

## **John Schmitz**

Born: August 12, 1930 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Election in which he ran for president: 1972

Party: American

Offices held: California State Senator 1965 - 1970 and 1978 - 1982  
United States Congressman 1970 - 1973

Entered the race: August 2, 1972 - Washington, D.C.

Stopped campaigning: November 7, 1972 - When Richard Nixon was re-elected president

Strategy: Run to the right of President Richard Nixon, exposing his vulnerability on the conservative wing of the Republican Party. Make a credible showing to build the party for success in future elections.

Best finish: Third place in Idaho (28,869 votes - 9.3 percent)

Total votes: 1,099,482

Amount raised: \$533,000

Current residence: Washington, Virginia and Washington, D.C.

Current activities: Serving as President of Chapelle Charlemagne Vineyards.

Interesting facts: Owns the townhouse where Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy lived while serving in the United States Senate.

Officially changed his registration from the Republican Party to the American Party upon receiving the latter's presidential nomination, thereby making him the first and only member of the American Party to serve in Congress.

Elected to the California State Senate in 1964, John Schmitz made a name for himself by advocating conservative causes that other Republicans feared to support. He was the first member of the ultra-conservative John Birch Society to serve in the body. When asked about his membership in the group, Schmitz jokingly replied that he "had to do something to get the middle-of-the-road vote" in conservative Orange County. As senator, he pushed through a bill

that curtailed sex education in the state's public schools. He also proposed selling the University of California system as a solution to the state's problem with student unrest. He criticized Governor Ronald Reagan on many occasions for not adhering to conservative principles, usually doing so with a tongue-in-cheek quip. Members of both parties had mixed emotions when Schmitz was elected to fill the vacant seat of Congressman James Utt in June 1970, who passed away towards the end of his term. While his rhetoric pleased conservatives and angered liberals, both agreed that Schmitz's wit would be missed in the Statehouse.

In Washington, Schmitz picked up where he left off in Sacramento. Only now, instead of criticizing the Governor of California, he was criticizing the President of the United States. As he did with Reagan, Schmitz chided President Nixon for not being conservative enough. Potentially troublesome to Nixon was the fact that his San Clemente home was in Schmitz's congressional district. Schmitz built a solid night-wing voting record, voting against the Administration's positions 42 percent of the time. On the eve of Nixon's historic trip to China, Schmitz was asked how he felt about the President's journey and he replied, "I'm not worried about Nixon going to China. Only if he comes back."

Schmitz continued to buck President Nixon by not supporting him in the 1972 primaries against challenges from the left by Congressmen Pete McCloskey of California and from the right by John Ashbrook of Ohio. It was evident early in the election season that Schmitz would actively campaign for Ashbrook in California, after Schmitz charged the President with "a disgusting betrayal of Republican principles." Schmitz headed the Ashbrook slate of delegates in California and recruited other disenchanted Republicans to fight for the cause.

Schmitz's constant criticism of Nixon and his failure to support Nixon's re-election bid was too much for Schmitz's constituents to bear. On June 6, 1972, the same day Nixon crushed Ashbrook in the California Republican primary 90 percent to 10 percent, Schmitz lost his bid for re-nomination to his congressional seat by only a few hundred votes. The race had been very competitive and it was alleged by Schmitz that Nixon himself targeted him for defeat and funneled great sums of money to Schmitz's opponent. Schmitz did not seem bitter about the loss, stating, "I refuse to walk lock-step and insisted on abiding by my campaign promises. I understand what happened. It's much more pleasant to believe that your congressman is wrong than to believe your president is. But the President is not abiding by his promises."

Two months later, Schmitz challenged Nixon directly when he announced he was seeking the presidential nomination of the American Party. The party was formed in 1969 by several conservative groups that supported and the American Independent Party, begun by Alabama Governor George Wallace for his 1968 Independent presidential run in which he received almost ten million popular votes and 46 electoral votes. The party continued to be known as the American Independent Party in many states including California and the names for all intents and purposes were interchangeable. Schmitz had been discussed by many in the party as their choice for the party's vice presidential nomination with Wallace serving as the presidential nominee. However, after Wallace was shot and partially paralyzed in April 1972 while

campaigning for the Democratic nomination in Laurel, Maryland, it was unclear whether he could still campaign for president in the fall under the American Party banner. By the time of the American Party convention in early August, Wallace still had not declared whether he would accept the party's nomination and seek the presidency. After Wallace announced to the convention via telephone that he could not physically campaign and that he did not wish to be nominated, Schmitz became the favorite for the party's nod. Schmitz captured the nomination at the American Party Convention in Louisville, Kentucky by winning 329 of the 460 convention votes. Georgia Lieutenant Governor Lester Maddox was second with 55 votes and four other candidates, including Wallace, split the rest of the votes.

Over 2,000 delegates and guests attended the convention, which was rich with speakers criticizing Nixon, Democratic nominee South Dakota Senator George McGovern and policies on busing, welfare, China and price controls. Editor of *Farm and Ranch* magazine and conservative activist Tom Anderson of Tennessee was chosen as the vice presidential nominee. Schmitz thought the choice was a good one because Anderson was a Southern Protestant and contrasted well with Schmitz, a West Coast Catholic.

The American Party platform called for the abolition of the federal income tax and the end of forced busing of children to achieve racial balance in public schools. It also advocated giving the responsibility for education and welfare programs to the states, as well as entertaining the idea of a general tax cut resulting from the decreased expenditures. Although the American Party platform had over 25 planks, Schmitz personally had only one each for foreign and domestic policy: "Never go to war unless you're willing to win" and "Those who work ought to live better than those who don't." Schmitz also advocated shrinking the federal government, reasoning that, "Any government that's big enough to give you everything you want, is big enough to take away everything you've got."

Schmitz acknowledged that he had little chance to win, but he sought to offer the American people a new choice in voting for president, one in which they would have a voice. He hoped voters would give him a respectable showing at the polls, which the party could build upon in future elections and one day become a dominant force in American politics. Schmitz was on the ballot in over 30 states, which caused him to be cautiously optimistic about his chances. He likened his campaign to a match falling into a pile of dry leaves. Most likely the match will get snuffed out, but if it fell in the right spot, it could start a fire across America.

