

Oral History Interview
with
WILLIAM MCCORMICK BLAIR, JR.

Administrative assistant to Gov. Adlai E. Stevenson of Illinois, 1950-52, executive assistant, 1953-55, and one of Stevenson's law partners, 1955-61. Subsequently U.S. Ambassador to Denmark, 1961-64, and to the Philippines, 1964-67.

Washington, D.C.
June 22, 1970

by Jerry N. Hess, Harry S. Truman Library

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HESS: Mr. Blair, tell me just a little bit about your background: Where were you born and where were you educated and what positions have you held?

BLAIR: I was born in Chicago, Illinois on October 24, 1916. I went to elementary school in Chicago; I went to Groton Preparatory School in Groton, Massachusetts from 1929 to 1935, took my undergraduate work at the University of Hawaii, the University of California at Los Angeles, the University of Arizona, the University of Chicago and Stanford, all in four years because of a sinus condition. I graduated from Stanford in 1940. Then I went to the University of Virginia

Law School for a year and then into the Army and then into the Air Force for a period of about four years serving in the China-Burma-India theatre most of the time. I came back to law school at the University of Virginia after the war.

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I started the practice of law in Chicago, and practiced for about three years, then went to Springfield as an administrative assistant to Adlai Stevenson and remained with him until 1952, then traveled a good deal with him between 1952 and 1956. The two of us had an office. I was active in the 1956 presidential campaign on his behalf, formed a partnership with him, Willard Wirtz and Newton Minow after the '56 election. I practiced law until '60 when President Kennedy sent me to Denmark as the United States Ambassador. After President Kennedy's death, President Johnson sent me to the Philippines as Ambassador where I remained until December of 1967, I then returned to Washington and became general director of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, which is my present occupation.

HESS: When did you first become aware that President Truman did not intend to run for reelection in 1952?

BLAIR: I guess the night he announced it here in Washington.

HESS: At the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner.

BLAIR: At the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner. I was not here at that time.

HESS: When was Governor Stevenson first approached about the possibility of being the standard-bearer for the Democratic Party in the 1952 elections?

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BLAIR: Well, my recollection is that this was discussed soon after he was elected as Governor in 1948 and there was some speculation that President Truman might not be a candidate for reelection and he was considered one of the comers in the Democratic Party. I don't remember any precise date.

HESS: When in 1952, what time of year in 1952, did you think that Governor Stevenson's name began to come before the public, in this context?

BLAIR: Well, again, I think, as it became more and more evident that the President might not run (nobody knew for sure), why, there was more and more interest in Adlai Stevenson.

HESS: And we have covered the nature of your earlier relationship with Governor Stevenson. In your opinion, were there others that Mr. Truman might have preferred to see as Democratic candidate other than Governor Stevenson?

BLAIR: In my opinion, that would have been the case just prior to the convening of the convention. I think Mr. Stevenson was Mr. Truman's choice originally, and then for various

reasons, Mr. Stevenson wasn't as receptive perhaps as President Truman had anticipated, and I had the impression that later on President Truman might have preferred someone else.

HESS: Why wasn't Governor Stevenson as receptive as he might

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have been at this time?

BLAIR: Well, I think the first reason is that he preferred to stay on as Governor of Illinois. He had already announced his candidacy for re-election as Governor, and this is what he really enjoyed doing, and I think he also felt possibly that it wasn't going to be a very good year for the Democrats, and it might not be the most propitious time to run.

HESS: In an article on Governor Stevenson by George Ball in the *Atlantic Monthly* in May of 1966 entitled "Flaming Arrows to the Sky," Mr. Ball states that David Lloyd and Charles Murphy of the White House staff talked to the President in January of 1952 about the possible candidacy of Adlai Stevenson for the Presidency. Ball states: "The President had not yet decided whether he would run himself. He had not commissioned them to sound out Stevenson but had indicated that he would interpose no objection if they cared to do so on their own initiative."

Were you aware of the efforts on Mr. Stevenson's behalf of those two White House staff members?

BLAIR: I don't recall that I was aware of it, no.

HESS: What do you recall about David Lloyd and Charles Murphy?

