

Disclosure Fails to Allay the Doubts

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In Miami there had been sardonic jokes about George McGovern heading off to a place named Custer, S.D., to plan his forthcoming presidential campaign. An omen, it was said: everyone knows what happened to Custer. No one believed it, of course. The real problem for the press was there wouldn't be anything of substance to write from South Dakota.

It was fun anyway. There, in the Black Hills, amid the pine-covered mountains and bluffs of stone and narrow, winding trails, the candidate's entourage had sung folk songs at night in the lobby of the Sylvan Lake resort lodge.

The candidate himself had gone horseback riding, attired in a jaunty

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silk astot. If he looked slightly ill at ease on the evening television films showing his ride, it didn't make any difference. He was performing the accustomed political rituals. And he was in good humor.

Once, when presented a photograph showing him posed in profile alongside

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the heroic four presidential faces hewn out of Mt. Rushmore, he casually scrawled: "From George McGovern, the fifth man."

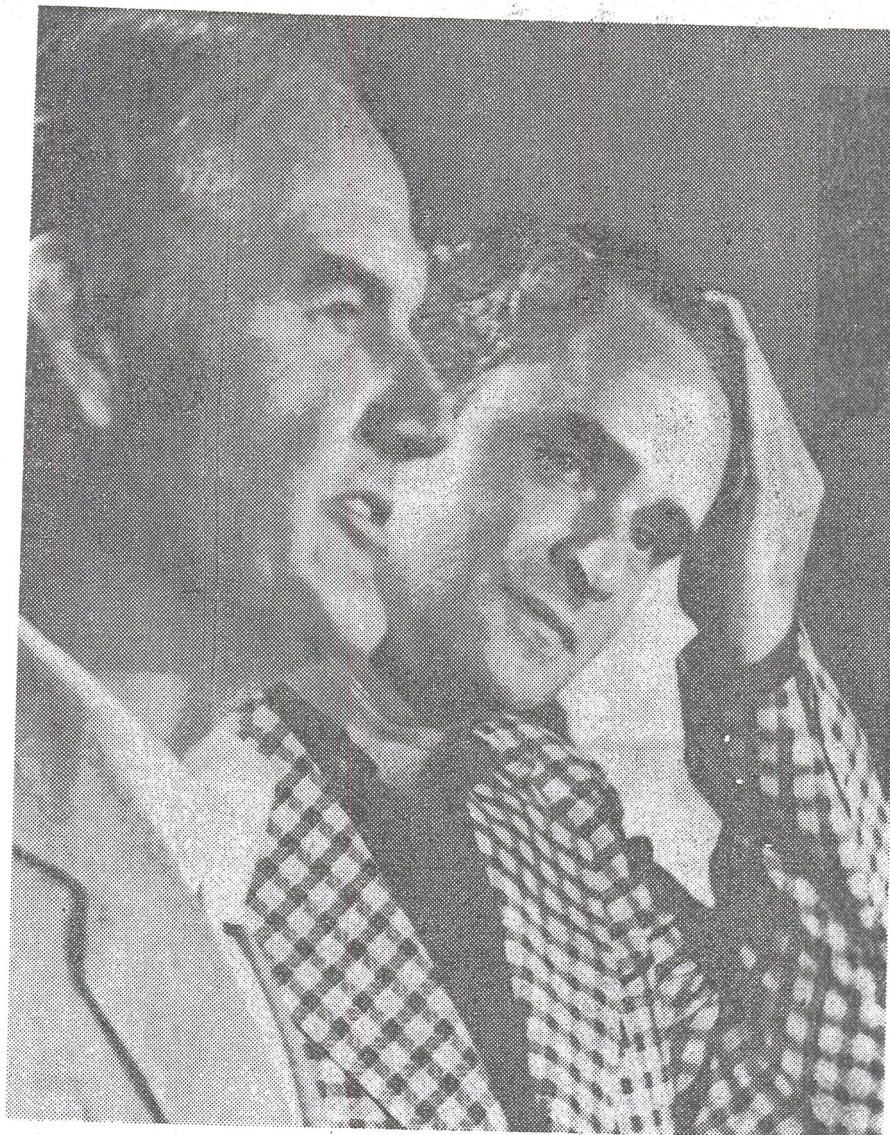
All that casual good fun and moments of relaxation were behind George McGovern as his plane headed back to South Dakota from Washington that Friday, July 21. He now knew the seriousness of Tom Eagleton's

health record and a measure of the problems he himself would have to face. From then on events would move rapidly. There would be no more periods of calm, only days of tension and crises.

