Beat: Politics

George McGovern, who lost 1972 presidential election to Nixon, dead at 90

-, 22.10.2012, 15:08 Time

USPA News - Former U.S. Senator George McGovern, who won the Democratic Party`s presidential nomination in 1972 on an anti-war platform but lost in a landslide to Republican challenger Richard Nixon, died at a hospice in South Dakota on Sunday. He was 90. McGovern died at approximately 5:15 a.m. local time on Sunday at Dougherty Hospice House in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, while surrounded by family members and close friends.

He had been admitted to the hospice on October 15 as his condition continued to decline and doctors believed his death was imminent. "We are blessed to know that our father lived a long, successful and productive life advocating for the hungry, being a progressive voice for millions and fighting for peace," McGovern`s children said in a brief statement. "He continued giving speeches, writing and advising all the way up to and past his 90th birthday, which we celebrated this summer." A viewing will be held at First United Methodist Church in Sioux Falls between 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. local time on Thursday, followed by a prayer service with remembrances starting at 6:30 p.m. Funeral services are scheduled to take place in Mary Sommervold Hall at the Washington Pavilion of Arts & Science in Sioux Falls at 1 p.m. on Friday. U.S. President Barack Obama praised McGovern for dedicating his life to serve his country. "When the people of South Dakota sent him to Washington, this hero of war became a champion of peace," he said. "And after his career in Congress, he became a leading voice in the fight against hunger. George was a statesman of great conscience and conviction, and Michelle and I share our thoughts and prayers with his family." Former U.S. President Bill Clinton and his wife, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, also expressed their sadness over McGovern`s passing. "We were deeply saddened to learn of the passing of our friend George McGovern," they said in a joint statement. "The world has lost a tireless advocate for human rights and dignity." Born in Avon, South Dakota on July 19, 1922, McGovern joined the Air Force in 1943. That same year, on Halloween, he married Eleanor Stegeberg, a fellow student at Dakota Wesleyan University (DWU), who met him after beating him during a student debate competition. They would eventually have five children - Ann, Susan, Teresa, Steve and Mary - and a 63-year-long marriage until Eleanor`s death in 2007. After joining the Air Force at the age of 22, McGovern became a B-24 pilot and was assigned to a bomber group in Italy, where he flew 35 combat missions across Europe, safely-landed his damaged plane on several occasions and was discharged at the war`s end as a First Lieutenant having won the Distinguished Flying Cross with three Oak Clusters. McGovern and his wife returned to DWU after the war and joined its faculty as a professor of history and political science upon graduation. But the war had pushed him towards public service, and he later began traveling town-to-town and farm-to-farm to rebuild the South Dakota Democratic Party and a competitive two-party system in the state. "No one worked harder or with greater organization on the campaign trail; George would walk both sides of the entire length of a main street, shake the hand and listen to every person on the sidewalk or in the coffee shops," his family said in his official obituary. "In an era before hand-held electronic devices, George had accumulated an archive of 40,000 voter 3x5 cards and could retrieve names and details from memory with ease." In 1956, McGovern won a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives and went on to serve two terms. He lost a run for the U.S. Senate in 1960 but eventually won a Senate seat in 1962 after having served as the first Executive Director of President John F. Kennedy`s new Food For Peace Program. McGovern unsuccessfully ran for the Democratic Party presidential nomination in 1968 to help hold together the delegates of U.S. Senator Robert Kennedy, who had been shot dead by a Palestinian immigrant while at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. Instead, he worked to reform party rules to make the nominating procedure more transparent and accessible. Four years later, after a drawn-out primary campaign under the banner "Come Home, America" for peace in Vietnam and reconciliation at home, McGovern won the Democratic Party`s nomination for president. But he lost in a landslide to Republican challenger Richard Nixon, who won 60.7 percent of the vote to McGovern`s 37.5 percent. McGovern went on to serve three terms in the U.S. Senate, until January 1981, where he made substantial contributions to a series of comprehensive farm bills and chaired the new U.S. Senate Special Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs. He later worked on Middle East peace and focused on child nutrition as U.S. Ambassador to the UN Agencies for Food and Agriculture and UN Global Ambassador to the World Food Program. McGovern also co-founded the International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program with long-time friend Bob Dole. The program commits an annual amount from the U.S. federal budget to provide nutritious meals to poor students around the world, and both were later awarded the World Food Prize for their work. McGovern was also awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Bill Clinton in 2001 in recognition of decades of work to enrich the lives of families and children around the world. "From his earliest days in Mitchell to his final days in Sioux Falls, he never stopped standing up and speaking out for the causes he believed in," the Clintons said in their statement on Sunday. "We must continue to draw inspiration from his example and build the world he fought for." "He didn`t live for confrontation, but risked his life in the greatest struggle of the century to defeat evil on a grand scale, yet never bragged about his personal war-time achievements," his family said. "Instead, he used that experience instead as a working, life-long

foundation for a more peaceful, constructive, and forgiving world. We who knew and loved him will remember his singular dedication to a life that made a difference."

Article online:
https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-106/george-mcgovern-who-lost-1972-presidential-election-to-nixon-dead-at-90.html

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