ROBERT J. DOLE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with

Sen. GEORGE S. McGOVERN

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Interviewer

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Smith: Now, let me ask you, ostensibly, this project is about Bob Dole, but at his insistence, it's about much more than Bob Dole. It's really a chance to look at, in particular, the Senate and how it's evolved over these last thirty to forty years, and in a larger sense still, the whole political process, which has been transformed, and the trajectory of your career obviously mirrors that. The Senate that you walked into was different how, from the Senate that we see today on C-SPAN?

McGovern: Well, first of all, every senator was known. I go over there now and go up in the gallery and look over the edge, and I don't know half of the people that are on the floor in the Senate, even when some page tells me that's Senator so-and-so, I still don't recognize him. I don't even recognize the names. So I think that individual senators had a more prominent place in the life of the Senate than they do today.

I also think there was more significant floor debate in those days than there is now. There was a tendency even when I was there that I think was just getting underway in the age of television and modern press communications and so on for senators to beat a path to the studio where they could get out a release on everything they were doing, but you have the feeling now that publicity and cultivating television and the press as a whole is more pronounced than it used to be.

Smith: Were party loyalties stronger then they are now?

McGovern: Maybe.

Smith: In terms of organizational ties or discipline?

McGovern: I think so. I was thinking about Lady Bird Johnson, who died this week. When Lyndon Johnson was running that show—he literally ran it when I came to the Senate—there was a sense of party discipline that I think was stronger than it is today.

But having said that, I also think the collegiality of the Senate has diminished since the years since Bob Dole and I were there. I had a very warm relationship with any number of senators, some of them Republicans, some of them Democrats, some of them people who regarded themselves as Independents, that seems to me to be in shorter supply today than it was forty years ago. There is some of that collegiality up there today. You see Ted Kennedy cooperating with Orrin Hatch, and you see other combinations like that. But that was even stronger, I believe, in the days of Dole and McGovern than it is today.

Smith: Let me ask you: you mention Lyndon Johnson, there is this legend about Johnson and his command of the Senate. Was it unique to Johnson? Was it a function of his personality, or were there rules? Were there institutional levers that he could pull that were not available to later Majority Leaders?

McGovern: I think Johnson was a power unto himself. He was a very determined man. He was skillful in knowing what the interests and the wishes of senators were, and he could be talking to you about some project in your state that you were interested in, and slide from that into the vote that was coming up. He says, "I sure hope you're going to be with me on this vote on such and such." [laughs] It wasn't a direct bribe or anything like that, but there was this use of power that Johnson was very good at exercising.

He might have been the strongest Majority Leader in the history of the Senate. I haven't researched that back to the days of George Washington, of course, but I don't know of anybody else in the history of the Senate who was more skillful at putting together fifty-one votes for something he wanted.

Smith: Of course, he also had a lot more than fifty-one Democrats.

McGovern: He did. He had control of both houses. When I first came to the Congress, he had Sam Rayburn presiding over the House, who was probably as influential as Johnson, and [Dwight D.] Eisenhower was president during those first eight years that I served in the Senate. They really ran the domestic side of American policy during the Eisenhower years.

I don't know that there was any gentleman's agreement that that's the way it would be, but Johnson and Rayburn pretty much backed the president on anything that had to do with foreign policy or with national defense or national security, and Eisenhower more or less went along with most of what Rayburn and Johnson wanted to do on the domestic front, on healthcare, education, housing, transportation, agriculture, conservation, resource development. Those things were pretty much run by Johnson and Rayburn, with the cooperation of the Democratic Senate and a certain number of Republicans who seemed to vote with us quite regularly.

Smith: Now, you had served in the House, didn't you, before you were—

McGovern: For four years, yes.

Smith: In some ways you have parallel careers. I mean like Bob Dole, you were in the House before you were in the Senate. You came from a rural farm state. You had a lot of similar experiences growing up, in terms of the Depression, the War; a heroic career in the War. Did that make it easier to establish a personal relationship with Dole, and how long did that take? I mean, to what extent did his reputation early on in the Senate as a gunslinger, you know, "the sheriff of the Senate," was something you had to get over?

McGovern: Well, he came to the Senate some years after I was there, and at that time Bob, bless his heart, was a pretty partisan, tough guy on the rhetoric, and he was pretty partisan. It's interesting that he came from a Democratic family. His mother and father were Democrats. My mother and father were Republicans. [laughs] So I think each of us always had a certain sympathy for the other's point of view, because we understood the background that we came from. I always knew that Kansas and South Dakota had a lot in common in terms of the economic interests. Bob understood that every bit as clearly as I did.

