

Oral History Interview

With

GOV. DAVID L. LAWRENCE

Mayor of Pittsburgh, Penn., 1946-59; Governor of Pennsylvania, 1959-63; Member of the Democratic National Committee, 1940-66; and chairman of the Democratic National Convention in 1944 when Harry S. Truman was nominated for the vice presidency.

Washington, D.C.

June 30, 1966

by Jerry N. Hess, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library

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[1]

HESS: Let's begin, Governor Lawrence, by having me ask you, when did you first meet Mr. Truman?

LAWRENCE: Mr. Truman was elected to the Senate in 1934. My old friend Joseph F. Guffey was elected the same year. They came here in 1935, and were "back-benchers" together with a

number of other so-called "young Turks" who were among the real liberals in the Senate, and being closely associated with Senator Guffey I naturally met up with Senator Truman. I had known not too much of him prior to that time, and of course with Senator Guffey I then met up with him a good deal, because we had a lot in common, because we were both supporting President Roosevelt and his legislative program, and so forth; and we were both on the liberal side, very definitely, and I grew to know him through that.

One of the very memorable things I remember about Senator Truman, was a famous hunting trip Senator Guffey got up, I believe it was in December of '36, in the

[2]

deer hunting season in Pennsylvania. Senator Guffey got about ten Senators, friends of his, and the party included also John Garner, who was Vice President at the time; and we went up to Elk County, Pennsylvania -- St. Mary's, Pennsylvania -- to the preserve and home of Colonel William Kaul, and we had a very delightful time there for a couple of days together. They went up on a special car that was arranged for them, railroad car, and that was sort of the real beginning of a friendship with Mr. Truman.

HESS: Did Mr. Truman shoot anything?

LAWRENCE: I don't recall that. It was sort of deer hunting deluxe. It was one of these wonderful preserves. They shoo the deer down through the woods and you get a shot at them. I don't know just what Senator Truman did at the time, but it was the only real hunting trip I was on in my life and I got a deer, and I'm sure that was some sort of a setup made for me to get it because I'm no crack shot by any means.

Then, of course, over a period of years, we would meet intermittently up in the Senate Dining Room at lunch, most of the time with Guffey.

Where I became attracted to Senator Truman was prior to the '44 convention. I had not been in sympathy

[3]

with the nomination of Henry Wallace in the 1940 convention. At that time, I was for Paul McNutt who was Governor of Indiana and a friend of mine. I met up with him in the American Legion. He was National Commander and I was just an ordinary member, but I observed him and the fight he made in Indiana, and therefore thought he would be a very attractive running mate for President Roosevelt. But President Roosevelt didn't agree with that. He insisted on Henry Wallace. And then I had some minor difference with the President on the selection and of course he naturally insisted that he should have a great deal to say about who his running mate should be. Finally McNutt withdrew. There was a famous scene in the Democratic Convention of that year at Chicago when the President prevailed on McNutt to drop out and the convention was very much opposed to it. McNutt had great difficulty in getting heard by the convention; they kept yelling and booing because they were not in sympathy with him. However, the President's wishes prevailed and they went on, and Henry Wallace became the Vice President of the United States.

Then the scene shifts to the '44 period and associated with me in Pittsburgh in politics was a man named John J. Kane, who was chairman of the board of

[4]

county commissioners. He had been into Washington a number of times on county business, and on several occasions drifted into the so-called Truman Committee, which was investigating war contracts and so forth; and Kane became very much impressed with Truman and the things that he was trying to do. Kane had a boy of military age who was, I think, then in West Point and subsequently graduated from West Point, and now is a colonel in the Air Force, Francis X. Kane. And Kane would come back from these meetings and tell me what a great job he thought Truman was doing in seeing to it that war contractors did their job according to specifications, and the great service he was rendering to every boy that was in military service, and so forth.

Well, as the pre-convention period wended its way along, Bob Hannegan was the national chairman at the time and Bob indicated a desire to push Truman forward. That same idea prevailed with Ed Kelly who was then mayor of Chicago and national committeeman of Illinois. I was then, as now, a member of the National Committee. We would meet here in Washington and discuss the possibilities of Truman. Finally, of course, the convention came on and the battle lines were drawn.

HESS: One question, sir. How long before the convention

[5]

was this that Mr. Truman was seriously being considered?

LAWRENCE: I would say it was months.

HESS: Months?

LAWRENCE: Months. Now, in fairness to Senator Guffey, he and Truman were great friends. Senator Guffey early in the year when Truman -- and I've had this from both President Truman and Senator Guffey. A lot of people had the wrong impression of what Guffey did in this situation. He and I parted company on the candidacy because Philip Murray, who was then head of the United Steel Workers, and Sidney Hillman were leading a campaign at the convention for Wallace. They were both good friends of mine, both Murray and Hillman, and I was a great admirer of theirs then and still am. I think they contributed as much if not more than any two men in the country in saving this country from communism because in both their unions they prevented communism from moving in and gaining any ground in their respective unions. And it was a very difficult position that I got into, because I'd known Murray particularly from the time I was a youngster working in the law office in Pittsburgh that was attorney for Murray's union then, which was the United Mine Workers of America,

[6]

District Number 5, with headquarters in Pittsburgh. It was a little bit hard to be on the opposite side from Mr. Murray and I think he was a little bit provoked at me for the fact that I was not

going along with Wallace. And of course labor generally was supporting Wallace, and that put me in an awkward position in Pennsylvania, particularly in the Pittsburgh area, which is strongly organized in the labor movement.

