

Senator Church on The Post's Reading of the McGovern Speech at Oxford

Apparently, the editors of the Post read a different text of Senator McGovern's Oxford speech than I did.

First, the senator did not blame his defeat on the press. What he did suggest, as the Post also has in numerous editorials, is that the administration has applied mounting pressure to make the media more amenable to its viewpoint. He cited the national press coverage of the 1972 campaign as an example, but he did not use it to excuse his own showing in the election. Moreover, he specifically paid tribute to newspapers like the Post—"brave reporters, newspapers, and television channels ready to take the heat"—which, your editorial reminds us, put "prodigious reportorial effort . . . into disclosures concerning a campaign spending, the Watergate affair, and the rest." Finally, that Senator McGovern was not discussing why he lost the presidency, but what is wrong with White House attacks on the press, is clearly indicated by the fact that he focused as much in his speech on post-election as on pre-election administration attacks on the media, specifically the recent proposals of a Nixon aide to restrict television news.

Second, Senator McGovern did not claim that his defeat "represents some larger decline of the national spirit reflected in the decline of our institutions." He did argue that such a decline had occurred and that it was manifest, for example, in congressional acquiescence to the Vietnam war and popular distrust of progressive programs. But the senator said very little about the effect of this on his campaign last year and very much about how and why it had happened over a long period of years.

Third, the senator certainly did not blame his loss on the liberals, who in general were a major factor in his winning the nomination. He did argue against the position of "some liberals"

—"so-called liberals"—who no longer believe that we should "try to save our cities, cure the causes of crime, or eradicate poverty." In context, it is clear that he is referring to the group that seems to have given up and decided that nothing will work. And he notes, quite accurately, that this group was anything but discouraged by his defeat—which is far from saying that they caused it.

Fourth, the senator's speech seems to



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me, not an expression of frustration in the face of the election results, but an expression of concern for the country's future in the face of ever growing executive power and constantly dwindling checks on that power. Already this is an important and perhaps the major issue before the new Congress. Contrary to your editorial, it is in my mind precisely "a model of what a Democratic leader should . . . be thinking . . ." (and) saying at the moment." And that is why Democratic leaders from every spectrum of the party are saying it. Senator McGovern's contribution to this dialogue surely deserves to be debated on its merits, not on the basis of what your editors consider to be his personal demerits as a campaigner or a potential president.

A prominent columnist has suggested, and your editorial implies, that as a loser, Senator McGovern should "have the Grace to keep quiet for awhile." Undoubtedly, this would be safer politics, but Senator McGovern chose instead to speak out—not about why he lost—but about how we might shape our institutions to serve the American ideals of individual liberty and shared-institutional power. I only wish that more reflective attention had been given to what was said and less advice enjoining silence upon the man who said it and who spoke for 28 million voters in 1972.

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