I have to confess I warmed up to him rather slowly, because I did think that he was something of a gunslinger. I think the same was true of him towards me. He probably sensed I had national ambitions, and so when I ran for president, he was the Republican National Chairman. You probably knew that. He had to do what he had to do, which is to play the role of Republican National Chairman. So he was a tough opponent during that '72 race of mine.

But even before that in the Senate we started working together on anything that related to agriculture, food assistance, rural America, veterans' affairs. We had common ground there, and our first cooperative efforts, as I remember it, were about 1968. I was responsible for launching the Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs.

Smith: How did that come into being?

McGovern: Well, the way it came about, I was watching a television program one night by CBS called *Hunger in America*. I remember saying to Eleanor [McGovern], "What are they talking about, hunger in America? This is the richest country in the world. There are no hungry people in America." I had run the Food for Peace Program for President [John F.] Kennedy, so I knew about hunger in the world, Africa, Asia, Latin America, parts of the Middle East. I knew about that, but I wasn't really aware of the degree of hunger right here in this country. I watched that hour-long documentary on CBS with fascination.

One of the things they showed that got under my skin was a little boy, you know, maybe a little guy nine or ten, in a school lunchroom, I think in South Carolina. It was during the school lunch period, and you had half the kids sitting down, you know, eating their lunch. The other half are standing along the wall, and the television camera zeroed in on this little boy and said, "What do you think when you stand here and are unable to eat like the other children?" I thought he would say he was mad or he was angry.

He kind of dropped his gaze to the floor and he said, "I'm ashamed."

The reporter said, "Well, why is that?"

He says, "Because I haven't got any money."

I remember saying to two of my daughters who were watching the program, "You know, it's not that little guy who should be ashamed. It's George McGovern." A United States senator and I didn't even know that students aren't allowed to eat unless they have the money to pay for their lunch. That's the way it was in those days. I didn't know that.

I went to the Senate floor that the next day and introduced a resolution calling for the creation of a Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs and introduced that as a bill. To my surprise, it passed without objection. I don't know whether you could do that today or not in the Senate. One objection would have halted the action on the bill.

But anyway, it passed, and Bob Dole became the ranking Republican on that committee, and from that day until we both left the Senate years later, he and I worked hand in glove on school lunches, on food stamps, on the WIC [Women, Infants, and Children] program, which we helped launch, anything that had to do—we revolutionized food assistance in this country. There are millions of people in America now getting food stamps; millions of children now getting fed at school even if they don't have the money to pay for their lunch; millions of low-income young nursing or pregnant mothers, and their infants through the age of five, that came out of that committee of ours; and Bob Dole was a key factor in this.

Smith: In some ways—I have to be careful how I phrase this, but in some ways it would be harder for a conservative Republican, given his constituency and their suspicion of government programs, food stamps, you know—quote—"the welfare state." How did Dole, who was a budget-balancing traditionalist, how did he reconcile those two schools of thought?

McGovern: Well, Bob Dole is a highly intelligent man and a man of great integrity, and he came to see in the hearings that we conducted that society actually gained income. The government actually gained income if you could produce healthy kids that go out into life better educated, more vigorous, able to earn more money and therefore pay more taxes. It's the same way the GI Bill worked. Bob and I are both beneficiaries of the GI Bill. It cost billions and billions of dollars.

Do you know that the federal government made money on that bill? They made two or three times what it cost them. The reason is that because we went back and got a college education after the war, or went on to graduate school—in my case, all the way to a Ph.D. at Northwestern University in history, your field—the government just made money hand over fist on the additional taxes we've been paying ever since we got these better jobs that go back to the—the same thing with the school lunch program. The same thing with food stamps. The same thing with the WIC program.

Every time you take a child or an adult or a worker, and you increase their nutritional health, you're going to increase their productivity and their earning power, and Bob saw that. We saw it in the hearings we conducted, and I'm sure that he—well, of course, we both got criticized in our home states for giveaways and that sort of thing, but that became more and more the diminishing minority.

Smith: The hearings, did you go out into the field?

McGovern: We did. We went right out into the field. The first one was in Florida, and I said to the staff, "Why do you want to go to Florida? You know, it's a prosperous state, and everybody's out on the beach, picking oranges, and so on." [laughter] "There's no hunger in Florida."

They said, "Believe us, there is."

So we go down there, and they take us into a migrant labor camp. People are out picking berries and doing other things in the fields, thousands of them. Then they go back to these little huts and tents and places at night. We visited one family that were living in a garage. I remember seeing this little mother, and she was little, and nine or ten children; they were all in a single-car garage. They had to take the car out, of course. They were on cots and sort of stacked up. It was obvious that they didn't have enough to eat. I wouldn't say they were emaciated, but the children were underfed. That was our first stop in going out into the field, but after two days of that in the migrant labor camps, we'd seen a lot.

