The 1938 Kentucky Senate Election: Alben Barkley, the New Deal & the Defeat of Governor A.B. "Happy" Chandler

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by
Walter Hixson
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THE 1938 KENTUCKY SENATE ELECTION: ALBEN BARKLEY, THE NEW DEAL,

AND THE DEFEAT OF GOVERNOR A. B. "HAPPY" CHANDLER

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PREFACE

A deep sense of uncertainty characterized American political and economic life in the late 1930s. Although President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal had inspired a brief wave of renewed confidence, it failed to achieve economic recovery. "I see one third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished," the President solemnly intoned in his second inaugural address on January 20, 1937. Roosevelt pledged still greater efforts to combat the economic malaise, but by the end of the year business had slumped dramatically, stock prices had tumbled, and new millions joined the unemployment rolls.¹

Although the New Deal had carried Roosevelt to a landslide re-election in 1936, within months of his victory he faced determined political opposition. A once docile Congress rallied against the Administration's Supreme Court reorganization plan, and Southern Democrats broke from Roosevelt's ranks to join Republicans in handing the President a stunning defeat. In the wake of this setback, the 1938 mid-term elections loomed as a major test of Roosevelt's political strength.

The 1938 Kentucky Senate primary between Alben W. Barkley and Albert B. Chandler emerged as the focal point of the national political struggle over Roosevelt's program. After a quarter-century in Congress, Barkley had

become Senate Majority Leader, a position he used to
give unwavering support to Roosevelt and the New Deal.
Kentucky’s popular Governor “Happy” Chandler represented
the conservative Democrats who sought to wrest control of
the party from Roosevelt. A victory for Chandler would
have been a severe blow to the President’s prestige and
a boon to New Deal opponents.

In addition to the national implications of the race,
the personalities of the two contenders also distinguished
the Kentucky campaign. Barkley achieved the kind of promi-
nence no Kentuckian had known since Henry Clay, the “Great
Pacifcator” of the mid-nineteenth century. Chandler is
recognized as the most colorful Kentucky politician of the
twentieth century. Either man could anticipate an easy
victory over a weak Kentucky Republican Party in the gene-
ral election. The clash of these two powerful personali-
ties in the 1938 senatorial primary added to the reputation
of a state already known for the “damnedest” politics.²

The writer wishes to acknowledge his gratitude to Dr.
David D. Lee, thesis director, and to committee members

² Malcolm Jewell and Everett W. Cunningham, Ken-
tucky Politics (Lexington, Ky., 1968), n. p. The oft-
quoted poem by Judge Mulligan reads in full:
The moonlight falls the softest in Kentucky
The summer days come ofttest in Kentucky
The songbirds are the sweetest in Kentucky
The Thoroughbreds are fleetest in Kentucky
Mountains tower proudest
Thunder peals the loudest
The landscape is the grandest--
And politics--the damnedest, in Kentucky.
Dr. James D. Bennett and Dr. Francis H. Thompson for their many hours of patient assistance. The Western Kentucky University Faculty Research Committee also facilitated work on this project with a generous research grant. The writer also benefited from the assistance of the staff of the University of Kentucky Department of Special Collections and Archives; Terry Birdwhistell and William Cooper were particularly helpful. Finally, I owe thanks to several Kentucky political sources and educators who provided invaluable information through interviews, letters and telephone calls.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface .................................................. iii

I. Kentucky Politics and the Making of a Campaign ............................. 1

II. Chandler's Challenge: Barkley and the New Deal on Trial ............... 30

III. Improper Campaign Activities: the WPA and the State Machine ....... 65

IV. Poisoned Water and a New Deal Victory ....................................... 89

Epilogue ..................................................... 111

Appendix I .................................................. 113

Appendix II .................................................. 114

Critical Bibliography .................................................. 115
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Analysis showed that the 1938 Kentucky Senate primary became the focal point of a national political struggle over the New Deal. The Kentucky campaign was the most significant of the mid-term elections which represented a major test of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's political strength. Senate Majority Leader Alben W. Barkley gave unwavering support to Roosevelt and the New Deal while his opponent, Kentucky Governor Albert B. Chandler, represented conservative Democrats who sought to wrest control of the party from Roosevelt. The clash of two powerful Kentucky politicians and the widespread use of federal and state patronage distinguished the campaign. Barkley's victory is attributed to his political skills and the enduring popularity of the New Deal.
I. KENTUCKY POLITICS AND THE MAKING OF A CAMPAIGN

The conflicting characteristics of politics in Kentucky reflect, in part, its status as a border state. Southerners were the primary settlers of Kentucky—which became the first state west of the Allegheny Mountains in 1792—but the state also shared a long border with the Northern states of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. Consequently, on the eve of the Civil War Kentucky had become both a center of the slave trade and a hotbed of emancipation sentiment. Opposition to slavery centered in the southeastern mountains, where Union strength flourished during the war, while the planters of the Jackson Purchase in far western Kentucky supported the Confederacy. 3

After the Civil War, Kentucky, like most Southern states, fervently embraced the Democratic Party. By the 1890s, a factional struggle within the party threatened to shatter its political supremacy. Small farmers and a nascent urban middle class revolted against the domination of monopoly capitalism while the established Bourbons backed the powerful public utilities, coal and oil companies, and railroads. In Kentucky, the political strife came to a head in spectacular fashion in 1899 when reformer William Goebel of Northern

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Kentucky won the Democratic nomination for governor on the twenty-sixth ballot. Goebel promised to implement the reforms he had advocated for twelve years in the State Senate—increased taxation and regulation of railroads and public utilities, anti-trust legislation, and increased opportunity for labor.4

Goebel's call for railroad regulation was anathema to the Louisville and Nashville Railroad Co., which responded to his nomination by uniting with other threatened industries to revive the moribund state Republican Party. Following a close, bitter campaign, the state election board declared Republican candidate William Taylor the winner in the general election. Goebel charged fraud and he and his supporters marched on the state capital at Frankfort to demand an investigation. Prepared for just such a demonstration, the L & N had shipped in trainloads of armed Republicans and, in the midst of the tumultuous event, Goebel was gunned down by an unknown assassin. The dying man nevertheless took the oath of office. When Goebel died four days after the shooting, Lieutenant Governor J. C. W. Beckham became the state's chief executive. Although the L & N and the burgeoning corporate interests lost the battle, they won the war because the zeal for reform seemed to perish with Goebel.5

For more than two decades after the turn of the century, the powerful economic interests which had toppled Goebel

dominated Kentucky politics. Both political parties were deeply influenced by the L & N, the state coal industry, tobacco warehousemen, whiskey distillers, and the racehorse industry's Jockey Club. Candidates for office could count on either well-financed support or opposition, depending on their willingness to court the state's economic overlords. Control by the "interests" remained unchallenged until 1923 when Western Kentucky Congressman Alben William Barkley decided to make the pivotal race of his political career.6

Barkley's tenure in politics already spanned nearly two decades when he opposed the candidate backed by the state's formidable economic groups in the 1923 Democratic gubernatorial primary. Barkley had emerged in Horatio Alger fashion from birth on November 24, 1877 in a log cabin in Lowes, a rural Western Kentucky community. The first of eight children, Alben worked closely with his father, John Barkley, a tenant farmer and sometime railroad hand. Memories of hard labor for scant financial reward on the Graves County farm always remained with Barkley, and help to explain his support for farmers and laborers. Young Alben took an early interest in politics, spending many nights by the cabin fire, listening to his parents and his grandmother as they recalled politicians in the family's past.7

A hard worker with a huge appetite, Barkley was fairly typical of rugged backwoods farmboys, except in one important

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respect—his gift for oratory. "My A'ben's been blessed with a silver tongue," John Barkley proudly remarked. At age twelve Alben wore his best Sunday knee-pants when he served as orator at the annual Children's Day at the Presbyterian Church in Lowes. Thereafter, he took particular delight in county court day and other speech-making occasions. Barkley engaged in formal debate after enrolling in Marvin College in Clinton, Kentucky, where the family relocated in 1892. After practicing his oratory for hours while alone in the woods, Barkley became accustomed to winning the gold medal in debate competition. He obtained the A. B. degree in 1897, financing his education with a Clinton College janitorial scholarship. (A plaque at the school years later proudly proclaimed "BARKLEY SWEPT HERE.")

Barkley planned to employ his oratorical skills in politics, but realized that the study of law was a necessary first step. He borrowed $175 to enter Emory College law school in Atlanta but returned home after one year, his funds depleted. Barkley became law clerk for a Paducah judge before advancing to court reporter at a salary of $50 a month. The work provided him with excellent experience and the opportunity to meet scores of influential people and future Barkley voters. Most of all, though, the job whetted his appetite for a political career. He saved enough money to take

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8. Bela Kornitzer, American Fathers and Sons (New York, 1952), 88; Libbey, Dear Alben, 5-6.
special courses at the University of Virginia law school before gaining admission to the Kentucky bar in 1901.\(^9\)

Barkley settled in Paducah, married Dorothy Brower, "a well-known local beauty," in 1903, and began his rapid rise in politics. He decided to oppose the two-term incumbent for county attorney in 1905, campaigning house-to-house and farm-to-farm on muleback. By the end of the campaign Barkley had traded the mule for a one-eyed horse named Dick, and was riding high as a landslide winner. The ambitious twenty-eight year-old prosecutor exposed widespread corruption among county officials, thereby saving taxpayers thousands of dollars. Barkley was so successful that he had no Democratic opposition when he announced his candidacy for county judge in 1908, but in the minds of voters he still was linked in party affiliation with the corrupt Democratic officials he had helped remove from office. Barkley's Republican opponent hammered away at the revelations of Democratic corruption, admitting only when pressed that Barkley was not guilty of any wrongdoing. Barkley's victory margin after the hard-fought campaign was smaller than usual in the heavily Democratic

county, but he was one of the few majority party survivors
in the wake of the Democratic scandals.  

Judge Barkley made road-building, bridge renovation,
and improved financial record-keeping the hallmarks of his
four-year administration. Barkley's ambitions transcended
the boundaries of McCracken County, however, and he made
plans for election to Congress in 1912. The fact that he
had lived in three counties in the First Congressional Dis-
trict helped Barkley overcome three Democratic primary oppo-
nents, and he easily won the general election. By the end
of this, his third campaign in seven years, the sturdy,
blue-eyed figure with protruding jaw and oversized ears
was familiar to thousands of Western Kentuckians.  

As a freshman representative in 1913, Barkley "appeared
to be an amalgam of reform-minded leaders[William Jennings]
Bryan, Theodore Roosevelt, and Woodrow Wilson." Barkley
quickly demonstrated the same loyalty for Wilson that he
would display later for Franklin Roosevelt: he lauded vir-
tually every Wilsonian program and later spoke of the former
Princeton professor as the dominant intellectual influence
of his life. Barkley supported progressive causes which re-
lected a belief, strengthened by the circumstances of his

10. Kornitzer, Fathers and Sons, 99; Libbey, Dear Alben,
10-13; Gerald S. Grinde, "Politics and Scandal in the Progres-
sive Era: Alben W. Barkley and the McCracken County Campaign
of 1909," The Filson Club History Quarterly, 50 (April, 1976),
36-51. Grinde suggests that although Barkley was not implica-
ted in any of the corrupt practices, he may have known for some
time about the illegal activities of fellow McCracken County
Democrats.

childhood, that many Americans needed the assistance only the national government could provide. Barkley performed the requisite political tasks in his district and became virtually unassailable; he was re-elected, usually without opposition, to seven consecutive two-year terms. 12

In November, 1922, during his fifth term in Congress, Barkley announced his candidacy in the 1923 gubernatorial election. Before entering this race, Barkley's strength in Western Kentucky had allowed him to remain aloof from the two major factions that dominated Commonwealth politics in the 1920s. However, when he decided to oppose J. Campbell Cantrill—the Eastern Kentucky congressman supported by the coal companies and the Jockey Club—he joined the opposing faction headed by former Governor J. C. W. Beckham. Barkley's campaign platform advocating a tax on coal and the elimination of para-mutual betting constituted a direct attack on the state's dominant industries. The Paducah congressman explained that "good government" could not be achieved without passage of these reforms to free politics from domination by the "interests." 13

Although the entrenched machine defeated him by the narrow margin of 9,000 votes out of 241,000 cast, the 1923 election proved to be a turning point in Barkley's political career. Indeed, Barkley shrewdly used the gubernatorial

12. Ibid., 245; Libbey, Dear Alben, 15.

campaign to make himself a statewide rather than a regional political force in preparation for the 1926 senatorial campaign. Despite its opposition to the "interests," the Louisville Courier-Journal only reluctantly supported Barkley in 1923 because he had refused to rule out a campaign for the Senate in 1926 even if elected Governor. In his autobiography, Barkley conceded that he entered the 1923 campaign despite having "no particular ambition to become Governor." With the backing of Beckham's anti-Cantrill faction, Barkley garnered widespread support, charmed hundreds of audiences, and placed himself in a commanding position to enter the United States Senate race.  

As a result of the bitter factionalism within their own ranks, Kentucky Democrats in the mid-1920s faced an intolerable situation: Republicans held both Senate seats for the first time in history. When Barkley announced plans to challenge incumbent Senator Richard P. Ernst in 1926, he won the Democratic nomination by acclamation. For his campaign manager, Barkley chose Congressman Fred M. Vinson, later Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, who enjoyed good relations with the coal industry. The coal operators

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14. Ibid., 123-33; Libbey, Dear Alben, 35-43; Barkley, That Reminds Me, 130-31. Barkley spoke as many as sixteen hours a day and slept only a few hours each night, thereby earning the nickname "Iron Man." The campaign pace may have been too much for Cantrill, who died between the primary and the general election. After Cantrill's death Barkley declined to be considered as the party's nominee, again evidencing his greater interest in the Senate than the Governorship. The Democratic State Central Committee eventually selected another congressman, William J. Fields, who then won the general election.
and the Jockey Club needed no encouragement to support Barkley, however, since they were eager to see him in the Senate and thus no longer a reform threat within the State. National Democratic Party sources such as New York financier Bernard Baruch helped Barkley garner campaign funds while the candidate traversed the state denouncing the Republican protective tariff and appealing to rural Kentuckians who were not beneficiaries of "Coolidge prosperity." The "Iron Man" proved more successful in his second statewide canvass, unseating the incumbent by 20,000 votes.¹⁵

Barkley had succeeded in uniting Kentucky Democrats behind his campaign, but within the year the party again exploded in a bitter factional dispute. Party reformers persisted in efforts to overcome the political influence of the state's ruling oligarchy by nominating J. C. W. Beckham for Governor in 1927. The enigmatic Beckham, who had inherited the reform mandate from Goebel in 1900 and then failed to exercise it, articulated a platform almost identical to Barkley's in 1923. Beckham called on a score of favors due him from his past administrations to defeat the rival faction in a primary which left a fractured state party in its wake. Defeated within the Democratic Party by Beckham, the coal and racehorse moguls simply plowed their resources into the Republican campaign coffers. The Jockey Club reputedly doled out $1 million, much of it going directly into the hands of election officials who "counted" ballots. The

¹⁵ Libbey, Dear Alben, 46-48.
predictable result was the defeat of Beckham by some 30,000 votes and the election of Flem D. Sampson, a politician from the southeastern coal region.16

The 1927 gubernatorial campaign once again demonstrated the futility of opposing the state's powerful economic overlords. By the 1931 gubernatorial election, the Democrats had united behind Hopkins County Circuit Judge Ruby Laffoon, whose views were sufficiently in line with those of the coal and racehorse interests. With the Democratic Party in relative harmony, Laffoon won the general election by a wide margin.17 The new Governor quickly proved unable to lead a state reeling under the impact of the Depression. Laffoon appointed a record number of Kentucky Colonels and pardoned more prisoners than any of his predecessors, but he did little to alleviate economic hardship wrought by the financial collapse.