Senator Guffey, as I started to say, and then got off on a tangent, was in the same position. He had talked to President Truman -- then Senator Truman -- and Truman had verified this with me since. At that time Truman dismissed any thought of being a candidate for Vice President, and therefore Guffey felt free to then make a pledge to support Wallace. A lot of people misjudged and misconstrued this action on Guffey's part but it was perfectly honorable. President Truman has on a number of occasions since said that he really was to blame for that himself.

So, anyway, we went on into the convention, and there we developed quite a large vote for Truman, and of course, I sat in on the strategy with Bob Hannegan, Mayor Kelly, Frank Walker -
- Frank Walker was Postmaster

[7]

General I think at the time. He was from Pennsylvania although he never took a real active part, but he was a delegate at large and he supported Truman. We had a famous meeting under the stage after midnight on one of the days of the convention. When the convention adjourned we moved down there to Bob Hannegan's office, the national chairman's office, at the convention hall in the stadium. We were laying lines for the next day.

HESS: Who was present, sir?

LAWRENCE: Well, there was Bob Hannegan, Frank Hague, Mayor Kelly, Frank Walker, and myself. That's all I can remember.

HESS: Was that after the first or the second day of the convention?

LAWRENCE: I think it was the second day. What had happened, I can identify as the night when the nominations were made and the great demonstration was put on for Wallace.

HESS: And you were recognized.

LAWRENCE: Yes, by pre-arrangement, Senator Jackson, who was presiding, recognized me and I made the motion for the convention to recess until the next day because we were fearful if it stayed in convention the CIO and other organizations were putting on terrific demonstrations for Wallace -- parading the aisles -- and

[8]

pandemonium had broken loose. By pre-arrangement with Senator Jackson, the presiding officer, he was to recognize me and I made the motion that we recess until the following day and that carried. Then we went into caucus under the platform and counted noses as to just what we had and what we didn't have.

HESS: How did the situation seem right then?

LAWRENCE: Well, it was very, very close. Wallace was very close to the nomination, and we felt that if it had gone into another ballot, some of the weaker-kneed delegates might run away from Truman and to Wallace or run away from some of the other nominees and go to Wallace. So then we went on, of course, into the next ballot the next day, and we had, I think, twenty-five votes from Pennsylvania for Truman, which was a great disappointment to Senator Guffey because he felt he would be able to deliver a whole delegation.

Joining with me in Pennsylvania, I think it's important to state, was James P. Clark, who was then chairman of the Democratic City Committee of Philadelphia, and eleven of the twenty-five votes we had were from Philadelphia. He was able to influence eleven out twelve delegates there. He only lost one, and he was a member of organized labor and very friendly to Sidney

[9]

Hillman and felt that he had to go along with Wallace for Hillman's sake. If you remember, I think the record will show there was about twenty-five votes in the California delegation, which did the same thing, supported Truman. That was the real break, those fifty votes, I think, that won the nomination and started the movement for Truman to be nominated.

HESS: During the meeting that night, what plans were made?

LAWRENCE: Well, I don't know in full detail, but naturally the plans were to check on all the delegations and to have the lines hold. I remember one of the things we did was to arrange for Bennett Clark to place in nomination Senator Truman. We picked him because he was his colleague at the time in the Senate from the State of Missouri.

One of the things that I might add that happened prior to this, early in the year, I would say probably in April, Senator Truman came to Pittsburgh to make a speech at a banquet of the motor association there, the transportation people, and they called me and asked me if I wouldn't come down to the dinner. I got Commissioner Kane and we went, and went afterwards to have a snack in a restaurant close by the Senator's hotel, the Penn-Sheraton, and that was the first

[10]

opportunity that Commissioner Kane had to really get acquainted with Senator Truman and it was a very happy meeting.

The next day I drove Senator Truman from Pittsburgh over to York, Pennsylvania. It was on a Saturday. Because he was booked in to speak to the Young Democratic Society of York, Pennsylvania at their annual dinner, and I was booked in also to speak at the same dinner. So it gave me my best opportunity to have a real visit over four or five hours of driving across the Pennsylvania Turnpike. The turnpike was built during the Earl administration of which I was a part and I was very happy to drive the Senator across the turnpike to York. Of course that day I had an excellent opportunity to discuss the Truman association with Tom Pendergast. I didn't know Pendergast except by reputation and I recall very distinctly that day Truman expressing his friendship for Pendergast. I remember he told me he had asked -- Pendergast at that time was incarcerated -- and he indicated to me that he was urging President Roosevelt to pardon him --

grant him a pardon -- because he said that Pendergast was the best political friend that he ever had. He had got him to run for county judge in Jackson County and one of the

[11]

very interesting things he said was, "Tom Pendergast knew me; he knew when he put me on that board that I wouldn't do anything that was wrong," and I remember him saying that he wanted to emphasize the fact that during the time that he served on the board of county judges, or whatever they call it there, Tom Pendergast had never asked him to do one single thing that was wrong. He added to that statement, of course, he said, "Of course, he knew I wouldn't do it anyway."

