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Subject: [26] EUGENE MCCARTHY, KEY PLAYER AT '68 CONVENTION, HAS NO DESIRE TO

RETURN TO SITE OF RIOTS, VIOLENT DEMONSTRATIONS DIRECT LATE QUESTION  
Selected by your NewsHound profile entitled "VIETNAM". The selectivity score was 26 out of 100.

Eugene McCarthy, key player at '68 convention, has no desire to return to site of riots, violent demonstrations Direct late question  
Eugene McCarthy, key player at '68 convention, has no desire to return to site of riots, violent demonstrations Direct late questions to Editor Dean Inouye at 301-990-8172.) Optional cuts bring story to 740 words (18'') from 1050 words (26'')

By Bill Salisbury  
Knight-Ridder Newspapers  
(KRT)

WASHINGTON -- While many of his loyal followers remember the 1968 campaign nostalgically, Eugene McCarthy passes harsh judgment on it. He pronounces it a failure.

McCarthy's challenge unseated President Lyndon Johnson and energized the anti-war movement, but lost the policy battle when the Democratic convention passed a plank embracing Johnson's escalation of the Vietnam War.

"It was a pretty disgraceful and disturbing performance by the party, and it never recovered," says the former senator from Minnesota.

"I sometimes think the war would have ended pretty much as it did if we hadn't made the fight."

So when the Democrats gather this week for their first national convention in Chicago since the 1968 debacle, McCarthy -- the last survivor among the leading actors in that classic political melodrama -- won't be there.

He has no desire to relive the police riot and violent demonstrations, his party's bitter brawl and its rejection of his effort to end the war. "I can still smell the tear gas in the Conrad Hilton," he says.

"There would be no point in me being out there. ... Besides, I haven't been invited."

Rather than return to the scene of so much pain and anger, the author and occasional presidential candidate plans to stay at his hobby farm in the foothills of Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains and do things he considers more important, such as reading and writing poetry, watching wildlife and pondering the state of the world.

At age 80, McCarthy no longer looks like the quick, trim semipro baseball player who once roamed the fields of central Minnesota. His 6-foot-4 frame is now slightly stooped, his gait has slowed, he's developed a paunch, and his thoughts are often abbreviated by long pauses.

But he still has the thick shock of hair, the professorial demeanor and biting wit that were his trademarks as a national political figure three decades ago. He remains a contrarian, offering critical and sometimes downright bitter assessments of past and present politicians.

(EDITORS: NEXT 2 GRAFS OPTIONAL)

When McCarthy launched his campaign for the presidency in December 1967, he didn't expect to win. The political pros wrote him off as a quixotic gadfly who would be stomped by Johnson. But McCarthy hoped to win enough votes to show strong public opposition to Johnson's escalation of the war in Vietnam.

He figured if he won a third of the vote in five or six primaries, the Democratic Party would have to break from Johnson's policy of expanding the war

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In the 1968 New Hampshire primary, McCarthy stunned the political world by coming within a percentage point of Johnson. His narrow loss was interpreted as a stunning victory. It prompted Johnson to announce at the end of March that he would not run for re-election.

With Johnson out of the race, Vice President Hubert Humphrey jumped in and was the immediate favorite of the party's old-guard establishment. McCarthy had to choose between his old friend from Minnesota and the new politics of the anti-war movement.

It was a clear, if not easy, choice, he says. "I was running not against Lyndon but against the war," he said. "When Humphrey came in, it was still a campaign against the war."

Though he once described Humphrey as the only foe for whom he had any respect, McCarthy remains bitter about how Humphrey took the nomination.

In those days, party leaders, especially the president, could ignore the result of primary elections and dictate a convention's makeup. Johnson and the party establishment handed the nomination to Humphrey, denying McCarthy his fair share of votes. They also rammed a pro-war plank into the party's platform, sparking an anti-war demonstration by McCarthy supporters and what he calls "some radicals and crazies" who wanted to disrupt the convention.

The nomination Humphrey won was damaged goods. It was so inextricably linked to the chaos, rioting and bloodshed on the streets of Chicago that his campaign was doomed.

Asked if he had any regrets about 1968, McCarthy replies: "Not really." He believes he did all he could to prevent violence in Chicago but was overwhelmed by events that got out of control.

(EDITORS: NEXT 2 GRAFS OPTIONAL)

He said the thousands of college students who went "clean for Gene," trimming their hair and dressing neatly to work on his campaign, caused elected officials to give 18-to-21-year-olds the right to vote, "even if they don't use it much."

"We provided a way by which a moral judgment was passed on the war," he says.

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He believes the convention was a disaster for the Democratic Party. "What the convention was about was Johnson forcing the party to take responsibility and the guilt for the war," he says.

Before the convention, it was presidential war, with Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson sharing responsibility for U.S. involvement, he says. But the convention endorsed Johnson's policies, making it a "Democrat war."

(EDITORS: NEXT 3 GRAFS OPTIONAL)

McCarthy contends the 1968 gathering was one of just two meaningful Democratic conventions in party history. The first, he said, was the 1948 convention in Philadelphia where -- prodded by then-Minneapolis Mayor Humphrey's admonition to Americans to "get out of the shadow of states' rights and walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human rights" -- the party adopted a strong civil rights plank. "That split the party, but the party did the right thing," he says.

"The next time it had a real issue was in '68, and the party made the wrong choice.

"In both cases, the Democrats were primarily responsible for the problem. They were responsible for the exploitation of blacks (before 1948). And although they had Republican support, they were primarily responsible for the escalation of the (Vietnam) war. In one case, they said: 'We'll change our position even though it hurts the party.' In the other case, they said, 'We won't.'"

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McCarthy predicts this year's Democratic convention will be irrelevant.

"Clinton is a Democrat," he says, "but he doesn't inhale. So there are going to be two Republican conventions. I think it's too bad. There are four or five issues that ought to be considered, but they won't be."

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He also thinks Chicago is the wrong city for the convention. "They should have gone to Philadelphia; there they took some chances" on civil rights, he says. "In Chicago, they just dug in."

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