We went into the slums of great cities. We went into schoolhouses where they didn't have a school lunch program. We traversed this country in public hearings, and we learned a lot.

Smith: It was an eye-opening experience.

McGovern: It really was. I remember one conservative Southern senator. He was a Democrat. You know, the Southern Democrats were more conservative than the Republicans. He was a great man; I don't want to ridicule him. But he said to me after we left this garage—I said, "Gosh, Alan, isn't that terrible, that poor woman living there with ten or eleven kids?"

He said, "Well, I notice she's got a television in there. Why couldn't she sell that television and buy some food?"

I said, "Alan, if I were stuck in an overheated garage with ten kids, if I had to beg, borrow, or steal the money, I'd have a television set. How are you going to take care of a raft of kids like that all day long, and her husband's out in the field picking berries and so on?"

That night he came to me, and he said, "You know, George, I hadn't thought about this, but you're right about that. It's okay." So he gave up making a speech on the Senate floor talking about this woman who was pretending she was poor who had a television. [laughter]

Smith: Do you think there's a little bit of a populist in Bob Dole?

McGovern: Yes. Yes, I think most of us from our part of the country have a streak of that, populism. We don't have the ever-present huge corporations that you have in some parts of the country. What you have are little independent merchants up and down Main Street, farmers toiling out in the fields, and so on. So there's always a certain amount of skepticism about people with great wealth and great power and so on, and that's a populist impulse. They didn't trust the railroads. They didn't trust the banks. They didn't trust the big oil companies. Yes, there's that populist streak in Bob Dole.

Smith: Do you think it was sharpened at all by living through the Great Depression? I mean, through the Dust Bowl?

McGovern: I do. I do. I think with Bob Dole, his instincts were also sharpened by the War. In World War II he was shot to pieces. By all odds, he shouldn't be alive today. They left him on the battlefield there for a while, thinking it was not worth bringing him back. So the rest of us came back from the War and enrolled in colleges and so on. Bob spent the first three years after the War trying to stay alive, and the people that saved him were the veterans' hospitals, the mighty federal government.

So I think that softened his attitude towards Washington [D.C.] and towards what you can do by federal power. It's not all evil. Sometimes they do things right. They won World War II. They sponsored the GI Bill. They healed me in a veterans' hospital. I think all those things are not far below the surface with Bob.

He's a good, authentic Republican, like my dad and mother, but he's perfectly capable of dealing with people across the aisle, with the opposition, and trying to work out a compromise, and he has a reputation for being a fair bargainer. So I think, yes, his populist background, but I also think his experiences with the federal government have softened him, and I use that word in a complimentary way.

Smith: He also developed, by all accounts, a very close friendship with Hubert [H.] Humphrey.

McGovern: Yes, Hubert liked Bob Dole a great deal and went out of his way to show that to Bob. There again, Hubert was born in South Dakota and grew up first in Doland, South Dakota, and then Huron. He still had the Humphrey Drug in Huron, South Dakota. So he spent his first twenty-five years in South Dakota. He left when his father convinced him that a Democrat couldn't be elected to anything in South Dakota. [laughs] I think when I did get elected ten years later, he thought something of a miracle had been performed. But he admired Bob, and he and I talked among ourselves several times. He said, "He's a good ally to have on your side."

Smith: Was it rough for you running against Humphrey for the presidency?

McGovern: Oh yes. Yes, that was the saddest part of that whole thing. Yes, that was tough. Before I ran, I asked Hubert if he were going to run again in '72, and he said, "No way. I've been over that trail one too many times." Ed [Edmund S.] Muskie talked to him and got the same answer.

But once the race started and he heard the fire bells ringing again, Hubert was a competitor. I had great affection for Hubert Humphrey, and I was sorry about the friction that developed in '72. He was desperate to get to the White House, and if he'd have gotten there, he'd have been a really first-rate president, in my opinion. So, yes, I found it difficult to run against him.

Smith: Do you have a theory—I mean, this is off the wall, but to people looking at the surface of the Dole-Nixon relationship, in some ways it doesn't make a lot of sense. I mean, it makes sense that originally there was a relationship, but when you look at how Dole was used and ultimately tossed aside—

McGovern: Tossed aside. They did him a favor when they cast him aside before Watergate broke. [laughter]

Smith: And yet Dole really seemed to have this kind of almost reverential relationship with Nixon right to the end of his life.

McGovern: I didn't frankly understand that. I thought they were so different, really.

Smith: How so?

