by the state committee to meet in Lincoln June 15, and I presume the county committee will, within the next ten days, meet to fix the time for holding the primaries. Whether these primary elections are to be held under the old system of selecting delegates to the state convention by a county convention, or whether these delegates are to be chosen by direct election through the so-called "Crawford county system," is in the main immaterial. The great question republicans must face is whether they will present a state ticket to the suffrages of the people, made up of the ablest men that can be selected from the best element of the republican party, or whether they will be content with nominating candidates who have to be apologized for and defended.

Bigger Men Needed for Leaders. It is as amazing as it is deplorable that the men who have been honored with leadership and high position in recent years are no match in point of intellect, moral force and integrity to the leaders and candidates of territorial days. That fact was amply demonstrated by the recent attending of the funeral of J. Sterling Morton, w. a. r. was associated with a galaxy of intellectual giants in the upbuilding of this great commonwealth. It is deplorable indeed that some of the ablest and best men in the ranks of the republican party do not in late years manifest active interest in our politics, or have been crowded to the rear because the idea prevails that anybody who has ambition can aspire to a state office, even though he is notoriously incompetent, ignorant or disreputable, and that anybody can go to congress, even if he has not the ability to fill the position of city councilman. We remember that in 1891 a well-digger, who had previously scarcely touched a law book, was a candidate for supreme judge on the fusion ticket of this state, and was only prevented from being elected to the highest judicial tribunal by the patriotic and common sense of the rank and file of democratic and populist, who did not want to degrade the supreme bench.

In the present campaign we must endeavor first and foremost to select as our standard-bearer a man broad enough to be chief executive of a great commonwealth, that boasts nearly 1,500,000 population. It has been stated semi-officially that William Jennings Bryan will not be a candidate for governor in the year 1920. I do not, however, consider it prudent for the republican party to make its nomination for governor with the name of a man who is not its opponent. Bryan will not be forced to run, even against his own wish and private interest. He is about the only democrat who could command the united support of all of the elements of opposition to the republican party.

No Defensive Campaign. The republicans must nominate a man capable of keeping with any candidate the fusion reformer. A man whose record affords a guarantee of unimpeachable integrity and executive ability of the highest order. It is gratifying indeed that we are not compelled to enter this campaign in defense of the violation of one of the declarations of the last republican state convention. That convention emphatically declared against condoning embezzlement, and we will not be compelled, thank God, to stand up in the next campaign to defend it. (Applause.)

Now, Douglas county republicans have little or no show for securing a nomination for one of our state offices in the republican ticket. I have lived here nearly thirty-nine years and do not remember a single instance when a Douglas county republican was nominated for the position of governor, but we will probably have the opportunity to secure the nomination of some competent and able man for the position of lieutenant governor, or for the position of state treasurer. I presume there will be no difficulty in finding men willing to serve, but we should be very particular to nominate only such a man for lieutenant governor as would be able to fill the position of governor creditably for himself and the party.

Fourteen years ago Benjamin Harrison carried Nebraska by about 28,000 majority, and for nearly twenty years preceding that campaign every nomination in a republican state convention was equivalent to an election. Two years later, in 1880, James E. Boyd was elected governor of Nebraska, and from that time on Nebraska has continued to be a debatable state.

Causes of Party Defeat. It was not merely the folly of submitting prohibition that placed the republican party in jeopardy. It was the misconduct of men it had placed in positions of trust. It was the peculation and jobbery that prevailed in the statehouse for years, by which an exasperated people were impelled to repudiate the republican party at the polls and

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SENATORIAL CAMPAIGN

have taught it a lesson it deserved. We impeached three state officers in 1883 and if these men had been pronounced guilty by the full court instead of being let loose half vindicated with a reprimand we would have no Barileys and none of the costly disgraceful experiences that have overtaken us since that time. Let us see to it that it does not happen again. By placing men in office so constituted that a bribe no matter how large will be spurned, and that men who accept office will regard it as a public trust.

Right here let me say that there is no man in the statehouse for whom I entertain a higher regard than I did for Mr. Stuefer. We had always been personal friends and I had the most implicit confidence in him. The idea has gone forth that I have some personal grievance and inspire the public by his conduct was inspired by some motive of revenge. This is absolutely unfounded. I can hardly even today convince myself that he was a doer of the lawless things that he did, but the record is there. The transactions charged up to him make it impossible, in my judgment, for him to make a satisfactory disclosure before the people of this state. I regret this as much as anybody, but the republican party must stand for the strict integrity in the office of state treasurer after all the lessons that we have had, and if the treasurer cannot afford to fill that office honestly, according to the spirit of the law, it is his duty to step out and let some one else fill it who will abide by the law. (Applause.)