HESS: You touched on this awhile ago, just how influential was Robert Hannegan in Mr. Truman's obtaining the nomination?

LAWRENCE: Well, I think he was quite instrumental, because Hannegan was the national chairman and the national chairman has a lot of power. And Hannegan, naturally, worked among his friends on the National Committee throughout the country, and then in the convention. He had a great deal to do with the selection of Senator Jackson as the chairman, and of course when the national chairman asked Senator Jackson to recognize me to make the motion to recess the convention, that was a very vital and important moment in the convention.

HESS: To stop things before they snowballed any further for Wallace.

[12]

LAWRENCE: Yes, because if the convention had gone on that night this demonstration was, like most of those convention demonstrations, pretty phony. It was manufactured; they had just hundreds and hundreds of people marching. They had arranged to get them in the convention; the Illinois delegation was divided, as I recall it. A great portion of it had the votes there for Secretary [Harold] Ickes and a number of other people. I think Scott Lucas had some and so on. So if the convention had gone on, I'm quite sure Wallace would have been nominated.

HESS: What was your impression of Mr. Truman at that time?

LAWRENCE: Well, I always had a very high regard for his innate honesty, particularly -- the thing that impressed me very much was my discussion with him on that eventful ride across the State of Pennsylvania to York, his loyalty to Pendergast, regardless of Pendergast or what he was or what he was not, in Truman's code of ethics in politics, he was loyal to a man who had been his friend, who had helped him along the way to become county judge and then to become Senator. He didn't run away from Pendergast when he got into difficulty, he stood by his friend regardless of the situation and that rates very high in my appraisal of people. You

[13]

see so many people that will take all that a man can give him and then at the first sign of some danger they run, they leave them like rats from a sinking ship. Truman was just the very opposite of that. I think that was one of his outstanding qualities. I think he had loyalty to his friends to a real fault in many, many respects. He stuck by them.

HESS: The next two questions really are together. One is on Roosevelt's health. Did the state of Roosevelt's health seem to concern very many people during the convention and during the campaign, say in the summer and the fall of '44? Was there very much said about his health?

LAWRENCE: Well, we were somewhat provoked at the attitude of President Roosevelt at the time, because he wrote the famous letter to Hannegan, that Hannegan went out and met Roosevelt in the railroad yard in a private car.

HESS: That's the Truman-Douglas letter?

LAWRENCE: Yes, and because the fact that he indicated in the letter that he was for Wallace, and that he was for Douglas or Truman and I don't know that that was in the letter or not. He had also indicated that he was friendly with Jimmy Byrnes.

[14]

HESS: The first letter I think was to Wallace by himself, wasn't it?

LAWRENCE: I don't know anything about that, but he hadn't told Wallace and he had been quoted in the press that if he were a delegate he would vote for Wallace.

HESS: I think that was in the letter to Wallace.

LAWRENCE: So then what we were doing was correcting that by getting this other letter so we could show it to delegates that in addition to his attitude toward Wallace he was also friendly toward Truman, or would take Douglas. And so in that way we were able to influence a lot of delegates that they were not doing something inimical to the wishes and the desires of the President.

HESS: Even the Wallace people knew that the President really wasn't coming out for them too strong, isn't that correct, because in '40 hadn't the President said, "You nominate this man or I won't run," and in '44 all that comes out is a letter saying, "If I were a delegate I'd vote for this man," but nothing more.

LAWRENCE: It weakened Wallace very much. I felt bad about Wallace because he had many great qualities. He was a real liberal and I was disappointed in the selection of him in '40. I wasn't for him as I said a minute

[15]

ago, but when I talked with President Roosevelt on the phone from the convention to the White House at the suggestion of Harry Hopkins, the President stressed very strongly that we were weak in the farm states and that Wallace being on the ticket would be a great help to us, which turned out afterwards not to be true. I had a very interesting experience on the Wallace thing if you're interested in that?

HESS: Marvelous.

LAWRENCE: When Wallace came in to campaign in '40, Senator Guffey said that the President wanted me to campaign with him, to break down any feeling among the Democrats in Pennsylvania that I was unfriendly to Wallace. So I recall meeting him in Erie, Pennsylvania early one morning and we campaigned together and automobiled down along the western tier of counties into Pittsburgh, and riding along with Henry I just casually said, "Well, Henry, I guess we'll do all right in Iowa."

And in a very offhand way he said, "Oh, no, we'll lose Iowa." And he said, "In fact, we'll lose nearly all those states," Nebraska, the Dakotas, and so on.

HESS: Did he give you his reasons?

LAWRENCE: Well, yes, he said that out there they basically were Republican states, basically anti-Democratic, and

[16]

he said, "You know, I voted for Al Smith and so did my father in 1928. So, we weren't just prejudiced but there was a lot of prejudice out there against Smith. They felt that the Democratic Party was the whisky party and so forth;" and he said, "They're just not going to vote for the ticket this year."

Well, of course, naturally, running through my mind was, "Well, where has gone this reasoning that you're going to help the ticket in those farm states." So I carried that with me I guess over into the '44 fight. He wasn't any great tower of strength, but that was a very eventful day and I remember, oh, sometime later recalling it to President Roosevelt, my attitude on that.

HESS: What did he say then?

LAWRENCE: Well, he just laughed and said, "Well, that's just one of those things."

