

Campaigning

THROUGHOUT Nebraska people discussed whether Norris should attend and play a prominent role in the Progressive party convention to be held in Chicago early in August. However, he still saw no reason to leave the Republican party. He would abide by a recall election if voters demanded one and, if recalled, would get off the Republican ticket. He made this announcement to illustrate dramatically his belief in the recall and to make it difficult if not impossible for the regular Republicans to read him out of the party. With progressive Republicans fully in control of the party organization in Nebraska, Norris still tended to his congressional duties in Washington.¹

The question of selecting a new chairman of the state committee was an important one and threatened to disrupt progressive Republican leaders. F. P. Corrick, who had ably guided the destinies of the Progressive Republican League, thought the job should be his, but he was quickly opposed. On August 13, the Republican State Committee chose Judge Ambrose Epperson as chairman. He regarded Norris' election as one of the most important items of business facing the committee. McCarl, though satisfied with Epperson, felt that Corrick deserved the post and, having been treated unjustly, would now direct the third party campaign in Nebraska. If Corrick remained angry, McCarl feared he might place a Progressive party candidate against Aldrich, who was largely responsible for Epperson's choice, and thus further jeopardize Republican chances.²

Norris intended to leave no doubt as to his stand on national issues. He would support Roosevelt and denounce the political robbery that was perpetrated at Chicago. He was disturbed and puzzled by reports that Roosevelt electors in Nebraska would probably withdraw from the Republican ticket. Since they had been chosen at the April primary and their course in supporting Roosevelt had been vindicated by the state convention, he could not understand why they would not continue to support Roosevelt on the Republican ticket. The only reasonable explanation was that the progressive Republicans

intended to trade electoral votes for state votes: Roosevelt electors would appear only on the Progressive ticket, state candidates would appear on both tickets, and organization men could then substitute a list of Taft electors to replace the Roosevelt men. Norris announced that he would play no part in such a compromise.³

He received several letters indicating that Aldrich favored such an arrangement, but though Norris stood to benefit by it, he refused to be swayed. He firmly believed that some form of harmony could be maintained within Republican ranks, avoiding the need to bring additional Progressive candidates into the field.⁴

McCarl, after attending several meetings in Lincoln, confirmed this impression. The executive committees of both the Republican and Progressive state organizations had met in separate rooms of the same hotel while the Republican candidates or their representatives were meeting with the Republican State Committee. McCarl, who represented Norris, reported that a state convention of the third party would be held in Lincoln on September 3. At this time the matter of endorsement of the state Republican ticket would be officially decided upon, though the Progressive Executive Committee had already approved the arrangement. It was the sentiment of this meeting that if the state-wide candidates would agree not to show any inconsistency to the Progressive party by advocating Taft's election in their speeches, all such candidates would be endorsed in the interest of harmony and victory in November.⁵

Furthermore, the Republican Executive Committee, McCarl informed Norris, had taken "the proper attitude." They intended to support Norris and the entire state ticket, including the presidential electors. If any elector wanted to withdraw to be placed on the third party ticket, this would be considered a personal matter beyond the committee's jurisdiction. Most members of the committee thought the electors would do so, since leaders in the Roosevelt headquarters in Chicago had indicated that they wished them to. McCarl regarded this position as sensible, but thought it should not be publicly discussed. Few voters actually understood that the politicians wished to give the Taft men a chance to vote for Taft electors to prevent many of them from voting for Wilson and possibly Shallenberger as well.

Though Norris disagreed with this scheme, McCarl thought there was wisdom in it. Since the decision for the Roosevelt electors to withdraw had been made in Chicago in the best interests of Roosevelt's candidacy, McCarl felt that Norris should be less concerned with this decision than with the fact that Taft voters and third party voters as well would be able to support his candidacy.⁶

Shortly after Congress adjourned on August 26, Norris announced that he intended to return to Nebraska on or about September 10, stopping first in Chicago for a conference with Senator Joseph Dixon of Montana, Roosevelt's campaign manager, and other Progressive party leaders. His delay in returning to Nebraska was wise politically because it allowed him to be absent when the Progressive state convention opened and gave him time to prepare campaign material.