Importance of Coming Contest. It is not my purpose to indicate what candidates or candidates Douglas county should support for any particular office, but I do not want to be a party to any man or masquerade. When we present a candidate he must be a man who enjoys popular confidence and respect, and must have our earnest support. If we are going to contend with a candidate for governor we ought to go into the contest with a determination that he should be nominated. If we put up a man simply to give him a boost and some free advertising, with no intention to put him forward as our candidate, it is not honest and it is not honorable. We have done such things in the past, but it was always my conviction that it was not good politics nor good faith.

You are doubtless aware that the last legislature left a great deal of important work undone, and that its work was not a disgrace. This is the consensus of opinion of all classes of our people. The duty of the last legislature to have reappointed the state in the legislative and congressional districts. It absolutely failed to do so by reason of the pressure by the democratic party. It is deplorable that some of the ablest and best men in the ranks of the republican party do not in late years manifest active interest in our politics, or have been crowded to the rear because the idea prevails that anybody who has ambition can aspire to a state office, even though he is notoriously incompetent, ignorant or disreputable, and that anybody can go to congress, even if he has not the ability to fill the position of city councilman. We remember that in 1891 a well-digger, who had previously scarcely touched a law book, was a candidate for supreme judge on the fusion ticket of this state, and was only prevented from being elected to the highest judicial tribunal by the patriotic and common sense of the rank and file of democratic and populist, who did not want to degrade the supreme bench.

Following this editorial came a double-lined appeal just before the primaries, saying, "Omaha Must Stand by Omaha." No man ever can succeed who does not stand up for himself. This is equally true in politics. No man who has prospered and prospered that has lowered its flag and turned its back upon its founders or its champions. It is true that the congressman Mercer and his opponents the republicans are at the helm of the ship and stand up for herself or her back. Never before has any political party in Omaha presented a candidate for governor who does the nomination of Mercer. Personal likes and dislikes, political fealties and party animosities are being set aside in a desperate struggle to bring a new era of business activity and a revival of the business life of Omaha to the attention of men who are notoriously incapable of being of any use in congress at the most critical moment. Every rational man must realize that the rejection of Mercer in the face of the voters of this state and the nomination of a man who has not the confidence of the people and the respect of the people of this state and the nomination of a man who has not the confidence of the people and the respect of the people of this state.

Our Absentee Representative. These articles certainly show that Mr. Mercer was under obligations to the Bee and under obligations to a very energetic backing through that medium. Nobody can truthfully charge that after Mr. Mercer's first term and up to a recent period he has not had the earnest and zealous support of the Bee with all the influence that it could exert, and that included the editorial staff as well as the circulation. In 1916 when he had already served three terms my efforts in his behalf were renewed with the same earnest vigor and his opponents found to their sorrow that the appeals of the Bee to the business man and to the working man had a decided effect, so Mr. Mercer certainly had no grievance and had no right to have any up to the last time he was elected, and in fact, up to the present time.

After he had served four terms his continuance became a serious question. It began to dawn upon the community that Mr. Mercer was what might be called a visiting statesman. He had absented himself from Omaha from year to year except when he came up for re-election. For twenty out of twenty-four months Mr. Blackburn was the only medium through whom Mercer could be reached, although during the periods of his congressional campaigns his constituents were showered with numerous letters and packages of garden seeds. Year by year the workers became more convinced that he was not in touch with them. They began to complain and as they thought justly, that he never took any interest in them. It was not until after the campaign was fought here on county and state tickets, and Mr. Mercer was never on hand; and he furthermore, systematically repudiated his campaign assessments, and did not contribute even to his own campaign, as every other man occupying such a lucrative position is expected to do.

Facts About the Dinner. In an article recently published Mr. Blackburn charged that I invited myself to dinner with Mr. Mercer in the spring of 1900, and sought his assistance in my senatorial campaign. Well, I never invited myself to dinner with anyone. I have always been able to pay for my dinners, or even to earn a living without spending, but I accepted an invitation from Mercer to dine with him and spent a pleasant afternoon. I do not comprehend why he should have retailed the story of my visit to Blackburn as a wonderful event, or why he should insinuate I had called there for the purpose of promoting my political interests.

I never asked Mercer to help me in the

senatorial campaign, and he cannot truthfully charge that I ever invoked his assistance in anything except what was in Omaha. (Applause.) I have time and again, of course, induced him to introduce and support certain measures, and even succeeded in getting him to do some things I knew to be for the promotion of Omaha's growth and prosperity and the interest of the state, but never have I asked him to do anything that would be damaging or detrimental to this city or to any of its citizens.