I also had a very embarrassing situation. After Roosevelt's death they had a memorial dinner in New York and I went to the memorial dinner and to somewhat my embarrassment (although they didn't seem to mind), I was seated at the table with the Wallace children. They knew what I had done to their father, or helped to do to their father in the convention. However,

[17]

Henry and I met a number of times afterwards and we were friends when he passed away.

HESS: My question about Roosevelt's health sort of ties in...

LAWRENCE: ...oh, yes. On that I didn't know too much about it except we had Roosevelt come to Philadelphia. They were trying to conserve his health and strength and they didn't bring him in until late in October. I went into the White House one day to just check on the situation with him, and I really was shocked when I saw him. Of course, he was at a disadvantage. He hadn't had a haircut for some time and he looked rather shaggy and had thinned out a lot from the time I had seen him.

HESS: When was this?

LAWRENCE: In October.

HESS: In October.

LAWRENCE: But then subsequently, which was probably a week later, he came into Philadelphia and we rode him around and that morning, of course, he was spruced up and he looked much better than he did. I was really shaken the morning I went in.

HESS: Just in the period of one week. Of course, as you say, he had had a haircut.

[18]

LAWRENCE: Then the next episode was, of course, the inauguration and the manner in which it was brought about on the back porch of the White House. I stood there in the mud and rain with my wife and a lot of friends, and I remember right along side of me was Senator Herbert Lehman, and that was a very tragic situation. Then the first knowledge I had that he was very sick was, Bob Hannegan was in Pittsburgh to some affair and I was sitting with him at the airport and he said to me, "Dave, do you realize that sooner than you might expect that your friend Harry Truman is going to be President of the United States?"

HESS: This was after the inauguration?

LAWRENCE: Yes, and if I remember it was just a matter of days...

HESS: Until April the 12th.

LAWRENCE: Yes. In other words, apparently Hannegan saw him down here pretty much and I didn't, because they were cutting down on the visits to the President...

HESS: Could you give me your impressions of the President at the time of the inauguration?

LAWRENCE: No, I didn't see him, you see. The thing was pretty much in the White House, you know. It wasn't like the other inaugurations.

[19]

HESS: They didn't come out on that portico at all?

LAWRENCE: Yes, and we were standing in the Rose Garden on the South Lawn.

HESS: But he did seem to be in pretty bad health at that time?

LAWRENCE: Oh yes, yes.

HESS: If I remember correctly I think he caught a bad cold at that time, didn't he?

LAWRENCE: I don't remember.

HESS: I think he did.

The other question is about Mr. Truman becoming President. At the time when, just as you mentioned, Hannegan told you that your friend would become President, what were your thoughts then? What kind of a President did you think Mr. Truman would make, and it looked like it might happen before very long?

LAWRENCE: Well, I figured he'd make pretty much of the type of President he did. The things that always impressed me about Truman was his innate honesty and his stalwart loyalty and that he was a great American. He had served the country with his cavalry from Kansas City and Jackson County and I figured, of course, he'd be an entirely different type from Roosevelt who came from the Hudson Valley and the aristocracy of the early days of the

[20]

Republic. The Roosevelts were early settlers in that country when the Dutch came into New York, and Truman was from the prairies and a midwestern farmer type. I figured he'd be pretty much the type of a President that he turned out to be.

HESS: From there let's move on up towards 1948. How great was the likelihood that the Democratic Convention in 1948 would not renominate Mr. Truman?

LAWRENCE: Well, there was a peculiar situation. I just assumed that everybody was going to be for Truman, and I was concerned about who the vice-presidential candidate would be. I had talked with a number of our leaders throughout the country and a lot of them were skeptical. I remember a particular one was Frank Hague. I called Hague one day -- I was going to New York -- and I told him I would like to see him about the Vice-Presidency, and I recall distinctly meeting him in the lobby of the Plaza Hotel in New York. He spent a great deal of time around there. When I met him he was very -- well, Hague was a very positive fellow in his likes and his dislikes, and apparently he'd had some difference with Truman and I told him what I wanted to talk to him about and he said, "Well, are you going to be for Truman?"

[21]

And I said, "Certainly I'm going to be for Truman."

And he said, "He can't win!"

He was friendly to Eisenhower.

HESS: During the time we've had out here I've been discussing with the Governor about the likelihood of my skipping something between our discussion of the '44 campaign and the '48 campaign, and he says that indeed we have and he would like to go back to the section about when Mr. Truman took over as President. What were your impressions then, sir? What would you like to say about that?

LAWRENCE: Well, of course, naturally, I was thrilled the first time I went into the President's office to see my friend, Harry Truman, occupying the chair of the President of the United States. I remember very distinctly his attitude. He was very humble, and in the first few visits he would never forget to say, "Say a prayer for me," and "This job's a great responsibility," and so forth. He sort of impressed me as if he was nervous about it.

HESS: How long after April the 12th was this, roughly?

LAWRENCE: Well, it would be a number of times afterwards as I would come down on some issue or another to see

[22]

him. Then it was interesting to watch the evolution as he got in the office -- firmer and firmer became his attitude. You could see that he had a hold of the throttle and was in control of the situation. First he was timid and approaching it slowly, realizing whatever inadequacies he might have had. You could just see him picking up the threads that Roosevelt had left down. In the course of about a year or so he was in absolute command of the situation, of himself, and of the various Governmental agencies. He would then express himself about this or that thing was wrong in Congress and he was going to do this and he was going to do that. It was very interesting to note that.