The American Party argued that the Republicans and the Democrats had ceased representing a large majority of the American people, who were subjected to high inflation and taxes, invasions of privacy, compulsory busing of school children and endless no-win wars. Schmitz went further, raising the concern that the Democratic and Republican parties were really one in the same. He opined that McGovern had been set up to win the Democratic nomination with Republican money. As a result, this plan allowed the Nixon people to say, "You have to vote for Nixon. You don't want McGovern, do you?" Schmitz claimed that eventually the parties would help establish a "one-world socialist government," controlling the world's banks, natural

resources, and commerce. The Schmitz campaign labeled its effort an "ankle-biting" campaign, one that would bite the ankle of Big Brother when he puts his foot on their neck.

Schmitz did not limit his criticism to just President Nixon. He also scored Henry Kissinger, Nixon's national security advisor. Schmitz called Kissinger "the unelected de facto president," and criticized the Council of Foreign Relations, which Schmitz claimed advocated a one-world socialist government. He also insisted the United Nations was the center for organizing a world government and because of this, he called for the United States to withdraw from the group. He described McGovern as "being so far to the left that he's in danger of falling off the earth."

On Vietnam, Schmitz wanted to go in with a strategy to win, which included more bombing and a declaration of war against North Vietnam. If the American people would not support those measures, Schmitz said the United States should get out of the war as soon as possible, but only after all prisoners of war and soldiers missing in action were found and released.

Although Schmitz received some coverage by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, he was mostly ignored by other newspapers, as well as by television broadcasts. This lack of publicity hurt the effort, because it was difficult to gain greater credibility and money without adequate coverage. Although Wallace received less coverage than Nixon and Democratic nominee Vice President Hubert Humphrey in 1968, Wallace certainly received more than Schmitz. Despite this lack of media attention, Schmitz was still able to raise over \$500,000, a significant amount of money for a third party campaign in 1972.

Calling himself the "Adlai Stevenson of the right," Schmitz's wry wit proved that he was arguably the funniest candidate on the campaign trail in the 1972 effort. However, there was little doubt that Schmitz would not be able to stir up the populist fervor as Wallace had four years earlier. Although they advocated many of the same policies, Wallace's Southern passionate style of campaigning was entirely different than the more cerebral conservatism of Schmitz. The fact that Wallace was a Democrat and Schmitz was from the Republican Party was not lost on Schmitz. He claimed his candidacy would allow him to widen the base of the American Party from its Wallace origins.

With Secret Service agents in tow, Schmitz campaigned almost non-stop for three months between his nomination and Election Day. He and his wife, Mary, traveled to over 30 states and gave up to three speeches a night. With little publicity for the effort, they worked in a pure grassroots fashion, spreading the word from town to town across the country.

On Election Day, Richard Nixon won in a landslide. Nevertheless, Congressman Schmitz received the votes of over one million people who saw him as a viable alternative to Nixon and McGovern. Although Schmitz gained his place in history by being one of only a handful of third party candidates to win over a million votes, the American Party would not gain a permanent place in American politics. Internal strife caused the party to split before the 1976 campaign into two factions. One retained the name the American Party and the other went back to using the

American Independent Party moniker. Each party's nominees received fewer and fewer votes in subsequent elections. While the American Party has remained on the ballot through the 1996 election, the American Independent Party has not been part of a general election since 1988.

BK: Who was the first president that you met?

JS: I saw Eisenhower and Hoover in the same parade, the 1953 Inaugural Parade. I was a second lieutenant in Bakersfield and Quantico and if we furnished a ticket to the event, we could get a day off and a bunch of other stuff. I got the cheapest parade watching ticket to get off a day and take in the '53 Inauguration. Hoover was in the parade and I think that was kind of an honor, instead of flying away right after the swearing-in. I think Truman was also in the parade. He stayed around and was in the parade. That's my recollection. So it was Eisenhower, Truman and Hoover, all in one parade.

BK: Then some more substantive contact?

JS: I know Jerry Ford very well. I know Ronald Reagan very well because when he was Governor, I was one of 13 state senators who were Republican back in California. Of course, I know George Bush very well because my son worked for him and I served in Congress with George Bush too.<sup>1</sup> We were both two-termers. His second term and my first term overlapped. So we met there, but I really got to know him when my son worked in the White House as Deputy Counsel. And then, of course, Nixon.

BK: As a state senator during the time when Reagan was governor, had you thought that at one point he was going to run for president?

JS: Yeah, they were grooming him for president from the time he ran for governor and there was a group that was pushing him. In his first year there, I was his conscience. He called me an S.O.B., not publicly. They were watching a public television rundown of his first year in office and they interviewed me and I ticked off a few things that he had done wrong. He was a better president than he was a governor, quite frankly. His first year as governor, he gave us the biggest tax increase in California history. I was the only one to vote against it.

BK: The only Republican or the only senator to vote against it?

JS: The only Republican. You see, the Democrats, especially Jesse Unruh, the leader of the Assembly, wanted to stick it to the Republicans so they would never again run as a no-tax party or a low-tax party. They were going to get every Republican in each House to vote

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<sup>1</sup> President George Bush served in the United States House of Representatives from 1967 to 1971. He left his seat to run against Lloyd Bentsen for the United States Senate in 1970 and lost.

for this biggest tax increase in California's history and the only one they didn't get was yours truly. It was the Democrats' plan to withhold any Democrat vote until every Republican voted for it. I got called down to Reagan's office and there's a long story there. I had a great line though after I spent 45 minutes with him. He tried to talk me into voting for that bill. I came out of his office, because all the other legislation was finished in Sacramento and they had taken care of all the other bills and they were hung up on this big tax increase. The only reason they couldn't get the votes was because the Democrats weren't going to go along with it until every Republican did and I was the hang-up Republican. The Assembly finished their business. So they called me down to the Governor's office and I spent about 45 minutes in the office. I came out and all the journalists are waiting there and they said, 'What went on in there Senator?' I said, 'Well, I'm not going to tell. But, I'll tell you one thing, the next time I spend 45 minutes with that actor, I'm taking a bag of popcorn along.' (Laughter) Fortunately, there was so much other business, because it was the last day of the session, that if it had been a slow news day, I'd have been crucified on that one.