In addition to being an ineffective administrator, Laffoon made some devastating political blunders. The Governor severed the tenuous bond between rival Democratic factions when he dismissed powerful Highway Department Commissioner Ben Johnson, a longtime political force from Nelson County. Johnson took his son-in-law, State Auditor J. Dan Talbott, with him when the split occurred. Laffoon exacerbated the divisiveness by proposing a controversial sales tax designed to bolster the depleted State Treasury. Such

17. Ibid., 49-55.
a proposal during the depths of the Depression proved disastrous for the Laffoon faction. Johnson and Talbott quickly sought to capitalize on Laffoon's tactical errors by finding a suitable candidate to oppose the Administration. The man they chose was Albert Benjamin Chandler.18

Chandler was born on July 14, 1898 near the Western Kentucky town of Corydon. The youngster experienced trauma early in childhood when his mother abandoned the home, leaving the four-year-old to be raised by his father, Joe Chandler, the town handy-man.19 Young Albert played sports, joined the boy scouts, peddled newspapers, and generally became known as a "good boy." After high school he entered Lexington's Transylvania College with nothing but "a red sweater, a five dollar bill and a smile," promising his father he would never drink or smoke. He worked two jobs while attending school, yet found time to pitch baseball, quarterback football, captain the basketball squad, run track, sing in the glee club, and perform on the stage. To accompany his photograph in the senior year college annual, Chandler requested the Biblical inscription, "Happy shalt thou be and it shall be well with thee" (Psalm 128:2).

18. Fenton, Border States, 27-30; Interview of Tyler Munford by Terry Birdwhistell, Sept. 18, 1975, Albert B. Chandler Oral History Project (University of Kentucky Special Collections).

Thereafter, the nickname "Happy" stuck with the gregarious young man. 20

After attaining the B. A. degree, Chandler completed a year at Harvard law school, but returned home to finish his legal studies at the University of Kentucky. Chandler, who rarely displayed eagerness for legal practice, studied law mainly to prepare himself for a political career. After law school Chandler moved to Versailles, a small Bluegrass town near Lexington, where he taught school and played and coached baseball all over the state. He married Mildred Watkins, a local teacher, and started a family. The affable Chandler became an active joiner; he belonged to the Masons, Shriners, Legionaires, Optimists, the Episcopal Church, and, of course, the County Democratic Committee, which he chaired. In plotting his political career, Chandler confidently bypassed the usual preliminary steps and made his first race for the State Senate in 1929. The young candidate attracted statewide attention by singing on the campaign stump, eliciting tears with the saga of his motherless childhood, and generally entertaining appreciative audiences. Chandler won the initial race by a surprisingly large margin. 21

The Senate gave Chandler a rapid lesson on the innerworkings of state government and an opportunity to expand his circle of acquaintances. Veteran politicians who had


observed a lifetime of intrigue in Frankfort advised the promising young man, whose infectious smile won him many friends. Faction leaders Ben Johnson and Dan Talbott shrewdly welcomed Chandler into their political camp, inaugurating a strong friendship that prompted Chandler to name his two boys, Ben and Dan, after his two mentors. The two insiders recognized that Chandler's innate political appeal combined with their sage guidance could produce a dynamic political phenomenon. 22

In 1931 Kentucky Democrats opened their first nominating convention in thirty years, determined to avoid the bitter factional strife which had cost them the last gubernatorial election. Ruby Laffoon's Western Kentucky forces had the votes to assure his nomination for Governor, but for the sake of unity they sought to placate the opposing faction. Consequently, through the influence of Johnson and Talbott, "'Happy' got dealt in for lieutenant governor," as a former state representative and active Democrat at the time put it. The popular Chandler had done little in his two years in the Senate to alienate fellow Democrats and, in any case, the lieutenant governor traditionally had been relegated to an innocuous role. 23

22. Interview, Munford; Interview, Ollie J. Bowen by Terry Birdwhistell, March 19, 1974. Albert B. Chandler Oral History Project (University of Kentucky Special Collections).

23. Interview, Frank D. Peterson by Terry Birdwhistell, July 28, 1977), Albert B. Chandler Oral History Project (University of Kentucky Special Collections); Interview, Munford.
Once installed in office, however, an ebullient and vigorous personality such as Chandler was unlikely to fade into the woodwork. When the Laffoon sales tax issue shattered Democratic harmony midway through the Governor's term, Chandler's position as presiding officer of the Senate provided an ideal forum to lead the opposing forces. He used the Senate leadership post to rail against the tax, arguing that it would further strap the beleaguered consumer and the "common man," whose cause the lieutenant governor championed. Chandler's opposition to the sales tax revealed a conservative political philosophy which advocated eliminating constraints on the individual so that he could improve his own plight rather than involving government directly in his behalf.24

Chandler allied with another young politician, Speaker of the House John Young Brown, Sr., to defeat the sales tax. In retaliation, Laffoon declared war on his lieutenant governor in 1934 and pushed through a measure stripping Chandler of his authority to preside over the Senate. The combination of the Depression and Laffoon's feckless leadership had, by this time, brought the state perilously near collapse; the federal government already had assumed administration of Kentucky's relief program. Laffoon threatened to empty the penitentiaries and close the schools if he failed in another attempt to pass the sales tax. After a

series of special legislative sessions, a three-cent levy finally passed by a single vote. 25

Chandler's opposition to the sales tax won him statewide notoriety and the uncontested leadership of the anti-administration forces. In 1935 he announced plans to unseat the Laffoon faction, setting up one of Kentucky's more memorable gubernatorial campaigns. Laffoon, constitutionally ineligible for a second term, had groomed Thomas S. Rhea, chairman of the state highway commission, to be his successor. As always, the stakes were high. Malcolm Jewell and Everett Cunningham have noted that:

In Kentucky the Governor is usually recognized as the most important leader in the Democratic Party. The governorship is the major prize sought by the rival factions in the party, and the outcome of the gubernatorial primary and the general election determines which faction will dominate the party for the next four years. 26

Laffoon sought to avoid a bitter internecine battle byappointing Rhea at a party convention. The Laffoon-controlled Democratic State Central Committee had adopted the nominating format in 1931, but when the Governor made it clear that Rhea would be chosen by the same method, the opposing faction, the press, and even the Roosevelt Administration, cried foul. A few influential Democrats, including J. C. W. Beckham and Barkley, opposed the closed convention on principle and urged Roosevelt to dissuade Laffoon. In a well-publicized letter, the President informed

Laffoon that such a nominating procedure countered the spirit of New Deal politics. Although Barkley pressured Laffoon to abandon the convention, the Senator had little to gain from enmeshing himself in state political struggles and therefore he avoided an active role in the campaign.

Despite mounting public criticism, Laffoon insisted on the party convention method. Since he controlled the Democratic State Central Committee and most county organizations, Rhea's nomination would be assured. Chandler would have had little chance in 1935 but for a critical mistake by Laffoon. On February 15, 1935, while attending a meeting at the Governor's office, Talbott overheard an aide informing Laffoon how much time he had before departure of a train. Talbott discovered that Laffoon and Rhea were travelling to Washington in search of federal highway funds and to sell the President on Rhea.

In view of the volatile political situation, Laffoon perhaps should have been more wary of leaving the reins of government in the hands of his lieutenant governor. In any case, the wheels of intrigue began to turn. Chandler's coterie of advisors, led by Talbott and Frankfort attorney Clifford Smith, sought to capitalize on a constitutional provision which gave the lieutenant governor full executive power.


authority during the governor's absence from the state. On the morning of February 6 Chandler marched into the governor's executive office and drafted a proclamation calling a special session of the legislature to enact a compulsory primary law.29

Laffoon and Rhea had barely arrived in Washington before they heard the stunning news and scurried back to Kentucky. Laffoon covertly slipped into Ashland—to avoid being served an injunction prohibiting revocation—and declared Chandler's call invalid. Word went out to Administration men that they were not to appear in Frankfort for the session. However, Chandler supporters and legislators eager to receive their pay responded to the call. The battle inevitably landed in the courts, where a circuit judge, who later received an appointment to the federal bench on Barkley's recommendation, decided in Chandler's favor. When the Kentucky Court of Appeals upheld his decision by a four to three majority, Chandler had won an important victory.30

Laffoon remained in position to choose his successor until he committed a final, decisive blunder. When legislative debate began on the primary bill, Laffoon and Rhea introduced a surprise of their own. Rather than choosing a candidate by a simple majority, they proposed a law requiring an absolute majority of all votes cast, with a runoff primary deciding between the two top vote-getters if

29. Ibid., 280; Interview, Munford.

30. Baylor, Dan Talbott, 280; Shannon, "Kentucky Epic," 179.
necessary. The Rhea forces apparently hoped to deadlock the General Assembly on the issue so that it could be adjourned without passing a primary law. Failing that, they believed the anti-Administration forces would wither after the first primary and the Laffoon machine could then take over for Rhea. Chandler, however, did not seem to fear the prospect of a double primary and it passed with his endorsement. 31

When the campaign began, voters witnessed the antics of probably the most colorful and energetic campaigner in Kentucky history. Chandler crisscrossed the state, a whirlwind of hand-shaking, baby-kissing, and song-singing. He broke the tradition of long stump speeches and concentrated instead on pointed political sallies against his opponent, whom he dubbed "Sales Tax Tom." Chandler delighted crowds with his tenor voice, trained through years of singing in church choirs and college fraternity functions, and often concluded an appearance with a rendition of his theme song "Sonny Boy." 32

Chandler displayed the rare ability to move an audience emotionally. The young man who had progressed so rapidly inspired his listeners; he demonstrated that success still could be attained in a time of depression and uncertainty. In stark contrast to Chandler stood laconic Tom Rhea, the machine man, some sixty years of age and woefully lacking

in charisma. His efforts to dismiss Chandler as a mere "roadside song boy" failed, but the Administration still commanded great influence. Many local officials and recipients of state patronage owed allegiance to Laffoon, who had spent four years building what one chronicler called "the most powerful political machine in Kentucky's history." Rhea won the August 3, 1935 primary by 13,435 votes.  

The Democratic campaign would have ended there had it not been for the Administration's runoff clause, which required the winning candidate to receive more than fifty percent of the vote. Fredrick A. Wallis, who had declared for governor using a slogan of "jobs, not bread lines," and two other minor candidates garnered enough votes to force a second primary. A mysterious character, the Kentucky-born Wallis had become rich selling life insurance in New York and had profited from the "invention" of a bogus cure for drug addicts. Returning to Kentucky, he had bought a farm near Lexington, entered local politics and, during the Depression, administered relief programs.  

After the first primary Chandler persuaded the defeated Wallis, who had a knack for fund-raising, to chair his campaign finance committee. The lieutenant governor also solicited support from disaffected Democrats, inviting them "to get on the bandwagon for the tailgate is down." Chandler


34. Leupold, "Kentucky WPA," 157.
disdained the usual courthouse approach to politics and concentrated on public gatherings, using a blaring sound-truck for the first time in a Kentucky gubernatorial campaign. "Happy" entertained at least four or five audiences a day, singing, calling out the names of friends in the crowd, and constantly promising to repeal the hated sales tax. "There was always hypocrisy in Happy's speeches," recalled former Union County state representative Tyler Munford, "but he was saying what the people wanted to hear." Chandler gradually wore down Rhea, who was tied too closely to the sales tax and in the end proved to be "a kingmaker instead of a king." On September 7, 1935 Chandler scored a 26,449-vote victory, picking up sixteen counties that had been in Rhea's column a month previously. 35

Chandler's canvass in the four weeks between primaries excited great interest and, combined with another month of publicity, lured an additional 44,806 voters to the polls for the second ballot. In addition to winning most of the new votes, Chandler's campaign became a haven for what one student of the election called "a queer assortment of fighting factions and hostile leaders, some of whom had been bitter foes for forty years." Chandler dominated returns from the Bluegrass and the middle of the state. He also won majorities in the major cities of Louisville, Lexington, and Covington, typically achieving the best results in the more

35. Shannon, "Kentucky Epic," 181; Interview, Munford; Jewell, Kentucky Votes, II, 16-17.
prosperous areas of the state and in Democratic counties. Rhea controlled most of his native Western Kentucky and also won the majority of votes in the mountains, where Democrats in traditionally Republican Eastern Kentucky were most susceptible to influence through patronage.36

After a few days rest, Chandler opened his campaign against the Republican nominee, Circuit Judge King Swope of Lexington. Swope had planned to oppose Rhea and the Laffoon machine, but instead confronted a popular new political figure who had become the champion of the issue Swope planned to stress—opposition to the sales tax. To make matters even worse, Chandler's base of strength in the Bluegrass coincided with Swope's and thus removed a geographic advantage the Republican nominee would have had over the Western Kentuckian Rhea.

Swope could only hope that Democratic in-fighting would doom his opponent, but Chandler quickly disappointed him by embracing the nominee for lieutenant governor, Keen Johnson of Richmond, who had been allied with the opposing faction. Most other former Administration men, although not Laffoon and Rhea, leaped onto the beckoning Chandler bandwagon. Senators Barkley and Mills Logan also supported the party nominee. In desperation, Swope resorted to allegations that Chandler pressured recipients of federal relief to vote Democratic. National Republican partisans claimed that

millions of Works Progress Administration dollars had been funneled into the state to coincide with Chandler's campaign. Although the WPA work force had increased dramatically in Kentucky, the surge coincided with national trends. Furthermore, the Republicans grossly overestimated the amount of federal relief money being expended in Kentucky and, while it would hardly be surprising if partisan Democrats used the WPA in Chandler's behalf, there is no evidence to blame Swope's defeat on such chicanery. Rather, the national Democratic ascendancy and the appeal of an exciting political luminary defeated Swope. Chandler won the general election by 95,158 votes.37

Chandler set the tone for his Administration in the inaugural, a "people's" ceremony devoid of the traditional pomp and ostentatious display. The thirty-seven year-old Governor declared that it was a time of national recovery and Kentucky would do its part by slashing government spending, reducing taxes, and balancing its budget. Chandler had been in office only a matter of days when he initiated a bold reorganization program that became known in some circles as "Kentucky's New Deal." He demanded the resignations of all appointive officials and purged 10,000 employees from the state payroll "without creating a vacancy." Chandler fully realized that patronage, as one observer put it, was "the mother's milk of Kentucky politics,"

so, under the watchful eye of the unofficial patronage chieftain, Dan Talbott, loyal Chandlerites replaced former Laffoon supporters.  

Chandler formed an all-volunteer reorganization commission, headed by the sage political warhorse Beckham, to seek means of cutting government expenditures. In what may have been the most effective move of Chandler's entire administration, he persuaded Dr. James Martin of the University of Kentucky to become the state's first Commissioner of Revenue. Essentially non-political and widely respected by all factions, Martin spearheaded an effort to get the state on sound financial ground and he won Chandler's endorsement of an income tax on individuals and corporations. It served as a cornerstone in Kentucky's development of "one of the best balanced and most progressive tax systems in America."  

When the state legislature convened on January 7, 1936, Chandler called for an immediate end to the sales tax even while pledging to wipe out by 1939 the state's $25 million debt. The Chandler adherents who had been appointed to key positions in both houses did not need to exert pressure; the sales tax repeal passed by an overwhelming majority. The Louisville Courier-Journal reported after the first week of the session that "but a handful--a small handful __________

39. Peirce, Border South States, 238.
at that—remained in opposition." Chandler opted for a unique legislative method, adjourning after thirty-nine days the General Assembly which normally met for sixty days every two years. Rather than having a bundle of ill-conceived legislation rushed through the assembly in its final hectic days, Chandler chose to dismiss the lawmakers only to call them back for a special session beginning February 16. Administration forces shepherded through the legislative process a reorganization bill prepared by Beckham's commission and a streamlined Chandler budget. The Governor ordered appointment of personnel and expenditures for state programs centralized under his own authority, prompting scattered outcries of dissent. Attorney General Beverly Vincent denounced Chandler for setting up "a political oligarchy the like of which Huey Long never dreamed" and Commissioner of Agriculture Garth Ferguson, embittered by Chandler's dismissal of eight of his employees, accused the Governor of attempting "to build an invincible political machine and establish an empire to perpetuate an oligarchy in power in the state of Kentucky." 40

These elected officials could not be fired by the Governor, but no other state employee would have survived such criticism. Chandler occasionally took a position on the floor next to the speaker during roll call votes, taking notice of anyone who dared to oppose him, and he sometimes rose to subject the brave foe to a punishing vituperation.