That famous dinner amounted to nothing except that an hour or two previous I received a telegram from Omaha announcing that Mr. Blackburn had called a very peculiar caucus to elect delegates to the Crawford primary for the congressional nomination, in which all the counties and all the precincts in the three counties were to be held together on one string, and the delegates to be all voted for in Sarpy, Washington and Douglas counties on one ticket. The caucus was held in Omaha on the day of a fractional fight and I was very anxious to avoid a fractional fight in 1900. I was so anxious to see Nebraska redeemed from populism that I was willing to make any sacrifice.

Community of Interests Plan. The only thing that happened on that memorable occasion was that I asked Mr. Mercer to have Blackburn's call reviewed, as there was really no serious opposition to Mercer. I got into no compact with anybody to nominate any other man and, in fact, did not encourage anybody to be a candidate, although I then thought that Mr. Mercer with four terms had about all that he was entitled to. In fact, that any man with ordinary ambition would have done better for himself and for the friends of Mercer. After several conferences we agreed substantially upon a delegation to the state convention and upon the members that were to represent this district in the national convention that nominated William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt. (Applause.)

After a few days thereafter Mr. Blackburn called me up with a paper, or rather an agreement, to support Mercer at the congressional convention, and requested me to head it. I signed that paper and my signature brought all of my friends into line. Mr. Mercer then called upon me and brought his own paper, through that agreement, if Mercer had not the manhood to appreciate that sort of treatment he has not a particle of manhood in him. I feel sure that any other man would have appreciated it.

Silver Platter Nomination. His nomination did not cost him a penny. He had put up a little scheme, or rather his understudy, to make every candidate pay tribute to Blackburn. The chairman of the congressional committee who carried all the other members in his pocket. Whether Mercer was to have paid \$500 or I cannot tell, I cannot guess, but presume he would have paid it. Whether the money would have been paid out or retained is another question. At any rate, he got his nomination without costing him a cent.

At that time he had drawn \$40,000 from the United States government. Just think of it, a man who never earned more than \$75 a month at any honest calling had earned in eight years \$40,000 and the president of the United States had named him to the senate. We went into the great campaign of 1900, and I went into it in good faith. It is a matter of record that the call for the congressional convention made no mention of the fact that there was to be a congressional caucus. That caucus was called to make the nomination of David H. Mercer worthless.

Judge Baker, who was anxious to contest Mercer's nomination, called upon me both before and after Mercer had been nominated. He said that the nomination was amounting to nothing but a game to get the courts and have it set aside and make Mercer run as a petition nominee, if he wanted to. I remonstrated against such a proceeding and succeeded in persuading Baker to drop it. I did not know until the last few days that the papers were made that contest would be by Mr. Baldrige. He tells me that he had the papers in his hands all prepared to go into court, and Mercer would have been thrown out if they had been filed. It was only at my instance that Mr. Mercer was retained as a regular nominee on the ticket, and I fought his bad assortment. I kept these papers from acting. (Applause.)

In Good Faith with Mercer. Now, then, Mr. Mercer certainly could not interpret my conduct as malicious, dishonest, treacherous or of any other kind. I was in good faith and remained in good faith until the end. Wherever there was a campaign meeting in this county I advocated Mercer just as much as I advocated the national, state and legislative tickets. Just before the campaign closed there was the meeting of German-Americans at Turner hall. We sat side by side there in a great gathering that was assembled in my interest, and not for Mr. Mercer. I appealed to the German-Americans to support Mr. Mercer, and pledged myself to do the same work hand in hand and shoulder to shoulder with the energetic representative for every measure that would promote the prosperity of Omaha. The great body of the people that was assembled in the hall gave Mr. Mercer an ovation, and doubtless many of them supported him because of the pledges that I made for his endorsement. That I was giving him. But strange as it may seem, during all that campaign Mercer never went near the republican county committee; he never was in touch with it. He refused to pay his campaign assessment, and while the committee and others who were not designated to carry on the campaign were paying for balls, fireworks, brass bands, carriages, posters and other incidentals to the campaign, he did not contribute a penny.

He did not take the campaign managers into his confidence to tell us who his workers were, where they were located, or any other candidate would have done without asking, and up to the time of the election, while I kept him fully informed of our plans and operations I never could get any information from him, nor from Mr. Blackburn, who was the chairman of his congressional committee. When the day of election came I went down to South Omaha with those terrible sample ballots that Mr. Mercer pretends were gotten up to assist his opponent.

