

Oral History Interview
with
J. C. TURNER

Official of the Operating Engineers Union since 1940, and national vice president in 1956. Later a member of the executive board of the International Union of Operating Engineers, and president of the Greater Washington Central Labor Council, 1958-70. Has served as a member of the District of Columbia City Council as well as on other District boards and committees and in other labor positions. Also served as a labor liaison man on the Truman campaign train in 1948.

Washington, D.C.
December 28, 1970

by Jerry N. Hess, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library
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HESS: Mr. Turner, to begin this afternoon, would you give me a little of your personal background; where were you born, where were you raised and what are the positions that you have held?

TURNER: Well, I was born in Beaumont, Texas on November the 4th, 1916. I came to Washington when I was fifteen years of age, and finished high school, and went to Catholic University here.

I joined the Operating Engineers Union, which I represent, in 1935. I have been a fulltime official of that union since 1940, except for a brief time in 1950 when I was on leave from the union working with the International Labor Organization. About six months was the time I was away.

First I started out as business representative of this local of Operating Engineers, 77, and then I

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became business manager in 1950. I have been business manager ever since for the local union. I became a national vice president of the union in 1956 and I am currently a member of the twelve man executive board of the International Union which has 400,000 members in the United States and Canada.

I have been a president of the Greater Washington Central Labor Council since 1958. I was vice president of the former AF of L portion from 1948 on.

I have been a member of the D.C. City Council, which was appointed by (the first one three years ago), by President [Lyndon B.] Johnson, although I have, back in 1951, when they established the -- I guess it was '52, they established a Citizen's Advisory Council, I was on that first organization which preceded our city council. I served on the Public Library Board, and I've served on the D.C. Minimum Wage and Industrial Safety Board. I have been president of the Washington Building Trades at one time for about ten years. I was also, and still am, second vice president of the Maryland State, and D.C., AF of L and CIO, which includes our union members in those areas. Those are some of the more important positions I've held.

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HESS: Quite an impressive labor background. What are your early recollections of President Truman?

TURNER: Well, my earliest recollections are his service as chairman of the, I guess they called it the Truman Committee, in World War II, in which he conducted a very exhaustive, continuing study of the conduct of the war, and made some, I thought, very significant contributions to decision-making and policy-making during that period. I may have met him probably along about 1944 or '45, but I can't recall exactly when and where, that is while he was -- I had met him while he was a Senator, but my closer association with him began in 1948 when he was running for re-election.

I recall that along in August 1948, late August, they had set up the headquarters, the joint headquarters, of what they called the Truman-Barkley Club and the Democratic Central Committee of the District of Columbia, and we set the headquarters up down on New York Avenue, just east of Fourteenth Street.

We made an appointment at the White House and Carter Barron, and Melvin Hildreth, who was then the Democratic National Committeeman, Tilford E. Dudley, who was vice-

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chairman, I think, of our -- he was active on our Central Committee, and Mr. Al Wheeler, who was the Chairman of our Democratic Central Committee; and Mr. Arthur Clarendon Smith, who was very active there in both the Central Committee and the Truman-Barkley Club; a fellow named Thomas Morgan. It seems to me those were the ones. I have a picture of that meeting in the Oval Room at the White House.

And at this particular meeting we told the President that we were opening our headquarters. As I recall, I think we asked him to come down. It seems to me he did come down briefly when we opened the headquarters, but this was to tell him about it. I remember I said, "Mr. President," I said, "how does it look to you?"

He said, "Well," he said, "I want you fellows to know that I'm going to put on the God damndest campaign that this country's ever seen." And he said, "I want you to know that you're looking at the next President of the United States."

Well, not long after, he went out to Detroit to make his initial speech of the campaign and he came back -- incidentally we had involved a lot more residents of the District and the Truman-Barkley Club and in our

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whole campaign here. And Milton Kronheim was quite active and "Jiggs" [F. Joseph] Donohue, who later (both of whom you know are still living), they were very active in the headquarters. And then after he made this short speech, we decided to have a welcome home party for him at least, down at the Union Station. And I was given the job of addressing the words of welcome to the President.

Actually, what happened was the car went into the station, and he got in the car and brought it out to the exit there on the east side of Union Station, and you know, I said a few words of welcome and then he made a speech. And we didn't have over about, oh, maybe five or six thousand people there to welcome him; mostly union people, by the way, members of labor unions. As you know, he had vetoed the Taft-Hartley Act and was making this a big part of his campaign, and organized labor was very, very strong in its support of Truman. In fact, I think all studies indicate that organized labor never turned out in such large numbers as was the case in the '48 election.

Well, anyway, we came behind him, coming up the Avenue, we drove in behind the White House, and we had

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a long caravan of cars, and that was the occasion.

Well, you know, after the campaign when the President was re-elected, he said, "Well, those fellows who put on the welcome home back in September," he said, "they can put it on now."

So, we put it on again, and this time I was in charge of arrangements up at Union Station. And I think there were 650,000 people this time, but one thing I was able to do was to see to it that some organized labor people, particularly William Green and Philip Murray, George Meany, Harry Bates, Jack Kroll, and Joseph Keenan were in the caravan that come from Union Station down to the White House. And I was also in charge of passing people through the Secret Service lines to greet the President.

I remember one fellow came through hadn't shaved, you know, and he had his hat sort of down over his eyes, and he said, "I'm Secretary [James V.] Forrestal."

And I said, "Go in."

Well, he looked terrible, but obviously I recognized that he was Forrestal, and he went through the line and went up on the platform. The President shook hands with him, but Barkley wouldn't shake hands with him. Mr.

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Barkley just let him go on by because, as you know, he hadn't campaigned for the ticket. And, as far as I know, he never even endorsed the ticket. He thought they were losers, that they couldn't win. But, of course, as you know, subsequently he committed suicide and he had a severe mental problem.