BK: You went to Congress after Congressman Utt passed away. You won the special election in June 1970 and then the full term in November. You were President Nixon's congressman. How did the White House feel about you criticized Nixon?

JS: They were very concerned. I was defeated by Nixon's office<sup>2</sup> and particularly by his political man, Murray Chotiner.<sup>3</sup> I think Murray Chotiner was Deep Throat.<sup>4</sup> That's just my guess. Woodward and Bernstein have said that they would not reveal who Deep Throat was as long as he were alive. But you know, logically speaking, that doesn't mean after he died, they were going to say so. They said, 'as long as he's alive.' but they didn't say that when he died, they were going to tell. Murray Chotiner died, in my estimation, very mysteriously. At any rate, he was the money channel from Washington. I was outspent in my primary. Jack Anderson<sup>5</sup> said in one of his radio programs that Nixon sent his henchmen to get me and the one name he mentioned when I asked him, he said 'Murray Chotiner.' But then when I asked him to elaborate, he clammed up. But Murray Chotiner was calling the Orange County Republican Central Committee every day, according to one of my supporters who worked there. He was calling virtually every day to see how the campaign against me was going.

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2 In his 1972 re-election primary campaign.

3 Murray Chotiner was a Nixon campaign strategist renowned for tough tactics. He directed Nixon's 1950 U.S. Senate campaign against Congresswoman Helen Gahagan Douglas in which she was dubbed "The Pink Lady" for supposedly being a Communist sympathizer.

4 "Deep Throat" was a person or persons that fed information about misconduct in the Nixon Administration to Washington Post reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, which led to the downfall of President Nixon. The source's identity is still unknown to the public

5 Columnist for the Washington Post.

BK: Well, that was after you had been in office.

JS: Right.

BK: But, when you were coming into your term, did you feel that Nixon was letting Republicans down and he was breaking the promises that he made in '68?

JS: When I ran for president, my unofficial campaign slogan was, 'Between the republican and Democrat's candidates, you had a choice between the candidate who broke all his promises' in other words, Nixon, versus a candidate, who if elected, you'd only hope and pray that he would break all his promises.'

BK: When you were in Congress, you continued your anti-abortion stance and you put forth the original pro-life amendment.

JS: Yes. I did it even before *Roe v. Wade*.<sup>6</sup> Because we knew from our sources, what the decision was going to be. So I put it in '72 and *Roe v. Wade* wasn't until January of '73. So it was one of the last things I did when I was in Congress.

BK: You also put forth the only declaration of war, technically, in Vietnam. Did they both die in committee?

JS: Yeah, they didn't get out of committee.

BK: Moving into '72, you supported John Ashbrook. He challenged Nixon in the primaries and he wound up with about five percent of the total primary vote. What kind of support were you giving him?

JS: Well, I was his California chairman and it had a lot to do with my defeat in my own primary because the opposition had a top-flight campaign organization and wealth. They had a lot more money than I did, but they took the ballot, you might say, with my name heading the California delegation for John Ashbrook. In other words, the delegates to the convention were listed in a kind of mailing to all the voters. It's not really on the ballot, but a mailer to voters. So they got that and they wrote on it, 'He wants your president defeated!' as if I was some agent of McGovern. (Laughter) It's a very Republican area. People don't even understand the difference between a primary and a general. 'He wants your president defeated!' They may have even had a picture of McGovern to make the obvious, but inappropriate connection. I tried to get the CRA,<sup>7</sup> which is a very large

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<sup>6</sup> *Roe v. Wade* was the Supreme Court decision that established a Constitutional right to have an abortion

<sup>7</sup> California Republican Assembly.

pre-primary endorsing Republican organization, to endorse Ashbrook over Nixon and I thought we had the votes. They were so much afraid that I would succeed in that, that none other than Ronald Reagan himself showed up unannounced to stop the group from endorsing Ashbrook. I was in the peak of my career. I got a better reception at the CRA than Ronald Reagan and he was very popular, but I was their hero. So it was a real threat when I was pushing Ashbrook to CRA, that they might actually endorse him.

BK: What were you hoping that Ashbrook would do? Did you have any realistic thoughts that he might win?

JS: My slogan was 'If you're willing to be taken for granted, you will be taken for granted.' Nixon was obviously taking the conservatives for granted, because he was galloping to the left. This became obvious when viewing his obits. When he died, [Howard] Phillips from the Taxpayers Party,<sup>8</sup> gave a commentary on C-SPAN and he mentioned at Nixon's funeral that all the people that paid tribute to Nixon were liberals.

The idea that Nixon was a conservative was built just on his activity on the House Un-American Activities Committee and the Alger Hiss case.<sup>9</sup> He made a whole career on that. But when he was president, he was no conservative. And the sell-out of Nationalist China, was to me just the last straw, but it wasn't the only thing. When I say the sell-out of Nationalist China, that's really what it was.

BK: I think you stated, 'Well, I know we got the pandas for Taiwan' and you stated that, 'it wasn't really a fair trade.'<sup>10</sup>

JS: I probably said that.

BK: He<sup>11</sup> advocated a stronger defense, constitutional amendment against busing, supported Taiwan, greater fiscal responsibility. He got about ten percent of the California primary vote, which wasn't bad. It wasn't even his home state. Didn't you also suggest that maybe Nixon wasn't particularly fond of you because you suggested to Vice President Agnew that he ditch the party and run against Nixon in '72?

JS: I was on the board of directors of Young Americans for Freedom, advisory board it may have been called rather than board of directors. They wanted Agnew to run against

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8 Howard Phillips ran for president in 1992 and 1996 under the Taxpayers Party banner, and in 2000 on the Constitution Party ticket.