The Progressive state convention met on September 3 to organize formally the new party by nominating a set of electors who would support Roosevelt and Hiram Johnson. This convention chose Corrick as chairman of its state committee, endorsed six of the eight electors nominated at the April primary on the Republican ticket—the Roosevelt men—and added two new men to complete the list. All other Republican nominees chosen at the April primary were endorsed by the Progressive convention, making it possible for their names to appear on the ballot in November under both the Republican and Progressive labels. Thus Norris was officially endorsed by two parties, and the arrangements between the parties had been worked out without involving him in bitterness and acrimony.⁷

On September 9, before returning to McCook, Norris stopped in Lincoln to speak and to visit with leaders of the state committees. To reporters he repeated that he supported Roosevelt and believed Taft unfairly nominated. Norris made great efforts to clarify his position because the campaign, he maintained, would be a crusade for political and civic righteousness, a national manifestation similar to the fight against Cannonism.⁸

Meanwhile, McCarl's job was to supervise Norris' campaign in cooperation with the Republican and Progressive state committees. He also collected information about the less honorable aspects of Shallenberger's record in order to be prepared in the event Shallenberger's campaign degenerated to the level of that of Fred Ashton's, Norris' opponent in 1908, and to satisfy a request from the Republican State Committee for a file on all Democratic candidates.⁹

Norris launched his campaign with a nonpolitical speech before some three thousand Odd Fellows assembled outside Omaha for their annual picnic. Governor Aldrich and several others delivered welcoming remarks before Norris started his speech on "Fraternity." No sooner did he begin than it started to rain. He continued his speech anyway, although only a few members of the audience stayed to hear him out.¹⁰ Afterwards Norris spent a day or two in Omaha and Lincoln discussing politics with Progressive and Republican party leaders. He was to deliver his first political speech in Lincoln on September

20, and thereafter was scheduled for two speeches almost every day for the rest of the campaign. But at the last minute, Norris changed his plans for the Lincoln meeting because Roosevelt expected him to spend that day on board his campaign train. Roosevelt, coming east from Denver over the Burlington route, spoke at Minden, Hastings, Lincoln, and Omaha, and Norris appeared on the platform with the former president during these addresses. In Omaha, Roosevelt spoke before an audience of 7,500 enthusiasts who waved handkerchiefs and cheered wildly when he appeared. Norris accompanied Roosevelt to the platform and addressed the crowd briefly after the former president had spoken. In this dramatic way Norris began his grueling campaign.¹¹

The next day he started a one-week tour of the western part of the state to get "in good working order" before appearing in the eastern counties. Nine formal meetings were scheduled. He returned to Lincoln on September 29 to spend two days in the First Congressional District. Thereafter he was scheduled to spend a few days early in October speaking in the south central part of the state before embarking on a tour of northeastern Nebraska. He agreed to devote most of his time to the more populous eastern end of the state where he was less well known, and to appear before as many people there as possible. Automobile transportation helped him carry out this plan.¹²

By the end of September McCarl thought that Norris might have to speak three or four times a day. He was encouraged by the interest aroused in Norris' first meetings in the eastern end of the state, an interest not matched in the western part of Nebraska where voters already knew their candidate. McCarl wanted Norris to be continually on the move, returning to certain areas, if necessary, to speak again. By going back to a locality he could defend himself against rumors, opposing local politicians who thought there was no danger of a "return engagement." Furthermore, if Norris moved continually, his opponents would be unable to trace or evaluate fully the change of sentiment following his meetings.¹³

Early in their campaigns both Norris and Shallenberger spoke before attentive audiences in Merrick County in east central Nebraska. As was his custom, Norris made no attempt whatever at oratory, preferring to let the facts make their own impression. Favorable comments from listeners suggested that this type of address, though it lasted over an hour, was eminently successful.¹⁴