Those Terrible Sample Ballots. I found ten dozen, democrats, hired by Mercer, but Mercer was the only candidate they were willing to work for. And now a word about those ballots. They were not gotten up surreptitiously; they were not designed to impose on anybody; they were headed independent-democratic sample ballots, and were gotten up for that class of democrats who were disposed to vote part of the republican ticket. These tickets were straight democratic for president and congress, and for the senate. In District, some were marked for Mercer, and most of them were marked for the republican candidates for the legislature.

The first batch of these sample ballots was printed blank and were marked by clerks in the bureau I had organized under the name of a committee, and Mr. Hayden, who is now secretary to Senator Millard, could testify, that they were marked with Mercer and marked without Mercer's knowingly, because we intended they should be used where they could to the best advantage. There was nothing improper in that. On election day a lot of these ballots were taken to South Omaha in a hack, occupied by Llewellyn, Collins and myself. They were exhibited to Troutman, Schmitz, Wilcox and other South Omaha republicans, and some were distributed. But about 8,000 of these ballots are still in my office in the original packages, and will be exhibited in due course of time, to show up the imposture by which Mercer has tried to excuse his treacherous course.

When the wolf wanted to swallow the lamb he charged him with rolling the water, and that is the way these people have done. Within forty-eight hours after the election Mercer and his henchmen pretended that they had found proof that I had tried to defeat Mercer, and yet Mercer knew that these ballots were to go into the ballot boxes only, and could not possibly have deceived any republican voter. In a recent article, in which I also trace Mr. Blackburn, he said that about 150 votes were lost to Mr. Mercer in South Omaha by these tickets. What an impudent falsehood. How could Mercer lose votes through the democratic ballots distributed among democrats? If the republicans had voted these tickets he might have lost some votes, but these tickets were democratic sample ballots and he certainly could not have sustained any loss among democrats who voted for Howard. The charge that I had tried to require a caucus election. It was trumped up by Mercer in order that he might find some justification for his own treachery in trying to defeat the republican legislative ticket and trying to prevent the election of two republican United States senators. (Applause.) That was his purpose, and I can prove it by credible witnesses.

Mercer's Unfounded Charges. Now let us examine the situation and the relation of Mr. Mercer to the republicans of Douglas county, and the republicans of the district and state. He was nominated in good faith, and received the largest vote he ever received in the district; not the slightest defection anywhere. If I had been disposed to wray him I might have done it, but I gave him the democratic ticket, and he got 5,000 as they could have done by appealing to the supreme court to rule him out of the republican ticket, and make him a petition candidate, I could have had all the help I wanted for the republican legislative ticket. He was not a candidate through that campaign I never approached a man connected with Edgar Howard, much less Howard himself, and he never dreamed of that—not until long after election. (Applause.)

Mercer had no ground whatever for complaint and he understood very well his obligation both to the paper that I edit, to myself and to the republicans of this city, county and district. What were these obligations? This is a government of majorities, and when the will of the majority is expressed it is to be respected, and any man who seeks to overthrow the expression of the will of the majority is a political anarchist. Verdict of the People. It was known to all men that the senatorial contest was squarely between myself and John L. Webster. Every sample ballot at the primary election of 1900 had either my name printed at the head or that of John L. Webster. Mr. Mercer was not thought of as a candidate for the United States senate. He was not a candidate for the senate, and the republicans of the county by a most decisive majority declared in favor of Mr. Webster, he it said to his honor, accepted the situation and abided the result.

But that was not all. When the election came the people of this district and state were given the privilege to express their choice for United States senator. Under the constitution of Nebraska every citizen has a right to express that choice on his ballot when members of the legislature are chosen that are to elect United States senators. Now, then, the choice of the people was expressed through the ballot box at that election. In this county alone 5,600 and some odd were credited to me on the official returns, but there were at least 600 in other counties who were going to vote because I was present at the canvass of the votes of this county. In the district nearly 11,000 all told were cast for me. A majority of the republican vote of Washington county was cast for me, and a majority of the republican vote of Sarpy county was cast for me. As a choice for United States senator Mr. Mercer was not thought of in this district. The official canvass of the state shows that only 15 votes were cast in the whole state of Nebraska for David H. Mercer—not one of these was cast in the counties of Douglas, Sarpy and Washington—not one. (Applause.)