9 Nixon made a name for himself in 1947 as a freshman congressman when he accused United States State Department official Alger Hiss of being part of a Communist espionage ring

10 In April 1972, China gave the United States two giant pandas, Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing as a symbol of friendship and a thawing of Sino-U.S. relations.

11 Ashbrook.

Nixon and they asked me to go to Agnew and ask him to run against Nixon. So I didn't pull that one out of the air. I did it at the request of the Young Americans for Freedom.

I went to Spiro Agnew in his office and we had a nice chat. His answer was a rather expected secular version of the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. In other words, he was not where he was for any reason other than Nixon. As Governor of Maryland and from there, Nixon selected him to be his vice president, which made him famous. So he turned me down, but he did tell me something interesting. He said, 'Keep up what you're doing.' What he meant was criticizing Nixon from the right. He said 'Nixon is getting a lot of pressure from the left and they need something to balance it out.' Nixon's vice president supported my hammering away at Nixon from the right side.

BK: When did you start seriously thinking about running for president under the American Party banner?

JS: Well, I was defeated in the primary. We had a June primary then. I was a very popular conservative speaker. I already had been scheduled to speak to a Fourth of July, 'God, Family, and Country' rally in Boston. It was a big, kind of a conservative, patriotic trade fair, including speakers and booths and everything. I think a lot of people didn't even know that I had lost my primary.

Meanwhile, during the primaries, George Wallace had been shot. No one knew how serious that was and whether he would recover and what his future was going to be. The day he was shot, he carried the Maryland and Michigan primaries, a Mid-Atlantic state and Midwestern industrial state in a Democratic primary. He was really riding high the day he was shot. The American Party was made up of Wallace supporters and people who wanted a third party regardless of Wallace. There were actually two groups that had gotten together and they had planned the convention in Louisville.

Wallace was running in the Democratic primaries, I think because H.L. Hunt told him to.<sup>12</sup> That's my own theory. It's never been in print. At any rate, the third party movement was going along, thinking they were going to nominate Wallace. But Wallace was not playing the third party game. Wallace was playing the Democratic Party game, so he wasn't cooperating with the third party people at all. A lot of people don't realize this, but the last vestige of states' rights is in political party organizations and requirements for getting on the ballot. Every state has its own rules as to how you get on the ballot in that state. A lot of states required that to be on the ballot, you had to list not only electors, but you had to list your running mate. Wallace wasn't naming any running mate. He wasn't playing the third party game. So they thought, 'Well, who are we going to put with him?' A judge called me up and he was active in this third party movement. He wanted to know if he could put my name on as Wallace's running mate. I don't

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12 H.L. Hunt was an eccentric Texas oilman with right-wing views.

remember, either Oklahoma or Arkansas, one of those. I had lost the primary and I said, 'Well, you know, why not? You know, maybe this is God's plan.' So I did. When I went to this 'God, Family, and Country' rally, the word had gotten around that this state was putting me on and it sort of spread like wildfire. So I was then going to be Wallace's running mate, whether Wallace wanted me or not, according to all these activists, in one after another of these states. I went to the convention, not knowing myself, but feeling in my heart that Wallace was not going to run. I even called him up and talked to him down in Alabama where he was recovering and he told me he was not running. So we went there and then Wallace spoke to the convention over the phone. He had a phoned speech to the convention saying no, he wasn't running. Well, by that time I had been kind of the odds-on favorite to be his running mate. Now, if he'd have named someone else, there might have been an interesting contest and they probably would have bowed to his choice.

BK: But you would have fought for it.

JS: Yeah, well, I don't know. It's a moot question now. I was more waiting and seeing. So what happened was I went to the convention as the odds-on favorite of the delegates to be his running mate, but not Wallace's choice. But I thought that Wallace was not going to run. Did I think therefore, that I'd be the candidate? Maybe, there were people that were saying, 'Look, Wallace isn't running. You go there and they'll select you.' So there was half a chance. So we went there and then an interesting thing happened. Lester Maddox<sup>13</sup> of Georgia came in and he was one of the speakers invited to speak to the convention. He's an orator. He's a real stemwinder and he gave a great speech, but he asked for the world in exchange for the nomination. Some people wanted him to be the nominee. He wanted the world, like to be placed on all the ballots or he wouldn't run. Well, some of them were impossible. At any rate, his name was put in nomination and he did finish second. But, my name was put in nomination and I won.

BK: But didn't you sort of announce that you were running for president, the day before the convention, up in the Capitol in Washington?

JS: I may have. I wouldn't argue that. My memory is not perfect. If you did research and found that, I wouldn't dispute that. Because you see, I had talked to Wallace.

BK: It was quoted that you had talked to him and he wasn't running. But the delegates wouldn't believe it until they heard it from him

JS: Right.

BK: Did you intend to leave the Republican Party or were you just sort of wait and see?

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13 Former Governor of Georgia.

JS: There were people from California there from the Orange County Registrar's office and on the stage I registered in the American Independent Party. I thought, if they're going to nominate me, it was proper that I ought be a member of the party. Although one of my supporters said, 'John, do you really want to do this?' But the thing is, you register in the party, you can go back. It's not something that indelibly branded on you. So I registered in the American Party right on the stage, part of a kind of thing to add to the occasion.

BK: It was a good convention?