Several days later Shallenberger spoke in another community in Merrick County, addressing about two hundred people, primarily

businessmen or town loafers. Very few farmers were present, chiefly because this was an afternoon meeting. Shallenberger criticized Norris' record in the Cannon fight because he had not voted to unseat Cannon and had opposed the creation of a tariff commission. He was applauded only when he referred to Bryan and the Baltimore convention. At the conclusion, as apparently was his custom, Shallenberger included a peroration to the flag. The speech was reported to be unimpressive; at least one prominent Democrat in the audience predicted that Norris would win the election, a prediction repeated elsewhere by Democrats after Norris spoke in their communities. Observers felt that if voters deserted their traditional tickets, Roosevelt might win Nebraska's electoral vote; otherwise, Wilson would win. In no case would Taft carry the state. Democratic support for Norris, therefore, would be beneficial to the Progressive party.¹⁵

McCarl was delighted with these reports of Norris sentiment and by a report that at one place Norris was in such demand that he was forced to make a speech to the crowd outside before they would let him enter the hall. McCarl's optimism grew when he learned that Corrick and Epperson were working harmoniously and effectively together. As a result, he decided to let the combined Speakers' Bureau of both parties arrange Norris' speaking dates for the rest of the campaign—subject, of course, to McCarl's approval.¹⁶

By early October Norris' itinerary for the remainder of the campaign was completed. At no time was he scheduled for less than two meetings a day, and on a few days five meetings had been arranged; this schedule, of course, did not include the many brief speeches and unscheduled appearances he would make en route. Sundays would provide him with all the rest he would obtain till after the election.

This busy itinerary, however, had one serious flaw. Norris had found that he was unable to give an effective short talk; he could make a point or two, but would be unable to discuss his record or say much of recent developments. Consequently, voters who did not know him sometimes received an unfavorable impression. McCarl suggested that when Norris was scheduled to make a number of brief stops, he have someone accompany him to give a short general talk before introducing him. This arrangement would keep Norris out of petty controversies in which local candidates, who might otherwise introduce him, were involved. Harry Sackett, a young and prominent Progressive from Beatrice, assumed this responsibility and proved eminently satisfactory.¹⁷

On October 5 and 6, Wilson spoke in Omaha and Lincoln and was the guest of Bryan at his home, Fairview. Bryan introduced Wil-

son at the auditorium in Lincoln and at the close of his address the enthusiastic audience called for Bryan to speak as well. He refused, however, merely motioning the audience to disperse. The appearance of Wilson in Nebraska was not only a tribute to Bryan but a move seemingly well calculated to throw the Roosevelt supporters into the depths of suspense and anxiety. McCarl, for example, confessed:

I am a little afraid of the Wilson boom, afraid of too many straight Wilson votes this fall. I am in hopes his visit won't set everybody crazy.¹⁸

Norris was much too busy to take notice of Wilson's speeches in Nebraska. To avoid possible rancor, he contributed one hundred and fifty dollars to aid the Progressive cause, matching a previous contribution to the Republican campaign chest. Speaking several times a day, shaking hands and talking with people in every community on his route, by and large he enjoyed the campaign.¹⁹

Years later Norris related an amusing anecdote, supposedly illustrating the evil of partisanship, that occurred during this campaign. A minister, who had come some distance to hear him speak, claimed to have followed his record with pleasure and admiration and to be much in favor of his election. The following conversation took place between the two men:

"Mr. Norris, I am so anxious to have you succeed that every night before I retire, on my bended knees I ask God to see that you are elected to the Senate. Why, I sometimes get so anxious to see you elected that I almost feel as if I ought to vote for you myself."

"My friend," said Norris, "if you feel that way about it, why don't you vote for me?"

"Oh," he replied, "I could not do that. I am a Democrat."²⁰

The opposition, meanwhile, had a difficult time seriously challenging or embarrassing Norris. To aid Shallenberger, the Lincoln *Daily Star*, a Democratic paper, dredged up the story of the 1895 disputed judicial election between Norris and Welty. Another possible threat was that Secretary of State Addison Wait would prepare the ballot in such a way as to create confusion among the voters. The presidential electors' names were arranged with the six Roosevelt Republicans appearing first under the name "Republican-Progressive." After all the other names on the ballot appeared those of the two regularly chosen Republican electors in the primary as Republican. These were followed by six names bearing no party label but only the words "by

petition." These names had been filed as Taft electors, but this fact was not clearly established on the ballot. Once news of this arrangement became known, attention quickly turned away from actual campaigning to the perplexing question of which electors favored Taft and which favored Roosevelt. Protests were made, and Democrats hoped that animosity between Taft and Roosevelt supporters would burst forth once more into the open.²¹