McGovern: It always seemed to me that Bob Dole was a straight shooter, that you could trust his word. Nixon was more of a devious person. Also, I think that Nixon had a paranoid streak that is absent in Bob, but I was puzzled that that admiration and affection for Nixon seemed to continue to the end. I went to Nixon's funeral, and Bob was one of the principal eulogizers, and he broke down and wept.

Smith: I wrote that speech.

McGovern: Did you. It was a good speech.

Smith: Well, you know, my theory is—you know, Nixon never did an uncalculated thing in his life.

McGovern: That's right.

Smith: Two of the eulogists had also spoken at Mrs. [Pat] Nixon's funeral. One was Bob Dole, and the other was Pete Wilson, and they were Nixon's guys for '96. I'm convinced that Nixon knew Dole, and he knew Dole wouldn't be able to get all the way through, and he was showcasing Dole. For people to see that side of Bob Dole would in some ways be beneficial. It would offset the harsher image that Dole had. To see Dole, in effect, show his emotions in that way would have actually been advantageous. I literally think Nixon was perfectly capable of calculating to that degree.

McGovern: Do you think he actually—did he request that Dole speak?

Smith: Yes, he did. He did.

McGovern: Well, that's interesting.

Smith: You, of course, said the classiest single thing I've ever heard that day, which, of course, the senator cites frequently. Well, no, it was actually at Mrs. Nixon's funeral.

McGovern: Mrs. Nixon's, yes.

Smith: When some reporter asked you why you were there, and you said you admired Mrs. Nixon and so on and so on, and I guess they pressed and pressed, and you said, "You can't keep campaigning forever."

McGovern: That's right. [laughs] You know, I went to Pat Nixon's funeral, and he made a big thing of that in a pleasant sort of a way. Were you there?

Smith: I was.

McGovern: He invited us into the library, and he started right off. He said, "I want to thank George McGovern for coming out, and that would have meant so much to Pat." [laughs] So I thought that was a nice touch.

Smith: Why is it, Senator, that—I saw it when President [Gerald R.] Ford died, and we see it not only when elder statesmen pass away, but when they become elder statesmen. What is it about this system where only when you're no longer on the ballot do you (*a*) have the freedom to be as bipartisan or as big as you can be, and the public responds?

Isn't that frustrating in some way? Wouldn't it be nice if you could do it while you were in office?

McGovern: Do it all the way through. I think we could do more of that all the way through. I think we're a little too uptight sometimes.

By the way, you've probably heard about me. I was on Larry King that night that President Ford died, and he was shocked when I said that I had voted for President Ford in 1976. [laughs] Maybe everybody was shocked, I don't know.

Smith: I wasn't. The family, by the way, were touched.

McGovern: Were they.

Smith: Oh, very much so, yes. Yes. The story I've heard—

McGovern: That means I also voted for Bob Dole, who was the vice presidential running mate.

Smith: [laughs] Yes. You were invited fairly early in the Ford presidency to, I think, a stag dinner in the White House.

McGovern: I was.

Smith: As the stories were told to me, you expressed some surprise. You had not been invited during the Johnson or Nixon presidencies, and President Ford said, "I know, George. That's why I invited you."

McGovern: That's right. That's exactly right. He seated me next to him. He had the king [King Hussein of Jordan] on one side and I was on the other, and Fulbright was there. [laughs] But anyway, yes, in the course of the dinner, I said, "Mr. President, I don't know whether you know this, but I haven't been invited to the White House for ten years since I started criticizing our policy in Vietnam."

He says, "That's why you're here." [laughs] So I thought that was nice.

Smith: Tell me about the WIC program.

McGovern: That's one of the best programs the federal government has ever launched. It provides nutritional supplements to low-income nursing or pregnant mothers and their infants through the age of five years. You can't talk to a person who's had anything to do with that program who doesn't tell you this thing is just wonderful, what it's doing to transform lives and to bring new strength and hope to young families.

That is the result of hearings by our Select Committee, but it also went to the Committee on Agriculture, which was the legislative committee. Bob and I served on both committees, and we were the chief sponsors of that.

Senator Humphrey came to me and said, "George, I would consider it a great personal favor if you'd let me be the lead sponsor. I know this came out of your committee, and I know you and Bob have worked on these things, but this may be my last term in the Senate, and I'd love to be able to say I was the lead sponsor."

So I said, "Why not?"

That's how it got brought to the floor as the Humphrey Bill with Dole and I and others listed as cosponsors to it. I've always been glad we did that, because Hubert was so grateful.

Smith: Would that happen in the Senate today?

McGovern: It could, depending on the relationship between the senators involved. Hubert knew me well enough as a long-time neighbor. You know I lived next door to him here for twelve years in Washington. I used to ride to work with him all the time.