HESS: Did there seem to be occurrences that helped to develop his confidence?

LAWRENCE: I don't know anything particular that I recall.

HESS: Just the passage of time, more or less.

LAWRENCE: Yes. And one of the things too, this may not be just apropos to this, that an incident in the proceedings was -- that I admired about Truman was his terrific devotion to his family and particularly to Margaret. I had an experience and you can use this or not use it. It might not be the thing to use. It was when Margaret started on her concert business, she was billed into

[23]

Pittsburgh and billed in in a very inadequate fashion by inexperienced handlers of concert singers.

I discovered this situation one day when the woman who had charge of her called me up and said they were coming in the next week and having a concert. Well, I hurriedly got hold of the local agents for things of that sort in Pittsburgh and discovered that there was no advanced sale worth talking about. And that the thing looked to me -- had all the earmarks -- of a boomerang if it went on. So I moved into the picture and at that time her grandmother was sick and they had to call off the initial concert, and that worked out to our advantage. Then we had the subsequent concert, and we moved into it -- the Democratic organization. I bought a thousand tickets for it and gave them to the school children in Pittsburgh, 500 to the public school children and 500 to

the parochial. And we put on a real concert and it was a howling success. I remember how grateful he was to me when I came in, and he said a thing that's always stuck with me. He told me how he appreciated what I did for Margaret and he said, "You know," here he was in the Office of the President, he said, "You know, Dave, she's all I got."

I thought that was really something. The man was

[24]

President of the United States and he was always so grateful for that. He said, "I'll never forget you."

And he never did.

HESS: Do you remember anything else about Mr. Truman before the '48 campaign or the '48 convention, that is of interest and that might be of note?

LAWRENCE: Well, as I started to tell you about Hague. Hague, of course, finally came around and, as I say, he was always a pretty gruff fellow in his attitude, and bossy. I'll never forget the night in Philadelphia, the Sunday night before the convention. We had a meeting of leaders, national committeemen, that Howard McGrath who was the national chairman called; and I remember when Hague came into the room, and of course he saw me, and he very meekly came over and he said, "Well, I'm going along." That was unusual for Frank. He was always pounding the table -- we were going to do this and do that.

HESS: This was after he had given up on Eisenhower.

LAWRENCE: That's right. He'd given up and was going along. And of course that was one of the very remarkable things, Truman's speech in that convention and then Barkley's. I was, of course, for Barkley for Vice President. That was my original mission to see Hague, was to be for

[25]

Barkley. And he said, "I'm not going to talk about that. We can't be for this fellow," and so forth and so on. But it worked out beautifully.

HESS: I have a question on that. I want to know your impression of Barkley's keynote speech. How instrumental was his delivery and the success of his keynote speech in obtaining the vice-presidential nomination for him?

LAWRENCE: Oh, yes. It did. He electrified that convention without any question. He made a terrific speech. That won him the nomination without any question -- without any question.

HESS: As I understand it, Mr. Truman had asked Supreme Court Justice Douglas to run with him as his vice-presidential nominee, but he'd turned him down. I wonder if you have anything on that?

LAWRENCE: I know nothing about that. I was, of course, for Barkley and centered on that from the start.

HESS: In 1948 Mr. Truman was confident that he was going to win the election, but how did the political leaders in the various states feel about that?

LAWRENCE: Well, I didn't think he was going to win. I was very pessimistic and very disturbed about it. I'll never forget the night he spoke in Pittsburgh. We were down

[26]

on the railroad car and he was about ready to pull out and we were shaking hands, Mrs. Lawrence and a group of friends and political leaders of the Pittsburgh area, and Mrs. Lawrence was saying goodbye to him and said something along the line, "Let's hope everything will be all right Tuesday." It was the week before.

And I remember how quick he snapped back, "We're going to win Tuesday. There's no question about it." Just full of confidence.

*GIESEY: You might mention, Governor, your reaction on the Republican side -- emphasize your misgivings.

LAWRENCE: Oh, yes. I was so disturbed about it that I actually prayed that at the Republican convention that Senator Taft would be the nominee, because while I was as far apart as the poles with Taft on political philosophy and politics and so on, nevertheless, I always recognized him as a very competent and able and above everything else, honest public official. And I figured the Republicans would probably win, and I didn't feel the same way about Dewey, so that I hoped that the Republicans would nominate Taft, because I

*Mr. Walter Giesey, Administrative Assistant to Governor Lawrence.

[27]

figured if the Republicans did win, or if either man would win, you would have an honest, thoroughly trained President of the United States.

HESS: Going back just a bit, who do you think might have won? You mentioned that you didn't think Truman could win on the Democratic ticket. Who would you have picked for the Democratic ticket?

