

The Selling of McGovern-- Back Home in Dakota

Joe McGinness is the author of "The Selling of the President 1968." Several weeks ago, he visited George McGovern to find out what defeat has done to McGovern and how he is able to force himself to start running again, so soon, for a Senate election that is a year and a half way. McGinness accompanied McGovern on a weekend campaign trip to South Dakota.

By Joe McGinness

New York

"K AAAAAAY, now that you're all armed up do you want to do it one more time?"

"Yes!" shouted 500 South Dakota Democrats, seated at long, straight rows of tables beneath glaring fluorescent lights in the big new banquet room of the King's Inn Motel in Pierre, S.D.

"All right," shouted Comet Haraldson, the master of ceremonies, "Let's go!" And one more time the organist swung into "Happy Days Are Here Again," and this time the people began to clap while they sang because now they were really getting into the mood of the annual \$25-a-plate Jefferson-Jackson Day Jubilee, the biggest social event of the year for Democrats in South Dakota. "Great State — Great Senator."

McGovern in '74," the new bumper stickers said, and the Great Senator, freshly tanned from a sunlamp treatment the night before and thoroughly stultified after two days of disaster-relief hearings and a \$100-per-couple reception, sat at the head table and smiled and made small talk with old acquaintances and wished to hell they'd get on with it.

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LAST November, these Democrats had, for the first time, won control of the state Legislature, and had re-elected a Democratic Governor, elected a new Democratic U.S. Senator, re-elected a Democrat in one of the state's two Congressional districts; had done, in short, almost everything they could have done — except win their state for George McGovern.

And now they were celebrating, and nobody was going to rush them, least of all Comet Haraldson, who was about to lead them headlong into "another old favorite that everybody knows—"You Are My Sunshine."

It was almost two hours later when George McGovern stood up to speak. He was uncomfortable with his audience. He knew, and they knew, and he knew they knew, that he had lost his own state last fall.

Even though they were Democrats who always had voted for him for the

Senate and despite the fact that he had virtually started the Democratic party in the state 20 years before, many people in the room had voted against him for President.

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"AS MANY OF YOU know," he began, for many years, I wanted to run for the presidency in the worst possible way — and last year, I sure did." The laughter was uproarious and he smiled along with it.

The laughter swept him along to his next line: "We took some other important steps in 1972. For one thing, we made a serious effort to open the doors of the Democratic party — and as soon as we did, half the Democrats walked out."

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THE MORNING after the Pierre speech, George McGovern went to Sunday services, walking there from his motel to a Methodist church, where his presence was noted by the minister and where he was given a "VISITOR" badge to wear on the breast pocket of his suit.

As he left the church after the serv-



Now McGovern says of Eagleton: 'I didn't like him one bit. He always seemed superficial to me . . . no dignity, no reserve'

ice, he was quick to remove the badge, not wanting his picture taken while he wore it. A political opponent in South Dakota could have done a lot with a picture of George McGovern wearing a badge that said "VISITOR" while McGovern was spending time in the state.

The sense that many people had of his not belonging to South Dakota anymore apparently was going to be one of the biggest problems he would have in seeking re-election.

As he walked into the Holiday Inn coffee shop after church, a man in a booth said, "Hey, George. Kind of far from your stomping ground, aren't you?"

"These are going to be my stomping grounds from now on," McGovern replied.

AT 11 p.m. that night the car carrying George McGovern pulled into the parking lot of the Staurolite Inn, a new and luxurious 80-room motel just off the Interstate at the edge of Brookings, South Dakota.

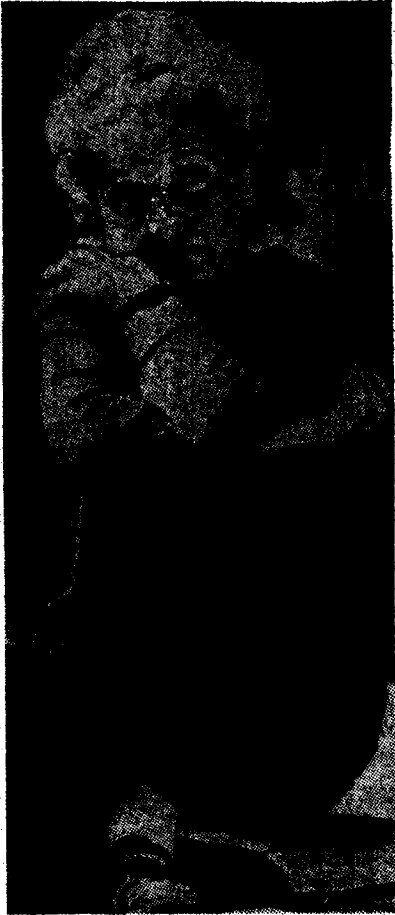
The sign outside said "WELCOME SENATOR MCGOVERN."

