



McGOVERN SUPPORTER: A beautician admiring poster of Senator George McGovern in parlor in East Los Angeles. The Senator is stressing Mexican-American program.

The New York Times/D. Gorton

Coast Rivals Woo Chicano Vote

By STEVEN V. ROBERTS
Special to The New York Times

EAST LOS ANGELES, May 25—Senator George McGovern devoted the first speech of his California campaign yesterday to an "eight-point program" for Mexican-Americans. Last Saturday, he interrupted his schedule to fly to Phoenix and accept the endorsement of Cesar Chavez, leader of the farm workers union.

On Sunday, Senator Hubert H. Humphrey visited the sprawling barrio of East Los Angeles, where he opened his local campaign headquarters and promised to appoint a Chicano to his Cabinet.

These incidents demonstrate the importance of the Mexican-American vote to both major candidates in California's Democratic primary on June 6. One prominent party official said, "If anybody could get the Chicano vote he would win the election."

A Close Race

Dozens of interviews with campaign organizers and ordinary voters indicate that the candidates are running very close among Chicanos, with Senator McGovern probably having more momentum. But even if the South Dakota Senator gets a standoff, it will be an important achievement.

Joseph Cerrell, Senator Humphrey's state campaign director, has listed the Chicanos as one of the five key elements in the Minnesotan's strength in California. The others are blacks, the elderly, Jews and labor.

"If Humphrey doesn't get the Chicano vote, then I think he's hurting in California," added Herman Sillas, the

Senator's chief Chicano organizer.

There are about 3.1 million Mexican-Americans in California, or about 15 per cent of the population. They vote heavily Democratic, but the percentage who are registered is relatively low, mainly because many are not citizens.

In addition, they suffer from the same handicaps as any poor community, including inferior education and a continuing struggle for survival that leaves little time for politics.

As a result, experts estimate that Chicanos will provide from 7 per cent to 15 per cent of the Democratic vote on June 6. About one-third will come from Los Angeles County, and about one-fifth from East Los Angeles, the physical and spiritual center of the Chicano community.

The character of the electorate is as inexact as its size. It ranges from middle-class professionals living in pleasant suburbs to the poverty-ridden laborers of the inner city slums. Chicanos have voted for liberals like Senator John V. Tunney and for conservatives like Gov. Ronald Reagan.

Personality Important

But one theme seems to run through their behavior — the importance of "personalismo," or personality, especially as it comes across on television. What Senator Tunney and Governor Reagan have in common is a certain "celebrity" quality that overrode their divergent stands on issues.

The key factor, therefore, could be two of the Chicanos' greatest heroes, Cesar Chavez and Robert F. Kennedy. Every McGovern leaflet, commercial or speech aimed at the Chicano vote all but beatifies these two men, and random talks with voters bear out their appeal.

"I think McGovern's more like Kennedy was," said an auto worker, as he shopped in a large supermarket. "His speech, the way he talks, I think he really means it, about reducing taxes and all that. It's like looking at Kennedy all over again."

Joe Lucero, a plumber, sipped a beer and said: "I'm for the working people my-

self, and McGovern, he's sponsored by Chavez, and that means a lot. Chavez supports the working man, too, the guy way down below. I used to be a farm worker, 20 years ago, and I know what a big hassle it is to make a living."

Senator McGovern, however, is still not well known here, and his vaunted campaign organization has been sputtering in the barrio. One reason is that many Chicano students have been urged to boycott the Democratic primary by La Raza Unida, a separatist Chicano party that is trying to build a following in California.

Mr. Chavez has promised to send in several hundred farm workers to aid the final campaign drive, but as of now, some voters share the view of Susan Sanchez, a probation official, who said:

"I don't like McGovern. I don't know too much about him, I guess that's why. He's like one of those people who just pop up during the election, and then at other times you never hear from them."

Attacks on Senator McGovern's record also seem to be having some effect. Mrs. Sanchez's husband, Paul, a factory worker, was afraid that the South Dakotan would "cut down the armed forces without Russia's agreement."

Conversely, Senator Humphrey's strongest asset is his long experience. As Mr. Sillas, a Chicano lawyer, put it:

"The basic thing is that he ran before, they recognize his name, they identify him with the civil rights movement. It's hard to say, I think they probably view him as a friend."

Ready for Another Try

Some do, including Frank Amado, a security guard. "The last time he tried to get in he didn't make it, so I hope he gets it this year," said Mr. Amado. "I'd like to give him one more try to see if he does what he says."

But to others, Senator Humphrey's familiarity is a drawback. As one social worker said, "I guess it would be like electing Nixon all over again."

Mrs. Carmen Marquez, who runs a stall in the Mercado, a community market, endorsed Senator McGovern this way: "I think he's sincere, he doesn't say he'll do this and do that, he just says he'll try to help everybody. Humphrey already ran once they need somebody new up there."

Senator Humphrey does not command the same long-standing loyalty among Chicanos that he does among blacks. In fact, some observers feel his identification with black causes could hurt him with Mexican-Americans, who often complain that blacks get a larger share of public concern and government money.

Many Chicanos seem as frustrated and distrustful as voters in other parts of the country, and some share the view of the clerk in a record store who said:

"I should vote, but to tell you the truth, I don't like anybody. Everybody promises you a lot of things, but it's just a talk. Sometimes I wish we didn't have to elect anybody."