On October 16, the Republican State Central Committee brought a petition for a writ of mandamus in the district court of Lancaster County to compel the secretary of state to remove the heading "Republican-Progressive" from the ballot. The names under this heading would appear as Progressives while the Republican ticket would bear the names of the two regularly chosen electors plus the six names filed by petition. On October 19, the judges of the district court granted the writ of mandamus. Thus the eight Taft electors would go on the ballot as Republicans, while the names of the six Roosevelt Republican electors chosen in the primary would appear under the Progressive party designation.²²

The matter did not rest here. Wait, a Roosevelt supporter, appealed the decision to the Supreme Court on October 22. At noon on October 24, only hours before the deadline for certification of the ballot, the Supreme Court of Nebraska unanimously affirmed the action of the district court, thereby assuring the Taft electors a place on the ballot and finally solving this complex and thorny problem. Now there was a chance that voters favoring Taft would vote the entire Republican ticket, whereas previously it was feared that many would scratch the Democratic ticket on election day.²³

When the matter of the ballot was settled there remained for McCarl only his concern about Norris' campaign. Though Norris was covering a large portion of the state, he could not speak at even half the places from which requests had been received. Before mid-October nearly two hundred different Nebraska communities had requested his appearance and fourteen states had clamored for a day or two of his time. Norris had no intention of campaigning outside the state, and would be unable to speak to voters in most of these communities.

To offset this factor McCarl had prepared a two-column plate with a cut of Norris and a statement of some of the things he had accomplished and was working for. He sent this plate to editors throughout Nebraska and distributed copies of Norris' speeches and other campaign literature. By mid-October, only one Republican country editor had told McCarl that he would not use the plate. Most

Taft papers had agreed to publish it. This widespread acceptance, plus the fact that the Democrats had to go back to 1895 to find anything to criticize, pleased McCarl.²⁴

The outlook was further brightened by a telephone conversation between McCarl and John L. Kennedy. Kennedy said that Norris would receive a fine hearing in Omaha, that an address would climax the good work being done there for the entire Republican ticket and particularly for Norris. Kennedy reassured McCarl regarding a rumor of railroad opposition, claiming that most railroad officials, while personally opposed to Norris, thought he would be easily elected and would not work against him.²⁵

Though all reports about Norris' meetings were good, no relaxation was contemplated. Norris was so tired that on Sundays, even when feasible, he did not return home to spend the day with his family, but rested instead in the community where he had last spoken. Until McCarl reported his conversation with Kennedy, Norris had been reluctant to attempt a meeting by himself in Omaha for fear he might not receive a satisfactory hearing; a poor meeting, coming at the end of the campaign, could hurt his chances. But now he began to reconsider. His speeches, however, did not change. While their content varied from town to town, all were crammed full of facts and devoid of oratorical flourishes or partisan criticism. They appealed to the intelligence rather than to the emotions of his hearers, and received a favorable reception.²⁶

Besides Kennedy's comments, Norris heard further favorable reports about the situation in Omaha. Travelers told of growing sentiment, and the Omaha *Daily News* in October published two editorials, both well received, endorsing Norris. R. B. Howell, attempting to sense the political situation, secured a number of straw votes at strategic points throughout the city. His conclusion was that Norris could carry Douglas County, though Roosevelt's prospects did not seem "overly bright." With these observations in mind, McCarl prepared twenty-five hundred personal letters to be mailed to Omaha residents on the Wednesday or Thursday before election, while Norris planned to spend November 1, the Friday before the election, speaking in Omaha and South Omaha.²⁷

At times, the effects of the tiring campaign showed on Norris. In the privacy of his hotel room and elsewhere, among friends, he sometimes became irritable, cursed, and complained about being driven too hard. But the public and most politicians rarely saw this side of his personality. By the end of October he looked haggard and tired but

was well pleased with the course of his campaign and felt assured of success on election day.²⁸