Except for the car that belonged to the desk clerk, the parking lot was empty. George McGovern and the five people traveling with him — two reporters, a photographer and two staff members — were the only overnight guests the Staurolite Inn was going to have.

At the Staurolite, McGovern had been given a suite. It had a giant living room, thick carpets, heavy furniture and sound-proofed walls in which pieces of genuine fieldstone were embedded. "I think this is the nicest motel I've ever been in," McGovern said.

Without question, it was the emptiest.

The six of us seemed lost in the elaborate sitting room, surrounded by empty corridors, empty rooms, empty lobby and empty swimming pool. And beyond the motel, the darkness of a small town in South Dakota, already sleeping on a quiet Sunday night; and beyond that, the



Eleanor is seeing a doctor about a 'pathological' hatred inside her

emptiness of the plains.

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IT SEEMED that there were things McGovern wanted to say. The atmosphere grew expectant, even tense.

He spoke of visiting George Wallace in the hospital and that led to talk of assassination fears and that, naturally, led to talk of Ted Kennedy and of what he might do in 1976.

"I don't think he'll run," McGovern said. "I think he's really afraid of being shot. Also, he's got some pretty tough personal problems. I really hope, anyway, for his sake, that he stays out of it. I'd be terribly, terribly afraid that something might happen to him if he ran."

"I guess you never came close to persuading him to run with you last year," I said.

"No, I guess not. Although I certainly thought I'd be able to. I thought once I had that nomination I'd be able to persuade anybody to do anything. But that certainly wasn't the case..."

"All along I'd had Fritz Mondale as a fallback position. He was my best friend in the Senate, I would have been enormously comfortable with him, and he would have campaigned well. But when I went to him, he turned me down. I'm still

not sure why; I think there were personal reasons there, too.

"But that was a real shock, and suddenly it was very late and it seemed that the only guy whom everybody had on their list was Eagleton. Labor was crazy about him, he was a Catholic from a border state, the blacks thought he was terrific for the work he had done on the District of Columbia committee. Women said he had enormous appeal to the female voter.

"So there I was. The only list he wasn't on was my own. We checked around quickly and everybody thought he was Superman.

"We did a quick check on his background and somebody said, 'Oh yeah, he used to drink too much when he was attorney general in Missouri, but it was nothing serious.' So I said, 'All right. It's Eagleton.'"

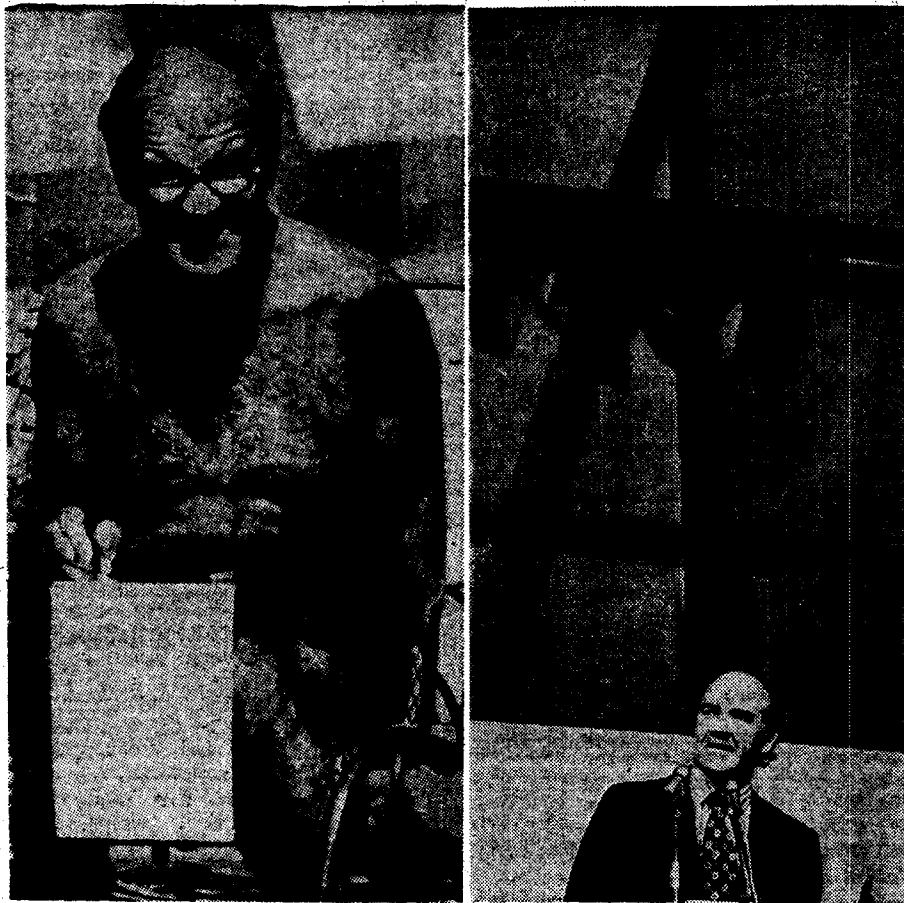
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HERE he paused, shaking his head slowly and staring at the floor, as if there were no one else in the room.

