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October 23, 2012: George McGovern, R.I.P.

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Title: George McGovern, R.I.P.

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10/23/2012—Former Senator and Democratic Presidential candidate George McGovern died on Sunday. I have to break from commentary on the issues of the day to salute the man who inspired me to go into politics to pursue democratic change. He also got me into law school. I entered the Georgetown School of Foreign Service in the fall, 1970. A few months into my first semester, I became interested in the Presidential candidacy of George McGovern. I had previously worked as a volunteer for Bobby Kennedy and I had frankly caught the Presidential campaign bug. I don't know why I had no interest in Edmund Muskie. I would say today that he was a perfectly fine man and would have made a better candidate than McGovern, who, I should have known, had no chance of winning. Nevertheless, I started very early working for Senator McGovern, whom I never really met. My job for a long time consisted in going to the Senator's office late at night and using the free Senate phone line to make campaign related phone calls. (The ethics of this I neither knew about nor cared). Later, when the campaign really got going, these calls would consist of transmitting sound bites around the country, sometimes to supporters and sometimes to small radio stations. By the time the primaries started in 1972, I was a full-time, paid worker. My immediate boss was Joe Slade White, a great guy, who unknown to me has since gone on to fame and fortune as a political consultant. Joe worked directly for Gary Hart, who ran McGovern's campaign. (I didn't get to know Hart either). When you start early enough on a campaign, you get jobs you should not get. So, for a time, I travelled on the second press plane during the fall campaign, splicing tape for sound bites and doing the voice over. (This experience has proved valuable because it taught me what a short, clear statement sounds like for purposes of the media.) After the campaign, I went back to Georgetown. Then, when it came time to apply to law school, I asked Joe if he could get me a reference from the Senator. Joe wrote it up, Gary Hart got it to Senator McGovern and the rest is history. The letter was an accurate description of my contribution and made it sound like I was the perfect candidate for law school. There you have it. I meant to honor McGovern and ended up talking about myself. I will say this. We believed in him. Everyone who worked for him. And it was not charisma, like it was in 2008 for President Obama. McGovern had zero charisma. He was perhaps the most decent man to ever run for President. It is an honor to have helped him.