Mercer's Inexcusable Treachery. And yet Mercer had the audacity twenty-four hours after the election to undertake to overthrow the popular will expressed through the ballot box by urging those who had been elected to violate their sacred obligations to their constituents, and to betray the trust confided in them by the people who had elected them. What would be thought of a man who would approach a presidential elector and ask him to violate his instructions and pledges implied through the expressed will of the majority at the ballot box? You vote for president nearly in the same manner that you express your choice for United States senator. You did not vote for McKinley, or Bryan, you voted for the presidential electors, and they were in honor bound to vote for the candidates for president and vice president nominated by their party. In this instance the party did not

nominate a candidate for senator, but the people was, in my judgment at least, as great a crime, as the people as would have been his attempt to persuade a presidential elector to desert the candidate of his party. That was precisely what he did. He did not wait until the members of the legislature had assembled and endeavor to discharge their duty. He did not wait until those members had registered their votes in accordance with the instructions of the people, so that they could at least excuse themselves for the betrayal of their trusts. But he approached them and had them approached and worked upon before that legislature ever met and before one senatorial ballot had been cast.

Carries Tales to Washington. Before starting for Washington he gave it out in Omaha that he had not decided to be a candidate, although a very great number of people were urging him to become a candidate. But when he reached Washington—in order to excuse his own despicable treason to the people of his own district—he made out that I had endeavored to defeat William McKinley and part of the republican ticket in my personal interest. But he found little credence in Washington. I sent him a scathing letter, and mailed a copy of it to the speaker of the house and to Senator Hanna. And the speaker wrote this in reply: "I regret that you have so much discord in Nebraska, but the olive branch and sometimes the hammer." (Laughter.) This is precisely what David H. Henderson wrote. I did not have to explain to President McKinley that I had been loyal to the party. He understood it well enough and at the last interview I had with him he complimented me highly on my course. Of course, it was all nonsense, because I had already stepped out and am out for good—but he said, "You will get there yet. You made a noble fight out in Nebraska; you carried the state; you ought to have been elected." That is precisely what he said to me. (Applause.)

Now let me review Mercer's senatorial campaign. He gave it out in Washington that he was being flooded with letters from members of the legislature asking him to become a candidate. There is not one solitary letter of that kind in existence. When the legislature met he received on lonesome vote, on complimentary day, and that was given as a joke. The man who voted for him would not vote for him in joint convention. A great many scattered on complimentary day. I had been in the house and in the senate, voting from day to day, nobody voted for David H. Mercer. And yet Mercer claimed at Washington that he was the choice of a large portion of the legislature.

Mercer's Play for Speakership. To show what little faith can be placed in what little honor he possesses: In the summer of 1899, after Thomas H. Reed had resigned from congress, it became apparent that a new speaker would have to be elected. A telegram was sent to me by the Chicago Tribune, in about these words: "Are you in favor of a western man for speaker of the house, and you favor the election of the Hon. J. P. Hale of Illinois?" And I responded: "I am in favor of a western man for speaker, but my preference is for David E. Henderson, believing him to be the most capable and the most worthy man now sitting in congress representing the western states." (Applause.)

That was before Henderson had announced himself. I had already supported Henderson when Connell was in congress. Within three days after Henderson announced himself, which was a few days after the Washington correspondent announced that David H. Mercer was going to be a candidate for speaker. The idea of Mercer for speaker was simply ridiculous. Presently I received a letter from Henderson and he said: "Well, what do you think of Mercer being a candidate?" I wrote him: "I do not think he means it. I do not think he is serious. He is simply wanting to be chairman of his old committee." Well, the fight went on, and here was Ohio pronouncing for Dave Henderson, then came Wisconsin, then came Illinois, and then came Massachusetts. Now Nebraska was still holding back. I finally wrote him the following: "Where does Nebraska stand?" and Burkett replied: "I am for Henderson. I am an Iowa man, but I made an agreement with Mercer not to go to anybody until he comes." In the meantime Mercer was non set. You could get no trace of him. He had not been seen in Nebraska for months and no one knew where to find him.

Case of Unexamined Brass. Finally I received a telegram from Henderson saying: "Where does Nebraska stand?" And I wired him: "Nebraska will stand with Iowa. Nebraska is for Henderson for speaker." I took the liberty to do that because I did not want Nebraska placed in a false light. When Mercer finally wrote up I said to him: "I have taken the liberty of assisting Henderson, that you were for him. It would have been shameful with Ohio, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts in favor of Henderson for Nebraska to hold back. You could not afford to stay out." "Why," said he, "that is all nonsense. I have been on the ground floor with Henderson all of the time. I have been for Henderson all of the time." Mercer evidently did not suspect that I had in my drawer a letter, received only three days previous, in which Henderson said: "I depend on you to look after Mercer." (Laughter.) I did not say to Mercer you are a blank falsifier, because that would have been disagreeably truthful. But I thought it disgraceful for a man to prevaricate.

(Continued on Ninth Page.)

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