But the labor leaders and the various citizens came through and shook hands with the President. He had this railway car parked, the Ferdinand Magellan, there in the station and they went in through the rear door and out through the train.

We came on over to the White House, and the President said to Meany and to Murray and to Green in my presence, "Well, we couldn't have won it without you. We owe a great deal to organized labor in this campaign. And," he said, "I want you fellows to know how much I appreciate it." And he had said that also to Green when Green came up on the train over at Union Station.

So, it was a great day after the election when he came back. I remember staying up on election night, November 19, 1948. I was with Meany and with Keenan and with

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Bill [William] Dougherty at the A.F. of L. Labor's League for Political Education and stayed up till 4 o'clock in the morning. It wasn't until 4 o'clock in the morning that Ohio came through. When Ohio came through then we knew he had won the election, because with Ohio ours that made the difference. There weren't very many television sets around at that time, perhaps that's probably the reason none of us had them at home, but we had one at the Labor's League for Political Education, which was on "H" Street next to St. John's Church in an old brownstone building, which is still standing.

Well, we, through the time that he was in office in '48 until '52, we saw quite a bit of him, at that time, at different Democratic functions, but I was not a personal friend of the President's. I think

I probably got to know him better toward the end of his term and in particular I was with him in the '52 campaign, when he was campaigning for Adlai Stevenson. I'll go in to that and then maybe I'll think of some other things.

Coming back, in the '52 campaign, as you know, he went to Chicago to the convention. On the third ballot when he put out the word that he was for Stevenson,

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Stevenson took the convention by a landslide.

As the campaign got underway in '52, I got a call from Joe Keenan, who was the head of Labor's League for Political Education, and Joe said to me that he wanted to have someone on the train with President Truman to make sure that when he was out campaigning for Adlai, that the labor people would not be left out of any meetings with the President.

I think you know that among politicians there is always a tendency to limit the number of people that get to meet the President, mainly because they want to make all of the contacts themselves. And so my job in the campaign train was to insure that labor leaders met the President. The first trip was the 8,700 mile whistlestop tour going out west to Chicago and up through the northwest through Minnesota, North Dakota, Montana, into the State of Washington, and down through Oregon, and down through San Francisco, and on back across the country through Iowa, New York etc. And later on there were a couple of other short whistlestop tours into Pennsylvania, West Virginia and then to New England. I went with him into West Virginia and Pennsylvania.

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HESS: Did you go with him on all the trips in '52?

TURNER: No, I only went on two of them. There were three I think. I didn't go on the one into New England. I wasn't able to go on that one, but I went on the other two. So, it was a great experience.

The first night out, we got on the train at 10 o'clock at night at Union Station. The next morning the President went to church and came back on board the train in Ohio (the train had stopped for him to attend church), and he said for me to come back to the Ferdinand Magellan. There was another fellow there from the CIO, at that time, and we started talking about the campaign and labor's views and so forth, and I said, "Mr. President, you did a fine job of settling that strike."

The steel worker's strike, you know, back in July and August of '52."

He said, "Well, I'll tell you," he says, "you know," he said, "those steel workers," he says, "were sincere." But he said, "Those owners of those steel mills, they weren't sincere." And he said, "I waited until I got them by the balls and then I squeezed them." He said, "That's how I settled that steel strike," at

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which I almost fell off of my seat. But he was always very blunt spoken about what he thought.

So, we talked at length about the campaign, and then I saw him any number of times on this trip and he did some fantastic things in the way of campaigning. I remember they would play "Hail to the Chief" in every town he'd stop to speak. We spent most of the time in the car adjoining the Ferdinand Magellan. And when he'd come back we'd come back to the car, and we had all the top newspapermen and television and radio people on the train.

When they played "Hail to the Chief" I think I would have something like sparks running up and down my spine everytime I heard it. No matter how many times I heard it I always got a thrill out of it.

And he'd say -- well, you know, he made almost the same speech, changing it a little bit here and there, and he'd say, "I like Ike," he said, "I like him right back in the Army where he belongs." He says, "Ike's against Social Security, which I can't understand, because he's been on it all of his life."

Then once we were out at Hungry Horse Dam, which is a big hydroelectric power project in Montana, and

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he got off and we all went down for him to dedicate Hungry Horse. He said, "You had better take a long look at this, because there won't be any more," he says, "if Ike wins." And he was right, there wasn't another public hydroelectric power project all during Ike's administration.

Well, then we went on down to Tiber Dam and he pushed the first plunger to explode the first dynamite on that dam, and he said, "You know," he said, "this is what I'm going to do to Ike," and he pushed the plunger. He was a great competitor and a great fighter.

I remember we spent the night, the train spent the night, alongside the track there at Tiber Dam, and I had arranged for the President of the Montana State Fair, a fellow named Jim Umber, a tall fellow, about six two, to come up and meet the President. As we went along, in fact, I had arranged in Kalispell for the President to meet about forty or fifty trade union people who were in a side room there and he stopped and shook hands with all of them before he went ahead and dedicated Hungry Horse. In fact, all through the campaign tour, I was meeting people and introducing them to the President and he would talk with them and so forth

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and so on.

So, on this particular morning that he was going to explode the dirt at Tiber Dam, this man James Umber came up to the Secret Service line. I sent him a telegram in advance, and met him. I took him through the line and introduced him to the President. And the President said, "Well, I'm glad to know you Mr. Umber."

And Mr. Umber said, "Well, Mr. President," he said, "I'm awfully glad to meet you." He said, "I've only got one regret."

The President looked up at him and said, "What's that?"

He said, "Well," he said, "I regret that you're not running for re-election."