Saturday was filled with political meetings that lasted into the night. State coordinators were assigned for the campaign, the politicians who had gathered from around the country for the South Dakota sessions prepared to head back to their communities. It was on Sunday that situation took what one Eagleton staff member now calls "a very nasty turn."

McGovern's closest advisers had known that several news organizations—in particular, the Knight newspaper

See EAGLETON, A6, Col. 1



Associated Press

Sens. McGovern and Eagleton at press conference at Sylvan Lake Lodge near Custer, S.D., at which Eagleton disclosed his medical history.

EAGLETON, From A1

chain and Time Magazine—had been making representatives flow out to South Dakota to present their findings. They met that day with Frank Mankiewicz.

As Mankiewicz says: "They had come up with a very incoherent and largely unpublizable memo full of rumors and unsubstantiated material—but a memo that was clearly on the right track." The memo contained such things as drinking reports—and reports that Eagleton had been hospitalized, and given electro-shock treatment, for psychiatric problems.

"But the real crusher," Mankiewicz said, "was a passage in the memo that had quotation marks around it, as if it had been taken from a hospital record.

"It said that Tom Eagleton had been treated with electro-shock therapy at Barnes Hospital in St. Louis for, and this was the part that was quoted, 'severe manic depressive psychosis with suicidal tendencies.' And that scared me.

Mankiewicz says he "stalled furiously" with the newspaper representatives, appealed to their patriotism, and promised them tangible news breaks. Both McGovern and Eagleton, he said, would have complete physicals later at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, and then challenge the other candidates to do the same and release the medical results. When that happened, he went on, he would try to arrange either an exclusive interview with Eagleton or give them a news cycle break on the Eagleton medical history story.

Private Conference

That night he went to George and Eleanor McGovern's cabin and met with them alone.

"I remember that night I called him 'George,' which I had vowed I would not do during the campaign," he says, "and I indicated I was speaking for Gary and myself."

Mankiewicz told McGovern:

"Let's get rid of this guy."

Later, he explained his reaction by saying: "I had three main reasons. The first was political and personal—he had lied to us and we couldn't have him around. The second was the public reaction that inevitably would come from these kinds of reports. And the third was patriotism. In other words, did we want this man to be in the position to be President?"

"I was very strong and very tough."

Mankiewicz's recollection is that McGovern listened to him quietly. "He didn't say, 'By God, I agree with you,' but neither did he say he disagreed with me. He wanted to wait and talk with him."

Because of the new material, however, Mankiewicz had contacted Eagleton aides that Sunday, he suggested it would be helpful to have the medical

records available in South Dakota when McGovern and Eagleton finally met. The Eagleton aides agreed. In fact, they attempted to get the records from St. Louis and Minnesota. They were not successful; the records were privileged material. The staff members who personally went to both hospitals failed.

Eagleton explains the problem by saying:

"I had difficulty trying to set up a conversation between McGovern and these two doctors. One doctor insists on remaining anonymous because he doesn't want to be badgered, he believes. And the other doctor, Dr. Shueb

in St. Louis, is not a very forthcoming individual. He's more reticent, let's put it that way. The psychiatrist feels that this jeopardizes his relationship with his patients that he continues to have; that sometime, or in some way, this jeopardizes his medical practice."

The McGovern people were left with the impression that the records would be arriving, via Eagleton aides, in conjunction with Eagleton's arrival Monday night. Today, the question of the records remains a point of contention between the McGovern and Eagleton camps. "The point is, they made no demand or strong request for the records," one Eagleton aide says. "It was merely a suggestion."

Tom and Barbara Eagleton had been scheduled to arrive in South Dakota around 10:30 o'clock Monday night. Like so much else in this story of lights and shadows, though, the plans went awry. They had had a stormy flight, and it wasn't until about 1 o'clock in the morning of Tuesday that they finally arrived at the Sylvan Lodge. When their bus from Rapid City pulled up in front of the resort, the lodge was darkened. It had closed for the night.