BLAIR: Well, I think I knew David Lloyd maybe a bit better. I saw more of him than I did of Charlie Murphy, but we

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knew they were both very close to President Truman, and I know that Governor Stevenson had a high regard for them. My recollection is that he was perhaps closer to David Lloyd. I believe David Lloyd had worked with him previously at the time that Mr. Stevenson was doing some work in the State Department.

HESS: When did you meet David Lloyd, do you recall?

BLAIR: I don't recall, but it must have been around 1948 or '50, some time around there.

HESS: What do you recall about Governor Stevenson's deliberations as to whether or not he should accept the nomination, from the time he was first approached until he finally accepted?

BLAIR: Well, as I tried to indicate, I think he was torn between (a) a feeling that he really wanted to stay on as Governor, and (b) a feeling that nobody really could turn down a nomination as a candidate for the Presidency; that it would have been presumptuous for him to

say that he would not accept, but the problem was that if he said he'd accept, then it would appear that he was seeking the nomination, which wasn't the case. That was his dilemma.

HESS: I understand he made some trips to Washington about that time of year. Did you accompany him on any of those trips?

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BLAIR: I did accompany him on those trips.

HESS: What do you recall about that?

BLAIR: As I recall, he went on *Meet the Press*, you perhaps remember the date. That was the day after the dinner at which President Truman announced that he would not be a candidate for re-election. As a matter of fact, we were staying right down the street here, not the Hay-Adams but the Roger Smith Hotel. We were staying there. I remember Mr. Stevenson coming home from the dinner in somewhat of a state of shock.

HESS: What did he say?

BLAIR: Well, I just don't remember, except his view hadn't changed at all. He worried about all the pressure that was going to come to bear on him. He was concerned, of course, about the next day, his appearance on *Meet the Press*. I remember his feeling that some people might think he had known about this all along, and that's why he was scheduled on *Meet the Press*, but that was purely coincidental.

HESS: Did you go with him to his appearance on *Meet the Press* the following day?

BLAIR: Yes, I did.

HESS: What do you recall about that occasion, anything particular?

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BLAIR: I recall a lot of excitement, a lot of interest, and I recall that he did extremely well, and that served to fan the flames.

HESS: Did you come back to Washington that spring and early summer on any other trips with the Governor?

BLAIR: I came back later in the spring when he came back to see President Truman -- no, I didn't come back that time, but I recall we went to St. Louis and the reservation was made in my name, so he came to Washington very quietly. I forget really whether it was Dave Lloyd who met him. It might very well have been. He saw President Truman at that time. My recollection is that he reiterated his desire to run for re-election as Governor, and not to go after the nomination.

HESS: Is this still at the time when President Truman was trying to get him to take the candidacy?

BLAIR: That's correct.

HESS: Why do you think that Governor Stevenson changed his mind?

BLAIR: Well, I think he changed his mind because it was inevitable that he was to be nominated. As I've indicated, he thought it would be presumptuous to say that under no circumstances would he accept the nomination.

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HESS: Was that a so-called "honest draft?"

BLAIR: I think it was as honest as a draft can be. He certainly did nothing, to my knowledge, to encourage it, because he didn't really want it.

HESS: What do you recall about the convention in Chicago that year?

BLAIR: Well, I recall quite a lot about it. Governor Stevenson was staying in my family's house. We were besieged, as I recall, the entire week. I don't recall moving from the house once, except that one morning, Governor Stevenson and I had breakfast with Governor Harriman. But otherwise we were answering the telephones, and trying to fend off visitors. You can imagine, it was pretty much of a madhouse.

HESS: Governor Harriman also wanted the nomination that year, do you recall that?

BLAIR: I recall that, although I don't remember that he announced. I remember more about that in '56 than I do in '52.

HESS: Also Alben Barkley would have liked to have had the nomination in '52.

BLAIR: Yes, well, I gathered that.

HESS: Do you recall Governor Stevenson saying anything about the other men who may have been seeking the prize actively?

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BLAIR: No, I really don't.

HESS: What do you recall about Mr. Stevenson's first activities following the convention?

BLAIR: Well, I believe after going back to Springfield, he went to Wisconsin with some of his advisors to think about speeches. I remained in Springfield to work on schedules.