Yes, I think it could happen. I'm just trying to think about the people there, but it probably could happen again.

Smith: Is it safe to say that the bulk of the Senate's work happens off the floor? I mean, is it in committees?

McGovern: Yes. Yes, in committees where the hard work, particularly the subcommittees.

Smith: But you thought debate in that time was more significant than it is today.

McGovern: I thought so, although I've seen that floor empty a lot of times with a single senator up raving away.

Smith: Without naming names, are there individuals who are capable of emptying the Senate?

McGovern: Yes, there were. There were some, but there were also some who were so eloquent you wondered why there weren't more people listening, like Wayne [L.] Morse.

Wayne Morse was one of the most articulate, powerful extemporaneous speakers this country has ever produced. I'm told by his staff that whereas staff members would go over and correct the senator's remarks in the Record before the Record was printed, knock out the duplications and the dangling participles, they couldn't find anything to change. He wouldn't have a note, and he'd just speak for one or two, three hours. But Hubert was like that, too, Hubert Humphrey, Wayne Morse, John [O.] Pastore of Rhode Island. They could get up and speak endlessly. So we had people that could empty the Senate, but we also had ones that should have filled the Senate.

I remember one day. It was about five o'clock in the afternoon, and there wasn't a person in the Senate except the senator who was speaking and the presiding officer, and then I'm sitting there waiting to get recognized. In comes Jim [James O.] Eastland, the old Mississippi Southerner. As I said earlier, those Southern Democrats were considerably more to the right than the Republicans.

He's standing there looking at me. He had a big cigar in his mouth; that's against Senate rules, but when the sergeant-at-arms would remind him of that, he'd say, "I'm not smoking." He wouldn't have it lit, and he'd be eating it, sort of chewing on it, so they didn't know quite what to do. He was the most powerful guy in the Senate, I guess.

But he had this big cigar hanging out of his mouth. He starts chuckling, and he's looking at me. I looked down to see if my fly was open or what was wrong here, and couldn't see anything. He finally sauntered over there and he says, "George, did you really tell that guy out in Michigan to kiss your ass?"

I said, "Well, Jim, I'm afraid that wasn't one of my better days in the campaign."

He says, "That's the only thing you said in that campaign I agreed with." [laughter] So I give you that.

Smith: That's the equivalent of remember when Nelson Rockefeller famously gave a one-fingered salute to the—

McGovern: Yes, that's right.

Smith: Did you know Rockefeller?

McGovern: Yes, I did. Yes, I knew him pretty well.

Smith: The seniority system—I mean, the Senate seems to have been a much more hierarchical kind of place when you arrived than it is today.

McGovern: I think so, yes.

Smith: What was the pros and the cons on that?

McGovern: I suppose the pros is that you had a pretty clear map of who you had to see to get something done. Maybe the lines of authority were a little clearer than they are now.

The minuses of that are that you couldn't get around those people. If they didn't want to see a bill move to the floor they had ways of trapping that measure so you didn't get very far. You know, that was just as true in the House. The head of the House Ways and Means Committee had great power. The Rules Committee had great power. Those committee chairmen, most of whom were Southern Democrats, had been there forever, both in the House and the Senate, and they had too much power, I think, for the sake of a democracy.

On balance, I'm glad that that hierarchical system has been modified.

Smith: Does it make it harder to get things done?

McGovern: Maybe. Maybe it's harder to get things done, but there's less tyranny involved.

Smith: Do you ever find yourself explaining or trying to explain to people—I'm sure people come up to you all the time, and they see the Senate on C-SPAN, and they're perplexed if not infuriated by what seems to be much ado about nothing. I mean, how do you explain the way the Senate operates?

McGovern: I try to explain to people that most of the hard labor has to be done in committees; that you can't write a bill on the Senate floor. You can't conduct a hearing on the Senate floor. So that bills are largely shaped off the floor, and that you shouldn't expect to see a lot of productive and constructive effort moving forward on the floor of either the House or the Senate. The fact that there's only six senators on the floor only means, in most cases, that the rest of them are hard at work in their committees or in their offices, doing things for constituents. They have a hundred and one things senators have to do, and that the floor is a place for final action, not for shaping work that determines the course of a bill.

Smith: What about the role of staff? Presumably when you arrived in Washington, the staffs were much smaller.

McGovern: They were. The staffs were smaller, but, you know, the country has become more complicated. It's bigger. There are more people. The problems are more difficult, I think, and so you need bigger staffs and well-trained staff. I don't think that's an unfavorable development.