JS: Yeah. It was nice. They're a different type of people than were at the Republican or Democratic conventions. They're not the kind of people you see at regular conventions. They're less phony. I had wore my hand out shaking hands. I shook the hand of every delegate that night. My wife and I finally went back to our hotel and opened up a six-pack of beer. (Laughter) Then right away, they were worried about getting Secret Service protection, so I was furnished with some private protection until I received Secret Service protection. There were only four people that had Secret Service protection in '72. The other one, I think they did just to balance me off, was to give Secret Service protection to one of the liberal candidates, Dr. Spock.<sup>14</sup>

JS: One night we had a fundraiser in New Jersey, and then we flew the next day to Salt Lake City. The difference between the New Jersey American Party people and the Salt Lake City American Party folks was profound. Italian and Irish blue collar workers in New Jersey and you go to Salt Lake City with non-drinking, rather refined Mormons. There was quite a difference. My best state was Idaho and it was the Mormon counties that helped me. One of the apostles who later became head of the Mormon Church, Ezra Taft Benson, supported me and he passed the word. I had a long talk with Ezra Taft Benson and he told me he didn't like Nixon. He served for eight years on the Eisenhower Cabinet with him. Eisenhower held weekly Cabinet meetings and Ezra Taft Benson was the only Cabinet member, Secretary of Agriculture, who lasted all eight years. Nixon of course, was vice president for all eight years. So he spent eight years of weekly meetings with Nixon. He told me Nixon never had any other standard for making a decision than some variation of 'How does it play in Peoria?' In other words, everything is purely political, which to a good Mormon leader there should have been some more higher standard than simply raw politics and 'How does it play in Peoria?'

BK: In your mind, if he<sup>15</sup> had not been shot, did you think that he was going to run an Independent third party run?

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14 Famed pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock ran for president in 1972 under the People's Party banner.

15 Wallace.

JS: I don't know. But, let me tell you a story regarding that point. I never got on the ballot in Texas. I did go down there and we had a fairly good campaign, a lot of support. We had a lot of money come out of Texas. I went down there and someone told me to call H.L. Hunt and ask him for some money. I said, 'Well, how do I get ahold of him?' He said 'Just call him up on the phone.' I said, 'Well, what's his number?' He said, 'It's in the phone book.' (Laughter) So, sure enough, he was in the phone book under H.L. Hunt and he answered his own phone. It was almost incredible that a guy, a billionaire like H.L. Hunt would do that. I talked to him and he turned me down and the reason he turned me down was that I was running third party. He said, 'Like I told that Governor fella,' must have been Wallace, he said, 'I'm not going to give any money unless you get with one of the two major parties.' Now he didn't say he told Wallace, he called him 'That Governor fella.' (Laughter) But, he turned me down, but I believe I got some money from his son.

But anyway, I tell you that story because if he was getting big money from H.L. Hunt and Hunt would say 'You switch over to that minor party and that's all from me. I'm off . . .' But, I don't know what Wallace was going to do if he hadn't been shot. A lot of people in the American Party were just waiting for him to get turned down by the Democratic convention and then he'd come running to them.

BK: You had to pick a vice president. How did you handle that?

JS: I threw it open to the convention. I didn't pick my running mate Tom Anderson, although at the time we were both members of the National Council of John Birch Society. I used to joke though, that we had an ideally balanced ticket, a Catholic Republican from California and a Tennessee anti-Catholic. I think he was a Democrat. Tom Anderson is a very clever fellow. He's a great after-dinner speaker and a very funny man and a very popular speaker. Not to be confused with John Anderson.<sup>16</sup> He's head-and-shoulders above John Anderson, as far as an after-dinner speaker goes. I did not select him though. Some people asked me to select one of the delegates there, a Texas assemblyman, a black fellow by the name of Clay Smothers, who gave a great convention speech. On my mischievous side I said to myself, 'What's the liberal media going to do with the John Schmitz/Clay Smothers team? Stick this in your megaphone.' I don't want to say I took the coward's way out, I just decided to do something old-fashioned. It used to be that presidential candidates let the convention select their running mate. This idea of naming a running mate is something that wasn't always the case. So I just selected the convention selection of Anderson. I don't know how close that one was. But Anderson was not second in the presidential nomination vote, as I said, Maddox was second. Anderson may not have even been third, he may have been fourth. A guy by the name of Greer<sup>17</sup> . . .

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16 Former Republican Congressman from Illinois and 1980 Independent candidate for president.

17 Allen Greer.

- BK: Favorite son from Florida. You got 329, Maddox 55, Greer 25, Anderson 23, and Richard Kay, who defended Lieutenant Calley<sup>18</sup> got 16. Eight people still voted for Wallace. Did you see any meaning or concern that Wallace was a Democrat, albeit a conservative one, and you were a Republican?
- JS: He supported Nixon by the way.
- BK: Did you tried to get his endorsement in the fall?
- JS: Sure. But he was still Governor of Alabama and he still had a lot of roads and bridges that the federal government was still subsidizing and he still was playing the political game of what was good for him and for Alabama. Wallace supported Nixon. He did not support me. I met George Wallace after the campaign and I think he, I don't know if he resented me. I think there was a friction there. I had met him, by the way, when he came to campaign in 1968. I was a state senator and he came to Sacramento. I was the only state legislator that came to visit him when he was up there. Later, after the 1972 election I visited him and I said, 'You know, I beat you in one state,' from his '68 showing. He said, 'Yeah I know, Utah.' (Laughter) Can you imagine that he knew that? Yeah, I told you I did well among Mormons. In one state I got a better vote than he did and he brought that back at me, 'Yeah. Utah.'
- BK: You got 20,000 more votes in Utah than he did in 1968. In your mind was the important thing not to win necessarily, but to get the message out to voters'?
- JS: I thought if we could get our message across, you never know when you're going to catch on. In my speeches, I would give lines like, 'We're like a spark falling on dry leaves.' Chances are you'll just get snuffed out, but on the other hand, if it hits the right place, you can start a prairie fire. And that was our idea. But we really got frozen out by the media. I talked to the head of a station in Cleveland. It was either a newspaper or a station in Cleveland. He said, 'Well, how many votes did you think you're going to get?' I said, 'Well, I'll ask you the question. How many votes do you think I'm going to get?' He said, 'About three percent.' Which is about what I did eventually get in Ohio, so they apparently had been doing some polling. I said, 'Okay, I'll settle for that. Give me two or three percent of the coverage. But why, because I'm only getting, according to your own estimates, two or three percent, why should I be frozen out completely?' That was my point. If I could get just my two or three percent of the media and get my message across, I thought it would catch on. Yet, I was basically frozen out. I used to give speeches after the campaign and examples on how we were frozen out. McGovern wouldn't campaign a day and I'd be getting ready to give three speeches an evening. I'd

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18 Lieutenant William Calley was court-martialed for carrying out the My Lai massacre during the height of the Vietnam War.

be shaving, watching TV and I'd be watching how McGovern's not campaigning that day. (Laughter) I am, but I wouldn't be covered.