Such tyrannical methods were rarely necessary since most legislators cooperated with the Chandler program. "You couldn't afford to be against him," recalled former state representative Ollie J. Bowen of Lawrenceburg. "He advocated the things the people wanted." 41

Chandler's repeal of the sales tax endeared him to thousands of Kentuckians, but the lost revenue also left the state short of funds needed to balance expenditures. The shortfall required new measures to complement Professor Martin's income tax. After negotiating personally with leaders of the industry, Chandler hammered out a "compromise" tax on the state's new distilling industry, which had re-emerged with the repeal of Prohibition. The Governor also secured an inheritance tax before achieving what has been called "a political miracle in Kentucky." After the legislature defeated a proposed tax on tobacco consumers during his absence from the state, Chandler declared himself ready for a good fight and proceeded to bludgeon through a levy on Kentucky's perennial number one cash crop. 42

When he finally freed the haggard legislators from the series of special sessions, Chandler could sit back momentarily to assess what he had done. In less than six months he had revolutionized the tax base, dispersed the income tax burden, and enacted legislation no previous governor would have dreamed of proposing. Chandler elicited praise

41. Interview, Bowen.

42. Shannon, "Kentucky Epic," 183.
from a surprising range of sources, including Senator Barkley, who observed in May, 1936, that Chandler had "made a remarkable record in dealing with the difficult problems of state government." 43

In his book The Border South States, Neal R. Peirce concluded that Chandler's financial reforms offered both positive and negative features. The infusion of new ideas, Peirce wrote, "was vital for Kentucky because the state government had been creaking along with patched-up agencies and personnel of the 1880s and 90s. Chandler brought in a crew of bright young men who were the first real innovators in state government in some forty years." On the negative side, however, Peirce maintained that Kentucky is still paying the price for the years between 1936 and 1960, when the absence of a sales tax and the prevalence of Chandler's pay-as-you-go philosophy stopped almost every kind of public construction in its tracks. It was in those years that Kentucky dropped to the bottom of the list in education and many other fields, depriving itself of a generation of growth necessary to give its people decent incomes and a chance to compete in the latter-day twentieth century economy. 44

Chandler remained in control of the General Assembly in the mid-term legislative session, securing passage of a child labor amendment which twice previously had been soundly defeated. When critics blamed Chandler's personnel cuts for a 1936 prison insurrection and the escape of several convicts from the state penitentiary, he personally

44. Peirce, Border South States, 238-39.
took charge of the recapture of escapees and coolly appeared before the prisoners to pledge better treatment. He kept the promise by initiating construction of a new penitentiary. 45

Even a prisoner uprising seemed like child's play when compared with the sordid events of "Bloody Harlan" in the 1930s. Chandler, like his two predecessors, faced periodic violence in the mountains when coal miners seeking a union contract were summarily fired, driven from their homes, beaten, and sometimes murdered by imported "goons" and industrial police described as being "as arrogant as Nazi storm troopers." The police and local courts invariably sided with the coal operators, whose determination to avoid unionized labor knew no bounds. The situation exploded on May 5, 1931, in the "Battle of Evarts" in Harlan County when one miner and three company policemen died in a shootout. The miners displayed increasing militancy, beating or slaying blacks and other cheap labor imported by the operators to work the idle mines. After nationwide press coverage and a congressional investigation of the violence caused the state embarrassment, Chandler urged the mine operators to recognize the union. On August 19, 1938, the Harlan County Coal Operators Association relented and signed a contract with the United Mine Workers of America. 46


46. Harry M. Caudill, Night Comes to the Cumberlands (Boston, Mass., 1962), 196-205; George B. Tindall, Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945 (Baton Rouge, 1967), 528-29.
Another crisis confronted the Governor in 1937 when heavy rains spilled Kentucky rivers over their banks for a ravaging assault on towns, cities, and mountain hollows. With thousands of Kentuckians still suffering privations from the economic collapse, the floods exacted a particularly harsh toll. From Paducah, to Louisville, to the Virginia border Chandler directed costly flood recovery efforts. In the same year expanded programs for the mentally ill and appropriations for the new penitentiary strained the budget, yet all were accomplished at less expense than during a comparable period of the Laffoon Administration. Chandler attained national recognition for his leadership, the New York Times referring to the "outstanding impression made by the Governor." 47

Such commendations, especially from influential national sources, heightened Chandler's already considerable self-esteem. When Chandler got the subservient legislature to pass a resolution endorsing Senator Mills Logan for a vacant United States Supreme Court post, his action confirmed what most political observers already suspected: the Governor had set his sights on national office, including a future run for the Presidency, and he meant to continue his meteoric political ascent in the United States Senate. Despite Chandler's best efforts, Logan did not receive a judicial appointment; thus the Senate vacancy Chandler planned to create for himself failed to materialize. The only other

prospect for immediate entry into the Senate lay in challenging Barkley, already a veritable political institution in Kentucky, the Senate Majority Leader, the President's "Dear Alben." Good sense dictated avoiding the fight against such a formidable foe, but Chandler believed himself to be a man of destiny. "Happy's" ambition would brock no obstruction. The fight was on. 48

48. Shannon, "Kentucky Epic," 188.
II. CHANDLER'S CHALLENGE: BARKLEY AND THE NEW DEAL ON TRIAL

The 1938 Kentucky Senate campaign was inextricably linked to the New Deal. President Roosevelt had won a smashing endorsement in the 1936 election when he defeated Republican Alf Landon of Kansas by eleven million votes, carrying all but two states. With record numbers of Democrats behind him in both houses of Congress, Roosevelt entered his second term with a powerful mandate. Conservatives could hope only for an event that would allow their voices to be heard above the din of New Deal Democrats. But then, a scant two weeks after the inaugural, Roosevelt provided his opponents with the opportunity they needed.

The court reorganization plan announced by Roosevelt on February 5, 1937 was one of the most egregious tactical errors of his entire Presidency. Perhaps overconfident in the wake of the landslide election victory, Roosevelt announced the controversial plan in a message to Congress without previously discussing it with the House and Senate leadership. The court reform plan was the President's answer to a series of Supreme Court decisions which emasculated the National Industrial Recovery Act, the Agriculture

Adjustment Act, and a New York state minimum wage law. Regarding the high court as a threat to virtually the entire New Deal, Roosevelt proposed to dilute its conservatism by adding a new justice for every jurist who declined to retire within six months of his seventieth birthday. Instead of bluntly declaring the need for an infusion of liberal blood, Roosevelt argued that the elderly justices were unable to keep pace with the court's crowded docket. The proposal would authorize the President to add immediately six new "co-adjutors" since there were six judges ages seventy or over.  

The "court-packing" bill aroused swift and widespread opposition. Even many liberals identified the President's use of the age criterion as a disingenuous ploy. Americans also were leery of tampering with such a venerable institution as the Supreme Court. Moreover, a large number of septuagenarians—particularly those in Congress—resented the blatant attack on the vitality of the elderly. Not the least offended was eighty-one-year-old Justice Louis Brandeis, one of the most ardent New Deal supporters.  

Despite the flood of adverse reaction, Roosevelt resolved to ride out the controversy, refusing even to consider compromise proposals. While Senate Majority Leader Joseph Robinson, who had been promised one of the new seats, worked zealously for passage of the measure, the


51. Ibid., 233-35.
conservative press rallied public opinion against the "dictator bill," drawing parallels with fascism. Even after the high court reversed its tack in the spring, upholding several New Deal programs, Roosevelt continued to press for a reorganization bill until mid-July when Robinson, weakened by the fight, died of a heart attack. With his death the Administration lost crucial votes which Robinson might have secured out of personal loyalty, and chances of obtaining even a compromise measure waned.\(^{52}\)

Robinson's death signalled the demise of the court bill and brought a fresh challenge to Presidential leadership. Funeral plans for Robinson were barely complete when Roosevelt penned the highly publicized "Dear Alben" letter to Barkley implying, without actually pledging, Presidential backing if Barkley sought the vacated leadership post. Barkley had been chosen assistant leader in 1936, perhaps because more senior senators preferred to hold committee chairmanships. Most senators expected Mississippi's Pat Harrison, ahead of Barkley in seniority and influence, to replace Robinson, but Roosevelt preferred the loyal Kentuckian who had opposed him on only one issue in five years—the President's veto (overridden by Congress) of a bill for early payment of a bonus for World War I veterans.\(^{53}\)

Barkley had attained national recognition by keynoting the 1932 and 1936 Democratic national conventions, unprecedented

\(^{52}\) Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism*, 123.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 146. *Literary Digest* (July 24, 1937), 12.
exposure which reflected Roosevelt's confidence in Barkley as a skilled orator and, more importantly, as a faithful New Dealer. "Both times," Jasper B. Shannon noted, "the voice had been Barkley's but the ideas were those of Franklin D. Roosevelt."54 Despite the insistence of Harrison and other senators that Roosevelt remain neutral in the leadership struggle, the President's men worked feverishly for Barkley, who claimed a one-vote victory (thirty-eight to thirty-seven) over Harrison on July 21, 1937. At least one senator, William Dieterich of Illinois, conceded that Presidential pressure prompted a change in his vote from Harrison to Barkley. Roosevelt's intervention won Barkley the Senate leadership post and the "Dear Alben" tag, which opponents used to characterize Barkley as the President's dupe.55

The court reorganization bill and the Senate leadership struggle widened the rift between Roosevelt and a group of Southern Democrats who had become, in the wake of the decline in Republican ranks after the 1936 election landslide, the leading spokesmen for conservative causes. These men had long been skeptical of New Deal spending programs, but the President's popularity and the economic emergency silenced them during Roosevelt's first term. However, in the summer of 1937 the Southern bloc gained momentum under the unlikely leadership of the Vice President of the United States, John


55. Patterson, Congressional Conservatism, 123.
Nance Garner of Texas, who had been rankled by the court plan and Roosevelt's sympathy for organized labor. Among the events which accelerated the Southern opposition were (1.) the South's loss of its veto power over Presidential candidates through the elimination at the 1936 Democratic convention of the traditional two-thirds nominating requirement; (2.) the spectacular growth of organized labor resulting from the occasionally violent "sit-down" strikes of 1937, which were greeted with a "hands-off" policy by the Roosevelt Administration; and (3.) the appointment to the Supreme Court of Alabama Senator Hugo Black, a liberal New Dealer in spite of his past ties to the Ku Klux Klan. After these developments, Roosevelt's selection of the seemingly obsequious Barkley to replace the popular Robinson further alienated the conservative Southern bloc. The rift widened when the new Majority Leader allowed an anti-lynching bill to be brought to the Senate floor, reviving fears of Northern interference with Southern racial practices.56

Still reeling from the political setbacks, Roosevelt found that his economic recovery program had collapsed. In June, 1937, the President slashed spending in an effort to curb inflation, but his action set off a sharp decline in industrial activity; a "sell psychology" on the stock market; a significant increase in automobile inventories; and a rise in the unemployment rolls of two million workers before the

New Year arrived. With the economy still faltering, and Congress in disarray after the leadership and court reorganization fights, Roosevelt failed to achieve any of his major legislative programs in 1937. As William Leuchtenburg noted, "A year after his overwhelming triumph in the 1936 election, Roosevelt appeared to be a thoroughly repudiated leader." 57

Conservative Democrats, particularly the Southern bloc, sought to capitalize on Roosevelt's declining prestige in the 1938 elections. Clearly, their goal was to gain control of the party before the 1940 Presidential nominating convention. Although it is difficult to determine how much the Old Guard Southerners influenced Chandler's decision to run against Barkley, they realized that the defeat of the President's hand-picked majority leader would strike a powerful blow against Roosevelt's control of the party. 58

Chandler knew many of the Southern conservatives, but his closest tie was to Senator Harry Flood Byrd of Virginia. The affable, pink-faced Byrd, like Chandler, entered politics at an early age and advanced rapidly. He became a senator in 1933 at the age of thirty-six after serving as a legislator, governor, and state party leader. A fiscally conservative governor, Byrd cut back spending and reduced corporate taxes. Chandler, whose wife was a native Virginian, became acquainted with Byrd and visited him in Berryville, Virginia after the Kentuckian received the 1931 nomination for lieutenant

governor. When Chandler became governor four years later, Byrd's gubernatorial administration in Virginia served as his model. As Chandler noted, "He reorganized the government of Virginia and I reorganized the government of Kentucky." The men developed a lasting friendship that included periodic visits among family members. "I loved him like a brother and he loved me," Chandler recalled.59

Byrd and fellow Democratic senator Carter Glass controlled what one historian called "the most powerful state machine in the nation" and therefore could oppose Roosevelt even at the height of his popularity. Although an early supporter, Byrd broke with the President in 1934, opposing both the NRA and the AAA; wage codes and taxing policies of the two agencies cut into the profits of Byrd's prosperous apple orchards. The Virginian became a frequent critic of the President and emerged as one of the leaders of the Southern revolt in 1937. It appears likely therefore that Byrd encouraged the Kentucky governor to make the race against Barkley, but only after Chandler failed to reach the Senate by other means.60

Early in his gubernatorial tenure Chandler decided he had to build a national reputation in the Senate to put himself into contention for the 1940 Presidential nomination. The Governor's swift rise to a position of considerable

59. Patterson, Congressional Conservatism, 29; Interview with Albert B. Chandler, March 6, 1981.

60. Patterson, Congressional Conservatism, 21, 29-30; Shannon, "Presidential Politics," 159.
power in Kentucky had nurtured glorious ambitions. Even as a boy in Corydon, Chandler frankly declared his intention to become President of the United States. "There will be a new President in this country someday," said Chandler in July, 1937. "And I have as good a chance as anybody." When a Lexington minister informed the governor that he had "the divine spark" and was "destined," Chandler envisioned for himself a mandate from heaven. 61

Chandler's early efforts to boost himself into a position of national prominence revolved around the Senate seat held by Mills Logan. Recalling Logan's support for Rhea in 1935, Chandler attempted to unseat the junior senator by convincing J. C. W. Beckham to oppose the incumbent in the 1936 Senate Primary. Chandler may have believed that he could somehow replace Beckham, who was nearing seventy, before the full six-year term expired. In any event, Beckham's prospects declined with the entry of a third candidate in the primary, John Y. Brown, who claimed Chandler had promised in 1925 to support him in a Senate bid. Chandler denied the alleged arrangement and the former allies became bitter factional enemies. 62

When Logan gained a narrow primary victory and then won re-election in the fall of 1936, Chandler's senatorial ambitions apparently depended on either opposing Barkley in

61. Shannon, "Presidential Politics," 159-60; Lexington Herald, July 25, 1938; Chandler interview.

1938 or waiting until 1942 to seek Logan's seat. By mid-
1937, however, the resourceful governor had arrived at a 
fresh approach, recommending on several occasions that Logan 
be appointed to a position on the federal bench, thereby 
creating a Senate vacancy for Chandler. When Justice George 
Sutherland retired, Chandler got the General Assembly to 
petition Roosevelt on January 10, 1938 to appoint Logan to 
the Supreme Court. Logan eagerly sought the appointment, 
exhorting a friend of Chandler's to press the national admin-
istration even harder, but at sixty-three he was hardly the 
right age for appointment to the Supreme Court by a President 
who fought Congress for the cause of vigorous, young justices. 
On Barkley's recommendation, the appointment went to another 
Kentuckian, Stanley Reed of Maysville.63

Angered by the unwillingness of Barkley and Roosevelt 
to cooperate with his ambitions, Chandler began to consider 
making the race against Barkley. Although rumors about the 
Governor's ambition long had been rife in Kentucky politi-
cal circles, Chandler first made his intentions known pub-
licly at a long planned testimonial dinner for Barkley on 
Saturday, January 22, in Louisville. Chandler, who had re-
ceived an early invitation to the dinner, not only declined 
to attend but scheduled a rival luncheon on the same date. 
Welfare Commissioner Fredrick Wallis, Chandler's onetime 
gubernatorial foe turned ally, cited discussion of state

63. Courier-Journal Magazine, Jan. 16, 1938; Shannon, 
"Presidential Politics," 160.
welfare programs as the ostensible purpose of the luncheon, but Chandler's decision to keynote the affair exposed it as a political gathering designed to counter Barkley's honorary dinner. 64

More than 1,000 persons, including many state legislators, the publishers of the state's two major metropolitan newspapers, and both the mayor and Democratic Party leader of Louisville, attended the Chandler luncheon at Louisville's elite Pendennis Club. A letter from Roosevelt explained that he could not accept an invitation but wished to commend Chandler's record in welfare matters. Chandler then spoke extemporaneously about welfare improvements made by his administration through construction of new facilities. Toward the end of his talk, however, the Governor turned to politics. Applause interrupted Chandler when he assured his listeners that Lieutenant Governor Keen Johnson would be a capable successor "if by chance you people want me to represent you in any other capacity." Chandler then delivered barbed remarks about the impending Barkley dinner. Noting that five New Deal senators planned to salute Barkley at the affair, Chandler declared that "When I go back to Frankfort this afternoon . . . I won't call upon any senators from the North to come help me. I have had all I could do to take care of my own business at Frankfort and now that I am getting it pretty well in shape, I may decide to take a hand in theirs." A Louisville Courier-Journal political

A few hours later some 1,300 persons crammed into the Brown Hotel dining room to fill their plates with boned breast of squab and hear praise heaped upon Senator Barkley. The highlight of the evening was not Barkley's prepared speech, but a letter from Roosevelt, who knew of Chandler's threatened challenge and chose the testimonial dinner as a forum to declare his full endorsement of Barkley's re-election. Roosevelt sent his personal secretary, Kentuckian Marvin McIntyre, to read the letter which said in part:

Senator Barkley's long familiarity with national affairs, his integrity, his patriotic zeal, his courage and loyalty and his eloquence in enunciating and elucidating problems and principles give him exceptional equipment as a legislator and as a leader.