Norris concluded his campaign in the eastern end of the state on the first day of November. At noon he spoke before a luncheon meeting of the Omaha Commercial Club and spent the rest of the day in Omaha and South Omaha. Kennedy introduced him to the members of the Commercial Club. "Because we disagree on president," said Kennedy, "is not to me a sufficient reason why I should withhold from him my support." Indeed, Kennedy's help, climaxed at this meeting, had been invaluable throughout the campaign.²⁹

McCarl had yet to finish his work. He arranged for Norris to spend the last days of the campaign in the Fifth Congressional District. There were numerous meetings scheduled, including one at Hastings on Saturday evening, November 2, and a final homecoming rally in McCook on election eve. The *Chicago Tribune* summed up the feeling of many voters just before election day by predicting that while the state might enter the Democratic fold, "It is more than likely that Representative George W. Norris will be the next United States Senator from Nebraska."³⁰

Though the election of 1912 was infinitely more exciting than that of 1908, seventeen thousand more votes were cast in Nebraska in the earlier campaign. Slightly less than two hundred and fifty thousand Nebraska citizens went to the polls in 1912. Wilson easily carried the state, running more than thirty thousand votes ahead of Roosevelt. But the combined Roosevelt and Taft votes surpassed Wilson's 109,109 votes. For governor, Aldrich was defeated by his Democratic opponent John H. Morehead by almost four thousand votes. This race was so close that Aldrich refused to admit defeat until several days after the election. All other state officers on the Republican and Progressive tickets were elected by pluralities of ten thousand to fifteen thousand, an indication of Aldrich's alienation of many voters. Control of the state legislature was divided. The Democrats would dominate the next session of the lower house, electing fifty-six members to forty-four for the Progressive and Republican parties. In the state senate the Progressive and Republican members won a three-man majority, electing eighteen members to the Democrat's fifteen. In the congressional races there was an even split, Democrats electing candidates in the three eastern districts, while Progressive and Republican candidates, including Silas R. Barton, Norris' successor in the Fifth District, won the remaining three districts. Finally, in the preference race for the United States Senate seat to be vacated by incumbent Norris Brown,

George Norris handily defeated Shallenberger. Norris received 126,022 votes to Shallenberger's 111,946.³¹

Norris was deeply gratified by the outcome. His exuberance, however, was tempered by the knowledge that his triumph was a notable exception to a general pattern of Progressive and Republican defeat throughout the nation. He was pleased that he carried Douglas County which went for Wilson by more than two thousand votes. Friction over prohibition between Shallenberger and James C. Dahlman, Democratic Mayor of Omaha, helped Norris' vote in the state's largest city. Democratic strife, while beneficial to Norris, nevertheless did not harm Wilson, who benefited immeasurably from Republican factionalism. Despite ballot adjudication, Wilson's vote was increased by conservative Taft supporters who resented the liberal group controlling the state party organization and its close cooperation with the Progressive State Committee. Others, fearful of a Roosevelt victory in Nebraska, voted for Wilson. Democratic managers did all in their power to encourage these resentments and fears. Despite Wilson's impressive victory, Shallenberger, though defeated by Norris, polled better than twenty-five hundred more votes than the head of his ticket, and Morehead, with 124,000 votes, polled almost fifteen thousand more votes than Wilson. Norris was the leading vote getter in Nebraska in 1912; his 126,022 votes were surpassed by no other candidate.³²

Both Republican and Progressive leaders were delighted with Norris' victory. Harry Sackett noted that it had an effect "upon the young men of the State in leading them to follow their honest and conscientious convictions in all matters pertaining to the public welfare as well as in business matters." Thus Norris' work in opposing Cannonism had born fruit by 1912. Nebraska voters accepted and even admired his independence and lack of partisanship. As one of his admirers, possibly summing up the views of the electorate, wrote, "We all expect him to just be honest with himself and square with the people of Nebraska." By 1912 Norris had been able to do just that. He had been able to throw off the yoke of partisanship and yet to obtain improved legislation benefiting his constituents.³³

Norris quickly regained his physical strength and by mid-November was feeling fine, though still deluged with correspondence and office work. He could not take an extended vacation, however, because the third session of the Sixty-second Congress was scheduled to convene early in December. This forthcoming short session, his last as a member of the House, promised to be an active one. It was also a session which cast Norris in a different role from any he had previously experienced in Congress.