LAWRENCE: Well, I didn't think anyone could win if he couldn't win -- in other words, I feel that way always, I think that it's a very difficult thing, that if a President is a failure -- and I mean by that, more or less, a failure as a vote-getter, and can't stand up as the nominee of the party. It's a very difficult thing for a new man to be brought in, and to try to sell them. And that's happened very few times in the history of the Republic. I don't know where that has happened. You take even with the sorry situation in 1912 in the Taft administration, the Republican Party nominated him nevertheless, and the same way with Hoover -- the hopelessness of his situation in '32, but they nominated him. Because you have to rise or fall -- in my opinion I think history indicates

that strongly -- on the record of the incumbent. And so, therefore, I think if we would have admitted on our

[28]

part by not nominating Truman that we felt that he wasn't a good President, which we, of course, did not feel, because he had done a great job, and I don't think the people -- that anyone else would have done anywhere near as good.

HESS: There were those who still wanted to get Douglas and others like...even people wanted to get Eisenhower and there were many people boosting other people.

LAWRENCE: Oh, yes, there was a strong movement among the Democrats, because they didn't know where Eisenhower was -- whether he was a Democrat or a Republican and they...

GIESEY: ...the A.D.A.

LAWRENCE: ...and among those was the A.D.A.

HESS: We've touched on Mr. Barkley getting the vice-presidential nomination. Can you tell me how that came about? Were there any behind-the-scenes...

LAWRENCE: Well, it was really spontaneous. He had been the floor leader and had a very attractive personality, and a very able man.

GIESEY: Governor, was John Lewis a part of that by any chance? I don't know.

LAWRENCE: Of what?

GIESEY: Of the Barkley movement, I know he was strong in

[29]

the Barkley for President...but I don't...

LAWRENCE: I don't recall, he might have been.

HESS: Now, I've read where Leslie Biffle had something to do with Barkley's name first coming to the fore. Is that right? What was their connection?

LAWRENCE: Well, I think you'll find you're talking about the '52 convention. That's when Biffle got into the thing very strongly trying to nominate Barkley for President. But of course, Biffle would, because you see, Biffle was the clerk of the Senators, Secretary of the Senate or whatever that job is up there, and he was a key man. And he was a key man with Truman, because you remember he made the famous trip across the country dressed as the farmer, in deep disguise and sounded out the sentiment of the people, and he brought back the story that Truman was going to win.

HESS: Did you ever talk to him about that?

LAWRENCE: Who, Biffle?

HESS: Yes.

LAWRENCE: Oh, yes, many times.

HESS: What did he have to say, anything in particular? Did he just tell you about the trip?

LAWRENCE: No, of course, he told about the trip. I talked to him about it when he first came back and he was very

[30]

bullish. Down at the grassroots people were for Truman. People admired Truman. I think the big thing was they admired his honesty. They knew he was absolutely...

HESS: What were the main things that stuck out in Biffle's mind that he found people talking about?

LAWRENCE: Well, he would go about and stop at gas stations, cigar stores, saloons, soda fountains, church groups, just got a real sampling of the country in an old, broken down automobile, which disguised him very well, about the very antithesis of anything that would come out of Washington hunting public sentiment, and that way he was able to pick up an honest opinion. Then, Les Biffle was a very smart, very able fellow.

HESS: Yes, we were sorry to lose him. He died not too long ago.

LAWRENCE: Yes, I was out to visit his remains. He was a fine person.

HESS: Unfortunately, he had been in ill health for so long we couldn't have interviewed him anyway as we understand, but we missed one there.

LAWRENCE: It would have been great if somebody could have because he had such a vast knowledge of the whole picture.

[31]

HESS: One thing about Mr. Truman's speech -- his acceptance speech -- when he said that he was going to call the Congress back into special session. Do you know anything about the source of where that suggestion came from?

LAWRENCE: No.

HESS: And one other question on that. Do you know if, whether or not he had cleared that with some of the other members -- surely with J. Howard McGrath?

LAWRENCE: No.

HESS: That is a question we get out at the Library quite often.

GIESEY: Governor, although it isn't pertinent, is there pertinence to the civil rights fight at the '48 convention?

LAWRENCE: Oh, yes, that was the big item. You remember the South walked out and of course Truman stood up like a major on the whole civil rights program, and of course the famous Humphrey resolution that was in there -- the minority report on the platform. That was the big item in Philadelphia in the '48 convention.

HESS: In your opinion, was the bolt in 1948 and the formation of the States' Right Democratic Party based solely on civil rights matters or do you think there were

[32]
other factors?

LAWRENCE: Oh, yes. It was on the adoption of the civil rights plank.

GIESEY: Probably based too on the overall feeling that permeated that Truman couldn't win, I mean, the question being would they have walked out if they had been convinced that Truman was a sure winner or were there the two things...

LAWRENCE: No, I think it was very deep-seated as this prolonged fight has indicated. You see, that's -- how many years ago was that -- '48 -- that's eighteen years, and back in those days the people weren't anywhere near as liberal on civil rights as they are today, and so you can see that hit some of those southern delegations very severely and they just got up and walked out.

HESS: How did you view the Progressive Party and Henry Wallace's participation in that in 1948?

LAWRENCE: Well, I was very disgusted with Wallace getting into that picture. He was entirely out of step as was proven by the poor showing that they made, and unfortunately for Wallace, in history, the Communists tagged themselves onto it and gave them whatever little degree of respectability they ever had in this country. It was a very fatal mistake of Wallace and from the

[33]
standpoint of history I wish he'd never done it -- or been a party to it.

HESS: Do you recall President Truman's commenting...

