

For G.O.P., a Ray of Light in Midwest

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HUMBOLDT, S. D., Nov. 7—Larry Pressler sat somewhat bleary-eyed from lack of sleep yesterday amid the leftover clutter of his campaign for Congress in the living room of his parents' small farmhouse on a gravel road just outside this village.

Every few minutes he jumped up to answer the hollow ring of the phone on the wall by the kitchen, where his mother was preparing lunch before his father came in from his chores.

Many of the calls were long distance and most of them were congratulatory. Mr. Pressler, a 32-year-old lawyer and former Rhodes Scholar, provided one of the few rays of light in an extremely dark election day for Republicans when he upset Representative Frank E. Denholm, a once heavily favored Democrat who was seeking a third term in South Dakota's First District.

Mr. Pressler was one of only four Republican candidates for the House in the nation to unseat incumbent Democrats.

His feat seemed even more remarkable because it came in the face of Democratic Senator George McGovern's strong comeback defeat of Leo K. Thorness, the Republican candidate who is a former Air Force lieutenant colonel and Vietnam prisoner of war.

Switch From 1972

In 1972, when Richard M. Nixon humiliated Senator McGovern in the Presidential race by rolling up a 54-to-46 margin in South Dakota, Mr. Denholm, the Democratic Representative, coasted to victory with 61 per cent of the vote in the First District.

But how much solace the National Republican Party can take from Mr. Pressler's impressive election by 55 to 45 per cent of the vote over Mr. Denholm is open to some question.

For moms the good-looking, brown-haired bachelor, a Harvard Law School graduate, who was a legal aide to Secretary of State Kissinger before returning here to run, was shunned by both the state and national G.O.P. organizations.

He invoked the anger of state party leaders by ignoring their advice not to seek the nomination and defeating two old-time Republicans by getting 51 per cent of the vote in the June primary. Later, the Republican Congressional Campaign Committee, convinced that Mr. Denholm was unbeatable, turned a deaf ear to Mr. Pressler's pleas for financial assistance until the last days before the election, when it became apparent that he had a good chance of winning.

And the way he conducted his campaign did not help him much with the party leaders. As far back as April, he said he would vote for the impeachment of President Nixon. When President Ford pardoned Mr. Nixon in September, he protested. Continually, he advocated Congressional reform. On most other issues, he sounded as much like Mr. McGovern as the Democratic Senator himself.

Mr. Pressler is an Army veteran who spent 18 months in Vietnam. He is a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and a former American Legion post commander. But he repeatedly called for a \$17-billion cut in the defense budget, urging troop reductions in Europe, scrapping the B-1 bomber and an end to the manufacture of nuclear weapons.

Seeks Idealism and Reform

"The Republican party now has the opportunity to become the party of idealism and reform," he said in an interview. "I'm going to speak out strongly—if anybody listens to me in Washington—to try to convince the President we've got to take some of these issues."

He is convinced that the large Democrat's majority in Congress will force the Democrats to assume the responsibility for much that happens in the country and that Republicans can best serve by offering provocative solutions to problems.

"I think we've got to change the Republican party to a problem-solving approach," he declared.

Along that line, he is in favor of more, rather than fewer, controls on the economy and urges such things as rollbacks in oil and fertilizer prices.

In his campaign, he refused funds from any "special-inter-

ests" groups, subsisting almost entirely on small contributions for which each donor received a painstakingly written long-hand thank you note from his mother. John Gardner, of Common Cause, is one of his idol and he continually referred to that organization and its work in his speeches and television commercials.

He raised about \$35,000 for his race and spent almost all of it on television and other media advertising. He had no billboards, no bumper stickers, no paid staff and no campaign headquarters except the tiny living room at the farmhouse 22 miles west of Sioux Falls. For months he traversed the district in a second-hand car, determined to shake 500 hands a day.

Mr. Pressler, a former young Republican at the University of South Dakota who dated Senator McGovern's daughter, Ann, for two years there, said he had decided to run the most "idealistic" campaign he could because "I really didn't expect to win."

Denholm Also Surprised

Mr. Denholm, a 50-year-old lawyer and former agent for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, did not expect Mr. Pressler to win either. He did not take his challenger seriously until the last few weeks of the campaign, spending much of his time in Washington.

There is no doubt that Mr. Pressler's victory can be attributed in part to the defections of many First District Democrats, especially among younger McGovern supporters.

At a McGovern celebration Tuesday night, large numbers of young volunteers acknowledged that they had voted for Mr. Pressler. And a long-time aide to the Senator said that their canvassers had found before the election "that about 30 per cent of our No. 1's were going to vote for Pressler."

If much of his support was from McGovern backers, the quiet, but outspoken, Mr. Pressler was not chagrined.

"I admire him very much," he said, "and agree with most of his things on agriculture. And I think he's given a positive face to South Dakota politics."