McGovern to Nixon

New Debate Challenge

Washington

Recalling President Nixon's enthusiasm in the past for presidential campaign debates, Senator George S. McGovern offered yesterday to pay for national television time for a series of debates before the November election.

In a telegram sent to the President yesterday morning, McGovern offered, ". . . to make available for the debates several of the half-hour programs that I will purchase in the coming weeks."

POLICY

Later in the day, White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler announced that the President had refused the offer. "Our opposition is unchanged," Ziegler said

Mr. Nixon has said that he has changed his view about debates and now believes a President should not engage in them. He contends that the President makes policy every time he speaks and that such debates are not a good place to make policy.

When McGovern's challenge was issued. Lawrence F. O'Brien, the Senator's national campaign chairman, expressed hope that Mr. Nixon would accept because of "Richard Nixon's numerous statements favoring presidential debates."

At a news conference called by O'Brien to detail the formal challenge, film clips of previous statements on presidential debates by Mr. Nixon were shown the press.

Included in the film clips was Mr. Nixon's response to a question about debates in Anaheim, Calif., on Sept. 16, 1968, when he said:

"I believe that nationally televised debates between the two major candidates, as I have stated on many occasions, would serve the public interest . . . I seem to be always anxious to debate. I'll be glad to take on anybody."

RECORD

Clearly attempting to corner the President with his own past record, O'Brien also furnished the press with two other similar statements in 1968 and a magazine article arguing for debates which he wrote in 1964.

Despite the record, however, the last Presidential debates were held in 1960 between Mr. Nixon and John F. Kennedy and were widely credited with aiding the Kennedy campaign.

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