HESS: I'd like to read a statement from Cabell Phillips' book, *The Truman Presidency*, page 425 and get your reaction to it:

In August Stevenson paid a visit to the President in the White House in the hope of working out a modus vivendi by which the President would remain in the background until the last couple of weeks of the campaign, while Stevenson created a public image and program of his own. The conference was held in the Cabinet room with the President and the key members of his staff lined up on one side of the vast coffin-shaped table and, on the other side, Stevenson and picked members of the "Springfield crowd" -- like representatives of sovereign powers at a treaty conference. It was stiff, painfully uncomfortable, and largely inconclusive.

Did you attend that meeting, sir?

BLAIR: No, I didn't.

HESS: Do you know who did? Which members of Governor Stevenson's staff...

BLAIR: I assume Carl McGowan attended it. I don't remember about whether Mr. Mitchell was there or not, Stephen Mitchell.

HESS: Now, he had replaced Frank McKinney at this time.

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BLAIR: At this time he had, yes.

HESS: What do you recall about Governor Stevenson's decision to replace Frank McKinney with Mitchell?

BLAIR: I don't really remember much other than Mr. Stevenson felt, as all candidates do, that he should have his own man in there.

HESS: It was about the time of the meeting in August when David Bell and Clayton Fritchey on the White House staff were informed that their services would be required in Springfield. Do you know why those two men were selected, and what they did in Springfield?

BLAIR: I don't know why they were selected; I'm glad they were selected because I think they were both very helpful, very loyal to Governor Stevenson. Dave Bell worked chiefly, as I recall, on speeches. I guess Clayton did too.

HESS: Just what were your duties during the campaign and how did you carry them out?

BLAIR: Well, I was, I suppose, appointments secretary. I traveled everywhere with Mr. Stevenson, was usually in a car right in front of him or back of him, was the first into the hotel suites with him, and the first to shut the doors so no one else could get in right away.

HESS: Did you have that specific title?

BLAIR: I did not have a specific title, because I really was an administrative assistant to Governor Stevenson in

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his capacity as Governor. I traveled with him and, arranged for people to see him or not to see him, etc.

HESS: Which is the most difficult, arranging for someone to see him, or not to see him?

BLAIR: I suppose it's more difficult to arrange not to see him.

HESS: Does that create any hard feelings at times?

BLAIR: I suppose. In looking back, I think he probably saw too many people, and had too much of a schedule.

I began to think Mr. Nixon was well advised in the '68 campaign where he would go off for three or four days at a time, particularly on weekends. But Mr. Stevenson's problem, of course, was that he was not well-known, and there was a great clamoring to get him around the country.

HESS: Did you ever have occasion to request any help or assistance from Mr. Truman's staff, and if so, was it forthcoming?

BLAIR: I don't recall having to request any assistance, but I had nothing but cooperation from the Truman people whom I did see from time to time.

HESS: Why did Governor Stevenson decide to have his principal headquarters in Springfield?

BLAIR: I think the main reason is that he was still Governor of Illinois.

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HESS: Was it to a degree to disassociate himself from Mr. Truman and the so-called "mess in Washington?"

BLAIR: You know, I've heard that expression.

I think it obviously helped him to create his own image, by having his own headquarters. He was still Governor, he had responsibilities there, he had to be in Springfield.

HESS: How was the itinerary for Governor Stevenson's trips determined?

BLAIR: Well, it was determined really on the basis of requests from all '48 states for Governor Stevenson's appearance. We would have to sit down and figure out where it would be most useful for him to go. This was largely a political decision. Mr. Mitchell, of course, had a great deal to say about it. So did Mr. [Hyman B.] Raskin, who was his assistant, Hy Raskin.

HESS: Was there adequate coordination between Governor Stevenson's staff and President Truman's staff in the matter of setting up itineraries for both their speaking trips?

BLAIR: I don't know that there's ever adequate coordination, but given the circumstances, it seems to me it was sufficient coordination.

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HESS: In referring to the events of 1952, in his book, *Mr. Citizen*, Mr. Truman stated:

Stevenson had made it clear during the campaign that he preferred to detach himself from the man in the White House and the party headquarters in Washington. Stevenson, of course, had the right to do what he did, but in my opinion he only helped the opposition and hurt himself.

In your opinion, what brought about this evident lack of understanding between Mr. Truman and Governor Stevenson?

BLAIR: Well, I don't know.

HESS: I want to restate that last question and just say, was there an evident lack of understanding? Was any misunderstanding evident?