John Anderson and I were both seated House members, granted that he had more seniority than I did, but boy, John Anderson was treated equally back in '80. Maybe I should have run instead of Ashbrook in the primaries like John Anderson did, and then switch from a primary candidate to the general election. That would have been a better comparison maybe with John Anderson. Maybe his breaking with the party after the primary was a little different. It's not an exact analogy, but boy, I mean I was a seated Congressman and it wasn't that I was a nothing. My defeat in the primary was rather heroic, taking on the President. I was his congressman. I took him on. I was outspent. Murray Chotiner was raising money. When I say he was raising money, he was directing money. John Rollins, the Lieutenant Governor of Delaware, contributed to my primary opponent. What's his interest? Well obviously, someone in the White House is directing the money out there and I'm sure it was Murray Chotiner. Jack Anderson apparently would agree with this.

BK: The campaign had two big main planks when you were trying to get that message out.

JS: I made those up. Every convention has all of its planks. It was very complete. It was one of these 25 plank platforms. Every one who had a cause brought it up at the convention and they hashed it out. I came up with those two main ones. Never go to war unless you plan on winning. Those who work ought to live better than those who don't. That was purely mine.

BK: But again, when you were out campaigning, forced busing was an issue, anti-abortion, deficit spending. You thought how to get out the Vietnam POWs was an issue.

JS: I'm a retired Marine Corps colonel aviator now. At that time, I was a lieutenant colonel. The guys in the POW camps were mostly my age and my profession. They were mostly majors. Major was probably about the average guy's rank there. There but for the grace of God go I. I used to joke about the fact that maybe the reason they didn't call up the reserves in the Vietnam War was that we were politically unreliable to fight a limited war.

BK: You said you wanted commandoes to go in and get the POWs.

JS: Yeah. Actually they tried that once. I mean, that was not a wild idea. It actually was tried and they went there and the camp was empty. In other words, the idea was good but the secrecy was bad, because by the time they went to the camp, the enemy knew they were coming and they had pulled them out.

BK: Walter Brennan,<sup>19</sup> the actor, served as finance chair [of your campaign]. How did that come into being?

JS: Apparently his granddaughter was a supporter of mine and his granddaughter asked him. A campaign staffer came to me and said, 'Walter Brennan's willing to be finance chairman. All you have to do is ask him.' (Laughter) So the groundwork had been laid. I didn't know Walter Brennan. But talk about a prolific actor. You watch American Movie Classics and he's in everything. He had to have made more movies than anyone.

BK: Do you know how much money was raised and spent?

JS: Yeah, it seems to me, my recollection is either a half million or a million. But I don't remember which one. The reason I don't think I can remember either one, half a million may not seem like a lot of money. In '72, that would have been big. It may have been that I figured that it was half a million that we raised and we got a half a million worth of Secret Service protection, from the taxpayers. (Laughter) We had 45 guys assigned to me. My head guy ended up being Jerry Ford's head guy. Jack Merchant was his name and he's the one who shoved Jerry Ford into the car at one of his two assassinations attempts-either Sacramento or San Francisco.<sup>20</sup> Both times he was the head Jerry Ford's detachment. He was a Schmitz trained man. (Laughter) Yeah, Jack Merchant was a good man. There were about 45 of them assigned to me. They weren't around me at once, but they were on rotation and they would work in shifts. They kept a mobile home outside my house in Bethesda and they went through my mail. I'm the first one they x-rayed all the mail coming to my house and everything. They're good guys. I think every one of them voted for me. You could always tell who the Secret Service guys were, they weren't laughing at my jokes cause they had heard them over and over and over again. They all said that they could have given my speech. The half million was money spent by the national effort, which was headquartered in Richmond. I have no idea what was spent on the state and local levels.

BK: You got votes in 38 states. I didn't know if you were on the ballot in 38 states.

JS: We were on the ballot in 32 states. I think we had a countable number of write-in votes in some states. For example, I think I got one percent of the vote in Wyoming on write-ins. Now in Wyoming, you don't have to get many write-in votes to get one percent because it's not a very populous state. But I did well in states that didn't have big cities, outside of California. But usually I did well in states, percentage wise, like Wyoming and Idaho.

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19 Brennan is the only person to win the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor award three times.

20 President Ford had two attempts on his life within a period of a month in September 1975, both occurred in California and both attempts were made by women.

BK: Was it tough getting on [the various ballots]?

JS: Oh yeah. We had a guy whose only job was ballot placement. We were on the ballot in Indiana. They knocked me off as a presidential candidate and everyone under me was on. In other words, had I been running for Congress in my party, I would have stayed on the ballot. Then we were on in one state, it was either Oklahoma or Arkansas, and I believe it was the ACLU<sup>21</sup> who went to court to knock us off. Leave me alone. We're on the ballot and some group who's for civil rights knocks you off somehow. Am I that much a danger to civil rights? Yes I am. (Laughter) Civil rights as they think it is.

BK: How difficult is it to gain recognition?

JS: It varies from state to state. Let me tell you a funny story. In the State of Washington, you get on the ballot by getting 1000 people at a convention and an official comes out and counts. 'Did you have 1000 people at your convention?' We had this convention in Seattle and they counted and they came down to, it was like 999. (Laughter) There was a cop there that was assigned for security purposes and he said, 'I like what you people stand for. Count me in.' (Laughter) That's how close it was getting on the ballot in the state of Washington. A cop who came there cause it was his Job, said he liked what we stood for so count him in. Some states are virtually impossible to get on and some states-Michigan apparently is very easy. They have any party you can think of on their ballot. Starting in August we were already on some states, by that states' laws, by virtue of previous standing. I think California we were already on, by virtue of the fact that maybe in the previous election that party had gotten a certain number of votes.