Smith: How about fundraising? That clearly is something that is—

McGovern: Well, that drives members of the Congress up the wall. It's common knowledge now, I guess, that a United States senator, the day after he's elected for six years, will be out raising money for the next campaign, and that they give an average of two out of every seven days to raising funds. I don't think that's an exaggeration. Senators who dislike that as much as I did really are frustrated and turned off by it. I think the Senate is ready to reform the system. I think the House probably is, too.

The one thing that keeps them from doing that is that they think the incumbent has an advantage in raising money and therefore if you try to restrict the activities of members of the Congress in any way on raising funds, you surrender an advantage that they now have.

But just speaking for myself, and that's all I should really try to do, I'd like to see us go to a system of public financing of campaigns, similar to what they have in most of the European democracies. Under that kind of system both the senator and congressman, the incumbents, and their bona fide challengers, would get a given sum of money from the U.S. Treasury. I know some people are going to say, "Gosh, all we need now is another drain on the Treasury." The best way taxpayers can defend themselves is to insist that they pay for campaigns rather than these special interests that have an ax to grind.

So if we had a system under which each person got, you know, a fair amount. You don't want to deprive them of the right to go on television and radio, but a fair amount, depending on the population of the state or the district, for each of the contender and the incumbent. I think that's what we ought to have and just exclude any private money at all. No candidate can spend his own money on a campaign. He can't go out and raise money from his friends or from a corporation or from a labor union. All of that's out. No private money in campaigning. I think it's the best thing we could do for American democracy.

We might have to amend the Constitution, because the First Amendment says that we have the right to free speech, and in some cases they include campaigning as part of free speech. So you might have to amend that; "except in the case of public campaigns" or something like this.

Smith: Did you ever have a donor or a lobbyist make an improper request? I mean a quid pro quo?

McGovern: You know, I never did. I know senators and congressmen who have, because they've told me about it, but I never really had anybody come to me and say, "Look George, I put up $50,000 in this last race, and I want money for this bridge," or, "I want my kid in West Point." I never had that happen.

Smith: Talk about Vietnam and in those years when Dole was just newly arrived in the Senate and you were clearly a national figure even before the '72 campaign, and there were amendments being offered—I mean, god, déjà vu—amendments being offered to end congressional funding for the War. Dole, obviously, was on the other side. I mean, how did you ever discuss those? I mean, was your relationship at that point such that you could talk about those things, or you just take it for granted that you were on opposite sides, and there was no—

McGovern: I don't think we ever talked about it. We just argued with each other across the aisles here, and that's the way those debates went on during the Vietnam period.

I think they were some of the best debates that I experienced in my years in the Congress. There were eloquent arguments made on both sides of the issue. But to the best of my memory and knowledge, I don't think Bob and I ever talked about these things privately, as we did things like food assistance or agriculture or veterans' benefits, things of that kind.

Smith: There is a school of thought that suggests that his marriage to Elizabeth, which took place the end of '72, is a factor in his so-called softening. Do you think that she had that—

McGovern: Yes, I think it doubtless was. I think if you're happy with your life, it's easier to be magnanimous in other things, and I think that Elizabeth doubtless added to his happiness. I didn't know his first wife, but I know Elizabeth, and she's a remarkable person.

Smith: The dichotomy between particularly the mid-seventies and actually the vice presidential campaign and that remark about Democrat wars; I mean, this notion of Dole as a gut puncher, as a very—occasionally mean partisan. And yet one senses even then among those who were his colleagues that that image wasn't the same. It took a while for the public to see the other side of Dole, but I take it among his colleagues you'd always seen that side of Dole.

McGovern: I think so. I think that's fair to say. What I have noticed about Bob over the years, he just gets more humorous all the time. I don't know what's the source of that, but he has a great wit and he has a great storytelling ability, and I don't think you can be a humorist and be entirely mean. [laughs]

Smith: Yes, yes. He also, I think, he likes to particularly poke fun at pomposity.

McGovern: Yes, he does.

Smith: I think that's a populist trait.

McGovern: Yes. Yes, he does. I think audiences respond to him very well, especially on the humor level.

Smith: He told me once that after the '76 campaign when he was taking some heat, Hubert Humphrey went to him—it may have been the day after, but it was that week—and said, "Bob, I know where you are. I've been there. Don't pay any attention to them," you know. "Forget the people who are scapegoating. You did what they wanted you to do." I mean, it was an extraordinarily generous kind of thing. It sounds like that was typical of Humphrey.

McGovern: I think it was, yes. Humphrey liked to get along with everybody. He called Nixon—did you see these recent Nixon tapes that came out this week?