BLAIR: Well, it certainly wasn't evident to me. As you know, President Truman felt that Governor Stevenson should go after the nomination, should be more assertive, and Governor Stevenson felt otherwise. He felt he had made a commitment to the people of Illinois and that he should not go after it. He couldn't, in effect, be seeking two offices at the same time. And I suppose that President Truman was disappointed that Governor Stevenson didn't take his advice. That's only natural. It seems to me in retrospect that the Governor did the only thing that he could have done. Of course, one never knows what the staffs are doing.

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I can talk later about 1956, but it was clear, certainly, at a later period, that people, on Mr. Truman's staff were telling him things about Mr. Stevenson's feelings about Mr. Truman that simply weren't true.

HESS: That we will get later.

BLAIR: That we'll get later.

HESS: What seemed to be the relationship between the two campaign efforts and the Democratic National Committee?

BLAIR: Well, again, I don't know if you've talked to Steve Mitchell. He would be the one, I suppose, to talk to about that. I just didn't get into so much of that. I was sort of removed from that. I suppose that inevitably there were conflicts and differences of opinion. There always are.

HESS: And we have mentioned about why Mr. Mitchell was selected to replace Mr. McKinney, but how effective as a leader of the Democratic National Committee was Mr. Mitchell?

BLAIR: My guess is that he was quite effective. I'm not suggesting that he didn't make mistakes, I think he did. I think one serious scheduling mistake, for example, was for Governor Stevenson not to accept the invitation from Cardinal [Francis Joseph] Spellman to speak, at the Alfred E. Smith dinner that he used to have in New York City.

HESS: Was that Stephen Mitchell's decision?

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BLAIR: That was his decision at that time.

HESS: Do you recall anything about the relationship between Mr. Mitchell and President Truman?

BLAIR: No, I really don't.

HESS: O.K. What was the relationship between Stephen Mitchell and Wilson Wyatt?

BLAIR: Well, I think that it was very good, to the best of my knowledge.

HESS: What was Mr. Wyatt's area of responsibility?

BLAIR: He was the Governor's sort of personal advisor, his campaign manager, really. He was with him...

HESS: Did he have that title "campaign manager?"

BLAIR: I think he did, yes.

HESS: How effective was he in carrying out his duties?

BLAIR: I think he was very effective.

HESS: Did there appear to be any duplication of effort or unnecessary division of command in the setup of having a chairman of the Democratic National Committee and a separate campaign manager?

BLAIR: Well, I suppose there appeared to be, but on the other hand, I think with Mr. Stevenson in Springfield a good part of the time, Mr. Mitchell, by necessity, in Washington, it was a good idea to have someone who would sort of be the liaison between the two. I think Mr. Wyatt

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did that.

HESS: There were a good many people in Springfield. We may not want to discuss them all or even all we have on the list, but what can you tell me, just a little bit, about some of the men that were in Springfield, what their duties were and how effective they were. Let's start with Judge Carl McGowan.

BLAIR: Well, I suppose he was the most effective. He was Mr. Stevenson's closest adviser, particularly when it came to policy matters and I don't think anyone could have possibly been more effective than Carl McGowan.

HESS: What was Bill Pendleton's job?

BLAIR: I don't remember.

HESS: Newton Minow?

BLAIR: Well, Newton Minow had really just been hired at that time. He was hired down here in Washington about the time Mr. Stevenson was first appearing on *Meet the Press*, that famous weekend. Newton Minow, as I recall, didn't do much traveling. He stayed in Springfield and looked after state matters for Mr. Stevenson. He was very effective.

HESS: Do you recall anything about Neale Roach?

BLAIR: Yes, I worked very closely with Neale Roach, because Neale Roach was in Washington with the national committee, and was the one most involved in scheduling. That's my

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recollection anyway.

HESS: Was he effective in his job?

BLAIR: Yes, I think he was.

HESS: All right, the Elks Club Group is quite a list there. Do you see any names that particularly come to mind, or bring anything...