Senators Sherman Minton of Indiana and Lewis Schwellenbach of Washington also spoke of the importance of Barkley's return to the Senate. The only mention of Chandler was Minton's quip that, "We in Indiana can't fish the Ohio River without getting a license from Happy Chandler."66

Chandler's remarks at the rival luncheon convinced Barkley that the Governor planned to oppose him in the 1938 Senate primary. Previously, Barkley had underestimated Chandler's temerity and, according to one Barkley partisan,


66. Libbey, Dear Alben, 78; Courier-Journal, Jan. 23, 1938. The other senators in attendance were Matthew Neely of West Virginia, Joseph Guffey of Pennsylvania, and Harry S. Truman of Missouri.
had Chandler's personal assurance that he would not run. "I have been surprised," the Barkley man lamented, "that so seasoned a campaigner as Barkley appears to have been taken in by these statements." Barkley admitted in his biography that he had been "somewhat surprised" to learn of Chandler's intention to run. 67

Once convinced of the Governor's opposition, Barkley acted quickly. The morning after the honorary dinner, as he prepared to return to Washington, Barkley officially announced for re-election, naming attorney Shackelford Miller, chairman of the Louisville-Jefferson County Democratic Executive Committee, to head his campaign. The announcement did not silence Chandler's ambitions, however. On January 24 the Governor told reporters that he had telephoned the President's son, James Roosevelt, to tell him that if a Chandler-Barkley senatorial race occurred, "I would be the senator from Kentucky and Senator Barkley would not be." 68

Just as a wrenching, internecine campaign seemed inevitable, an unexpected opportunity to avoid the clash arose on January 26. The death of federal Circuit Judge Charles H. Moorman brought renewed efforts by Chandler to clear his path to the Senate by negotiating Senator Logan's appointment to the federal bench. Within a few days, however, Logan declared that he would not be party to "a deal" to

67. J. J. Greenleaf to Urey Woodson, Jan. 10, 1938, Urey Woodson Papers (University of Kentucky Special Collections); Barkley, That Reminds Me, 163.

avoid the Barkley-Chandler race by relinquishing his Senate seat. Logan admitted privately that he preferred the judicial post over the Senate, but, he mused, Chandler had "gone so far in the matter that it made it impossible for me to consider it." 69

In a last-ditch effort to avoid the divisive primary campaign, several influential Kentucky Democrats—supporters of both Barkley and Chandler—arranged a meeting in Washington between the Governor and President Roosevelt. J. Dan Talbott joined Chandler on the journey to Washington for the January 31 meeting. During a twenty-minute tête-à-tête at the White House, Roosevelt sagely advised Chandler to be patient and await a better opportunity. "I reminded him that he didn't wait himself," Chandler recounted. "He popped it to them when he had the chance." 70

A tense political chess game unfolded that Monday in Washington, with Chandler's chat with the President representing only one gambit. Indeed, Tom Rhea and John Y. Brown followed virtually on the Governor's heels, arriving at the White House for their own meeting with the President. Rhea emerged from the brief session saying Roosevelt "left no doubt" that he supported Barkley over Chandler, while Brown pledged to join the bandwagon against the man who "double-crossed" him in the 1936 Senate election. Barkley also

69. Ibid., Jan. 27, 1938; Mills Logan to Tom Underwood, July 25, 1938; Underwood Papers, Politics, Name File (University of Kentucky Special Collections).

took the offensive. In what appears to have been a pre-conceived, same-day counter-attack to Chandler's Washington pilgrimage, Barkley released a statement bitterly denouncing the Governor's activities.

For months I have been threatened from Frankfort with opposition in my race for re-election to the Senate unless I entered into a conspiracy which would have involved Senator Logan, the President of the United States and me, to find some way to eliminate Senator Logan from the Senate by appointing him to something else in order to avoid opposition to me. Accusing Chandler of "contemptible threats" and "despicable expediency," Barkley said neither he nor Logan had been "willing to bring about the appointment of a federal judge at the point of a pistol." 71

Later the same day Chandler shrugged off Barkley's attack, declaring that "I am so well known I don't have to issue any statement bragging about my integrity. The Southern Senators are helping me. Several, including Senator Harry F. Byrd of Virginia, called on me today and I expect to see others informally tomorrow." The next day Chandler emerged from a closed-door meeting with Senators Byrd and Harrison appearing confident of his campaign prospects, although many Kentucky Democrats, some of whom Chandler counted as political advisers, continued to urge the Governor to avoid the primary struggle. As a contemporary chronicler noted, "Many of his sage advisers warned him of the reckless nature of his action," but "... having threatened to run

71. Ibid., Feb. 1, 1938.
for the Senate, the Governor had to make good or lose face." 72

When Chandler returned from Washington on February 2, an enthusiastic, banner-waving crowd greeted his train on cue in Frankfort. Escorted back to the Executive Mansion by state policemen and the Frankfort High School Band, Chandler hinted to reporters that he would announce his candidacy later in the month. He recalled how he had stood up to "that fellow" [Roosevelt], telling him that "I was from Harvard, too" in case the President thought he was dealing with a mere "country boy come to the city." The Governor told the friendly legislators who greeted his return that "The time to run is when you are in and have someone on your side." 73

Shortly after his return to Frankfort, Chandler began huddling in strategy sessions with Talbott and other top advisers. During the cold days of early February they debated campaign strategy and prepared to fire the engines of Chandler's political machine. On February 10 Talbott convened a gathering of state employees in a state-owned building in Frankfort to announce the formation of "Chandler for Senator Clubs." The patronage chieftain frankly acknowledged that the clubs were meant to ensure "loyalty from the members in the coming campaign." On Saturday, February 12

Lieutenant Governor Johnson introduced Chandler as "Your next United States Senator" at a banquet of the Kentucky Association of Highway Contractors. The Governor invited the highway men, who depended on state contracts for most of their business, to climb onto what he promised would be "the biggest bandwagon Kentucky has ever seen." Once again Chandler declared that the Senate might only be a rest area on his route to destiny. "I may be President of the United States the next time. How do you like that?" 74

In addition to mobilizing state employees and contractors, Chandler and Talbott sought to employ the legislature in behalf of the Governor's campaign. The Kentucky General Assembly, convening for its biennial session in the winter of 1937-38, already had mirrored Chandler's political intentions by endorsing Logan for the Supreme Court. A state Senate committee controlled by the Administration now undertook consideration of a bill to advance the primary election from August to June. Questioned about the proposal while in Washington, Chandler said an early primary "might do some good" since Barkley would be shepherding the Congress and thus unable to campaign. However, the Governor backed off the proposal a few days later, apparently deciding that the benefits did not outweigh the public opposition such a blatant political maneuver would arouse. 75

75. Ibid., Feb. 1 and 3, 1938.
The same risk did not prevent Chandler from advocating a proposal to give Republicans an opportunity to vote in the Democratic primary. On February 14 the legislature debated a bill allowing persons to change their party registration before the primary election. "The Republicans have got a right to vote," Chandler obliquely responded to questions about the proposal. Chandler expected the Republican, anti-New Deal sympathies to accrue to his benefit, but the Governor could not enlist enough votes to secure passage of the bill.76

Chandler's threatened grab for the GOP vote and his advocacy of a voter registration and purgation law prompted damaging opposition from Louisville Democrats. The latter measure called for a sweeping review of registration records to remove ineligible voters from the rolls. Louisville Mayor Joseph D. Scholtz said the proposed law threatened to undermine the city's Model Registration Act, and decried Chandler's mobilization of "the almost limitless patronage attached to the office of Governor." Scholtz declared that "the vaulting political ambition of one man threatens the political integrity and self-government of a great city." On March 11 Chandler signed the controversial purgation bill, which became effective immediately under an emergency clause. Thus, early in the campaign Kentucky's major urban center posed stiff opposition to Chandler's bid.77

76. Ibid., Feb 3 and June 16, 1938
77. Ibid., Feb. 6 and March 12, 1938.
While Louisville showed signs of falling to the enemy, Chandler arranged a show of strength in Frankfort. "Chandler for Senator" buttons and banners filtered through a crowd of 5,000 at a supposedly spontaneous rally at the State Capitol on February 19. Chandler's speech reflected the verdict of numerous campaign strategy sessions; he had decided to pledge personal loyalty to Roosevelt while depicting Barkley as a do-nothing senator who had lost interest in Kentucky. "I am President Roosevelt's friend and everybody knows it," Happy declared. Using a loudspeaker, Chandler referred to "fat, sleek Senators who go to Europe and have forgotten the people of Kentucky except when they run for election." Chandler injected into the campaign the fact that Barkley's two daughters married non-Kentuckian husbands who were on the federal payroll. "These jobs should have gone to some worthy young Kentuckian," said Chandler, asking the enthusiastic throng to wait a few more days for his formal announcement of candidacy. The Governor, superstitious by nature, had decided to make his announcement on February 23 in Newport, the Northern Kentucky city where he opened the 1935 gubernatorial campaign. 78

Chandler also hoped to secure the endorsement of his bitter gubernatorial foe, Tom Rhea, before officially declaring for the Senate. Unlike John Y. Brown, Rhea had not endorsed Barkley after meeting with Roosevelt on January 31. Chandler and Lieutenant Governor Keen Johnson, the nominee

78. Ibid., Feb. 20, 1938.
of the Laffoon-Rhea organization in 1935, arranged a curious rendezvous with Rhea in a Nashville hotel on February 21. John A. Whitaker, a friend from Rhea's native Logan County in southwest Kentucky, attended the Tennessee conference and recorded that "Happy is offering Tom the world with a fence around it. . . . He tells Tom there are only two organizations--his and Tom's."

Writing on February 23 to Kentucky Democratic national committeeman Urey Woodson, a close Barkley partisan and longtime Roosevelt supporter, Whitaker advised that "Tom hasn't committed himself to anyone." However, "I think if someone close to the President would get in touch with Tom it might help." On February 28 Rhea emerged from the White House, his vanity apparently replenished by a second, hastily arranged meeting with the President, to tell reporters, "It would be a calamity to lose Senator Barkley as Majority Leader." What remained of the once-dominant Laffoon-Rhea organization now belonged to Barkley. 79

Failure to win Rhea's support did not, of course, deter a beaming, fist-clinching Happy Chandler from formally declaring his candidacy for the Senate at the annual banquet of the Campbell County Chamber of Commerce on February 23. Chandler billed himself as "a man of action to replace a man of words." Naming Judge Brady Stewart of Barkley's home in McCracken County as his campaign manager, Chandler

proclaimed, "I go into the battle with a smile on my face and a song in my heart." Without mentioning his opponent's name during the one-hour speech, Chandler referred to the senior Senator as "a stranger to the State" who "has given Kentucky the absent treatment."³⁰

Although the Governor and his strategists had decided not to criticize Roosevelt directly, Chandler's policy statements carried a decidedly anti-New Deal tone. Contrasting deficit spending in Washington with the fiscal conservatism of his own administration, Chandler advocated

establishing in Washington what we've already established in Kentucky, a decent, respectable government. . . . We've got to undertake to pay the national debt . . . We've got to cut governmental costs. We've done it in Kentucky and now we are prepared to lead the way in Washington.

Thus Chandler's early campaign attempted to walk a fine line by implying personal support of Roosevelt while attacking his chosen Senate leader and the fiscal policies underlying the New Deal.³¹

The Senate campaign entered an early lull in March as the rumors, angry denunciations, and Washington pilgramages gave way to quiet behind-the-scenes politicking. Both sides launched efforts to register friendly voters after the Administration's new registration law extended the deadline to June 7. Chandler monitored the General Assembly, held a tight rein on the state political organization, and renewed

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the granting of Kentucky Colonel commissions after having previously "outlawed" them. Always an energetic campaigner, Chandler made plans for an extensive stump schedule, pledging to shake hands with every voter in the state. In his public appearances the Governor continued to assail Barkley and big-spending in Washington.  

By early April, however, it became apparent that Chandler's attacks against the national debt and deficit spending failed to gain him any momentum. His advisers warned that voters perceived such statements as anti-Roosevelt at a time when the President, who carried Kentucky by 172,242 votes in 1936, remained highly popular. Their fears deepened on April 10 when Dr. George Gallup published the results of his "America Speaks" survey, which showed that "Senator Barkley is leading Governor Chandler by about 2-1." The scientific sampling showed that although "it is true that President Roosevelt's personal popularity has declined somewhat with all groups of voters since the beginning of the business slump... the sentiment of rank and file Democrats still points to New Deal victories in the Democrats' own primaries."

The news would have chilled anyone but a "born optimist" such as Chandler. Privately, the Governor insisted that the recession would continue, that anti-Roosevelt sentiment would mount by August, and that he expected to benefit from it. Chandler apparently based his confidence at least

partially on the assurances of outside industrialists, businessmen, and the anti-New Deal senators. Commenting on the political dangers of Chandler’s anti-New Deal rhetoric, widely read Courier-Journal Frankfort reporter J. Howard Henderson suggested on April 3 that the "important men" Chandler consulted may have given the Governor "a distorted view." 84

Chandler continued to cite Barkley’s long residence out-of-state and his European vacations as evidence that he "shamefully neglected" Kentucky while "enjoying magnificence." In contrast, Chandler said "I've never gotten so big nor so important that I couldn't devote all my time and interest to the people of the state." Although the Governor presented himself as a friend of the national administration, stating that "President Roosevelt said he hasn't had any trouble in Kentucky since I became Governor," Chandler still persisted, despite his advisers' warnings, in calling for a balanced federal budget and in attacking the "pump-priming" economics upon which the Roosevelt program depended. "Contrary to the beliefs of some," the Governor admonished, "it isn't possible to spend your way to prosperity." 85

For all his campaign rhetoric and the power inherent in the Governor's office, opinion polls continued to reflect Chandler's failure to dent Barkley's sizable lead. In

84. Interview, W. E. Crutcher by Terry Birdwhistell, July 11, 1978 (University of Kentucky Special Collections); Courier-Journal, April 3, 1938.

85. Chandler interview; Courier-Journal, April 22 and 29, 1938.
mid-May a second "America Speaks" survey showed Chandler trailing Barkley sixty-five percent to thirty-five percent. Gallup reported that, despite some slippage due to the sluggish economy, it was a "persistent fact that within the Democratic Party the New Deal wing still far outnumbers the conservative wing."  

