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Review of *Vote Your Conscience: The Last Campaign of George McGovern* By Richard Michael Marano

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Vote Your Conscience: The Last Campaign of George McGovern. By Richard Michael Marano. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003. xiv + 272 pp. Photographs, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. \$59.95.

In the two-party system of the United States, political candidates are fated to be separated into “winners” and “losers.” The broad narrative of American political history defines George McGovern as one of its biggest losers, the victim of Richard Nixon’s 1972 steamroller re-election campaign, which pulled out all the stops, legal and illegal, to convert the moment into a new Republican majority. Ironically, despite Watergate, Nixon remains in

the minds of many Americans as more of a political statesman than his defeated opponent.

This recounting of McGovern's abortive 1984 campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination by the senator's Connecticut coordinator that year (Marano was twenty-four at the time) reminds us that he was more than the candidate of "acid, amnesty, and abortion." Republican efforts to cast McGovern in 1972 as an ultra-liberal and even radical political freak were highly successful, and to this day calling someone a "McGovernite" works as effectively as calling someone a "McCarthyite." *Vote Your Conscience*, a heavily researched and well-written analysis of McGovern's 1984 bid for the nomination, helps us understand how misleading the label was. Its signal contribution is to put that event into historical context and to demonstrate what kind of person and politician McGovern really was, and is.

Marano begins with a chapter describing how this Methodist minister's son from a lightly populated prairie agricultural state with a long tradition of conservative Republican domination personally rejuvenated the state's Democratic party in the 1950s and got elected first to the House of Representatives and then to the United States Senate as a New Deal Democrat. His failure to win a fourth term in 1980, at age fifty-eight, seemed to be his political valedictory, but four years later he ran again for the presidency in a quest that seemed in the beginning to almost everyone but himself a quixotic effort.

This book shows how in the three states where he campaigned before dropping out of the race—Iowa, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts, where he finished third, fifth, and third—he impressed voters, reporters, and politicians with his candor, integrity, consistency, and good humor and convinced them of his seriousness of purpose and political acuity. Drawing upon McGovern papers at Princeton and Dakota Wesleyan University, journalistic accounts, memoirs, and interviews with people involved in the campaign, Marano

provides a useful account of an episode in the career of one of the twentieth century's most important politicians, whose success in his own state of South Dakota was as remarkable in its own way as was his failure in the field of presidential politics.

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