

**PRESS & TELEVISION**

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victory," McGovern's national support among Democrats remained at about five percent until one month later, when he won his first actual primary victory in Wisconsin.

The importance of early "media victories" is overrated, conclude Hofstetter and Moore. To build a national following, candidates must show that they can win consistently at the polls in truly significant contests, not just excite TV newsmen.

### *The View from The Fringe*

"The View from the Fringe" by Fred Barnes, in *Washington Journalism Review* (Jan.-Feb. 1983), 2233 Wisconsin Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20007.

Spokesmen for the New Right and their left-wing opponents seldom agree on anything, but on one matter they see eye to eye: The nation's major news organizations treat them unfairly, albeit in different ways.

One complaint is more common on the Right, writes Barnes, a Baltimore *Sun* reporter: Reporters tend to label its spokesmen as extremists. Right-wing activists are tagged, pejoratively, as "ultraconservatives," while their Left counterparts are described not as ultraliberals but as "progressives."

Ideologues on both sides agree that Washington newsmen judge success or failure by parochial standards. Nannette Falkenberg of the National Abortion Rights Action League notes that while her group has been working to elect "pro-choice" state legislators, reporters focus only on the group's influence in Congress. "If the political class isn't talking about something," adds Jeffrey Bell of the conservative American Enterprise Institute, "reporters don't know about it."

The media's habit of "blowing hot and cold" on subjects also fuels charges of poor coverage, says Barnes. Newspapers and TV spotlighted the National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC) when George McGovern and several other prominent liberal Senators were defeated in the 1980 elections but dismissed NCPAC after its apparent failure to score again in 1982. Yet NCPAC attracted many more donors during the latter campaign. Its true influence, Barnes suggests, has never been accurately gauged.

To the Left, the chief problem is "institutional" distortion: Partly due to sloth, journalists rely almost exclusively on government and "establishment" sources for news and comment. Conservatives, on the other hand, see a liberal bias in the press corps itself. Moral Majority spokesman Cal Thomas contends that newsmen practice "subtle censorship," barring, for example, pictures of aborted fetuses as "too emotional" while film footage of slain Palestinians is standard TV fare.

Barnes concedes that the critics are often correct. Yet he notes that events can change journalists' perceptions. After the 1979 Three Mile Island accident, the confusion of government and industry sources cost them credibility among newsmen; antinuclear activists gained. American fringe groups, he suggests, should "take heart."