86

While Chandler contemplated his lack of progress, Barkley conducted a plodding campaign based on his experience and his loyalty to the President. Restricted to weekend appearances because of congressional business, Barkley relied on the canvassing of his Kentucky organization. However, many of the Senator's close associates feared a loss of support for Barkley since there had been no challenging primary campaign since the 1923 gubernatorial race. Moreover, as one observer noted, Barkley "is not a typical machine politician" and "ordinary patronage seems to bore him." Barkley's inability to maintain a cohesive organization and his failure to mount a stronger fund-raising effort prompted national committeeman Urey Woodson to complain that "it is a very hard thing to do anything for a man like Barkley." Nevertheless, the Senator's organization held sway in Louisville under the city's "political boss" Mike Brennan, Mayor Sholtz and campaign director Miller, while Mrs. Lennie McLaughlin and federal Judge Elwood Hamilton, the co-managers of Barkley's 1923 campaign, again rallied to his cause. Henry Ward, a former state representative and influential newspaper editor,

also worked doggedly as Barkley's publicity director. The Barkley name, of course, continued to command great influence in Western Kentucky whereas the relief provided by the New Deal promised support from many impoverished Eastern Kentucky mountain communities. The Barkley camp identified Chandler's areas of strength as his native Bluegrass and Central and Northern Kentucky, areas where the Governor had most liberally distributed patronage.  

Beyond geographic considerations, Barkley counted on his close ties with the President and the universal appeal of the New Deal to generate support. He appealed to the state's three major voting blocs--rural, urban and labor--by citing New Deal programs that assisted them, while equating a vote for Chandler as a vote against Roosevelt. In his first campaign confrontation with Chandler, at Lexington's Phoenix Hotel on April 21, Barkley shook hands with his opponent before stepping to the podium to extoll the national administration, reminding the audience of "the complete collapse" that preceded the New Deal. "We have preserved the substance of democracy in solving the problems of the American people," said Barkley, solemnly denying hostile press allegations that Roosevelt was a dictator.  


88. Lexington Herald, April 22, 1938.
Smiles abounded as Barkley (left) and Chandler met for the first time during the campaign on April 21 in Lexington. Both candidates addressed the Democratic Woman's Club of Kentucky, whose Lexington branch president, Mrs. R. L. Northcutt, also is pictured.
Barkley seemed to enjoy campaigning, which provided welcome relief from the tedium of Senate affairs. Chandler's motto of "A man of action, not words" and his derisive reference to Barkley as "Old Alben" stirred the sixty year-old Senate leader to energetic displays. On May 15 Barkley shoveled dirt at a ground-breaking ceremony for a half-million dollar flood control project in Middlesboro and then "cut the rug" with co-eds at a University of Kentucky dance. After the day's activities the smiling Barkley quipped, "See, I'm a man of action." Noting Chandler's attempt to make his twenty-six year tenure in Congress a negative issue, Barkley said simply that he had "been there as long as people have kept me there. If I am any judge of sentiment, I believe I will be there six years longer."\(^{89}\)

Kentuckians who admired Chandler's boldness in challenging Barkley began to respect the latter's spirited response. On June 18, finally freed by the congressional recess, the "Iron Man" promised a vigorous stretch run. "If there are persons in Kentucky who think the iron that is reported to be in my blood has rusted away, let them follow me from now until August 6.\(^{89}\) In sharp contrast to Chandler's extemporaneous brevity, Barkley enhanced his reputation for long-winded stump speeches in the 1938 campaign. Although a two-hour political speech would seem tedious to a modern audience, a skilled raconteur such as Barkley provided a cherished form of entertainment in a time before television.

\(^{89}\) Courier-Journal, May 16 and June 12, 1938.
and other popular diversions. As Kentucky historian Thomas D. Clark has noted,

... political campaigning in Kentucky has been mightily dulled by modern technology. Who could take time on radio or television to wind up telling a juicy anecdote? Anyway these media have created a kind of public squemishness that has removed the earthy folkiness from public speeches.90

Barkley's speeches helped maintain his wide lead in the race, which inevitably prompted some defections from Chandler. The Governor's command of the General Assembly suffered a damaging blow in mid-May when state Senate floor leader Ralph Gilbert reneged on an earlier pledge to support Chandler. Gilbert called Chandler's early administration "outstanding" but said "a marked change in policy became apparent" as the Senate race developed. The Shelbyville Democrat accused Chandler of "exploitation of state projects and state employees for political gain." Gilbert seemed to twist the knife in his victim by remarking that "every practice condemned by the Governor in 1935 is being employed in his behalf in 1938."91

The setbacks suffered by Chandler coincided with the revived fortunes of New Deal candidates in national primary elections. After his endorsement aided New Dealer Lister Hill in a decisive senatorial victory in Alabama, Roosevelt contemplated direct Presidential involvement in state elections. Claude Pepper, the New Deal senator in Florida, faced

a significant challenge from the state's ex-governor and a congressman. On February 6 James Roosevelt announced that the President wanted Pepper re-elected. On May 3 Pepper won a huge victory with more than seventy percent of the vote.92

The Florida primary seemed to cap a series of events that eventually forced Chandler to reassess his campaign strategy. Pepper's overwhelming victory and congressional passage of a controversial Administration-sponsored wages and hours bill indicated rising prestige for Roosevelt rather than the declining support Chandler had predicted. The polls continued to show Barkley well ahead while other New Dealers across the nation remained strong. Chandler finally accepted the advice of supporters and silenced his rhetoric about the need for a balanced budget. There were no more press releases from Chandler headquarters to the effect that it would take 200 years to pay off the national debt. Instead of attacking the New Deal, Chandler claimed to be an adherent who was better equipped to assist the President because of his youthful vitality.93

The change of tactics prompted comment from the Barkley camp. Campaign manager Shack Miller challenged Chandler to admit that he opposed Roosevelt's program, saying the Governor would not because of Pepper's victory for the New Deal. "Ever since [the Florida election] Happy has been singing

93. Ibid., 162; Courier-Journal, June 11, 1938.
a different tune," Miller crowed. "He isn't making speeches against the President now."94

The Florida primary proved to be a pivotal event, influencing not only Chandler's strategy but also the Presidency of Franklin Roosevelt. Pepper's landslide, as Jasper Shannon noted, "seems to have had great influence on Presidential action. It appeared to make it safe . . . for national leadership to intervene in local elections." At a White House press conference on May 17 Roosevelt declined to confirm that he would abandon the traditional policy of non-intervention in state primary elections but reporters knew of the drafting of a Presidential campaign itinerary in the White House. Having volunteered early in the year to campaign for Barkley, Roosevelt on June 9 concluded plans to swing through the state in early July. In a fireside chat two weeks later, Roosevelt formally declared his "right" to intervene as "head of the Democratic Party" in "those few instances" where there was a clear choice between liberal and conservative candidates.95

The impending Presidential visit to Kentucky had Chandler concerned but, for all appearances, undaunted. The day after Roosevelt's pledge to intervene in local elections, Chandler downplayed the President's importance in the campaign, telling a Hopkinsville audience that his and Barkley's public

94. Washington News, May 1, 1938, quoted in Barkley Papers, Scrapbook (University of Kentucky Special Collections).

records, not Roosevelt and the New Deal, were the real issues of the senatorial campaign. Chandler also charged the Laffoon-Rhea faction with attempting to recapture control of the state. Delighting the crowd with race-horsing parlance, Chandler said John Y. Brown was the "lead pony," Mrs. Lennie McLaughlin "the jockey," Rhea the "stable boy," and Laffoon "the starter" in the effort to dislodge him. Chandler also scored some telling blows against his opponent, charging with some justification that Barkley did not speak of his personal record in Congress but ran solely on Roosevelt's accomplishments. Chandler detailed how Barkley, a former paid speaker of the anti-Saloon League, abandoned the "dry" cause "when he felt it was politically expedient" during the 1928 Presidential campaign of "wet" Al Smith. Finally, Chandler concluded his peroration by chastising Barkley and his immediate family for receiving "approximately $400,000 from the federal government in salaries and expenses." 96

While Chandler's rhetoric accelerated as Roosevelt's visit approached, national attention also focused more sharply on the Kentucky campaign. Actually, knowledgeable political observers had long seen the significance of the election on national affairs. Writing in mid-February, Arthur Krock of the New York Times described the Kentucky Democratic primary as the "Gettysburg of the party's internecine strife over national control in 1940." The outcome would "provide an unmistakable test of the President's

political leadership." As the campaign progressed, the national spotlight turned to reports that Barkley and Chandler employed the full measure of federal and state patronage to buttress their campaigns. Anti-New Deal forces nationwide seized upon the "politics in relief" charge as a result of alleged misuse of the Works Progress Administration in Barkley's behalf. 97

By the time Roosevelt embarked on his promised transcontinental political barnstorming tour, interest in the Kentucky election eclipsed all others. A huge national press entourage joined the President's train on July 8 as it rumbled from Washington to Covington, the Northern Kentucky city chosen for the President's first stop because it was one of Chandler's areas of strength. As Governor, Chandler received an invitation to join the President during his visit, although Roosevelt's aides worried about Happy's potential for mischief. Chandler, his wife, Dan Talbott, Keen Johnson, lesser elected officials, and state policemen joined the train at Cincinnati. Barkley and Shack Miller already were aboard. Roosevelt awoke from a nap in time to greet Chandler in the train's dining salon before their arrival. Barkley then rejoined the President as the train crossed from Ohio into Kentucky for the first of three stops. 98


A teeming, enthusiastic crowd greeted Roosevelt as the special chugged into the station at Covington. Seemingly unabashed by the President's appearance in support of his rival, Chandler gleefully joined Roosevelt in waving to the masses. The schedule called for the President to proceed by motorcade to Latonia Racetrack where he would deliver a speech. Presidential Secretary Marvin McIntyre, in charge of protocol, elected to seat Roosevelt, Barkley, and Chandler together in the open-topped car. The President entered the vehicle first, followed by Chandler, who by one means or another managed to sit next to the President. Barkley later claimed that Chandler "literally leaped over the President," momentarily alarming McIntyre and the Secret Service, in order to secure the middle position. According to Chandler's version, Roosevelt designated seating in the automobile. 99

In any case, scores of Kentuckians—whether incited by the "Roosevelt magic," the hot Kentucky political race, or both—lined the streets for the brief ride under an azure sky to Latonia. The President delighted in meeting large crowds, perhaps because his affliction with polio limited his ability to meet the public. "He was very upbeat," recalled Barry Bingham, Sr., then editor and publisher of the Courier-Journal, who traveled on the President's train and to Latonia. "He responded to crowds more enthusiastically

than any man I have ever seen. They just seemed to renew
his spirit . . . you could just see his adrenalin flow."100

When the motorcade rolled up to the grandstand at
Latonia, the President basked in the cheers of 50,000
people. A statewide radio audience also heard his speech.
Chandler again crowded nearer to the President than Barkley
and, smiling non-stop, waved and clinched his fists as the
President spoke. "Your Governor deserves due credit for
getting this state on a sound financial basis," said Roose-
velt, quickly adding that, "He never came to Washington and
went away empty-handed." The President then lauded Barkley
to the tune of raucous cheers for his support and leadership
in Congress. Roosevelt concluded his skillful oratory with
a firm endorsement of Barkley, which at the same time re-
mained friendly toward Chandler.

I have no doubt that Governor Chandler would make a
good Senator from Kentucky--but I think he would be
the first to acknowledge that as a very junior member
of the Senate it would take him many, many years to
match the national knowledge, the experience and the
acknowledged leadership in the affairs of our nation
of that son of Kentucky of whom the whole nation is
proud, Alben Barkley.

Chandler and the President parted company at Covington al-
though the Governor could have remained aboard the train if
he had wished.101

In Louisville, where virtually the entire police force
and hundreds of Fort Knox soldiers joined several thousand

100. Interview with Barry Bingham, Sr., March 10, 1931.
Thousands of supporters greeted the President during his July 9, 1938 campaign swing through Kentucky. Roosevelt is shown here joking with the crowd in Louisville, his second of three stops. Pictured left to right are Shackleford Miller, Mayor Scholtz, Roosevelt, and Barkley.
Roosevelt partisans, the President praised the city's recovery from the 1937 flood. Roosevelt said a planned national flood control policy would "make the Ohio Valley flood-proof for our children and theirs." When he mentioned the "splendid cooperation I've had from the senior senator from Kentucky," the crowd erupted in applause for Barkley. "Because of the great national problems, we need people of national experience," concluded the President, posing arm-in-arm with Barkley for photographers.102

In his final stop in Bowling Green, where the crowd vastly exceeded the city's population, Roosevelt again praised Barkley and also floated the slogan "We are again on our way" as a promise of renewed economic recovery. As he left the state, the President took a parting shot at Chandler for "dragging federal judgeships into a political campaign." Roosevelt chose Bowling Green to revive the judgeship issue before the home folks of Senator Logan, whom he praised for setting "an example in probity in public life" for declining to make a deal with Chandler. The President released to the press a letter he had written to Logan in February stating that Chandler made "the same proposition" when he met Roosevelt in Washington, "and seemed surprised when I told him that you and I would be the last people in the world to traffic in judicial appointments in order to satisfy the ambition of one office seeker."103

102. Ibid.
103. Park City Daily News, July 9, 1938; Courier-Journal, July 9, 1938; Lexington Leader, July 9, 1938.
Roosevelt also revealed another piece of correspondence, this one written on May 17 by White House Press Secretary Steven Early to Chandler, asking the Governor to correct a statement attributed to him "which is so at variance with the facts." The letter referred to quotes attributed to Chandler in early May in which the Governor insinuated that Roosevelt offered him "a soft job" if he would refrain from opposing Barkley. Barkley supporters supplied the letter to a national political columnist for broader circulation. When reporters confronted Chandler with the letter on July 9, their inquiries elicited a rare "no comment." 104

The President's swing through Kentucky, prompting as it did an outpouring of support for Barkley and the national leadership, clearly put pressure on the Chandler campaign. As usual, however, Happy responded gamely to the challenge. Back on the hustings, Chandler simply repeated Roosevelt's remarks that were complimentary of him while ignoring those that praised Barkley. "He says he's my friend, and I have made a good Governor, and I'll make a good Senator, and that's enough for me," Chandler explained. On at least one occasion Chandler implied that Roosevelt secretly favored him over Barkley, confiding that "The President seemed very

much pleased and patted me on the hand when I told him I would see him in Washington."105

While Chandler scrambled to ameliorate the impact of Roosevelt's appearances, Barkley appealed to Kentuckians who took pride in his proven close ties to the popular President. "Mr. Chandler says that I have been a 'yes man' to the President," Barkley told a Central Kentucky audience. "Well, I plead guilty to this charge. Maybe the Governor won't like it but I take some pride in confessing that I have been loyal and faithful to the President."106

Barkley's winning coalition emerged formidably in the wake of Roosevelt's Kentucky visit. Since polls before and after the Presidential appearance showed the Senate leader maintaining a consistent lead, Roosevelt's actions do not appear to have been decisive. However, many Kentuckians took pride in the President's warm reaffirmation of Barkley's close ties to the national leadership. Although he entered the final weeks of the campaign in commanding position, Barkley would not enjoy smooth sailing to primary day. On the contrary, the furor over "politics-in-relief" promised rough swells indeed.


III. IMPROPER CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES: THE WPA AND THE STATE MACHINE

In this campaign it was the patronage and highway boys against the WPA and other federal public works agencies. No one knows how much political shenanigans went on in this campaign . . .

Thomas D. Clark in *Kentucky: Land of Contrast*, 159.