He said, "Well, Mr. Umber," he said, "it's mighty nice of you to be saying that, but," he said, "you know," he said, "if I were running," he said, "there's just so many people around the country would be saying 'Look, that no-good son of a bitch is running again:'"

So, he told him very bluntly what he thought.

Well, we went on out to Spokane, Seattle, Tacoma, Klamath Falls, Oregon, San Francisco. In San Francisco we arranged for him to meet with a very large number of

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trade union leaders in that area. He came into a separate room, made a brief address to them and shook hands with all. And then we arranged for two or three of the trade union leaders to ride on the train back toward Nevada from San Francisco. Some of those fellows have pictures of that trip still in their offices in San Francisco.

And we went on back to Independence and through Iowa. We stopped at a state fair in Iowa, and he made quite an address there. And then we came back on into Washington, and that picture was made just before we got into Union Station, 8 or 9 o'clock at night and that's right in the rear of the Ferdinand Magellan. [At this point Mr. Turner indicated a photograph hanging on the wall of his office, the photograph was of President Truman, Mr. John Mullen and Mr. Turner.]

HESS: Who is the other gentleman in the photo?

TURNER: A fellow named Mullen, John Mullen. He's dead CIO. And the President...

HESS: Was he your counterpart in the CIO?

TURNER: He was my counterpart in the CIO, yes. And then a week or so later I went with the President, and he went up to Philadelphia, and he addressed a tremendous group of people there and we went on out to Pittsburgh

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and on the way to Pittsburgh just before we got to Pittsburgh, Arthur Goldberg, [David J.] McDonald, who later was president of the steel workers and the incumbent president, Phil Murray, got on the train. The meeting which he addressed in Pittsburgh was primarily organized by the steel workers, a tremendous meeting.

And then we went on toward Wheeling, I think it was, somewhere in West Virginia, where he made several more speeches.

Incidentally, on the big trip, I forget to mention that we came through Denver also on the way back, made quite a speech there, a big crowd at the depot. And then we backed into Colorado Springs, and that night, at 9 o'clock at night, I don't think we were -- I don't know what the population is of Colorado Springs, it was, oh, 10 or 12 thousand people and probably less than that, there were 16 to 20 thousand people out there to see the train at 9 o'clock at night, because the President was there. People have often talked, you know, as to whether or not Truman could have won the election. I've always believed that had he ran in '52, he could even have beaten Eisenhower, he was so popular. The crowds that he attracted everywhere that we went were very

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large crowds, people coming from miles around to see him.

Incidentally, that was the last whistlestop that we had in presidential elections. The Ferdinand Magellan was gotten rid of shortly after that and I don't think any other President has used it in that way.

The President came back here a number of times after he was President and he usually would stay at the Mayflower. Several times I got calls from friends of his, General Mara, and Jiggs Donohue, etc., and I would go over to the Mayflower and spend some time with him. I was a close friend, but these fellows would call me and I would come over and get a chance to spend a few minutes with the President.

I knew Charlie Murphy pretty well and Don Dawson, who were extremely close to the President. And I think, probably, Charlie Murphy was about as close as anyone was to the President.

And I remember one time along about '54, when at a fundraising dinner at the Statler Hotel, and there was quite a crowd of people present. I was one of the head table guests, and they had a reception room for the head table guests. So, my wife and I were there, and

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all these people were crowding around the President. And I said, "Well, let's wait a minute, there's so many people there." So, I waited a few minutes and we walked over.

He said, "Well, it took you long enough to come over. "

You know, it is hard to believe that he was that observant, that he saw me hesitate about coming over and he gave me the business because I was slow getting over.

And I remember another time. Our Democratic Party here sponsored a lunch for the living wives of Democratic Presidents. Now, this included Mrs. [Woodrow] Wilson, who was then living; Mrs. [Franklin D.] Roosevelt, and of course, Mrs. Truman. And I sat next to the President at the table and I had the honor of presenting a bouquet of red roses to Mrs. Truman. And I remember I enjoyed it very much.

But the point of the story is that here with all these, there must have been five, six or seven hundred people there, at the Mayflower, and Tallulah Bankhead was present that day, and she

came over, said hello to the President and she kissed him on the cheek. And somebody said, "She ought to sit down on his knee so

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they can take a picture."

And he whispered to me, "Get her away. Get her away." He said, "By God, Bess would kill me."

He was in enough trouble already when she kissed him on the cheek, but he was scared to death that she was going to sit on his lap. And I'll never forget that particular incident.

Well, one other incident I want to mention to you that might be a footnote to history. We had been up in New York, I think that maybe that was the tail end of our western trip, or it could have been the second trip, but we came up there and I was in about the third or fourth car behind the President. We always rode with him in the parades in different cities where we had a parade. And I was with Matt Connelly, the secretary to the President, and I said, "Matt," we were riding up Broadway to Harlem, and I said, "Matt, I've always wondered why it was that Truman came out all of a sudden for civil rights." I said, "You know he wasn't known so much for his great advocacy of civil rights, until, as a matter of fact, the 1948 convention of the Democratic Party." And I said, "What happened?"

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He said, "Well, I'll tell you. " He said, "The only thing I could see was there was a fellow in about 1946 who came back down to South Carolina, a Negro. This man had been -- I think he had earned the congressional medal of honor, and had a tremendous war record. But this Negro could not get, evidently, a decent job in South Carolina." And Matt Connelly said, "You know," he said, "the President got so upset about that, because he had a particular feeling for soldiers, being an old soldier himself." And he said, "You know, from that point on," he said, "I noted Truman seemed to take a different tack."

Now, that's a strange thing, but that is, I think, a very, very significant story. I just wonder how -- of course, Connelly was very close to him, but it might be something you might want to check with Connelly. He might want to tell you more about it.

HESS: In 1952 when you were arranging for the various trade union members to board the train, did you work with the members of the White House staff on that?

