

McGovern Position Paper on Indians-

Senator Initiated Policy of Indian Self-Determination

By RICHARD La COURSE

WASHINGTON, D.C.—(AIPA)—Sen. George McGovern, D-S.D., who has just released a position paper on how he would administer Indian affairs if he wins the presidency in November, is from one of the high population areas of Indian country.

South Dakota is Sioux country, with a constituency of nine tribes with a combined enrolled population of 36,000. When McGovern was elected to the House of Representatives in 1956, Indian voters were solidly in his camp.

McGovern served two terms in the House till 1960, lost his bid for the Senate and was appointed to a special hunger and nutrition committee by the late President John F. Kennedy. McGovern won the Senate race in 1964 by a slight margin, and is now serving his second term in the Senate.

In the Senate, McGovern

holds the position of chairman of the Senate Sub-committee on Indian Affairs. Both his Indian supporters and his Indian critics form their opinions of him on how he has performed in that crucial position.

His supporters point first of all to a 1966 resolution introduced by him into the Senate calling for a new national Indian policy based on self-determination and self-help. A key theme in the McGovern resolution, which surfaced in the highly respected Nixon Doctrine in 1970, was the Indians' right to manage and control Indian affairs.

That resolution called for the end of termination and relocation, for tribal contracting, for additional services for Indians from other agencies besides the Interior Department and the Indian bureau, for resource protection and respect for Indian identity and culture. The re-

solution, which passed the Senate but not the House, was reintroduced in 1969 — before President Richard M. Nixon's special Indian Message to Congress in July 1970.

"It is not enough to call for a reorganization or transfer of functions in Indian affairs — though this may be needed," said McGovern in 1969. "A careful, well-conceived plan... without new direction and a firm commitment to action will only result in a continued inadequate performance. A hasty ill-conceived plan could well mean disaster for the Indians on a monumental scale."

His supporters also point to McGovern's activity in behalf of Taos Pueblo for Blue Lake in 1970, active participation in the debate to settle the Alaska Native land claims in 1971, and his visit to the Pine Ridge Res-

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ervation in 1972 following the murder of an elderly Oglala Sioux, Raymond Yellow Thunder.

McGovern's Indian critics discuss his absenteeism from regular Senate subcommittee working sessions on pivotal reform Indian legislation, and his frequent absences from the Capitol during critical floor votes in the Senate.

They question whether he has used his chairmanship on the Indian affairs subcommittee to its fullest in serving the legislative needs of Indians.

In his home state today there is some disenchantment with him on the part of Indians, who believe that once he won his Senate seat he lost his working concern for Indian needs and instead devoted himself exclusively to "national issues." Consequently, he has a "credibility problem" with the Indians at Home.

Now the senator has taken the lead among Democratic candidates by announcing the major lines of a new policy on Indian administration which emphatically elevates the status of Indians within government.

An Office of Indian Affairs in the White House staffed and directed by Indians is one of the bolder strokes of the new policy. The work of the new White House office would be to see that all new policies on Indian affairs are carried out rapidly and effectively throughout government.

The Indian director would report directly to the President.

The core of the outlined McGovern policy is to develop "an integrated program with a single purpose—the acceleration of the Indians' attainment of their own goals." McGovern has pledged himself to an enhancement of Indian preference in staffing top position, and consultation with all sectors of Indian America.

Particulars of the McGovern

policy will probably sit well with Indian voters.

In matters of contracting, he would authorize by executive order the right of tribes to contract for services, rather than waiting for Congress to act. He would also authorize grants-in-aid paid in advance to the tribes which would run for periods of up to three years.

All contracting laws and regulations in conflict with Indian programs would be waived.

In resource conflicts, the administration would provide legal representation "whenever requested" to prevent conflicts over natural resources, water, hunting and fishing rights.

In funding matters, McGovern would increase appropriations for every field of Indian activity "to levels that will assure funding adequate to achieve the goals"—including special appropriations for school contracting, roads, irrigation and water projects, resource surveys, childhood programs and an end to relocation.

For urban Indians, they would be eligible for "identical services and benefits" now available to reservation Indians. Costs would not come from present or projected reservation expenditures.

Such services would include urban health and medical care councils providing free health services, increased higher education scholarships, and the creation of urban and rural centers on federal land.

"In 1972," says McGovern, "it is still shamefully true that the Indians of the United States are not free. The first order of business is to clear the way—fully, quickly and without equivocation—for them to secure for themselves every freedom enjoyed by other Americans."

It remains to be seen whether Indians will choose McGovern as their Abraham Lincoln to lead them out of that bondage.