President Roosevelt's decision to intervene in state elections provoked a new wave of bitter condemnation of the Chief Executive. Republicans and conservative Democrats described his involvement as a "purge" and capitalized on heightened public concern over the rising tide of European fascism by representing Roosevelt as a power-hungry dictator. The denunciations multiplied as Roosevelt, angered by his critics in Congress, displayed an increasing interest in defeating opponents of the New Deal in addition to re-electing its adherents. The discovery of political abuses committed in Kentucky and other states by the giant Works Progress Administration created a furious new battlefront for the anti-New Deal forces. The misuse of WPA in Barkley's behalf focused the national political spotlight on Kentucky and prompted a congressional investigation which uncovered additional improprieties on both sides.¹⁰⁷

The WPA emerged as a focal point of the 1938 political debate when the agency's administrator, Harry Hopkins, endorsed the New Deal candidate in Iowa, Congressman Otha Wearin, against incumbent Senator Guy Gillette. New Deal opponents promptly charged Hopkins with attempting to mobilize the WPA relief programs into a political machine. In Congress, Republicans and conservative Democrats fought the President's plans to rekindle the sagging economy with a large-scale spending program that included new millions for WPA and other New Deal agencies. Although Congress eventually approved the election-year expenditures, hostile senators on May 25, 1938 accused the Administration of "playing politics with human misery." A timely letter from Chandler campaign manager Brady Stewart fueled their charges. Addressed to the President but copied and widely circulated in the Senate, the letter claimed that "every federal relief agency in Kentucky is frankly and brazenly operating on a political basis." 108

Stewart's letter attempted to depict Chandler as a helpless victim of the mammoth federal relief program. Stewart alleged that relief agencies employed "crudely reprehensible" tactics and singled out the WPA as being "prostituted" to promote Barkley's candidacy. Kentucky WPA Administrator George Goodman dismissed Stewart's charges as "absolutely without foundation" while Hopkins offered to investigate if provided with "information of a sufficiently

specific nature." Hopkins, who had recently dismissed ten WPA employees for political activity in the Pennsylvania primary, also pledged to stand by a May 5 directive which warned all WPA employees against political activity. 109

The combination of Stewart's letter and Hopkins' endorsement in the Iowa race provided momentum to advocates of legislation to remove politics from relief programs. Even moderate New Dealers were concerned that the sprawling WPA, created in 1935 to provide emergency public employment, could serve as a political machine. Senator Carl Hatch of New Mexico had proposed legislation to curb political activities by federal employees as early as 1936, when charges involving the WPA in politics first surfaced, but the measure lacked administration support and failed again in 1938 to gain congressional approval. The press accused Barkley of opposing the Hatch bill for selfish political reasons. "The proposal to keep relief out of politics," noted Colliers magazine, "was killed by Senator Alben Barkley, the Administration leader in the Senate who is up for renomination." Barkley declared that the measure would "tie the hands" of federal employees while leaving state workers free to use their positions for political purposes. Barkley seemed to be advocating the right to employ federal political power to retaliate against state abuses. Columnist

Raymond Clapper called Barkley's argument against the Hatch proposal "a classic of political cynicism."\(^{110}\)

Barkley grew accustomed to "bad press" following his one-vote victory over Harrison for the Senate leadership. The same writers who depicted "Dear Alben" or "Bumbling Barkley" as the President's stooge now concentrated on the alleged use of federal agencies in the Barkley campaign. Conservative columnists Joseph Alsop and Robert Kintner, for example, reported that in a closed-door meeting in Barkley's office the Senator and Administration men devised plans to funnel federal dollars into the re-election effort. "Credible estimates of the share of taxpayers's funds now being allocated to help Barkley run as high as $52,000,000," the columnists claimed. The enormous sum included such projects as the Gilbertsville Dam [now Barkley Dam] which the anti-New Deal Chicago Tribune described as "an unspeakable piece of pork, sought by the Administration to help Senator Barkley in his fight for re-election."\(^{111}\)

Ironically, it was a New Deal supporter, Thomas Stokes, who created the greatest sensation with his reporting on the federal government's role in the Kentucky campaign. Beginning June 6, Stokes ran a series of eight articles

\(^{110}\) Colliers (July 16, 1938), 54; Washington News, May 27, 1938, in Barkley Scrapbook, Barkley Papers (University of Kentucky Special Collections); Congressional Record, 75 Congress, 3 Session (1938), 7996; Davis, Barkley: Vice President and Majority Leader, 65.

\(^{111}\) Detroit News, May 27, 1938, in Barkley Scrapbook, Barkley Papers; Chicago Tribune, April 2, 1938.
for Scripps-Howard, the nation's largest newspaper chain. Traveling 1,400 miles in the state and interviewing dozens of people, Stokes found that the WPA was "deep in politics" for Barkley. In addition, Stokes reported that Chandler "has thrown his whole state organization--one of the best political machines in the country--into the fight." Stokes, a veteran of seventeen years as a Washington reporter, summed up his findings in the opening paragraph of the series when he wrote: "A grand political racket in which the taxpayer is the victim is going on in Kentucky preparatory to the Barkley-Chandler senatorial primary."112

The Stokes' series focused national attention on the Kentucky race and precipitated an outpouring of press coverage of politics-in-relief. Many newspaper and magazine accounts were, as one student of the 1938 campaign noted, "little more than sensational journalism at its yellowest." The conservative press prominently displayed doubtful stories about impoverished widows being coerced out of their relief checks by Barkley partisans. Although reportorial hyperbole enhanced subsequent accounts, Stokes uncovered much substantial material and won a Pulitzer Prize for his reporting on the Kentucky campaign.113


The Stokes' series and the resulting press barrage prompted demands for a congressional investigation of politics-in-relief. In the last days of the 75th Congress, a five-member Senate committee, chaired by Texas Democrat Morris Sheppard, began to investigate allegations of improper campaign activity by federal agencies in Kentucky, Tennessee, Pennsylvania and other states. Hopkins directed Kentucky WPA head George Goodman to prepare a response to Stokes' charges for the newly created "Special Committee to Investigate Senatorial Campaign Expenditures and Use of Government Funds in 1938." Goodman could hardly be considered an impartial investigator, however, because of his close ties to Barkley. Although Goodman, who had made a fortune selling whiskey by mail, was perhaps an unlikely associate of a former Prohibitionist senator, the two men nevertheless found basis for friendship. As owner of the Paducah Sun-Democrat in the 1920s, Goodman had staunchly supported Barkley, who, in turn, secured Goodman's appointment to head the Kentucky WPA in 1934. 114

On Hopkins' order, Goodman conducted interviews and took affidavits concerning the charges of WPA political involvement. Stokes' evidence pointed to a wide range of activities, including threatening employees with dismissal for failing to support Barkley and coercing Republicans to change their party affiliation to be eligible to vote.

for the Senator in the Democratic primary. Goodman care-
fully collected and prepared responses to Stokes' allega-
tions and forwarded them to Washington. On June 29, Hopkins
released the findings of his internal investigation to the
press; the WPA administrator claimed to have refuted all
but two of Stokes' twenty-two charges. Two Kentucky WPA
men were disciplined, one for threatening to dismiss an em-
ployee for political reasons and the other for handing out
registration cards. Hopkins promised to "deal swiftly and
summarily" with any WPA wrongdoing, but attributed the wide-
spread charges against his agency to New Deal foes who were
"backed only by malicious partisan gossip."115

If Hopkins hoped his response would silence charges
of WPA involvement in the Kentucky race he was sadly mis-
taken. Stokes responded to the slap at his reporting in a
follow-up article, declaring that it was "natural that our
reports should disagree" since Stokes investigated the
Kentucky campaign objectively while Hopkins narrowly sought
to defend his agency. Hopkins' response failed to impress
the Sheppard committee and did little to silence WPA's
critics. An indiscretion by Hopkins' assistant Aubrey
Williams, who told a group of relief workers "We've got to
keep our friends in power," provided new ammunition for
New Deal opponents. The Senate more than doubled the
Sheppard committee appropriation and broadened its

115. George H. Goodman Papers, Box 3 (University of
Kentucky Special Collections); Courier-Journal, July 1,
1938.
investigative powers; by July the committee had sent an investigator to Kentucky for a fresh examination of Stokes' charges. 116

The Sheppard committee encountered great difficulty in evaluating charges and responses concerning WPA political activity. Donald S. Howard may well have had the Kentucky campaign in mind when he wrote in his massive study of the WPA:

> Not infrequently the controversy as to how much or how little politics there is in the WPA resolves into a battle of affidavits—the charges producing sworn statements that political skulduggery was going on, the defenders producing equally impressive affidavits supporting the lily-whiteness of their acts. Unfortunately, there is almost no body of data to help the impartial observer to make his choice between these two camps.

Thus, for example, if a WPA employee claimed his dismissal was for political reasons while his supervisors insisted the firing stemmed from dereliction of duty, neutral observers would be hard-pressed to prove or disprove either party. 117

Despite the difficulty of resolving specific cases, the evidence of WPA political activity in the Barkley campaign is overwhelming. Goodman's personal papers contain numerous items which reveal the use of WPA personnel and facilities for purposes that could in no way be part of


their normal function. Barkley's life-long friend conducted a county-by-county survey labeled "Political Analysis 1938" which included the party affiliation of county officials and the expected political impact of WPA projects. In a confidential letter, Goodman, acting on instructions from Barkley, ordered a regional WPA supervisor to hire a Barkley associate who had labor union connections and to arrange for him to "get around through the communities of the Western part of the state." In another confidential letter, this one to Harry Hopkins, Goodman noted that "in a quiet way we undertook to encourage all persons employed in this program to register [to vote] and have members of their families register." Other incidents, such as the formation of "Barkley for Senator clubs" in WPA office buildings and the distribution of campaign buttons and other paraphernalia, powerfully support a case for political involvement. 118

On the eve of the Kentucky primary, Senator Sheppard released a preliminary committee report revealing the discovery of "deplorable" tactics on both sides which constituted a threat to the "free and unpolluted ballot." When the committee released its final report at the opening of the new Congress in January, 1939, the five senators upheld Stokes on all but four of his twenty-two charges of WPA political activity. Although the Senate committee "found nothing to show that Senator Barkley had any knowledge

118. Goodman Papers, Box 2; Goodman to James B. Boddie, Feb. 28, 1938, Goodman Papers, Box 2; Goodman to Hopkins, July 23, 1938, Goodman Papers, Box 2.
of . . . political activity within the ranks of WPA personnel in his interests," evidence in Barkley's personal papers indicates otherwise. A detailed memorandum prepared by Barkley advisors Mildred Spalding and federal judge Elwood Hamilton contains a listing of activities of the WPA and other federal agencies in Barkley's behalf. They sent the memorandum to Barkley complete with a tentative schedule for the Senator to meet with key program administrators to enlist their assistance. Although local officials carried out most of the political activity, the memorandum shows that Barkley and his top campaign advisors sought to realize the benefits of employing federal agencies to bolster the Senator's campaign. 119

Hopkins attempted to explain the WPA activity in Kentucky as an uncontrollable product of local politics. When questioned about the improprieties in January, 1939, during Senate confirmation hearings on his appointment as Secretary of Commerce, Hopkins replied:

A political campaign starts, about as hot a political campaign as I have seen in America, and it was a hot one, and they threw everything at each other but the kitchen stove. Now you get down in some of those Kentucky counties and the local political party fellows started operating on our boys, and our boys caved in. Now that is what happened. 120


120. Nomination of Harry L. Hopkins to be Secretary of Commerce, hearing before the Committee on Commerce, United States Senate, Jan. 11, 12, and 13, 1939, 46.
Local politicians could dominate the WPA because of its organizational framework. Congress declined to place the WPA staff under the federal merit system, apparently because elected officials wanted to retain the right to make patronage appointments to the agency. Furthermore, because Kentucky had no centralized home relief authority, operation of programs generally fell into the hands of the state's 120 county judges. 121

Although county officials controlled the administration of relief, the number of persons employed by WPA depended on the allocation of funds from Washington. Roosevelt and Hopkins repeatedly faced charges of manipulating WPA employment rolls to facilitate election of New Deal candidates. For example, a national magazine claimed that Roosevelt’s 1936 campaign produced the "full flower of political relief. Here, in the face of a strong upward movement of all the basic economic indices, the relief rolls expanded from 17,900,000 in July to 19,113,000 in November." After Roosevelt’s landslide victory, the relief rolls declined. 122

Similarly, Chandler and opponents of New Deal candidates in other states charged that the WPA increased its work force for political purposes. Chandler claimed that


"the WPA wheels began to roll" soon after his entry into the campaign. The following table reveals that Kentucky's WPA work force expanded in 1936 and 1938 election years and contracted in the years immediately following.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Monthly Number of Workers Employed in Kentucky</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1939</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WPA, 1936 to 1939</td>
<td>55,218</td>
<td>42,309</td>
<td>60,467</td>
<td>50,507</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Estimates of the number of WPA employees during the campaign months of 1938—roughly the first seven months of the year—exceed the calendar year average shown above and are generally placed between 65,000 and 71,000 persons. Clearly WPA work rolls increased in Kentucky during the 1938 campaign. How much of the increase resulted from politics and how much from economics remains uncertain.

Chandler's efforts to capitalize on the national WPA controversy met with mixed success. The Governor scored

123. Howard, WPA and Relief Policy, 538-43. Statistics compiled by Howard also showed Kentucky to be near the national average in WPA employment although the state consistently had fewer relief cases proportionate to population than the national average.

124. Goodman Papers, Box 5; Hatcher, "Barkley and the Hatch Act," 255; Davis, Barkley: Majority Leader and Vice President, 70.

125. Leuchtenburg, Roosevelt and the New Deal, 256-57. Roosevelt's decision in the spring of 1938 to increase spending, including an additional $1.4 billion for WPA, stemmed not from politics but from an effort to combat the economic recession, according to Leuchtenburg. In any case, Congress had final authority over WPA appropriations.
well with his campaign manager's widely circulated letter alleging WPA abuses. Similarly, Chandler embarrassed Barkley by uncovering and publicizing one of the senior senator's rawest political maneuvers—the supplying of food to hungry mountain families, neatly packaged in paper sacks emblazoned "THIS FOOD WAS DONATED BY A FRIEND OF SENATOR ALBEN W. BARKLEY." However, Chandler trapped himself in rhetoric which denounced the spending for WPA in one breath and endorsed the demands of WPA employees for higher wages in another. The ambivalence reflected Chandler's inability to reconcile his conservative views with the popularity of New Deal programs. 126

Although the scrutiny of the Kentucky primary stemmed from charges of impropriety in Barkley's campaign, the press and the Sheppard committee also uncovered deplorable tactics in the Chandler camp. Even vehement anti-New Deal columnists Alsop and Kintner commented on the Governor's high-handed tactics after a visit to Frankfort. On July 13 they reported that

"... the blindest eye can see that Happy is anything but innocent. He has constructed for his own use, to oppose the federal machine, a state machine as ruthless and efficient as anything Kentucky has known. He is using it for all it is worth, caring quite as little as the federal people for the means to gain his ends." 127


Many state employees assisted the Governor's campaign with activities ranging from organizing precincts and preparing laudatory newsletters to ensuring by their presence en masse that crowds were of a size befitting a campaign address by the state's chief executive. Furthermore, supervisory personnel such as Emmett Durrett of the Department of Industrial Relations promised to deliver votes and monitor employees. "You can count on me," he wrote the Governor, adding that "if there is such a thing as a disloyal employee in this Department I haven't found it, and off the record--if I do, they [sic] won't be an employee long." 128

Despite such pressure from above, many state employees had little regard for Chandler's chances against Barkley, an attitude which prompted an angry Dan Talbott to dispatch a letter from campaign headquarters to supervisors in which he explained:

I am attempting to instill confidence into our workers because I feel that this is a vital element in the success of our race--but I find that this work is being counteracted by the pessimistic expressions of some of our state employees who feel that Governor Chandler cannot win the race. . . . I believe you will agree with me that such an attitude is damaging to our cause and I would appreciate it deeply if you would point out this feature to any employee . . . who is doubtful of Governor Chandler's chances to win. 129


When Chandler abandoned his anti-New Deal strategy in
the middle of the campaign, it signalled more than a
political decision to curb his rhetoric against government
spending; indeed, the Governor himself began to spend. In
eary June, for example, Chandler inaugurated a sweeping
$2,500,000,000 road program and began hiring "friends and
supporters of mine" as state employees. "In his quest
for votes in the August primary," the Courier-Journal's
Howard Henderson wrote, "the Governor has become overnight
one of the loudest champions of excessive expenditures."
Chandler's rural highway program bulged with 3,000 workers,
prompting one Barkley man to complain that the Governor
"has the highways lined with weed cutters." In one week
twenty new rural highway workers took jobs in Rowan County,
including seventeen "assistant maintenance foremen." Rural
Highways Commissioner Cecil Williams boasted in an official
form letter addressed to "Dear Friend and Voter" that

There has been more road building under the present
administration than any time since the creation of
the highway department, and we are just getting started.
If you have not gotten the road you want, remember
we have two more years under this administration.
... So, if you have been disappointed, just remember
your time will come. Be patient... We want to
build roads where they are appreciated and where we
can accommodate those who are loyal, tried and true."130

