

Dakota Images

George S. McGovern, humanitarian and statesman, was born in Avon, South Dakota, on 19 July 1922, the son of Wesleyan Methodist minister Joseph C. McGovern and Frances McLean McGovern. He graduated from Mitchell High School in 1940, excelling in both academics and forensics.

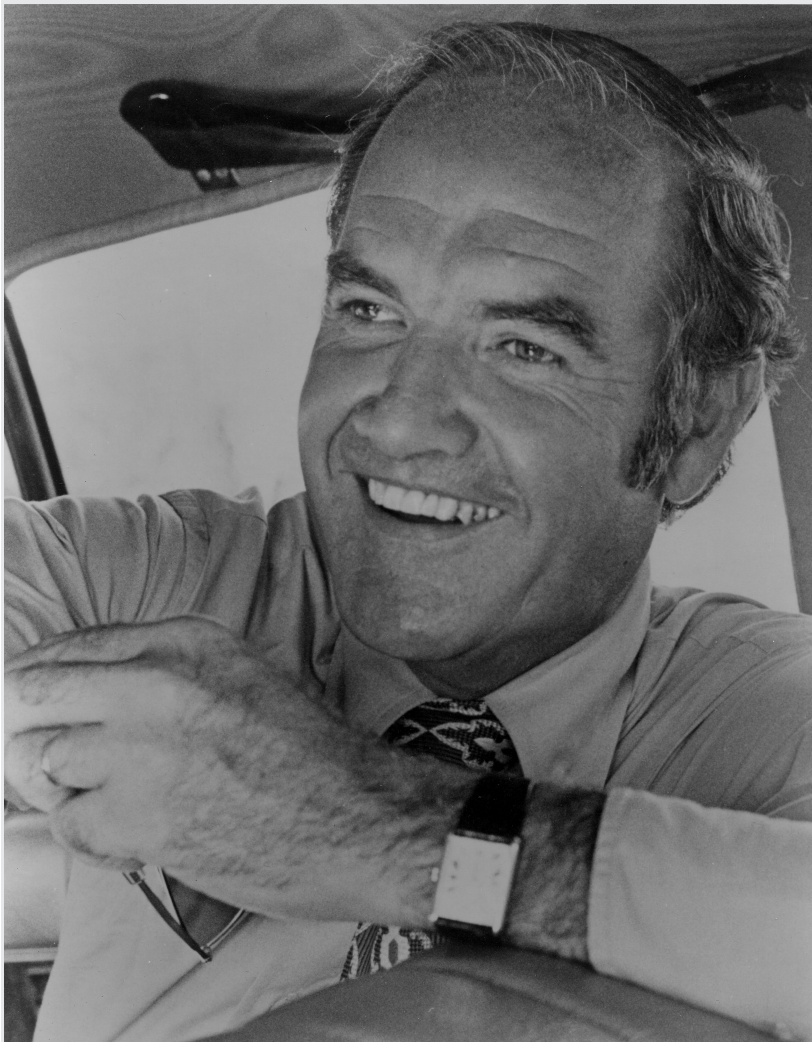
As a bomber pilot during World War II, McGovern flew thirty-five combat missions in Europe, winning the Distinguished Flying Cross. After the war, he resumed studies at Dakota Wesleyan University and graduated with honors in 1946. He married Eleanor Stegeberg in October 1943, and the couple eventually had five children.

McGovern briefly studied for the ministry before entering Northwestern University's graduate program in history. While working toward a Ph.D., he taught history and political science at Dakota Wesleyan but left to become executive secretary of the South Dakota Democratic Party in 1953. McGovern displayed a knack for grassroots organization that revived a moribund state Democratic party. In 1956, he won the first of two terms in the United States House of Representatives but lost his 1960 bid for Republican Karl E. Mundt's Senate seat. Newly elected President John F. Kennedy then appointed McGovern as director of the Food for Peace program.

In 1962, McGovern won election to the Senate, where he championed price supports for farmers and food aid to the needy and often proposed reductions in military spending. He served as chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs and became a forceful critic of the Vietnam War. Vietnam was a central issue in McGovern's 1972 presidential campaign, in which he succeeded in winning the Democratic nomination only to lose the general election to Richard Nixon. McGovern won reelection to the Senate in 1974.

After his defeat in the 1980 Senate race, McGovern never held elected office again, although he ran unsuccessfully for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1984. He then began a career as a lecturer and author, as well as serving as a fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C., and a goodwill ambassador for the World Food Programme. Returning to Mitchell, he helped to establish the George and Eleanor McGovern Center for Leadership and Public Service at Dakota Wesleyan. George McGovern died in Sioux Falls on 21 October 2012 and is buried in Washington, D.C.

—Stephen S. Witte



George S. McGovern

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On the covers: Lyle R. Johnson (front) grew up on a farm near Lake Thompson in Kingsbury County (back, bottom) during the 1930s. In this issue, he provides a year-by-year account of the decade of drought and its effects. Harl A. Dalstrom delves into the life and career of A. M. Jackley (back, top), sometimes called the Saint Patrick of South Dakota for his work to eliminate the rattlesnakes that posed a threat to the state's West River residents.

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