BLAIR: I think, as I look down [Kenneth] Galbraith, [Arthur M., Jr.] Schlesinger, [John] Fischer, [Sidney] Hyman, [Willard] Wirtz, [Bernard] De Voto, [William] Reddig, [John Bartlow] Martin, [Robert] Tufts, [David] Cohn -- they were all close to Governor Stevenson. All, in my judgment, very effective. I think that if there's one thing that people remember about the campaign about '52, it was the quality of Mr. Stevenson's speeches. I'm not suggesting that they wrote all the speeches, but they gave him a lot of good ideas, and they submitted drafts and all that, and I think they were very effective.

HESS: I believe George Ball was co-chairman of the National Citizens Volunteers for Stevenson. Did he assist in Springfield?

BLAIR: Yes, he did. He was, you know, with us a good part of the time.

HESS: Do you recall anything about Bertram Gross, who that year was director of the Research Division for the

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Democratic National Committee?

BLAIR: No.

HESS: Do you recall if Pierre Salinger served on Governor Stevenson's campaign staff?

BLAIR: No.

HESS: You mentioned the speeches. Just how were Governor Stevenson's speeches written, and to what extent did he participate in their writings?

BLAIR: Well, before he became the candidate, he participated almost exclusively, but obviously when you are making, as he did on occasion, twelve or sixteen speeches a day, you have to have drafts. I think in retrospect it was too bad that he insisted that every speech should be different. If he had made more or less the same speech at these whistlestops along the way, varying it a bit for the morning paper or the afternoon paper, and then give a major speech each night, he would have been able to, conserve his energy, somewhat.

He took these speeches very seriously. He felt that people were entitled to hear what he thought on the various issues, and not just hear a repeat of some former statement.

HESS: There has been some criticism that his speeches were on too high an intellectual plain, and not aimed at the average voter. What's your reaction to that statement?

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BLAIR: Well, I think you're probably right. But he used to say that he didn't want to insult the intelligence of the average voter. He was an intellectual, and he was very articulate. He was what he was, really.

HESS: In reviewing the speeches and statements of both Mr. Truman and Mr. Stevenson, it seems that Mr. Truman spoke out far more often and far more forcefully against General Eisenhower. Is that a fair assumption?

BLAIR: My recollection is that that would be a fair assumption.

HESS: What was the reason for that disparity?

BLAIR: Well, I don't know. I think Mr. Stevenson had high regard for General Eisenhower and it just didn't interest him, really, to go attacking anyone just for the sake of attacking him. He was more interested in issues than he was in personalities.

I'm sure he didn't have the political acumen that President Truman did. And I suppose President Truman's purpose was not to try at all to destroy General Eisenhower but to bring him down where he would be vulnerable.

HESS: Did you feel that Governor Stevenson would have preferred to have Mr. Truman conduct a somewhat more low-key campaign, one with a little less "give 'em hell, Harry" overtones?

BLAIR: I don't think so. I think he felt that President Truman had his own way of campaigning, that it was very effective,

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and that he, Stevenson, had his. That was fine with him.

HESS: Did you travel on all the campaign trips?

BLAIR: Yes, every one.

HESS: Do you recall anything in particular about any one event that comes to mind when you look back on the days of those campaign trips?

BLAIR: Well, I was in on every one in '56, too. I have feeling of weariness at the thought. I took every trip Stevenson did for ten years, in 64 countries, and in 50 states. I never would have driven my car through 50 states when I was in college if I'd known I was going to end up with him.

HESS: You did that when you were in college.

BLAIR: I did that when I was in college.

HESS: Were you present when most of the major speeches delivered?

BLAIR: Every speech.

HESS: What was your impression of the way that the speeches were being received? Did you think that the audience, seemed to be receptive to Governor Stevenson's speeches?

BLAIR: Well, I think certainly that was the case in 1952, not so much the case in 1956, perhaps.

HESS: That we'll get into in just a moment, also.

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Were there any people who were assigned tasks of long-range planning in the event that Mr. Stevenson had won the election, perhaps on both high-level staffing, and on programs that Mr. Stevenson would have wanted to implement?

BLAIR: Well, there were. Again, I think Judge McGowan could give you more specific information on that.

HESS: Where were you on election night?

BLAIR: I was with Mr. Stevenson in Springfield.

HESS: What do you recall of the events of that evening?

BLAIR: I recall we got beaten.

HESS: What else do you recall?

BLAIR: Well, I recall that we had sort of an office pool, and that Governor Stevenson's estimate of the outcome was that he would get about 300 plus electoral votes and he gave, I think, General Eisenhower, 180. I was not at all sanguine about the results. In fact, I had applied for a new passport about a week before the election.