Chandler even employed Kentucky convicts in his cam-
paign. Barkley publicist Henry Ward revealed that the

130. Ibid., June 11 and July 28, 1938; Charles C.
Grassham to Urey Woodson, July 21, 1938, Woodson Papers;
Williams letter to Pulaski County voters, Barkley Box IX,
Barkley Papers.
prisoners made "Chandler for Senator" metal plates in the state license tag plant in Frankfort. The Governor stopped a General Assembly resolution to probe the matter while a state official lamely excused the activity because, he explained, the Chandler plates made money for the state. The Governor also accommodated liquor and beer distributors by thoughtfully extending their license deadline to just beyond primary day. "If a lot of free drinks are not served on his behalf it will be a great shame," noted the August 1 issue of *Time* magazine, which featured Chandler's smiling face on its cover. Chandler was even accused of raiding the state hatchery to provide entrees for campaign fish-fries.¹³¹

Perhaps the baldest and most controversial activity in behalf of Chandler's campaign was the personal delivery of old age pension checks, distributed by the state to some 54,000 Kentuckians under the Social Security Act. After Chandler ordered the checks handed over personally rather than by mail, Barkley charged that the deliverers threatened to withhold checks from elderly recipients unless they agreed to support Chandler. Welfare Commissioner Wallis hastily explained that the state "saved $2,000 by not mailing them," but the skeptical Social Security Board ordered an investigation. Talbott, characteristically, did not bother to deny the campaign tactic, telling the

¹³¹ Chandler Papers, Box 45; *Time*, Aug. 1, 1938, 10; *Courier-Journal*, July 13, 1938.
New York Times that "Those folks would be crazy not to vote for Happy . . . and it's a service to 'em to tell 'em so . . . . We told those field agents to line up the vote, but we also told them, 'now don't you go bulldoze those old folks.'" 132

The ruthless tactics employed by both the Barkley and Chandler organizations included improper fund-raising activities, although the Sheppard committee's report on this aspect of the campaign raised as many questions as it answered. The Senate's financial probe stemmed in part from a report by a Fayette County grand jury which "severely condemned" solicitation of contributions from state and federal employees. The grand jury reported on June 20 that employees of a state mental hospital and a reform school contributed to Chandler's campaign, although the donations were said to be voluntary. The jurors also found that Barkley partisans sent letters to WPA employees soliciting contributions. 133

Despite Chandler's statement to the Sheppard committee that he had not "received from any source any contribution, gift, service or anything else of value in behalf of my nomination," the committee found that the Governor's campaign received "in the neighborhood of $70,000" solely from "state employees whose salaries had been partly or

132. Davis, Barkley: Majority Leader and Vice President, 58 (f.n.); Courier-Journal, July 16, 19, 1938.

133. Lexington Herald, June 20, 1938.
wholly derived" from federal funds. The committee limited itself to investigating solicitation of federal funds and Chandler reported no private contributions. The committee also did not probe repeated allegations, denied by Chandler, that state employees were coerced into contributing 2 percent of their salaries to the Governor's campaign.

In addition to Barkley's charge that Chandler received contributions from the arch-conservative Liberty League, foes claimed that Texas oil millionaires and Pennsylvania steel magnates provided financial backing. No records of such contributions are available, although Chandler received at least one letter from an oil and gas company executive offering assistance. ^134

Barkley's record of financial contributions was even more mysterious. Solicitation of federal funds from persons within the Kentucky WPA, Federal Housing Administration, and even the Bureau of Internal Revenue, netted Barkley about $24,000, according to the Senate committee. As with Chandler, private contributions were not recorded. It is clear, however, that persons closely associated with the Barkley campaign perceived a lack of contributions and actively sought donations. The personal papers of national committee man Urey Woodson contain many letters to influential national figures such as Secretary of State

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Cordell Hull and Thomas Watson of IBM bemoaning Barkley's lack of campaign funds. In a July 18 letter to Joseph Hartfield, a Kentucky attorney-turned-Wall Street financier, Woodson mused that, "Through sheer neglect, which is most unaccountable, Barkley's financial affairs have been, and still are, in very poor shape." Subsequent correspondences between the men showed that Hartfield made an unspecified contribution to Barkley.135

Woodson maintained close contact with Barkley's campaign leaders, including Henry Ward, who warned on June 9 that "Our greatest handicap at the present time is lack of funds." More than a month later Ward groused in a letter to Woodson that "It seems to me that the entire finance organization of the Barkley campaign is asleep at the switch." Woodson, who held a Justice Department post and served unofficially in the Senate campaign, subsequently chastised Barkley's campaign finance director, R. C. P. Thomas, for the lack of campaign contributions and poor record-keeping. Woodson asked Thomas what became of contributions sent from Washington yet apparently not funneled into Barkley's campaign. Thomas replied that he never received the contributions Woodson referred to.136


136. Ward to Woodson, June 9 and July 12, 1938; Woodson to Thomas, July 15, 1938; Thomas to Woodson, July 19, 1938, all in Woodson Papers.
Similarly, the Sheppard committee discovered an instance in which several thousand dollars allegedly accumulated for Barkley seemingly disappeared. The key figure connected with the missing money was Charles G. Tachau, a respected Louisville insurance man and friend of Shack Miller. Tachau had no official position in the campaign yet he wrote 1,200 letters soliciting contributions. Tachau told the Senate committee under oath that he drew a check for $20,000 cash from a special campaign account and left it with his secretary to be given to a person connected with the Barkley campaign. The secretary then testified that she handed over an envelope allegedly containing the check to an unknown man from Barkley headquarters who called for it. The committee found no one in the Barkley campaign, including Thomas, Miller, and Barkley himself, who claimed any knowledge of the alleged $20,000 check. Moreover, no bank record of the check could be found and the committee therefore concluded that Tachau's testimony was "not substantiated by the evidence." 137

The issue apparently ended officially with the committee's conclusion, but political insiders continued to speculate about the curious nature of Barkley's campaign and personal finances. "There are those who believe Barkley supplemented his income with campaign contributions," noted Edward Prichard, a longtime Kentucky political figure.

and advisor to several state and national politicians. Barry Bingham Sr. also recalled that "there were rumors at the time" that Barkley pocketed contributions. 138 Although unconfirmed, such rumors may have gained credence for some with the revelation, about the time of Barkley's death in 1956, that he had not paid income taxes on several thousand dollars garnered over the years from lecture tours. 139

Since neither candidate reported any personal collection of funds, it is impossible to know the total campaign expenditures. However, as Jasper Shannon noted, "Expenditures in Kentucky were undoubtedly heavy." The Sheppard committee, in any case, accepted the testimony of both Barkley and Chandler that they had no knowledge of their subordinates' improper solicitation of funds from employees paid in whole or part by the federal government. Similarly, the improper WPA activities and other federal relief abuses were blamed mostly on local politicians. Robert Sherwood, author of Roosevelt and Hopkins, suggested that politicians were reluctant to probe too deeply into such activities because of their own vulnerability. "I


139. Peirce, Border South States, 229. Barkley kept one of the heaviest speaking schedules in Congress, constantly seeking the outside income to help defray medical costs incurred as a result of his first wife's eventually fatal illness. Three-quarters of his estate went to pay deficiency tax assessments and fraud penalties. Barkley had $8,000 cash with him when he died in addition to large sums in a safe in his apartment.
can say with assurance," wrote Sherwood, "that there were not many members of Congress at that time who had never used WPA in one way or another to shore up their own political fortunes." Another contemporary political writer observed that "there is no concealment in the Capitol's informal political discussions concerning the political manipulation of relief. Everybody accepts it as a matter of fact." 140

The press scrutiny and the Sheppard committee probe into activities in several states in 1938 revealed myriad campaign abuses of relief agencies. Nevertheless, the issue of politics-in-relief "had been used as little more than a red herring to hide the real political stakes." The conservative press and anti-New Deal politicians seized upon the issue and exaggerated its abuses in an effort to undermine the liberal wing of the Democratic Party before the 1940 Presidential election contest. The controversy generated enough attention, however, for Senator Hatch to secure passage of his bill proscribing political activity by federal employees. Ironically, Barkley, who had blocked the bill previously, used his leadership position to ensure passage of an amended version in 1939. 141

140. Shannon, "Presidential Politics," 167; Senate Report, Campaign Expenditures, 18; Sherwood, Roosevelt and Hopkins, 98; Sullivan, "Relief and the Election," 612.

The furor over politics-in-relief resulted in new funding restrictions on the WPA. After 1939, "WPA had to fight constant congressional criticism, more investigations, and repeated cuts in appropriations." The adverse publicity endured by the agency for political abuses tended to obscure its impressive accomplishments: construction or improvement of 2,500 hospitals, 5,900 school buildings, 1,000 airport landing sites, and some 13,000 playgrounds. In addition, special WPA projects made it possible to include writers, musicians, actors, and artists among the three million people it employed.\(^\text{142}\)

Barkley's campaign weathered the storm aroused by the imbroglio over the WPA and politics-in-relief. Although what one overzealous writer called the "nation-wide stench" from the Kentucky primary tarnished Barkley's image, the Majority Leader remained comfortably ahead of Chandler as the race entered the stretch run.\(^\text{143}\) Chandler's effort to capitalize on Barkley's campaign improprieties was largely nullified by the revelations of his own draconian political tactics. The Governor, Dan Talbott, and other strategists realized that their candidate's perfect record at the polls was in grave jeopardy. They could only hope for an event so stunning, so outlandish that it


would somehow reverse the ominous trend. Then again, perhaps they could do more than hope for such an event; perhaps one could be contrived.
IV. POISONED WATER AND A NEW DEAL VICTORY

Chandler's frantic campaign pace and a bizarre incident occurring two weeks before the primary marked the close of the Senate race. A New York Times reporter assigned to follow the Chandler canvass in mid-July concluded that the Governor was "one of the most remarkable campaigners who ever sought political office." During those sultry, mid-summer days in Kentucky, Chandler made some six speeches a day, shaking as many hands as possible at each stop. This dizzying pace inspired political folklore. On one occasion, when the candidate's auto coasted to a momentary halt at a traffic light in Louisville, Chandler reportedly leaped out of the vehicle, "shook hands with seventeen persons whom he called by name, and re-entered the car before the traffic light changed to green." Undoubtedly apocryphal, the story nevertheless is symbolic of Chandler's hectic pace.144

As the primary approached, Chandler told aides to cram still more appearances into his already crowded itinerary. "They can't put too much on me," Chandler vowed. "We aim to win this election." Having stumped virtually all of Kentucky's 120 counties, Chandler planned

follow-up appearances in the final few weeks. Increasingly, he returned to the tactics which had proven successful in 1935 the sound truck blaring "Happy Days Are Here Again" and the Governor regaling audiences with his new theme song, "There's A Gold Mine in the Sky."¹⁴⁵ The Governor and Mrs. Chandler joined in activities at churches, fairs, and picnics, working crowds relentlessly. Chandler's perpetual smile vanished only when he encountered an undisguised Barkley supporter, whereupon the Governor reportedly ripped Barkley buttons off the person's chest, snapping "You can't do that to me! I'm the best Governor you've ever had."¹⁴⁶

Despite his feats of energy and endurance, Chandler continued to receive discouraging reports. Adding to his misery, the Governor's usual good health failed him on July 21 after he made a radio broadcast from Louisville's Kentucky Hotel. Chandler awoke in the night with chills, stomach pains, and high fever. Hotel physician J. W. Bryan attended the Governor and reported that "He is not seriously ill . . . but I advised him to rest a couple of days." The punishing campaign pace and Chandler's "habit

¹⁴⁵. Courier-Journal, July 17, 1938; Shannon, "Presidential Politics," 161. Chandler explained that he chose the song because it symbolized that his Kentucky was the soundest state in the nation—so secure that the government could keep its gold within the state's borders at Fort Knox. Barkley, however, told audiences that Chandler must have chosen the song to honor his campaign contributors.

of eating hasty lunches of sandwiches" apparently caused the illness.\textsuperscript{147}

Two days later Chandler, still in the Louisville hotel, told reporters he suffered from a gastric disturbance similar to one he experienced the year before after eating disagreeable food in Biloxi, Mississippi. "I have been suffering for several days," the Governor revealed. "Many times when I was making six or eight speeches a day and shaking hands with everybody who wanted to shake hands with me, I was in severe pain, but they didn't know it." On Sunday Chandler went to Frankfort by ambulance while Dan Talbott, who apparently suffered from the same illness, remained at the hotel.\textsuperscript{148}

On July 25 the Governor began describing his illness as "intestinal poisoning" and pointedly referred other questions to his Louisville physician, who dropped a bombshell to the press. In a written statement Dr. Bryan said the illness of Chandler and Talbott occurred because a pitcher of their hotel drinking water had been "doctored with a poison." The physician explained that Chandler, Talbott and a state policeman all became ill after they drank from a water pitcher provided for the Governor's July 21 radio address. "There is no question that it was


\textsuperscript{148} Courier-\textit{Journal}, July 23 and 24, 1938.
a chemical poison," Bryan claimed, "and that the Governor got more than half the fatal dose." 149

Although he had denied Chandler was seriously ill after his initial examination, Bryan now maintained that the Governor had narrowly escaped a deadly dose of "chemical poison." Louisville police, uninformed of the alleged poisoning until the doctor publicized it, immediately investigated, interviewing the hotel manager and a bus-boy who had carried the water to the Governor's suite. The police found no evidence to support Dr. Bryan's theory; the pitcher had been removed and cleaned. Laboratory tests of specimens taken from the patients showed no indication of poisoning, and, although Bryan said he "felt sure they had been poisoned from the first," another physician who also examined the Governor the morning after his illness, said he "never heard any such suspicion." After a five-hour investigation, Louisville police chief John M. Malley dismissed the case as "a political bedtime story." 150

The Chandler camp charged in response that Barkley forces controlled the Louisville police. "Of course that is what the opposition would say," exclaimed Mrs. Chandler. State police Major Joe Burnam announced an investigation into "the attempt on the Governor's life. We have our suspicions already. . . . This is not the first time such a thing has happened during this campaign," said

149. Ibid., July 26, 1938.

Burnam, referring without elaboration to four "similar experiences," and adding cryptically, "someone even tried to get me twice." 151

The administration's Commissioner of Health, Dr. A. T. McCormack, also ordered a poisoning probe, pledging to proceed on an "open theory" basis. After a two-day investigation, McCormack said he was "thoroughly in accord" with Bryan's diagnosis of chemical poisoning and revealed that a fourth man, an American Legion commander from Erlanger, also had become ill after drinking from the Governor's water pitcher. Although McCormack failed to produce any evidence of poisoning, he concluded that "There is no other plausible explanation of the illness of the four men." 152

The alleged poisoning did not generate sympathy for Chandler; instead it elicited a reaction of humor. "Most people laughed about it," recalled Tyler Munford, a state representative at the time. "They thought it was a political gimmick." Barry Bingham, Sr. recalled that there was "a great deal of laughter about it . . . it just seemed like the last desperate ploy of a candidate who saw he was going to lose and had to find some way out of it." Chandler conceded in an interview that the incident "was very funny to everybody but me," but he insisted that "somebody connected with that [Barkley's] campaign wanted

151. Ibid.
to kill me." Chandler added that he survived the poisoning only because "I was tougher than a Mississippi boarding house steak." 153

The confident Barkley partisans delighted in the revelation of the "poisoning." "I had great fun with the Case of the Poisoned Ice Water," wrote Barkley in his autobiography. Although he had tactfully wired his condolences to Chandler upon learning of the illness, Barkley played the incident to his advantage once the charges of poisoning were aired. Campaign manager Miller gravely announced that Barkley would employ an "ice water guard" and a "food taster." He promised to impound for five days all used water pitchers so they could be analyzed in case the Senator became ill. In the remaining days of the campaign, Barkley frequently paused during a speech to bring a glass of water to his lips. He would then stop dramatically just before taking a drink, eye the water warily, and set it aside with a shudder, a routine his audiences thoroughly enjoyed. 154

The Barkley camp and other less partisan political observers obviously believed that Chandler concocted the poisoning scheme. The Governor and Talbott had three days together at the Louisville hotel to evaluate their failing position in the campaign. They would have considered, skeptics argued, the impact of Chandler's illness,

153. Munford, Bingham, and Chandler interviews.

154. Barkley, That Reminds Me, 164.
which not only slowed their campaign but left Chandler open to Barkley's gleeful reminders that it was the younger Governor, not "Old Alben," who had fallen victim to the rigorous campaign. Certainly the Governor could have been vulnerable to illness as a result of the campaign: he was traveling extensively and speaking several times a day; he had lost twenty pounds; he frequently became soaked with perspiration before speeding off in a car; he ate at irregular intervals; and he was in daily contact with thousands of people who could transmit germs. Moreover, the state suffered an epidemic of dysentery and diarrhea that summer; many victims experienced symptoms similar to Chandler's.  