TURNER: Yes.

HESS: Who was in charge of that, Matt Connelly?

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TURNER: No. Matt was there, but he was with the President mostly. He was Secretary to the President. Charlie Murphy was there, but Charlie was mostly writing speeches.

HESS: He was the Special Counsel at that time.

TURNER: That's right. He was doing a lot of speechwriting, and this fellow from West Virginia, who is now a member of Congress...

HESS: Kenneth Hechler?

TURNER: Hechler was there. But the man who was really in charge of arrangements was an assistant to the President, and he is now an arbitrator, he is a very well-known labor arbitrator.

HESS: David Stowe?

TURNER: Dave Stowe, that's it. Dave was in charge of the arrangements. Whenever I wanted to get anybody on the train, or when I had a list, I would have to clear it with Dave.

HESS: How would you decide who you wanted to see the President and who you would not?

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TURNER: Well, if you went into a big city, you would try to see to it that the heads of the labor council in that city -- you see every city has labor councils; CIO and the AF of L, cities of any size, and usually the political action in the labor movement is principally carried on by the city's central labor council.

So, in each city of any size, I had a list of all the names. I would send telegrams ahead, and if he was going to make a speech, we would arrange for the -- for this man to be in the local delegation to meet the President on the rear of the train. He had a handshaking ceremony in most cities where people would pass over the rear of the train and shake hands with the President. This was a great stimulus to work in the campaign.

Or, when we got into a big state, or a state where we were going to make a number of stops, we would try to have the heads, maybe one, two, as many as four, top labor leaders meet the train, preferably at the edge of the state, and ride through the state, maybe spend as much as a day or half a day with the train. Usually there would be an opportunity to have a private meeting with the President for a few minutes. And all of this

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was a tremendous stimulus.

Stevenson's campaign was dead until Truman got moving in '52, and there would have been a terrible defeat in '52 if Truman hadn't worked so hard for Stevenson.

HESS: At the time in 1952 when you were discussing political matters with Mr. Truman, did he tell you what he thought Mr. Stevenson's views on labor were, or should be?

TURNER: No, we never got into any particular discussion of that.

We always assumed -- Stevenson had a good record on labor in Illinois, and he said, "I accept your nomination. I accept your platform."

Now, we had a very good labor platform due to the efforts of Mr. Truman and other Democrats, and we felt that he meant what he said that he would go along with it. And we did know what he had done as Governor.

HESS: One question on the Truman-Barkley Club in 1948: You have, of course, mentioned meeting Mr. Truman's train when he came back, but just what did the Club do to promote the Truman-Barkley ticket, other than what you have mentioned?

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TURNER: Well, I would say that the Truman-Barkley Club primarily raised money.

You see, we had a dual operation out of one office. There was the Truman-Barkley Club, whose central function was to raise money, and then we had the local Democratic Central Committee, and the national committeeman Melvin Hildreth.

As you know, incidentally, Melvin Hildreth later on was chairman of the President's inaugural committee. In fact, we in the labor movement, sent a very strong telegram down to Key West, where the President was resting up, urging that Melvin Hildreth be the chairman of the inaugural committee. I was in charge of grandstands for the inaugural committee. I had quite a job there. We had about 240,000 seats, I think, to arrange, which I think maybe was the high water mark.

HESS: That pretty well blocks the sidewalks down there doesn't it?

TURNER: It certainly does; 240,000 seats. And we had a wonderful, wonderful homecoming for the President.

HESS: Did you have any particular difficulty raising

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money here in the District when Mr. Truman was not favored?

TURNER: Oh, it was very, very hard to raise money. People -- most people didn't think he was going to win and people love to be with a winner.

We were having -- we were, I think, in a good period economically. It seems to me we had pretty good employment at that time in the town.

I mentioned that number awhile ago about seats, I'm sure I'm away off. Perhaps what I meant was 52,000 seats. It seems to me...

HESS: How many did you mention?

TURNER: I mentioned 250,000. It couldn't have been that many. It must have been about 52,000 seats. I'd have to -- all that is in the record, I'm sure.

HESS: I'm not sure, but as you know, they string them all down Pennsylvania, so they could seat quite a number.

TURNER: There wouldn't have been but about 52,000. I know it was greater than we had at subsequent inaugurals, because I've been on every inaugural committee from '48 on, even the Republican ones.

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HESS: One question about Mr. Truman and his receiving the Democratic nomination. Now, as you know, in that year there were several efforts to try to get someone else to run as the Democratic standard-bearer in 1948. Do you recall any particular agitation here in town for someone else to represent the Democrats?

TURNER: No, I don't recall any support for anyone else. I remember some people were quite willing who later became quite prominent in the party, they were quite willing to downgrade Mr. Truman you know. And I remember one particular woman leader who later on became pretty close to the Trumans.

HESS: Who's that?

TURNER: Well, I won't mention the name, but she said, "That little man," she kept referring to him as "that little man." Well, he did such a tremendous job that I noticed when everybody was down to meet him later on, she was among those present. But his victory, at least the part I was in on, gave me renewed faith in the wisdom of the people. It was another harbinger of the adequacy of our system of government.

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HESS: Did you go to the convention in Philadelphia that year in 1948?

TURNER: No, I was not a delegate that year. I have been a delegate to every other one except -- I guess I didn't go in '68, but I've been a delegate in every other one.

HESS: You have mentioned Mr. Truman's veto of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947, but just what effect did that have?

What effect on labor's vote did his veto of the Taft-Hartley Act have?

TURNER: Well, he became our champion. I mean we felt that in '47 that this was the 80th Congress, you know, the whole campaign that he made was against the 80th Congress. And he nailed the 80th Congress for its failure to carry out his programs, to adopt his legislative programs, to adopt his budget, and he particularly nailed them with the Taft-Hartley Act.