"He was the one guy I didn't know at all. And the funny thing is, I never liked him."

"You never liked him?"

"No. Isn't that something? I didn't



The Senator plans speeches and addresses crowds in South Dakota, trying to make up for having neglected the state

like him one bit. He had always seemed superficial to me. He had no dignity, no reserve. And there was always this nervousness about him. He seemed like a real Junior-Chamber-of-Commerce type.

"I remember when they came to our cabin for breakfast — he and his wife — the morning we made the announcement. He was in tears, his wife was in tears . . ."

"They were crying?"

"Well, sobbing. I remember Eleanor putting her arm around him and telling him not to worry, that somehow everything would work out."

It was 1:30 a.m. We said good night. McGovern looked very tired and, for the first time since I'd met him, something more: He looked spent.

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THE NEXT morning there was a 7:30 party fund-raising breakfast, a speech

to students at Brookings High School, a visit to an old people's home, a speech to students at the South Dakota State University campus in Brookings and a luncheon speech to the Brookings Lions Club.

With each talk that morning, he drove deeper and deeper back into last year's campaign. He seemed possessed anew by the need to make himself understood.

"Yes, we made mistakes in our campaign," McGovern said. "But they were mistakes of the heart . . . mistakes of judgment. They didn't cost any lives. They didn't even cost any money. All they did was cost us some votes. . ."

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HE FLEW back to Washington that afternoon. He sat with me after he changed planes in Chicago.

"That was interesting last night," I

said.

"You mean my speech at Lake Preston?"

"No. I mean in the motel room."

"Oh . . . oh, yes." He took a deep breath.

"That business with Eagleton," he said, "that was the saddest chapter of my life." Then he stared out the window.

"Keeping my self-control that week," he said, "with all those reporters around watching every move I made for the slightest sign of something happening—that was the hardest thing I've ever had to do. To force myself to stay completely in control of my emotions, with all that I was feeling at that time. It was all falling apart. I could see that. There wasn't any way out, politically. What I'd worked that long and hard for was being destroyed, over something like this. Because a guy I hardly knew hadn't leveled with me."

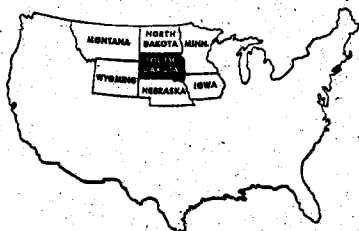
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McGOVERN continued. "That's when it hit my wife so hard. She suffered

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much more from all of it than I did. She was the one person who had been with me from the beginning. Who had stayed up with me all those nights as we worked, for years, to put that thing together. And then she saw it all being torn apart, by Eagleton, and by the press.

"The way I felt about the press was that we blew it. I've always felt it's an adversary relationship, between the politician and the press, and in the case of Eagleton they won and we lost. That's all. But my wife couldn't look at it that way. Here were all these fellows who had



been dinner guests in our home. People she'd always been fond of, who'd always seemed fond of us. And now they were doing this to me. Saying I wasn't qualified, saying I couldn't make decisions. To my wife this was a personal betrayal.

"During that campaign she developed this hatred for the press, because of the way they were misrepresenting me, that became, really, a pathological thing.

That's why she had to leave the campaign in October. She just could not bear to step onto that airplane one more time with all those people whom she hated.

"It's been very rough for her since November. I've got to keep taking her out to dinner and getting her loaded all the time in order to get her mind off it. It really is a pathological thing."

"And she's not getting any better?"

"Well, she is, actually. She's started to see a doctor to try to work out some of this anger that's inside her, and that's helped. And she's writing a book—not about the campaign, about family life—and having that to think about has helped a lot. She'll be all right. I'm sure. But it's been rough."

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THE PLANE started its descent toward National Airport. "What do you do next?" I asked.

"Well, for the next year and a half, obviously, I'll have to devote 90 per cent of my time to South Dakota. After that, it's hard to say."

"Would you like to run for President again?"

"I don't know . . . I really do feel that once a guy has had his chance, that's it. Next time let somebody else try."

"Like who?"

"Oh, the same old faces will be in there, I think. Muskie, Jackson, Humphrey. And Bayh and Hughes, I think, will be going after it in a much bigger way. Mondale might try, too, if Humphrey doesn't."

"Would you be capable, personally, of trying for it again?"

"Yes. I'd be capable. Personally, I could do it again. After what I endured last year, believe me, I don't think there's anything I couldn't go through."