LAWRENCE: You can see the frame of mind of people at that time when you add all this up together. The Democrats who were willing to go for Eisenhower and all, you can get in retrospect just what the picture was.

GIESEY: That's why I mentioned the States' Rights, the Wallace thing -- all of it -- I think there was a lot of it deep-seated, but part of it -- all of these -- was the feeling that Truman couldn't win. Even the civil rights battle itself, I think, was that, wasn't it, Governor?

LAWRENCE: Yes, and if you remember the question for quite some time about whether Eisenhower would run, and you remember the famous meeting at the White House with Truman, from which the story came that Truman said to Eisenhower, "You're the only man in the country that can take me out of this seat." And that was the day that Eisenhower informed him, I think, that he wasn't going to be a candidate.

HESS: After Mr. Truman won did he ever mention anything to you about not running again or whether he would run again?

[34]

LAWRENCE: No. Nobody knew. I was as surprised that night at the Armory when he added that on to his speech as anyone in '52. There was no thought of it, at least in my mind at the time, and it was just a shocker.

HESS: After his announcement then, did he ever mention a potential candidate that you had heard of?

LAWRENCE: No. I sort of considered myself very close to him and of course I was one of the early advocates of Adlai Stevenson, and I was very definitely on the Stevenson side, and if you recall, I don't think he did anything on it, did he, until he came to Chicago and then said he was for Harriman?

GIESEY: No, no, that was in '56, Governor.

LAWRENCE: Oh, that's right.

GIESEY: '52 -- I think -- I don't know whether he ever said it, but I think there are clear indications that he was pointing toward Adlai Stevenson.

LAWRENCE: There was a period in '52 when it looked very much like he was for Barkley, remember?

GIESEY: Yes.

LAWRENCE: Then when they started to get the votes for Barkley, they couldn't get them, because, unfortunately at that time, they had raised the question of age on

[35]

Barkley -- that he was too old to make the fight. And that's where Les Biffle made a stand for him at the convention, for Barkley, which was belated because Barkley had made a speech out there that electrified the convention and they thought on the strength of that he could ride in.

GIESEY: That's where John Lewis comes in as I remember. Lewis was strongly for Barkley in '52.

HESS: In the 1952 campaign, Mr. Truman put on a very strenuous campaign for Mr. Stevenson, but it has always seemed to me that the liaison between the two, between the major candidate -- the real candidate -- and the President, was just not too good.

LAWRENCE: No.

HESS: Why do you think that was, or was that that way?

LAWRENCE: Well, I don't know. Probably I'm not the person to judge that, but there may be a lot of theories as to why it was so. There never was the close connection that was so desirable in a situation of that sort. If you recall, the candidate Stevenson inflicted Steve Mitchell on the National Committee as its chairman, which was a very bad move. It wasn't one that was conducive to getting the friends of Truman into the picture in a vigorous fashion that they would have

[36]

under some other chairman. I remember Jack Arvey had to come here with Mitchell to sell him to the members of the National Committee. He knew them and he put his stamp of approval on from Illinois.

HESS: He generally wasn't accepted by the other people.

LAWRENCE: No.

HESS: Any particular reason?

LAWRENCE: Well, I don't know. He had not been a part of the Democratic organization in Illinois and they sort of looked upon him as not too friendly to the out-going administration.

HESS: Do you have any other recollections of Mr. Truman and the '52?

LAWRENCE: No.

HESS: Anything we've failed to cover?

GIESEY: He came to Pittsburgh in that campaign and gave a hard-hitting speech against Eisenhower.

HESS: What do you believe are Mr. Truman's major contributions during his presidential career?

LAWRENCE: Well, I'm not the one -- you can get that without me.

HESS: This was just a general question I thought I might throw in.

Where do you place Mr. Truman on the scale from

[37]

liberal to conservative?

LAWRENCE: I would say he was a liberal, a genuine liberal.

HESS: Drawing on your years of public service, are there any two or three reporters or representatives of the press that you think would be more reliable for scholars to use with some sense of reliability?

LAWRENCE: You mean Washington correspondents?

HESS: Washington correspondents.

LAWRENCE: My number one fellow would be Ed Folliard.

HESS: And on the other side of the coin, is there anybody that you would warn our future scholars against?

LAWRENCE: David Lawrence.

GIESEY: I was going to bet on Joe Alsop. Of course, I would think, although he's a national commentator, wouldn't you feel in terms of objectivity -- Walter Lippman?

LAWRENCE: Walter Lippman, yes, he'd be high class.

GIESEY: Marquis Childs.

LAWRENCE: Marquis Childs, very definitely. There's one -- I can see him, but I can't remember his name.

GIESEY: Is it someone, Governor, who writes nationally?

LAWRENCE: Well, I think Merriman Smith is definitely one, but that isn't who I was thinking of.

GIESEY: An AP man?

[38]

LAWRENCE: Yes, I think it is -- one of the associations.

GIESEY: I think I know who you mean. He's sort of thin, gray-haired, AP White House correspondent who has been around for a long time.

HESS: Maybe we can think of his name when we edit this.

LAWRENCE: Yes, sure. [Ernest Vaccaro]

HESS: Is there any other aspect of Mr. Truman or the Truman administration that you'd like to talk about? Anything in general?