HESS: You did not think he would win?

BLAIR: No, I didn't think he'd win. I never thought he'd win.

HESS: What was the general attitude of Mr. Stevenson's staff? Did they think that he would win?

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BLAIR: No, I think most of them felt he would not win, although there were a few perhaps that...

HESS: Why didn't you think he would win?

BLAIR: I didn't think he would win because I just didn't think that anybody could defeat General Eisenhower, a national hero, and I think there was the feeling that it was time for a change.

HESS: Were there any particular mistakes made that might have turned it around. Let's take the Democratic Party, first. Did they make any particular mistakes that hampered a Democratic victory?

BLAIR: I don't think so. I don't think anyone, any Democrat could have won against Eisenhower, it's always easy to look back and recriminate. Mr. Stevenson could have here and there and other places done perhaps a more effective job, but by and large, I think he ran a stronger race than anybody could have run against General Eisenhower. I think on the whole he did extremely well.

HESS: Can you think of any mistakes that Mr. Stevenson might have made himself?

BLAIR: Well, he could have said "no," earlier, perhaps, and run for re-election as Governor, although I don't happen to think so.

I have a theory that if he had run for re-election as

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Governor of Illinois, he might well have been defeated, because the Democratic candidate, had it not been Mr. Stevenson, might well have been Senator Kefauver, and Senator Kefauver had had some trouble with the Chicago organization, because of his investigations, and he would have run very poorly in Illinois. Even though Governor Stevenson might have run six or seven hundred thousand ahead as a candidate for Governor, that might not have been enough to surmount General Eisenhower's lead against Kefauver.

HESS: Before we move on to the events of '56, does anything else come to mind about the election in '52, and Governor Stevenson's candidacy?

BLAIR: No, except as I say, by and large, I think it was a great campaign.

HESS: You mentioned earlier that you were associated with Governor Stevenson in his second attempt in 1956. What do you recall about that?

BLAIR: Well, I think a number of people would say that that wasn't as effective a campaign; that the speeches weren't as good, but I think that people forget that in 1952, Mr. Stevenson was new to the scene. People had not heard him before, I think that the quality of his speeches, the man himself stood out so, that he made an enormous impression.

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By 1956, of course, he was old hat. He had been speaking everywhere.

After the '52 election, he spent months traveling around the country trying to raise money to pay off the campaign debts. He spoke in virtually every state. So by 1956 he was well-known. And also the circumstances were very different in 1956. In 1952, Mr. Stevenson, was defending a Democratic administration. In 1956 he was on the attack, attacking the incumbent administration. It was bound to be different.

HESS: Also you mentioned earlier that Mr. Truman had been given some information by people close to him concerning Governor Stevenson.

BLAIR: I wish I could recall exactly, but sometime in 1956, David Noyes came to Chicago, my recollection is, at the instigation of President Truman. They had a meeting...

HESS: With Governor Stevenson?

BLAIR: With Governor Stevenson in Chicago. I recall sitting in just for part of it, and I just remember that Mr. Noyes made a very bad impression, a very poor impression on Mr.

Stevenson. Mr. Stevenson didn't want to be associated with him. I forget whether he was to do some work for Mr. Stevenson or what it was.

HESS: Do you recall what he said or did to make the bad

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impression that he did?

BLAIR: I don't recall exactly, but I recall later on being told by David Lloyd and others that one reason President Truman was critical of Governor Stevenson was because he had been fed stories about what Mr. Stevenson allegedly had said about Mr. Truman. These stories were simply not true, and I know David Lloyd was very upset about it. He said David Noyes was poisoning President Truman's mind against Stevenson.

HESS: Did Mr. Lloyd tell you the substance of the stories?

BLAIR: No, but apparently Noyes was saying that Governor Stevenson had made disparaging remarks about Truman which, to the best of my knowledge, and certainly to Mr. Stevenson's knowledge, were not true. Now what his purpose was, I don't know.