I think that organized labor was convinced that this was simply a conspiracy by big business and Republicans to weaken labor unions. Of course, I still believe today that that was the purpose of it. And every survey that has been made of labor votes, and every presidential

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election, demonstrates that in 1948 the Democrats got a bigger percentage of trade union votes, workers votes, than any election before or since, that is for which we have statistics. But certainly there was a great sense of identity with President Truman and with the things that he stood for in '48.

HESS: Two questions on the Taft-Hartley Act: One, he was unable to get Taft-Hartley repealed. And two, he invoked the Taft-Hartley Act more than once between 1948 and 1952. Did that have any effect on his standing with labor, between those two years?

TURNER: I think what really aroused antagonism in one of the railroad strike crises, in which the Taft-Hartley Act had run out, the 80 day cooling-off period, a special act of Congress was called for by the President, and the leaders of the railroad union thought that he hadn't given this an adequate opportunity to explain their position. I must say however that they blamed John Steelman more than they did the President. There was much blaming of Steelman.

HESS: Why?

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TURNER: Well, they thought that Steelman hadn't given the picture clearly to the President. That is, this is what they told me. They didn't think that Steelman had -- whether or not this is true or not I don't know. All I'm relating to you is what was said to me by the leaders of the railroad unions.

HESS: Dr. Steelman had the title The Assistant to the President, and he handled many labor matters. Did you often speak to, work with, have occasion to meet Dr. Steelman during the administration?

TURNER: Well, I was on the local level.

Dr. Steelman has been a personal friend of mine for, oh, about 1941, '42 on. I have known him pretty well, but you see, I was working at that time at the local level, and I had very few occasions to see him except in the relation to District of Columbia matters. And he was always very responsive to me in anything that I ever asked him.

There was a lot of feeling in the labor movement however, that, and it was not shared by me, I thought Steelman was a good man. I thought he was in a good place at the right time. A lot of people felt that

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this was in derogation of the position of Secretary of Labor.

It's a little bit akin to what you find when the Presidents have special advisers on security matters, or international matters in the White House, quite a bit of feeling that perhaps the Secretary of Labor would be a more important man if it were the other way around.

[Maurice J.] Tobin, by the way, was one of those who was completely convinced in '48 that Truman was going to win. As a matter of fact, Tobin got all the money he could get hold of on Truman's election. Made quite a bit of money, as a matter of fact.

HESS: Did you talk to him about that?

TURNER: I talked to him about it in 1950 or '52. He was a delegate to the ILO [International Labor Organization.] I was a delegate at that time and he was telling me about what he had done in the election. I have heard this from several of his close friends. What convinced him was while in Iowa he had talked to farmers and took a poll of about twenty or thirty of them. This was all Republican country, seemingly, and they all said -- just

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about twelve out of sixteen said, that they were for Truman, and he just made up his mind that the farm belt was going to go for Truman and that Truman was going to win.

HESS: On the trip that you were on, did Mr. Truman stop by the National Plowing Match in Dexter, Iowa, do you recall?

TURNER: Yes, he did. Yes, that's one of the things he stopped by, and I think that was in conjunction with the state fair. My impression was the state fair was meeting at the same time that the plowing match was held.

HESS: What was your view on how the farmer was going to vote that year?

TURNER: Well, I really didn't know. I knew so little about the farmer I couldn't judge it. I just believed that Truman was going to win in '48.

HESS: Do you recall how labor at that time tried to put their views before President Truman? What seemed to be the most effective way for labor, in the Truman

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administration, to put their views before the President?

TURNER: Well, I think the point is that there were a lot of people in the labor movement who were very close personal friends of President Truman. Joseph Keenan was one. I think he was very close to Truman, but the closest of all was a man named Herbert Rivers who came from Kansas City.

Herb Rivers was then the Secretary-Treasurer of the Building Trades Department and he had been business agent of the laborers union in Kansas City. He knew Truman, I guess, from the

time Truman was a young man, and I think he was even one of Truman's -- I think he played poker with Truman once in awhile.

And there was so many people who were personally close to Truman that they knew his views, beyond any doubt, they knew what he had done in terms of trying to support labor legislation and legislation of a general welfare nature which the organized labor movement had supported.

So, he had a long record of being closely allied not only in Kansas City, but here in Washington, with those who were in the labor movement.

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HESS: What would be your general evaluation of Mr. Truman's handling of labor matters during his administration? It was a period of strife and strikes.

TURNER: Well, I thought he did a very fine job. The only criticism I would have was again, on the railroad strike, when the Congress invoked special legislation. I think the President didn't have all the facts before him. I think he acted a little precipitously. When you look at the overall record, he had a little mistake coming to him here and there, at least from my point of view. I would give him very top -- I would give him a higher rating than any other President in terms of the way he handled labor problems, even probably -- well, I guess FDR would be very close to him, but I would even put him above FDR.

HESS: In 1952, when did you first become aware that Mr. Truman did not intend to run for re-election? Do you recall?

TURNER: Well, there had been so much talk about his trying to get Eisenhower to run in '48. That he had said that if he would run he wouldn't run and said that he had tried to get him to run as a Democrat. And

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then there were a lot of stories going around that Truman had told Ike that he would only run one term, which story I didn't believe and I still don't believe.

I can't recall when I first -- I can't really recall when I first came...

HESS: That's an announcement that he made, I think on March the 29th at the National Guard Armory. I was just wondering if you were at the National Guard Armory that night.

TURNER: Was that a fundraising dinner?

HESS: It was the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner.

TURNER: Yes, I was there. I was at that dinner. Yes, I must have heard that announcement, but I didn't become aware of it before he made that.

HESS: At the time that Mr. Truman withdrew from the race, who did you think would make the best Democratic standard-bearer that year?