BK: So probably McCarthy<sup>22</sup> and John Anderson learned from the efforts that your campaign made?

JS: We all learn from each other. By the way, no matter how much I agree or disagree with some of the other people, I think we all agree that it really ought to be easier to get on the ballot in a lot of states. I think Hawaii was very difficult. We didn't get on the ballot in big states like Massachusetts. That didn't hurt me as much as Texas and Florida. We had real good support from Florida, Texas, and Georgia and we couldn't get on the ballot in those three states. Those really hurt. I think I could have gotten, who knows, another million, if I could have gotten on in Florida and Texas, because not only are they big states, but they're our type of people. Fertile ground for me. I didn't mind not getting on in Hawaii and Massachusetts. In New York, I didn't get on. It was hard. Some states would count the write-ins and some didn't. There are different accounts of my total

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21 American Civil Liberties Union.

22 Former Democratic Senator from Minnesota and 1976 Independent candidate Eugene McCarthy.

number of votes. Some guys say I got 1.1 million and some say I got 1.2 million. Some listings of the vote were just those states that didn't wait-some of them didn't wait until the write-ins were counted. I think one of them was like 1.06 million and one was 1.1 million. 1.1 million is the most common. But 1.2 million is what my aunt found out and that's from getting all the final final write-ins from all the states.

BK: You were on *Face the Nation* at least once and I think that you said that both Nixon and McGovern were going to surrender Vietnam, but McGovern was going to do it immediately and Nixon was going to do it on an installment plan.

JS: I was right. I was right.

BK: What you wanted to do with Vietnam was declare war and win this thing?

JS: Yeah. Or get out.

BK: Internally you obviously thought that it was important to get the message out, but you made some comments to the press that you thought that you were going to outpoll McGovern.

JS: Oh sure. In four counties of Idaho I did. But seriously, that does show that the fact that I outpoll McGovern in four counties of Idaho meant it was not impossible to do. Why were we able to do that in four counties of Idaho and nowhere else? I think it had a lot to do with the type of people that were there, the Mormons. I think they're a little bit immune to the general mass media and the freeze-out, but the fact that I did it. By the way, let me just tell you something, you know you can't show movement in the polls unless you're in the polls. They called up to Idaho, I think the newspaper's called *The Statesman* in Boise and they said, 'Can you give us a rundown of Nixon versus McGovern?' They were told by the political editor of that newspaper, 'You better put Schmitz in the polls because he's doing very well up here.' It was only after that that the national polls started including me. But by that time it was too late to show any movement. The movers of public opinion were perfectly happy to leave me out until they were told by the Boise, Idaho newspaper that they're leaving out one of the more interesting aspects of the campaign. So that's what I went back to when I said, 'Yeah, I can outpoll McGovern.' I did in some places and if I did in some places, it was possible to project that.

BK: In the end, you got by my count, 1,099,482 votes and at least five percent in five states. For everything that you put into it, were you happy or satisfied with that total?

JS: Yeah. On the night they were counting the votes, there's an interesting story. ABC News did one story on me during the campaign. Outside of that, zero. A guy by the name of Murphy of ABC News did a story on me, otherwise the media we got was what we

bought. I don't know if you've ever heard of Dan Smoot. He used to have a TV program himself. Former FBI man, he was my chairman. I have in my attic, films of Dan Smoot interviewing me in half-hour infomercials. 'Send in your bucks and that will pay for the next one.' That's how finally we got on national TV, buying our way on in half-hour infomercials. Outside of that it was going city-to-city and we would get news in the local stations, not the networks. The only network breakthroughs were the one you mentioned on *Face the Nation* and I think his name was Charles Murphy on ABC.

Then, one of the other stations, it could have been ABC, on the night of our victory party, (laughter) they stick a microphone and a camera in my face and say, 'You're not doing so well.' I wanted to say, 'You S.O.B.' Excuse me, I didn't say that. But what I did say is, 'I went through two-and-a-half months of campaigning here and I would have given my right arm to have someone from network television ask me how we're doing in the campaign. Now that they're counting votes, you tell me, 'Hey' rhetorically, 'you're not doing too well,' or 'How come you're not doing so well?' And then I pointed to the camera, which you're not supposed to do and said, 'How many of you out there know that you had a choice between the candidate that broke all his campaign promises or the one, who if elected, we'd only hope that he would?' A guy by the name of, I think it was Trohan from the *Chicago Tribune*, I may be mistaken, one of the big columnists from the *Chicago Tribune*, wrote an article titled, 'Who Pulled the Plug on Schmitz?' because as I'm going into my tirade with my finger in the camera, all of the sudden there's a flip-flop on everyone's TV and I'm off. He wrote an article, 'Who Pulled the Plug on Schmitz?' because just when I was making the point, I went off the air. It was obvious enough so that a big Journalist for the *Chicago Tribune* thought that it was one of the most interesting parts of the campaign; after freezing me out the whole campaign, then they come to my victory party and ask me how come I'm not doing so well.

BK: But you yourself, all things considered with that media freeze-out . . .

JS: Hey, I'm one of four living guys that got a million votes.<sup>23</sup> I did it. No one can say that I did it as running on Wallace's coattails. He endorsed the other guy. (Laughter) This is something that we did on our own and it was basically a reaction to the war, to the coddling of criminals, foreign and domestic, abortion.

BK: You don't think it would have been better to tone down your statements a little bit? But was the allure that you were a little strident and that was the reason you got as many votes as you did?

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23 The others are South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond in 1948 on the States' Rights Party ticket with 1,176,125 votes, former Illinois Congressman John Anderson in 1980 as an Independent with 5,720,060 votes, and Ross Perot in 1992 as a Independent with 19,741,657 votes and in 1996 on the Reform Party ticket with 8,085,402 votes.

JS: Oh yeah. People were looking for something other than Nixon and McGovern, who were saying the same thing.

BK: Did running change the way you looked at people or issues and things?

