

Apathy on Watergate Puzzles McGovern

By George Lardner Jr.
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DETROIT, Oct. 18—Just the other night, George McGovern said, a young black man came up to him and warned that "this election is going to break your heart."

All McGovern could tell the Detroit Economic Club here today is that he hopes it won't. But it was just as clear from what he said that he is afraid it might.

Still just inching upward in the polls against President Nixon's massive lead, the Democratic presidential candidate acknowledged that his campaign against alleged corruption in the GOP has failed to catch fire thus far.

McGovern said he was frankly "puzzled" by lack of any great public outcry over the Watergate break-in and other examples of what he considers a "total erosion of political and moral and public values" under the Nixon administration.

"I don't know whether I have the answers to it," McGovern said. "I do know that I'm deeply disturbed by it."

On that note, the South Dakota senator ended what began as a sharply worded attack on Mr. Nixon's economic policies, and especially on the President's bid for a \$250 billion spending limit free of congressional strictures.

Speaking to an audience of close to 1,000 in a banquet room at Cobo Hall, McGovern

denounced the proposed ceiling as a "cynical device" aimed at diverting public attention from the administration's mishandling of the economy for the past four years.

He said it could only result in continued emphasis on military spending "accompanied by substantial cutbacks in education, health care and the like," in contrast to McGovern's program "to cut military waste, close tax loopholes and use precious public funds to meet the needs of our own people."

During his speech, McGovern also assailed Republican suggestions that welfare rolls would increase astronomically if he were elected. He noted pointedly that "I haven't been President the last four years" when welfare rolls rose some 70 per cent. At the same time, McGovern said he did not intend to lecture those who find themselves on the dole.

"For those that are unable to work," he said, "I don't want to give them a sermon on the work ethic. I want to give them a job."

The candidate's apparent and perhaps momentary disillusionment popped up in the question-and-answer session that followed his prepared talk. The final query was, on the surface, a friendly one, asking McGovern why the public seemed not to care "about the police-state methods of the Republican Party, the corruption and favoritism in the Nixon administration, and the undermining of a democratic society."

McGovern began his answer by making up for his failure earlier in the talk to mention Michigan Attorney General Frank Kelley, who is the state's Democratic senatorial nominee against incumbent Republican Sen. Robert Griffin.

The South Dakotan said he

hoped Kelley would be successful and quickly added that he hoped his endorsement "won't be too damaging."

Then he turned to the question. He suggested that one of the problems with the Watergate case is that the public has "not stopped to realize" that it involved highly placed officials in the President's re-election effort, including two former White House aides.

By contrast, McGovern said, "there was a time not so many years ago when far less incidents really shook the foundations of any incumbent administration."

"Everybody remembers Harry Vaughan in the Truman administration," he recalled. "He took a deep freeze, probably worth \$300 or \$400, and it caused a national scandal... Then came Sherman Adams, probably the man President Eisenhower most wanted to keep within the White House walls. And yet when it was revealed that he had accepted a vicuna coat and a little rug of some kind in return for arranging an appointment for somebody at a regulatory agency, it was a national scandal and he was forced to resign."

McGovern, however, did not quarrel with the point that no such sense of scandal can be found today. He said the young black man who approached him after a late party in New York told him:

"I don't think people care any more. I don't think they care about undercover deals..."



Associated Press

Cigar smoke from the audience curls around George McGovern as he addresses the Economic Club of Detroit.

I think the appeal that you're trying to make to the ideals and the values of this country will probably fall on deaf ears."

The minister's son from South Dakota didn't quarrel with that thought either. He simply said he couldn't let it stop him.

"In a sense," McGovern said, "that's what life is all about. It's a struggle between our better impulses and more selfish, baser instincts. No one ever knows for sure how that struggle will resolve itself. We can only hope that the American people do care. . ."