Inside the dim lobby, a group of reporters was playing bridge. They became aware of the arrival of the vice presidential candidate and his wife when aides began stumbling around with bags looking for someone to direct them to their rooms. The Eagletons were outside waiting in the dark.

Early the next morning George and

Eleanor McGovern and Tom and Barbara Eagleton met alone for breakfast. No one else—staff, friends, counselors, advisers—met with them. During that long period when they were together to discuss Eagleton's health question several irreversible decisions were made: Eagleton would stay on the ticket; his health record would be made public that very morning at a press conference; McGovern would be committed publicly to standing behind his running mate.

This was the most sensitive and crucial of all the private sessions in the Eagleton affair. Some now say it was a highly emotional meeting; but they are receiving their reports second-hand. George McGovern will not discuss his meetings with Eagleton or his subse-

quent conversations with Eagleton's doctors. It is, it seems, too personal, too private, too privileged.

One can only speculate about all the complex considerations that affected the outcome of that key meeting—and why, indeed, George McGovern chose to handle it in such close surroundings in an atmosphere far removed from the rough-and-tumble of advisers raising questions of the harshest political realities. Certainly, this was not the kind of session that Winston Churchill recalled so vividly:

"I have been present at several great conferences where 20 or more of the most important executive personages were gathered together," Churchill said. "When the discussion flagged and all seemed baffled, it was on these oc-

casions Harry Hopkins would rap out a deadly question: 'Surely, Mr. President, here is the point we have got to settle. Are we going to face it or not?' Faced it always was and being faced, was conquered."

For George McGovern and Tom Eagleton that day it was strictly a private, and personal, family affair.

When Eagleton was asked about that meeting later, he said:

"I'm the one that said, 'George, let's start talking. Let's get down to talk about my health history and see what the situation is.' If I hadn't, he was about to.

"He was very understanding. I spelled it out in great detail to him in terms of dates and years and he was listening, made a few notes on I think a yellow pad or paper he had with him. He didn't react negatively in the sense of being surprised or chagrined and he probed further and questioned about some of the details."

Withholding Records

Eagleton's memory is that McGovern did not ask him for his medical records. Later, this reporter asked if he would have given McGovern the records or tried to make them available to him personally had he been asked. Eagleton said he was "not going to release those records or give them to anybody.

Eagleton also said of that breakfast meeting with the McGovern:

"I told McGovern at that meeting, and also at the breakfast meeting with Mankiewicz and Hart (in Washington five days earlier) that if it appears my continued candidacy would constitute a hindrance or impediment to the ticket, I will withdraw. I raised that. I made that statement."

"The response," he said, "was more or less a sort of nod" but no statement to the effect that he should withdraw.

Eagleton also was asked by this reporter, "Did the question come up of why you hadn't volunteered information before that? Did George ask you that?"

"No, he didn't," Eagleton replied. Eagleton answered the same way

when asked if he had any indication at any time before the McGovern meeting that McGovern and his people were getting apprehensive about the health question impact. "No, I didn't," he said.

In the end, he said, "nothing unexpected came out of that meeting."

Perhaps. But certainly the result of that meeting was unexpected to some of McGovern's own key people.

Gary Hart got the word in Washington, where he returned on Sunday, when Frank Mankiewicz called him.

"Frank said, 'You aren't going to like this,' Hart remembers, "But I am standing here and the Senator and Tom Eagleton are going to be here in a couple of minutes to hold a press conference."

"What?" Hart said.

To Stay on Ticket

"They are getting ready to do a press conference," Mankiewicz repeated. "George McGovern is going to say he is keeping Tom Eagleton on the ticket."

"Frank, has he talked to anybody? Have you talked to him?"

"No. He said he's made up his mind and that's the way it's going to be."

"Frank, did he bring the records?"

"No, I don't think so," Mankiewicz answered. "No, he said he didn't bring them. He told us that the doctors won't let them out, it's a part of hospital policy and all that stuff."

"But what's he (McGovern) going on?"

"Well, you know, Eagleton talked to him."

"Were the staff people present, has he talked to anybody, has he talked to you?"

"No."