TURNER: In '52?

HESS: In '52.

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TURNER: [Estes] Kefauver.

HESS: Kefauver?

TURNER: Yes.

HESS: What did you know about Mr. Kefauver and why did you feel favorably disposed to him?

TURNER: Well, I had known him personally for a number of years, and as a matter of fact, he ran in the D. C. primary, but he was defeated by Averell Harriman and so I ran as a delegate for him in '52. But what we did, we named the same delegates for both Kefauver and Harriman. The delegates were instructed to vote for Harriman as long as he had a chance, and we did think that. You know Kefauver won about seven or eight of the primaries in '52. And coming into the convention he had more votes than anyone else, but President Truman didn't like him. He got mad at him about several things.

He got mad at him because of the way he conducted the crime committee. I think he felt that the hearings which were conducted by Kefauver in different parts of the country, were injurious to the chances of the Democratic Party. I think he had the idea that when

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you had problems with the party that rather than having public airing of it, it should be a private handling of these kind of matters. He made several disparaging remarks about Kefauver to people, and he just didn't like him and when he got to Chicago, at the time of the third ballot, the convention went all the way with Stevenson.

HESS: Do you recall anything in particular about Mr. Barkley? Mr. Barkley went to Chicago that year with a great desire to get the nomination.

TURNER: Well, I remember how disappointed he was. He was trying very hard to get it. And then what happened...

HESS: Wasn't labor's endorsement the main thing he was after?

TURNER: Well, what happened was that I thought that through clever maneuvering on the part of somebody, organized labor was made to look like the bad guy in the situation where I know

that some labor leaders were gotten into a meeting with Barkley and when he asked them, you know, would they go along, they wouldn't do it.

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We had a series of meetings there with our LLPE. Labor's League for Political Education in Chicago, which was a caucus of the labor delegates. And in that caucus, I would say Kefauver had the most support going into the convention. They loved Barkley, but the problem there was one of age.

I think it's so unfortunate that it made it look as though the labor movement was the one that vetoed him, but what happened I think, some of the people, who loved him like a father, just told him frankly that his age was so much against him that they couldn't stay with him. And I think the whole thing was very unfortunate.

HESS: And you mentioned that you and labor had a rather high evaluation of Adlai Stevenson, correct?

TURNER: Yes. Yes, everybody who knew him, particularly Joe Keenan, who had been head of Labor's League for Political Education, and was still the head as a matter of fact. Let's see, '52, I think he still was director, but maybe he wasn't. But he was still very active, you know, as a top Democrat, and he had worked with Stevenson very closely in Chicago and he was also very,

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very close to Jake [Jacob M.] Arvey. And Jake Arvey, really, picked Stevenson so far as the party was concerned in Chicago.

And so, it wasn't just a confidence in Stevenson, it was a confidence in Arvey and also there was a confidence in Truman. I mean Truman wouldn't pick a guy who wouldn't be a friend of organized labor.

HESS: Did you feel that Adlai Stevenson was Mr. Truman's first choice?

TURNER: There was some talk that Harriman was his first choice, but for some reason he didn't support Harriman. I don't know exactly why, but I didn't know whether he was his first choice or not. I know that when he made up his mind, he moved into that convention, and it moved very quickly.

HESS: Were there any particular mistakes that the Democrats made that year that contributed toward the defeat? What could Stevenson and the Democrats have done differently to have beaten General Eisenhower?

TURNER: I don't think Stevenson had a chance of beating him. I think the only man that could have beaten him would

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have been Truman and that would have been an "iffy" thing. But I think that if Mr. Truman had made up his mind to run for re-election, I don't think even Ike could have beaten him. In fact, I don't think Ike would have run against him.

HESS: You don't think he would have run against him?

TURNER: No, I don't think so. I think that he had too much respect for Truman. I think he knew that Truman was a great leader. I think he had to respect Truman as being his former Commander in Chief and I think it just would have gone against Ike's grain. I think he might have waited four more years. I don't believe Ike would have run against Truman.

HESS: Back during the Truman administration, the AFL and the CIO had not yet joined. Do you think that their disunity, to use a word that's probably bad in a labor office, do you think their disunity during that year may have weakened labor in trying to put forth some of their legislative goals, such as the defeating of Taft-Hartley?

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TURNER: Oh, yes, yes. Oh, yes there was a very definite situation, and you might want to interview Keenan about this, Joe Keenan.

But over in the House, I think in 19 -- that would have been '49, we had a great opportunity to repeal many of the most onerous sections of the Taft-Hartley Act, but then when we couldn't get everything we wanted, there was a split there between the AFL and CIO and they weren't able to get an answer in there quickly enough, and the vote was lost because of the lack of unity.

There's no doubt in my mind, but what at that particular point, when we had had every reason to expect repeal of Taft-Hartley, you know, as a mandate from the people, that had we not been outmaneuvered by the parliamentary situation, and an inability to get answers back quickly, could have repealed most of Taft-Hartley.

HESS: Taft-Hartley is still on the books. Would you like to see it repealed now?

TURNER: Yes, I think most of it had ought to be repealed.

HESS: What are the main provisions that you find distasteful?

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TURNER: Well, the main thing I find distasteful is the secondary boycott provisions.

Take in the building trades, if you've got eighteen trades working on the job, and let's say that one of them is nonunion, and you want to advertise the fact that one of them is nonunion, and you put up a picket line, that one of them is nonunion, it is illegal for the union to tell its members, or advise its members, or urge its members, or influence its members to recognize that picket line. They call this secondary boycott. A lot of unions have been sued. I think it's slowed down a lot of organization.

The fact that they did away with the closed shop hasn't hurt unions a great deal. I think the union shop has worked out all right with the closed shop, the only difference is that you can require a man to become a member of the union before he goes to work. In a union shop, you must become a member after a certain time.