Smith: Well, I've read a little bit about them, and then some of your comments, where even at the height of his greatest triumph, he didn't seem a very happy man.

McGovern: He didn't seem to be happy. You know, you'd think having just won a landslide victory, he'd be jubilant, but these tapes that came out shocked me. I have to tell you, I kind of laughed at them, but in one paragraph he called me a "clown," a "prick," and a "son of a bitch." He was talking to [Henry A.] Kissinger and to Rockefeller, and this is on election night. He said, "And that concession speech of his, didn't you think that was awful?"

Well, I got a copy of it out. It's really a rather magnanimous thing, in which I congratulate him on his victory and pledge my support in moving the country to peace and justice and so on. I even quote Isaiah, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They will rise up on wings as eagles. They shall run and not,"—how does it go—"run and not faint." No, "they shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint." Anyway, I just threw in that biblical verse to my discouraged supporters. I couldn't see anything that he could object to.

Smith: Of course, you had contact with him in his later years.

McGovern: I did, yes. Yes, after he left the White House. Yes, that would have been 1984. I went to New York and talked with him about an idea I had, and from that point on he couldn't be nicer. From then on he never wrote a book or an article or anything without sending it to me and sending a letter to me. He had a strange way of writing longhand letters. He would start up here like this, and they just kept getting shorter. You'd go down to the page; right down at the end, there would only be one or two words, and then "Richard Nixon" at the bottom.

How much more time are you going to need with me?

Smith: Oh, just about five minutes.

McGovern: Okay, I've got to get ready for this big show tonight.

Smith: Okay. No, listen, that's fine. Yes. Tell me—well, maybe we can maybe sum up. How do you think Bob Dole changed over time?

McGovern: I think clearly Bob Dole became more tolerant of others, more magnanimous in his outlook, more humorous. He became a more admirable human being. I always thought Bob was a person of high integrity and a keen intellect, but what I have seen in the more recent years, and this is over a considerable period of time, is a process that has made him a better and more admirable person.

Smith: Do you have any theories as to what contributed to that evolution?

McGovern: Maybe just the lessons of life, that that's the way to go through this world. He hasn't always had it easy. He's had to suffer a lot physically. But I think just his experience with other human beings, his discovery that people who disagree with him on politics don't necessarily present a threat or a reason for animosity, that instead it's a kind of a challenge to warm up to them and to try to see areas of common ground.

Smith: Finally, how do you think he should be remembered?

McGovern: Bob is one person that was a true leader. We can't all be leaders. There are a lot of great people who—[telephone rings].

Can I get rid of this thing? This is to rescue me from what was an awkward answer there. [Smith laughs.]

[Off-tape conversation]

McGovern: Okay, now, what was that last question?

Smith: How do you think Bob Dole should be remembered?

McGovern: I would say he should be remembered as a constructive, patriotic American leader. He had a national reputation, deservedly so, candidate and nominee, in fact, for the presidency. He was the Majority Leader of the United States Senate. And in all of those roles he manifested the qualities of a strong and effective leader. I think that's the way he'll be remembered.

Smith: One last thing I have to ask. I have to ask you, you belong to a small club of people who have run for the presidency. I wondered, do you give advice to each—I mean, did you get any advice after Election Day in '72 from Barry [M.] Goldwater?

McGovern: I did. I went to see Barry Goldwater, and I said, "What can you tell a junior senator from South Dakota who's running for president?"

He said, "Don't get fatigued. Fatigue is the big enemy in a presidential campaign." He said, "That's why I went into Florida shortly before the election and came out against Social Security. Not smart, especially in Florida where everybody's on Social Security. But no," he said, "seriously, I'd pace myself."

He was absolutely right. I think the biggest mistakes I made in '72 were an outgrowth of fatigue, especially right after I was nominated. We just did everything to win that nomination. There were sixteen contenders, and I was the first lengthy campaigner for the presidency. I started this business of announcing a year ahead of the election. I was so exhausted by the time we got that nomination, I was ready to collapse, and that's when we started making mistakes, in picking a running mate, in when to give my acceptance address, which we decided that three o'clock in the morning would be a good time, after everybody was asleep. All those things were the results of fatigue.

Smith: Did you, in fact, seriously consider Kevin [H.] White?

McGovern: Yes, I did. I considered him seriously. He didn't turn us down, but he was opposed by some of the political—

Smith: I think Father [Robert S.] Drinan, didn't he oppose it?

McGovern: Yes, yes, yes.

Smith: I wrote speeches for Mayor White for a while, and he's a wonderful guy.

McGovern: Yes. I wish we'd have picked him.

Smith: [laughs] Listen, I can't thank you enough. It's so good of you to do this.

McGovern: It's always nice to see you.