Looking back on it now, Hart tries to analyze what happened that morning this way:

"The elements in that decision are very personal: Understanding, pity, empathy, genuine sort of deep regard, sympathy, and probably a sincere belief that this was the right thing to do."

"I think George McGovern completely forgot that morning that he was a politician. He was dealing with this at another level. He was not thinking about the campaign. He was not thinking about the political implications. He was not thinking about the problems. He was just thinking about: 'Gee whiz, here's a man that has lived through a lot and I've lived through a lot and I understand him.'"

"McGovern has one weakness, and that is there are some things he wants to decide himself and he doesn't want to be talked out of them. And when he's in one of those moods, he makes sure that people don't have a chance to have access to him. Because they may cloud his mind. And the decision to

keep Eagleton on was very much a George McGovern decision—and he didn't want to hear anything else about it. I'm convinced of it.

"He had heard our recommendations. At no point did he ask for my vote up-or-down on Eagleton. What I did was try to create an atmosphere in his mind which said: 'Senator, if you have not seen those records, you have no choice.'"

McGovern had not seen the records, and he had made his decision. It was swiftly implemented.

After their meeting, McGovern and Eagleton left for a nearby small house where they were joined by their respective staffs. There, they discussed the health question—and there, a number of McGovern aides learned for the first time of the full problem.

One of Eagleton's aides immediately reacted to news of the sudden forthcoming press conference. He told McGovern personally that it would be better to wait until both candidates could be back in Washington. Mankiewicz, he says, agreed. But McGovern wanted to go ahead with it. Do it now, get the campaign going. Eagleton concurred.

Privately, before facing the TV cameras and the questions, they agreed to say that the only conversations about the health question had been between the two candidates, and not their staffs. The Eagleton side says Mankiewicz suggested having the one conference, and then "clam up." In other words, try not to answer later press inquiries on Eagleton's health.

Then, they all headed for the press conference.

Eagleton began casually, in a low-key. "I'm very grateful to George and Eleanor McGovern for their cordial hospitality here in the Black Hills, more for their friendship and the confidence they expressed in me and in my wife..."

On Three Occasions

Then, moments later, the reference to rumors, and finally the statement: "On three occasions in my life, I have voluntarily gone into hospitals as a re-

sult of nervous exhaustion and fatigue." He listed the times: 1960 and 1964 and 1966. The first time he was exhausted and fatigued, the second was also exhaustion and fatigue and something else: a stomach disorder.

"I'm not too dissimilar from the fellow in the Alka-Seltzer ad who says, 'I can't believe I ate the whole thing.' But I do get, when I do overwork and tire myself, I do get kind of a nervous stomach situation. It's one of the physical manifestations of what I've experienced."

The third time it was once again exhaustion and fatigue.

Out of all this, he said, he had learned many things about himself. One of the most important was the knowledge of how to pace himself, and since 1966 he has "experienced good, solid, sound health."

Then he took questions. Tom Eagleton had not mentioned depression or psychiatric treatment or being administered electro-shock treatment. These came out in the questioning.

The newsmen ended the conference by asking George McGovern a series of questions. McGovern was unequivocal: "Tom Eagleton is fully qualified in mind, body and spirit to be the Vice President of the United States and, if necessary, to take over the presidency on a moment's notice."

Would he do it differently if he had the choice to make over again?

Wouldn't Have Hesitated

"I wouldn't have hesitated one minute if I had known everything that Sen. Eagleton said here today."

He added:

"I think what you have seen here today is a demonstration of the kind of candor and openness that you're going to get in this campaign from Sen. Eagleton and myself. We have no secrets to hide."

The candidates and their staffs headed off in different directions. Some went back to the East Coast and Washington. Others, including Eagleton, to the West Coast and eventually on to Hawaii. George McGovern remained in South Dakota.

Once again, they were all isolated physically from each other and separated by thousands of miles. But now, if the recollections are correct, they all seemed confident the worst was over. They would weather the storm. It would all pass over in a matter of days.

Eagleton says:

"As I left South Dakota, there was no understanding on my part that it was any kind of a trial. I was confident in the fact that I was still the vice presidential nominee."

Yet, for them all, the most difficult part was still to come.

Next: The Trial.