I think 14-B is a very vicious part of Taft-Hartley because it's the only legislation that I know of in which the state can determine whether or not it should be covered by the Federal Statute.

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HESS: One point: We may have already covered it adequately, but I want to be sure. In 1952 when you were on the train, speaking with Mr. Truman, and he was speaking of Mr. Stevenson, what did he say about Mr. Stevenson?

What seemed to be his view of Mr. Stevenson?

TURNER: Well, the last night, we talked quite awhile about the campaign. And after awhile I said, "I think you've won the election for Stevenson." You know, we were getting headlines all over the country. Truman, you know, was a masterful campaigner. I guess I was getting very optimistic, but I said, "I think you've won the election for him."

Well, he said, "I won't go that far." He said, "I think we improved the campaign a great deal, but," he said, "I'm not certain that we've won it."

He probably was being nice, I think he was letting me down easy. I'm convinced, you know, in retrospect, that he didn't think that Stevenson was going to win. But I think at that point, which was in October, when we got back from the long whistlestop trip, he did not believe, in my opinion, that Stevenson was going to win the election.

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HESS: A general question: What in your opinion were Mr. Truman's major accomplishments during his administration?

TURNER: Well, I think obviously, the Marshall plan was terribly important. I think it has certainly rebuilt Europe. It made so many things possible like the iron and steel grouping, and the common market.

I remember being in Europe in 1950 and '52 and seeing in what conditions those countries were, and then going back in subsequent years in '64 and '66. And it's the difference between night and day, the recoveries which have been made in those countries.

I think the fact that his whole policy of containment of Communism was a great part of the Marshall plan. I think that had we not done what we did there was a great danger that many of the western European countries, particularly France and Italy, could have been taken over by Communists, and possibly even Germany.

I think his decision to drop the atomic bomb was a tremendous decision, and looking back...

HESS: Do you think it was a wise decision?

TURNER: Looking back, I don't think that we had much

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choice; I think that it had to be done. I think the world had to know sooner or later what the atomic bomb could do. In retrospect, whether or not all the time was taken in giving the Japanese proper warning, I don't know, but I think eventually it would have -- I don't think the Japanese believed us.

A lot of people said, "Well, we should have dropped the bomb somewhere else to let them see it, you know, before we did it. But even after we had dropped the first bomb, as you know, we still couldn't get any response from the Japanese in terms of any kind of a surrender that we could accept. Then came the second bomb.

So certainly the first bomb had to be dropped, and certainly millions of lives were saved and Truman never, evidently, doubted the wisdom of what he had done there.

Oh, there are so many great decisions which he made, which I think greatly improved our whole posture.

HESS: Your mentioning of the Marshall plan, brings up an interesting point. The Marshall plan was passed by the 80th Congress, the Congress that Mr. Truman ran so hard against. They also passed the Truman Doctrine, the aid to Greece and Turkey. They did do what he requested in

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the foreign affairs, but not in domestic affairs. Do you think that elections, even major presidential elections, are decided and run on domestic affairs rather than foreign affairs?

TURNER: Well, it seems to me that normally this is the case. In the Vietnam situation I think if you look at '68, Vietnam was the big issue. If you look back at 1952, certainly Korea was the big issue, and I would say that normally, yes, that normally domestic affairs carry a great deal more weight with American voters than foreign affairs

HESS: Unless you've got a shooting war.

TURNER: Unless we've got a shooting war, yes.

HESS: In many of Mr. Truman's speeches in 1948 and in 1952, he invoked the old memories of the Hooverilles and the Hoovercarts and the bread lines. In those years labor was still pretty solidly Democratic. Now, in this recent election we heard a good deal of talk about labor turning conservative, and moving towards the Republican Party. What is your view of that?

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TURNER: Well, I think what's happened is that since 1940 we've had this country a long -- thirty years of affluence. And we take in our own union here, whereas we only have maybe 12 percent of the members attending union meetings, I can remember back in the '30s when we had as many as 50 percent attend meetings. And again, it's a matter of affluence.

I mean the people, with full employment, people tend to pay less attention to the affairs of the labor union. And in the same way, I think that more and more people who have affluence tend to identify themselves with the middle class.

In other words, back in the '30s a man was a worker, he identified himself as a working class person, and he was pretty happy with it. Now, you get into this period here thirty-five years later, and the average working man is sending his child to college (if the child wants to go, his son or his daughter), and usually has a home that he has partly paid for.

When I was a child growing up my father lost about five homes. He was a building tradesman, he was an ironworker, and it was work in which there was very little economic security, a lot of unemployment. There was no unemployment insurance, there was no Social

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Security, no Medicare. All of these things which have come on, have undoubtedly reduced the fear in the eyes of the average working man of the specter of unemployment. It doesn't bother him so much. Now, here in the last few months we've begun to get a much higher level of unemployment. We find a lot of middle management people, a lot of technicians...

HESS: A lot of Ph.D.s out of work too.

TURNER: Out of work, and I can remember back in the depression there were a lot of Ph.D.s out of work. And so, really it may come back to where it will be the other way around.

Now, I think too, that the racial issue has been used to a great extent by the Republican Party almost to the same way as the old-fashioned southern Democrat would use it, you know, to wave the bloody shirt about the Civil War and talk about the problems of the Negro. And the Republicans had tried to establish themselves a position that is much more conservative in relation to race relations than the policy of the Democratic Party.

Of course, this is an emotional issue, and I think that it's been -- the leadership of the trade union locals

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has spent a great deal of time, money, energy and thought trying to remove this issue from the area of partisan politics. Now, I'm talking about race relations. I think that it's something that's bigger than party and I think that when people try to use the race issue, I think they make a terrible mistake.

I remember Stevenson said back in 1956, he said, "If we can do something within the next ten years about integration we shall have done a great deal indeed."