Smith: No, it's nice to see you.

[End of interview]

Index

_____, Alan, 10

C-SPAN, 2, 21

Dole, Elizabeth H., 25
Dole, Robert J., 3
    1976 vice presidential campaign, 26
    and GI Bill, 8
    and Hubert H. Humphrey, 12
    and Richard M. Nixon, 13
    and Vietnam War, 24
    and WIC program, 17
    becomes senator, 24
    contributions to food assistance for Americans, 7
    gives eulogy for Pat Nixon, 14
    gives eulogy for Richard M. Nixon, 13
    injuries in World War II, 11
    member of Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, 7
    parents of, 5
    Republican National Chairman, 5
    U.S. Senate Majority Leader, 29
Drinan, Robert S., 31

Eastland, James O., 19
Eisenhower, Dwight D.
    presidency of, 4

Food for Peace Program, 6
Ford, Gerald R., 15, 16
Fulbright, J. William, 17

GI Bill, 8, 11
Goldwater, Barry M., 30
    on presidential campaigning, 30
Great Depression, 11

Hatch, Orrin, 3
Humphrey Bill, 18
Humphrey, Hubert H., 12, 26
    and Robert J. Dole, 12
    lead sponsor on WIC program, 17
Hunger in America (CBS television program), 6
Hussein, Abdullah (King of Jordan), 17

Johnson, Lady Bird, 3
Johnson, Lyndon B., 3

Kennedy, John F., 6
King, Larry, 16
Kissinger, Henry A., 27

McGovern, Eleanor, 6
McGovern, George S.
  1972 concession speech, 27
  1972 presidential campaign, 5, 12, 20, 30
  and Barry M. Goldwater, 30
  and Gerald R. Ford, 16, 17
  and Kevin H. White, 31
  and Nelson A. Rockefeller, 20
  and Robert S. Drinan, 31
  and Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, 7
  and WIC program, 17
  at Pat Nixon’s funeral, 15
  contributions to food assistance for Americans, 7
  early years in Congress, 4
  education of, 8
  election to Congress in 1956, 12
  in House of Representatives, 5
  influence of *Hunger in America* television program, 6
  invited to stag dinner by President Ford, 17
  launches Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, 6, 7
  on campaign finance reform, 23, 24
  on campaign fundraising, 22
  on changes in U.S. Senate, 21
  on collegiality in U.S. Senate, 3
  on congressional staffs, 22
  on debate in U.S. Senate, 2, 18, 25
  on Dwight D. Eisenhower’s presidency, 4
  on Elizabeth H. Dole, 25
  on federal assistance programs, 8
  on First Amendment, 24
  on GI Bill, 8
  on hearings for Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, 8, 9, 10
  on House of Representatives, 21
  on House of Representatives process, 22
  on House Ways and Means Committee, 21
  on Hubert H. Humphrey, 12, 18, 19, 27
  on hunger in America, 6, 7
  on influence of news media on U.S. Senate, 2
  on James O. Eastland, 19
  on John O. Pastore, 19

- on Lyndon B. Johnson, 3, 4
- on party loyalty in U.S. Senate, 3
- on populism, 10
- on public financing of campaigns, 23, 24
- on relationship with Robert J. Dole, 5, 6
- on Richard M. Nixon, 13, 14, 27, 28
- on Robert J. Dole, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 16, 25, 28, 29
- on Robert J. Dole and humor, 26
- on Rules Committee, 21
- on Sam Rayburn, 4
- on southern Democrats, 10, 19, 21
- on speeches in U.S. Senate, 19
- on U.S. Constitution, 24
- on U.S. Senate, 2, 3, 7, 17, 18, 19, 21
- on U.S. Senate process, 22
- on U.S. Senate seniority system, 21
- on Wayne L. Morse, 19
- on WIC program, 17
- on world hunger, 6
- opposition to Vietnam War, 17
- parents of, 5
- visiting migrant labor camps in Florida, 9
- voted for Gerald R. Ford in 1976, 16

Morse, Wayne L., 19
Muskie, Edmund S., 12

Nixon, Pat, 14
Nixon, Richard M., 13, 14, 15
  and new tapes released, 27
  on George S. McGovern, 27

Pastore, John O., 19

Rayburn, Sam, 4
Rockefeller, Nelson A., 20, 27

Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, 6

U.S. Senate
  Committee on Agriculture, 17
  Majority Leaders of, 4
  Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, 17
  seniority system, 20

Vietnam War, 24
  funding for, 24

Washington, George, 4

Watergate, 13
White, Kevin H., 30
Wilson, Pete, 14
Women, Infants, and Children program [WIC], 7
World War II, 11