I recall hearing about Frank McKinney, who was very anti-Stevenson because he had been removed as national chairman when Mr. Stevenson was nominated in 1956, and that there was an effort on the part of Jack [Jacob M] Arvey, who was a great friend of Mr. Stevenson's, the Democratic National Committeeman from Illinois, to bring them together. I remember a meeting at Colonel Arvey's house in Miami Beach in '56, at which Colonel Arvey, Frank McKinney, myself and Governor Stevenson were together in an upstairs

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room. At this meeting Frank McKinney promised his support to Governor Stevenson for the nomination. He said he wanted to be helpful in every way. Ten days later, without any communication at all with Governor Stevenson, McKinney announced his support for Governor Harriman.

That didn't make a very good impression.

HESS: Also that year Mr. Truman announced his support for Governor Harriman.

BLAIR: That's right.

HESS: What impression did that make on Governor Stevenson?

BLAIR: Well, it didn't surprise him, because Averell Harriman was a great friend of the Governor's and he knew that Averell and Truman were always very close. I think it disappointed him, but it didn't surprise him at all.

Again, I think that he felt that one cause of it was that Truman believed that Stevenson didn't like him, which really wasn't the case. Stevenson believed that President Truman had been fed a lot of erroneous stories by people like David Noyes.

HESS: In your opinion what was Governor Stevenson's opinion of Mr. Truman?

BLAIR: I know he admired and respected him very much and thought of him as even a great President. But I remember after Governor Stevenson was nominated in 1956, he called

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President Truman and said he'd like to come up and see him, and the President said no, that he would come down and see him. This was at the Blackstone Hotel, and the Governor said, of course, no, he'd go up, and I went up with him. We were led into President Truman's suite by Mrs. Truman, and the President came out of the room and took Mr. Stevenson by the hand and led him off and as they left I heard President Truman say, "I don't know why I did it. I don't know why I did it. Bess kept telling me not to." That's all I heard.

HESS: Do you think he was referring to his support of Harriman?

BLAIR: He was referring to his support of Governor Harriman.

HESS: Did you think that the Governor would be successful in 1956?

BLAIR: No, I didn't think so.

HESS: Why not?

BLAIR: Because I still didn't think anybody could beat General Eisenhower.

HESS: Were there any plans made to try a different tack, a different direction? They had run against the same man four years earlier and were unsuccessful. Were there any new plans formulated?

BLAIR: Well, as I suggested, I think this time they felt they would be more aggressive and more on the attack,

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because they were no longer defending a Democratic administration. They were attacking an incumbent administration.

HESS: Do you think that was the correct thing to do?

BLAIR: I think in retrospect it was. I think the mistake, really, was -- one mistake was -- that Mr. Stevenson was over-scheduled. He got awfully tired. He made too many speeches; too many different speeches. But in retrospect, I don't think any Democrat could have won.

HESS: Do you have anything to add regarding Governor Stevenson?

BLAIR: No, I'd just like to say this about the 1956 campaign. I think the result would have been very different had it not been for the Hungarian revolution, and for the invasion of Israel, by Egypt. I think people were terribly concerned a week before the election. There were estimates made that these two events cost the Democrats between three and five million votes. If Mr. Stevenson had gotten those votes he still would have been defeated, but he would have done better than he had in 1952.

Obviously most people trusted General Eisenhower. He was a great General. There was a threat of war, and they decided they had better stick with Ike.

HESS: Don't change horses in the middle of the stream.

[29]

BLAIR: Don't change generals.

HESS: In your opinion, what were Mr. Truman's major contributions during his career?

BLAIR: I think he'll go down as a great President. I think he made a lot of tough decisions and he made the right decision. The Marshall plan was one of these great decisions. I think the intervention in Greece was one of his great decisions. I think he was absolutely right in his decision to use the atom bomb. It's all very well for people to decry that decision now, but at the time, he made the right decisions. Again, that wasn't an easy decision.

HESS: What do you see as his most serious shortcomings or failures?

BLAIR: Oh, I really would rather not get into that. I suppose everybody has shortcomings. I'd rather think of his successes which were of far greater significance and import.

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

BLAIR: Well, I think he'll have a very high place in history, and deservedly so. I don't know that I'd rate him with George Washington or Abraham Lincoln, but I'd certainly rank him among the strong and effective Presidents.

[30]

HESS: Do you have anything else to add concerning Governor Stevenson, President Truman, the election of '52 or '56?

BLAIR: No, I don't think so.

HESS: Thank you very much for your time.

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