JS: Oh, I met a lot of nice people. I got to see this country. From a personal, selfish view, we probably had one of the grandest tours of the country. John and Mary's<sup>24</sup> wild ride! (Laughter) Oh man, we wore those Secret Service guys out. I mean, we were giving three speeches a night. It was interesting. We learned some interesting things, like in Memphis, we had a big dinner and it was standing room only. People were wall to wall. The local chairman said, 'You haven't seen anything yet. This is Just the dinner. After dinner, we go to the opera house and you give your real speech.' I said, 'The opera house?' It was this huge, huge thing. Knowing politics myself, I sat there and thought, 'Why couldn't they quit while they're ahead,' because they already had the people at the dinner. They're voting for you, that's why they're there. What you want is the media covering a room where it's standing room only. That's what I wanted, that room where we're eating dinner we'll want to appear the next day in the papers, not empty seats in the opera house. We had three times as many people in the opera house, but there were twenty times as many seats, so the TV cameras ended up panning the empty seats. You know, these people in the American Party were not professionals, they were grassroots. This was a case of 'Mr. Schmitz goes to Washington'- with all the problems.

BK: But generally, for two-and-a-half months it was a great experience?

JS: It's the type of thing that I'm too old to do that now, but it was adrenaline all the way. My wife accompanied me on everything. Her aunt quit her job as a school teacher in the Pittsburgh area and went down and took care of our kids. We had seven kids and they were young and they just couldn't be left. So she came down and moved into our house and as I said before, the Secret Service detachment was across the street and it was quite an experience. We were constantly on the go around the country. One time, we went all across the Northern tier-places like Great Falls, Montana and in between and all across, along with our Secret Service detachment. That was the nip wherein we stopped at Idaho Falls. Our number two Secret Service man, Tom Bales was from Wisconsin and we liked him because he played a three-comer game called 'Sheep's Head' that they play in Wisconsin. So my wife and I and Tom Bales are playing 'Sheep's Head' in the airplane while we're flying from stop to stop. But he had a mustache and looked something like me. So the airplane pulls into the Idaho Falls airport and the first person out is the number two Secret Service man and they all cheer, the people waiting at the airport. And the next day, Tom Bales had been ordered to take off his mustache, so there'd be no confusion. But I drew great crowds in Idaho Falls. They loved me there.

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24 Schmitz's wife.

BK: When you used to lecture about the race you called it 'How I almost became President of the United States but was edged out by 44 million votes.'

JS: Right. (Laughter) Well, historically something had to be said about the fact that Nixon was not a conservative. You see, one of the reasons why history textbooks leave me out is because textbooks are primarily written by liberals. And they-I'm putting motivations into them I suppose, which is always dangerous, but because Nixon left office in disgrace, they like to name him a conservative because that disgraces conservatism. So if they paint Nixon as a conservative in college and high school textbooks, then my million votes against him has to become an Orwellian un-fact. Just try this yourself sometime, ask 'Who are the four living minor party candidates who got over a million votes?' to anyone. They'll come up with oh, Gus Hall<sup>25</sup> or some left-winger. I've tried it and that's who I get as answers-Norman Thomas,<sup>26</sup> Gus Hall, Dr. Spock and they come up with some left-winger. They cannot imagine that Richard Nixon, as painted, had someone get a million votes running to the right of him. Nixon was not a conservative. He was a Republican Clinton. This type goes to where the votes are. Therefore, I think that if my place is nothing else in history, it is this: To raise the question: If Nixon's a conservative, how did Schmitz get a million votes against him? I didn't intend to do that. But that's what it comes out to be. That's my place in history.

Richard Nixon was not a conservative. John Ashbrook is left out often too. Pete McCloskey will be in as a primary one because he was a liberal Republican. Why did John Ashbrook run against him in the primary and John Schmitz in the general if Richard Nixon was a conservative? John Ashbrook and John Schmitz stand as kind of a terrible fact to operate against this theory that the liberal textbook writers want to make Richard Nixon a conservative.

BK: What other experiences do you recall about the campaign, maybe about the Secret Service?

JS: The Secret Service is like lighthouses, you don't count the ships they save. The only ships you know about are the ones they miss. They end up with a shipwreck by the lighthouse. But all the ships that sail by, the lighthouse doesn't get credit for. That same flight that went from Sacramento to Madison, Wisconsin, stopped off at Bismarck, North Dakota. No one goes to campaign for president in Bismarck. (Laughter) The main street had a two-story Walgreen's drug store at the main intersection and above the Walgreen's drug store was the TV studio. When we landed in Bismarck-how the Secret Service cars were there, I don't know. They must have driven them over from Chicago. By Secret Service cars what I mean is when the Secret Service supports you, they support you with a bullet-proof car and a lead car and a chase car. Well, the cars were there when we

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25 Communist Party nominee for president from 1972 to 1984.

26 Socialist Party candidate from 1928 to 1948.

landed at Bismarck and they took us to the Walgreen's drug store and we went upstairs and went on TV. When we left, Jack Merchant said, 'Okay, one by one now, stay right close to me. Don't ask any questions, just stay close to me.' One by one, he takes us out into the car from the Walgreen's from the upstairs TV studio. We get in and we speed away. There's the driver and Jack Merchant in front, my North Dakota chairman and my wife and I and all three of us are in the back seat there. I said, 'What's all that about?' He said, 'Well let me tell you. As you know, we send an advance party to where you're going and what we do is we check out your route and the reason you can't deviate from your route is we have to check for ambush points. We also check out people who have bought a gun since it was announced that you're going to be here and people who are on narcotics who might do something for hire. In North Dakota it's easy. Not many gun sales because everyone's already got a gun. But there was one gun purchase right after it was announced that you were coming and we checked that guy out. Then we checked out druggies and they don't have that problem in North Dakota. However, they got one guy and he's the guy that bought the gun. Then we checked out ambush points. No one comes to Bismarck, except to go on TV, so the one door you're going to walk through while you're in Bismarck is that TV studio door and the ideal ambush point would be upstairs across the street. As we left, that's where the guy was. The druggie who had bought the gun was standing in the window across the street.' How's that for a three way coincidence?