LAWRENCE: Well, of course, one of the things he'd be remembered by would be the winding up of the war. It was a terrific decision to make. It took a man of his courage to make it and he faced it like the soldier he was.

HESS: Specifically referring to the dropping of the bomb?

LAWRENCE: Yes. Then, of course, you admire him all the way to the present day when he's always stood by the party just like a true patriot he was. He was the same true person. When I think of Truman I think of the thing that his mother said -- I probably can't quote her -- but one time she referred to him -- in the early days when he got on the national scene -- that how as a boy and as a farmer he could cut the straightest furrow of anybody she'd ever seen. That's the impression that's

[39]

stayed with me, that he's that thorough kind of person. He may have made mistakes, he may have done some things that were wrong, but he never did anything of that kind with any premeditation or any malice of forethought or anything of that sort. I think he was just as wholesome a person that I'm sure I've had any contact with or that you'll find in American history.

HESS: Speaking of history did Mr. Truman ever talk to you about history?

LAWRENCE: Well, that was his hobby and in many respects he loved it. He was devoted to it. I've often felt that he didn't do enough teaching or lecturing. I imagine that he didn't do as much as he would have done after he left the White House, because he seemed to me to want to do that sort of thing. Of course I feel the same way about it. I think it's a great field that we ought to give more attention to. To get the young American mind on the many, many ramifications of history and the great things that were done and get them off some of these screwball things that they have, that we'd be so much better off, and I think that that is the way he looked at it.

GIESEY: Governor, if I may, how would you assess him in history among the Presidents?

[40]

LAWRENCE: Well, I would put him up very high. Of course, you have a number of great Presidents, like our present President, I think I rate him very high from the standpoint that I think he's the best trained President that we have had of the whole thirty-six. I think, of course, Jefferson stands out in many respects alone. I sort of think that Truman ranks with the innate honesty and roughshod honesty of Teddy Roosevelt and Grover Cleveland and that group.

Roosevelt was another type -- the aristocrat on the scene. Woodrow Wilson was the intellectual type. That was different, you just can't compare anybody with Wilson.

GIESEY: Unless it would be Jefferson.

LAWRENCE: Unless it would be Jefferson himself, yes. Truman will rank very high for the period that he was President, as being outstanding because, you know, he was the connecting link between Roosevelt and the great progressive movement that took momentum under Roosevelt. It was very fortunate that we followed with Truman who kept it moving in the direction we've come, and of course there was the period of Eisenhower, which was again a stagnant period, and now it's moved on with Kennedy and Johnson in the great direction we're going toward the liberal cause, liberal legislation. All right?

HESS: That's it.

[41]

INDEX

Alsop, Joseph, 37

Arvey, Jacob, 36

"Back-benchers", 1

Barkley, Alben W., 24-25, 28-29, 34-35

Biffle, Leslie, 29-30, 35

Byrnes, James, 13

Childs, Marquis, 37

Civil Rights, 31, 32, 33

Clark, Bennett C., 9

Clark, James P., 8

Democratic National Convention (1940), 3

of 1944, 6-9, 11, 12, 14

of 1948, 24, 25, 31

Eisenhower, Dwight D., 20, 24, 28, 33

Elk County, Pennsylvania, 2

Folliard, Edward T., 37

Garner, John H., 37

Guffy, Joseph F., 1-2, 5-6, 8, 15

Hague, Frank, 7, 20, 24

Hannegan, Robert E., 4, 6-7, 11, 13, 18, 19

Hillman, Sidney, 5, 9

Hopkins, Harry L., 15

Ickes, Harold L., 12

Inauguration, Presidential (1945), 18, 19

Jackson, Samuel D., 7, 8, 11

Kane, John J., 3-4, 9-10

Kaul, William, 2

Kelly, Edward J., 4, 6, 7

Lawrence, David L.:

 and the Republicans, 26-28

 and Truman, Harry S., 1-2, 12-13, 21, 25-26

 as President, opinion of, 19-20, 30

Lehman, Herbert H., 18

Lewis, John L., 28, 35

Lippman, Walter, 37

Lucas, Scott W., 12

McGrath, J. Howard, 24, 31

McNutt, Paul V., 3

Mitchell, Stephen A., 35-36

Murray, Philip, 5-7

Pendergast, Thomas J., 10-11, 12

Presidential Election (1948), 20, 24-33

Presidential Election (1952), 34-36

Progressive Party, 32

Roosevelt, Franklin D., 3, 16-19

Smith, Merriman, 37

States' Rights Democratic Party, 31-32

Stevenson, Adlai E., 34, 35

Taft, Robert A., 26

Truman Committee, 4

Truman-Douglas letter, 13

Truman, Harry S., 4-6, 8, 12-13, 14, 19-24, 25-26, 30, 39

 and Atomic Bomb, 38

 and Democratic Convention of 1948, 20

 and Hannegan, Robert, 11

 and hunting trips, 2

 as liberal or conservative, 37

 and Pendergast, Thomas J., 10-11

- and Presidential nomination, 1948, acceptance speech, 31
 - and re-election, decision not to seek, 34-35
- Truman, Margaret, 22, 23
- Vaccaro, Ernest, 38
- Walker, Frank C., 6-7
- Wallace, Henry A., 3, 6, 7-8, 14-17, 32
- White House press correspondents, 37, 38