Well, the next day he was attacked from all sides as being very conservative, very reactionary. And here we are fourteen years later, and the problem is just with us as much today as it was then.

Going back to Truman,, though, it was his example of courage that meant so much, I think to our country. I was reading someone somewhere about an interview with McCarthy of Minnesota, and he was saying that his ideal of a President was Harry Truman.

Truman was always very direct in everything he said and did.

When I think of Truman I always think of Andrew Jackson. Of course, Truman consciously made Jackson his model, and he acted a great deal like Jackson, but

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he had wonderful characteristics in that he could delegate authority, that he could accept advice. So many people -- I think this is one of the many real reasons that poor Roosevelt died is because he could never delegate authority.

You look at the things that Truman did. So many times he would bring in the top guy, like an Acheson, and ask him his opinion. Now, when he gave him his opinion, the President acted on it.

He knew when he was getting good advice and he knew when to take it, and he knew that you couldn't do it all yourself. Harry Truman could always sleep well. He always mentioned that he had no trouble getting a good night's rest.

HESS: In the current situation, where do you think that the best home for labor is; in the Democratic Party or the Republican Party?

TURNER: Oh, I don't think the Republican Party will ever be a home for organized labor. I think it has been captive for the last, at least the last forty years by big business. I think there was a time back in the '20s and prior to that, when people like Roosevelt

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(talking about T.R.), was a liberal, was a real liberal, I think there were other people; Gifford Pinchot and a few others like that. Now, you look at today. Except for five or six members of the House and maybe three or four members of the Senate, and maybe two or three governors, we don't have any liberals in the Republican Party.

I look on the labor movement as being the people's lobby, and if it is the people's lobby, it certainly can't find a home with the Republicans. It can't inhabit the same premises. And I don't think this will change.

I think that there could be a realignment on the national level of all parties. There could be some new party come in that could force some realignment, but I don't see it at this time.

I think that the Democratic Party is pretty badly split, but I think that organized labor is the greatest catalyst for trying to keep it together. And even if it isn't -- so many elections in state after state, the political activities of the labor movement are effective and they are helpful in bringing the Democratic Party together and we've got encroachments from the new left. You've got encroachments from [Governor George C.]

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Wallace, you've got them left and right, and organized labor, I think, is a great stabilizing factor in the party.

HESS: What is your estimation of Mr. Truman's place in history?

TURNER: I think that he will grow with the years. I think that he did such outstanding things; he seemed to be so eminently qualified for the job.

We look back on history, and we look back on the day Roosevelt died, and Truman said that he didn't know how he could fill the shoes or some such remark, and many people said, "Well, we are lost. Roosevelt's dead." Of course, he had been in there for sixteen years. Let's see, was it sixteen?

HESS: About twelve years and three months. He had just started that last term.

TURNER: It would have been sixteen. And he -- and Truman took over and the country was -- looked back on all the things that Roosevelt had done, he had been around so long. He had helped to bring the country through a terrible depression. We were winning the greatest

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war in history. And here was a man of tremendous sophistication, very erudite, very much a man of the world, seemingly a brilliant man. Here he had died and here Truman, who had been a judge of a county court, wasn't even a lawyer, came into the position. And through strength of character, and top-notch intelligence, he was able to hold the country together and move forward through some of our most critical problems in history.

In fact, I guess, since the dawn of man, no problem has been more critical than the bomb, because we finally have the means at our disposal of destroying ourselves and the world and he had to grapple with this problem and make a decision.

HESS: Asking you to remember all the way back to April of 1945, but when Mr. Truman became President on the death of Mr. Roosevelt, what kind of a job did you think he would do? What kind of a President did you think he was going to make at that time?

TURNER: Well, I knew that he had done a great job with the Truman Committee. I had known some of the people that worked with him in the Truman Committee.

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HESS: Who did you know?

TURNER: I knew a fellow out in New Mexico named Joe -- what is Joe's last name; he later on was Attorney General of New Mexico? It's hard to remember those Spanish names. But he was on the staff, and he used to see Truman a great deal. Matt Connelly, as I recall it, was on the staff of the Truman Committee wasn't he?

HESS: Don [Donald M.] Lathrom also, who was one of the members of the Truman-Barkley Club.

TURNER: Is that right?

HESS: Yes.

TURNER: Well, I'll think of Joe's last name in a minute.

HESS: Well, I should know it myself.

TURNER: Joe used to give me all the -- he could tell me a lot of...

HESS: Martinez?

TURNER: That's it. Joe Martinez. How did you know that?

HESS: Oh, I've had a few interviews on the Truman...

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TURNER: On the committee.

HESS: On the Truman Committee.

TURNER: Well, Joe Martinez used to always talk about it and he was a close friend of mine. And he used to tell me a lot of stories about what a guy Truman was. So, I guess I had a little better insight than others and I thought he would be a good President. I didn't expect him -- he certainly exceeded what anybody could have hoped. I mean, he was a great President.

HESS: Do you have anything else to add on Mr. Truman or the Truman administration; labor's role in those days?

TURNER: No, I think I've covered everything. Have you ever talked with Joe Keenan?

HESS: No.

TURNER: Well, he was a guy...

HESS: Does he live here in town?

TURNER: Yes, right here in town, with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and he was vice-

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chairman of the War Production Board during World War II very close to Truman. He used to go in the back door all the time. And I think that Keenan could give you more insight into Truman than anyone who is around at the moment. He was closer -- I would say that he was -- he and Herb Rivers were the two closest labor leaders to Truman. I don't think that anyone was as close as those two.

HESS: Well, fine.

TURNER: Whatever you do, I would call Keenan right away. He's seventy -- he's about seventy-three or seventy-four years old.

HESS: Well, thank you very much.

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