

THE LINCOLN STAR

ON TARGET



By DON WALTON

Anyway you slice it, that was a smashing victory for Senator Kennedy in Nebraska last week.

"Smashing" is just what veteran Associated Press newsmen Jack Bell called it... and it's the same word Tom Wicker of The New York Times employed in wrapping up the Nebraska story.



Walton

The final results made Kennedy somewhat of a prophet. His last words, in his last campaign speech in downtown Omaha a week ago today, were: "Hooray for the people of Nebraska."

Fifty-one per cent of the vote was good in itself, but when you examine the contents of that vote, the results for Kennedy look even better.

At last count, he was winning 88 of the 93 counties and still had a chance to win them all, once mail and absentee ballots are added to the totals.

That means Kennedy won urban areas, suburban areas, ranch country, corn and wheat counties, college towns (except possibly for Lincoln, where McCarthy led by two votes at last count) . . . north, south, east and west.

That kind of a border-to-border sweep was a big surprise.

Then, you add to the Kennedy victory absolute control over Nebraska's delegation to the Democratic national convention.

At last count, Kennedy apparently holds at least 20 of the 23 delegates selected by Nebraska voters last week. In the process, he came close to making a clean sweep of the "uncommitted" candidates advertised as supporting him — 16 out of the 17 elected.

Since Kennedy had entered the presidential race too late to enter a slate of committed delegates in the Nebraska primary — he announced the day after the filing deadline — any hope of winning control of the Cornhusker delegation had appeared to be slim, if not altogether nil.

If you had to choose the worst possible place for Kennedy to try to get his slow-moving Indiana bandwagon into high gear, and you were denied only the states of the South and the Southwest in making that choice, you might very well choose Nebraska as the toughest available state for a Kennedy sweep.

Conservative, agrarian, rather insular Nebraska was not exactly the best place for an urban liberal New

York senator from Massachusetts to get rolling.

Nebraska, where Kennedy's brother ran his worst race in the 1960 general election . . . Nebraska, a state which Robert Kennedy had not even set foot in for nearly eight years . . . Nebraska, where the four major party officials were all strongly pro-administration.

That list could go on and on.

Sweeping Nebraska, of all places, is also one of the impressive ingredients of the Kennedy victory.

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Marv Stromer's presidential primary was a soaring success . . . if you measure it in terms of giving the voter an opportunity to participate in picking presidential nominees.

Counting write-in campaigns, voters had a choice among four Democrats and among three major Republicans, plus George Wallace. Every voter had a place to go.

But the real success of Stromer's law came in the delegate selection process. In fact, it was so successful, that you can now look for one party or both to try to change that system at the next legislative session.

Voters, who had always been criticized for choosing "name" candidates on delegate lists, exercised careful judgment and turned the delegate selection into an extension of their presidential preference, ignoring big names in the process.

So, out the window went Gov. Norbert Tiemann, former Gov. Frank Morrison, former Gov. Robert

Crosby, Secretary of State Frank Marsh and others. Had there been one more Nixon-committed delegate running statewide, Sen. Roman Hruska might have joined the outsiders.

Some party leaders aren't going to like that a bit . . . and they may try to knock the delegate commitment section out of the primary law so that all candidates would seek election unpledged to any presidential aspirant. Worse yet, other party officials — quite understandably — would like to return the whole selection process to state party conventions.

Either move would take power from the people.

Remember 1964, when Senator Goldwater failed to win 50% of Nebraska's presidential primary votes, but gained all 16 delegate votes at the national convention.

Or think what would have happened in 1968 without the Stromer primary law.

On the Republican slate, Nebraska would still go to Nixon at the convention.

But Nebraska's Democratic convention delegation would very likely have gone to Vice President Humphrey, instead of Senator Kennedy, if the choice were left to big-name Nebraska Democrats or to a state convention.

The delegate process this year, in short, permitted Nebraska Democrats to transform their presidential preference vote into national convention votes.

Don't look now . . . but the people are running the parties.