The circumstances of the alleged poisoning also raised other questions. Why was the incident not reported to police or even mentioned at all for more than three days after it allegedly occurred? (Indeed, Louisville police actually charged Bryan with violating a city ordinance by not promptly reporting the alleged criminal activity.) Why did Bryan report initially that Chandler was not seriously ill? How could Chandler survive after drinking two-thirds of the water in the pitcher, as Bryan reported, while three other persons became seriously ill from the remaining one-third? Finally, why did the Governor say that he was suffering from the same sickness he had been experiencing for "several days"? After conducting an

investigation of the alleged poisoning in September, 1938, the Jefferson County grand jury found no evidence of "any wrongdoing." 156

In the final two weeks after the incident, Chandler clearly was on the defensive. Besides answering those who doubted the alleged attempt on his life, the Governor was forced to answer other charges by Barkley, who closed his campaign aggressively. Barkley and Logan continued to remind audiences of Chandler's "indecent proposal" to clear a path to the Senate by securing a federal judgeship for Logan. Barkley also claimed Chandler had offered Tom Rhea $10,000 and a ranking post in state government for his support in the Senate race. Furthermore, Barkley attacked Chandler's reputation for fiscal responsibility, claiming that the Governor made "taxpayers foot the bill" while "millions have been wasted from the state treasury." 157

Chandler spent more and more of his time attempting to refute Barkley's charges, characterizing them as acts of desperation. "We've got Barkley defeated," Chandler blustered. "We've got him desperate." In fact, the opposite was more nearly true. Chandler fought against the image of himself as a Liberty League-financed foe of the President. The Governor denied he was funded by reactionaries and insisted that Barkley had "not succeeded" in an effort


to "jockey me into the position of being an opponent of the President of the United States." However, as the widely circulated Courier-Journal noted in a spate of pro-Barkley editorials, although Chandler "professes personal friendship for the President . . . he has not uttered one word of commendation for a single accomplishment of the Roosevelt Administration in the whole five years. . . . The Governor appears contemptuous of the voters' intelligence." 158

Chandler later cited opposition by the Courier-Journal and the Louisville Times as significant in his defeat. Ironically, Chandler claimed that Robert Worth Bingham, United States Ambassador to Great Britain and owner of the newspapers, encouraged him to challenge Barkley. "Judge Bingham wanted me to beat Barkley," Chandler said in an interview. After Bingham's death on December 18, 1937, the newspapers switched allegiance to Barkley, Chandler claimed. However, Barry Bingham, Sr. said in an interview that Chandler's version "really is untrue. . . . My father was a pretty strong supporter of Alben Barkley [and] just couldn't have" encouraged Chandler to oppose the Senate leader. Noting that Robert Bingham received Roosevelt's first diplomatic appointment in 1933, Barry Bingham said there is no doubt his father favored Barkley as the Administration's candidate. "We were New Deal

158. Ibid., July 26, Aug. 1 and 5, 1938.
supporters and Barkley seemed to be the effective symbol of the New Deal," Bingham explained. 159

Although the two Louisville dailies had the largest state circulations, their opposition was somewhat offset by support for Chandler from other newspapers. The Governor received the endorsement of the Lexington dailies, whose publisher, Tom Underwood, Chandler appointed secretary of the prestigious State Racing Commission. In addition, the stridently anti-New Deal Scripps-Howard newspapers in Cincinnati and Knoxville circulated in Kentucky and favored Chandler. The Governor used allocation of patronage to control many county newspapers, but Barkley publicist Henry Ward countered with a syndicated weekly column which he privately describes as a "mild form of propaganda for Barkley and against the Chandler organization." 160

State and national newspaper coverage expanded as the candidates made their final stump appearances on the eve of the primary. Barkley closed his campaign with a motorcade through nineteen Western Kentucky towns, ending in Paducah where he confidently asked for the widest possible margin so that the nation "will know that Kentucky is supporting President Roosevelt and the New Deal." Chandler ended his canvass with a rally in Lexington before returning home to Versailles where he sounded, for

159. Chandler and Bingham interviews.

perhaps the first time, like a candidate resolved to defeat. "If I lose—well, there are worse things. If you want to send me back to the country, all I can say is that I still know the way." 161

Clear and hot weather dominated election day, Saturday, August 6. Law enforcement officials watched for confrontations; two days earlier a Chandler booster had been killed and a Barkley supporter hospitalized after a shooting incident in Breathitt County. Having lost a court battle in which he sought a role in naming Louisville precinct officials, Chandler sent a large contingent of state police to roam the city on motorcycles, watching for ballot box shenanigans. There were, however, no major incidents. 162

Ballot counting ended at midnight in compliance with state law, but Barkley had seen enough to claim victory two hours earlier. "It has been a hard fight—one that I did not think I ought to have to make," the Senate leader told a radio audience. Barkley won 74 of the state's 120 counties, receiving 56 percent of the 525,555 votes cast to Chandler's 42.6 percent. The other 1.4 percent went to minor candidates. Barkley's 70,872-vote margin made the previously undefeated Chandler the worst beaten primary candidate in Kentucky history. "I bow to the will

162. Ibid.
of the majority," Chandler wired Barkley on Monday as the final, devastating results rolled in. 163

Barkley achieved his mandate by dominating the vote in three areas of the state. As expected Barkley controlled his native Western Kentucky, piling up a majority of some 25,000 ballots in the modern First Congressional District. The Senate leader also outpolled Chandler by about 10,000 votes in Eastern Kentucky. However, Barkley achieved his greatest margin in Louisville. Political boss Brennan had predicted a 20,000-vote victory, but the final tally in Jefferson County found Barkley a stunning 30,000-vote winner. 164

Chandler fought Barkley to a near standoff in other areas of the state. The Governor showed his best vote-getting ability in the Central Kentucky counties where many local officials owed allegiance to patronage chieftain Dan Talbott. The Governor also captured a group of counties in northeast Kentucky, but he brooded over the loss of Covington (Kenton County). Chandler had opened his campaign in Northern Kentucky and had distributed patronage generously, yet Barkley rode the support of organized labor and, perhaps, the Presidential visit to a narrow victory in Kenton County. The Governor managed only a standoff in his home base in the Bluegrass. 165

164. Jewell, Kentucky Votes, 1, 30-31.
THE 1938 KENTUCKY SENATE PRIMARY:
RESULTS BY COUNTY AND CURRENT CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS

-- BARKLEY

-- CHANDLER

KENTUCKY

No. D 116
Chandler's plurality in several predominantly Republican counties in southeastern Kentucky may be attributable to registration habits of Kentucky Republicans. Many persons who voted Republican in national elections registered Democratic in order to participate in state elections normally dominated by that party. Urey Woodson claimed that "If we could have excluded the Republican votes from the primary, Barkley's majority would have been largely more than 100,000." 166 The conclusion that Chandler benefitted from anti-New Deal Republicans voting in the Democratic primary is, perhaps, supported by a comparison of the Chandler vote in 1938 with his performance in the 1935 gubernatorial runoff. In the 1938 primary the Governor topped Barkley in fourteen counties which Chandler had lost to Tom Rhea in the 1935 runoff. Of the fourteen counties, most were considered Republican-dominated and most lie in the GOP stronghold in southeastern Kentucky. Thus Chandler's ability to carry in 1938 the counties he lost in the 1935 runoff may be attributable to Republicans voting against Barkley. 167

Soon after the primary, Chandler blamed his defeat on Barkley's manipulation of the New Deal relief agencies. As Chandler explained in a letter to his mentor, Harry F.


167. Jewell, Kentucky Votes, I, 30-31, and II, 16-17. The fourteen counties were Butler, Clay, Cumberland, Edmonson, Green, Jackson, Leslie, Lewis, Monroe, Nicholas, Owsley, Metcalfe, Marion, and Madison.
Byrd, "We were not able to combat the WPA coercion and the spending on the part of the national treasury." In an interview with the writer, Chandler referred to the 1938 election as "the great steal," again citing WPA coercion to explain his defeat. 168

Although Barkley partisans clearly employed the WPA for political purposes, there is little reason to believe the agency played a decisive role in the election. George Goodman's activities revealed that virtually the entire WPA apparatus in Western Kentucky aided Barkley's campaign, but the Senator undoubtedly would have carried his home region anyway; Barkley dominated the Western Kentucky vote in all of his statewide elections, including the losing gubernatorial race in 1923. The WPA appears to have proven most helpful to Barkley in Eastern Kentucky. Harry Caudill, author of several works on Appalachia, recalled in his Night Comes to the Cumberlands that, "In effect the gargantuan relief program was transferred into a colossal and supremely effective political machine nourished by almost limitless patronage." In a letter to the writer, Caudill explained that his father directed the Barkley campaign in Letcher County [Southeast Kentucky] and

I know precisely how he and his counterparts in other counties were, for all practical purposes, placed in charge of all the federal relief programs. They very effectively used those millions of dollars in federal relief funds . . . 169

168. Chandler to Byrd, Sept. 14, 1938, Chandler Papers, Box 51; Chandler interview.

169. Caudill, Night Comes to the Cumberlands, 209; Caudill to writer, Sept. 18, 1980.
Caudill's father and other political leaders were able to garner votes for Barkley in their counties because local officials controlled administration of WPA programs. But local control also allowed Chandler partisans in other counties to manipulate the WPA to their candidate's advantage, a discovery that aroused consternation in the Barkley camp. "Our friend George Goodman is in real trouble," Henry Ward told Urey Woodson. "... He has to be careful to prevent the local politicians from gaining complete control of the WPA." Similarly, Tom Rhea complained that "We are having a hell of a time getting any action out of the WPA. In many instances, the Chandler people have control and are trying to take WPA over."\(^{170}\)

Barkley claimed after the election that he received only a fraction of the WPA ballot, maintaining that Republicans and Democratic politicians elected the previous year with Chandler's endorsement controlled most of the state WPA. Interestingly, a poll of senators elected in 1938 revealed that most of them considered the WPA a political liability rather than an asset. A post-election investigation of the Kentucky WPA by the anti-New Deal Cincinnati Enquirer also found no evidence to support the claim that the WPA played a significant role in the outcome of the election.\(^{171}\)

\(^{170}\) Ward to Woodson, undated, and Rhea to Woodson, March 31, 1938, both in Woodson Papers.

\(^{171}\) Barkley, That Reminds Me, 166; Patterson, Congressional Conservatism, 297; Cincinnati Enquirer, Oct. 7-14, 1938.
Although political manipulation of federal relief did not decide the election, the New Deal agencies had a profound effect on state politics. Before the creation of the agencies, state programs offered virtually the sole outlet for patronage, allowing a powerful governor to dominate political manipulation in his state. However, the advent of the myriad New Deal agencies brought a whole new array of programs affecting the lives of millions of people. A governor, no matter how powerful, could not dominate an agency administered from Washington. This fundamental change of political realities perhaps explains the conservative outcry over politics-in-relief more than does the actual occurrence of abuses.

The altered political framework also helps to explain the ruthless tactics employed by both sides in the Kentucky campaign. Chandler admitted to padding the rolls of his state machine, but insisted that he was "a small proposition" compared to Barkley's political force. "To the extent I could retaliate, I did," Chandler explained. 172 Barkley, meanwhile, opposed the original Hatch Act on grounds that the law would preclude retaliation against abuses by state political machines. Thus both candidates created the proverbial vicious cycle which could only culminate in a "dirty" campaign. Nevertheless, the political improprieties committed in 1938—whether in the form of questionable fund-raising activities, vote fraud, or

172. Chandler interview.
distribution of "election whiskey"—should be evaluated in the context of an era in which such practices were more common and less restricted by law than in modern times.

Barkley's victory stemmed from his control of three crucial voting blocs—farm, labor and urban—rather than from political coercion. Kentucky farmers who benefitted from the policies of the Agricultural Adjustment Act staunchly supported Barkley. The WPA controversy obscured the significant role played by farmers, most of whom, one observer noted, were "tobacco growers who have received approximately everything they have asked for, tied with a baby-blue ribbon, from the AAA." Chandler claimed that the AAA actually exploited Kentucky tobacco growers by giving them a proportionately smaller quota than before, but farmers ignored the charge.173

Like the farmers, labor owed allegiance to the New Deal. Roosevelt's sympathy for labor allowed the unions to surge to an unprecedented level of strength by 1938, and labor leaders responded by endorsing New Deal candidates. John L. Lewis, head of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, had endorsed Barkley in May for "being cooperative in his attitudes toward legislation in the interests of labor and the common people." William Green of the American Federation of Labor made it virtually

unanimous on July 20 when he pledged the support of Kentucky's 65,000-member union for Barkley. 174

Labor's endorsement contributed to Barkley's domination of the urban vote. New Deal programs such as the Home Owner's Loan Corporation also prompted city dwellers to back Barkley, who won all of the major urban areas. The Senate leader's greatest strength, of course, accrued in Louisville, which produced nearly half his victory margin. Chandler's tampering with the city's election system through the statewide purgation law combined with what many perceived as an anti-urban bias to doom the Governor under the steamrolling Brennan machine.

In the final analysis, Barkley's victory resulted from the enduring popularity of the New Deal. Kentucky voters expressed their approval of the Roosevelt program by overwhelmingly supporting Barkley in 1938 as they had supported the President two years earlier. The public vividly recalled the privations of the Depression; in its aftermath, as Edward Prichard noted, "It is now hard to appreciate the real magic of Roosevelt and his program." 175 Barkley consistently appealed to the advances made by the New Deal while ambiguity characterized Chandler's rhetoric on the President's program.


175. Prichard interview.
Chandler's unbridled ambition and naive faith in his own political destiny precluded a sober analysis of his opponent's vote-getting ability. Barkley was a shrewd politician and a gifted orator; he was no Tom Rhea. Although Barkley's organization had perhaps grown complacent in the absence of challenging opposition, his supporters quickly united when Chandler made his bid. Barkley's quarter-century in the House and Senate allowed him to assist hundreds of grateful constituents. Barkley also received support from United States marshals, federal judges (five of whom were appointed on his recommendation), and other recipients of federal patronage. Kentucky's Democratic congressmen also endorsed Barkley.

While maintaining his long-standing support, Barkley courted new voters by citing the benefits provided by New Deal agencies. After speaking to audiences for more than an hour about the accomplishments of federal programs, Barkley frequently concluded: "Now all of you who have gotten checks from the federal government since Roosevelt came in, raise your hands." A reporter at the scene on one occasion noted, "Nearly all went up."\(^{176}\)

Roosevelt's Kentucky visit, although not decisive in the election, generated state pride in Barkley's position of national leadership and his friendship with the popular President. Chandler, conversely, identified himself with the right-wing of the Democratic Party at a time when

\(^{176}\) *Courier-Journal*, July 17, 1938.*
the New Deal coalition maintained popular support. A reading of Chandler's personal papers concerning the 1938 election leaves little doubt that the Governor appealed most strongly to the anti-New Deal elements. Chandler received scores of friendly letters from out-of-state conservatives voicing support for his opposition to Barkley and Roosevelt. "Like yourself I am an anti-Roosevelt Democrat," began a typical letter to the Governor. Chandler received offers of support from friends of Father Coughlin and such groups as the "Anti-Third Term for Franklin D. Roosevelt Club." Myriad unsolicited letters contained openly racist and anti-Semitic statements, although Chandler did not voice such views.177

Chandler's efforts to use Barkley's age and experience against him failed completely. "Old Alben" disappointed the young Governor by matching his punishing campaign pace stride for stride. Rather than a negative factor, Barkley's experience and Senate leadership compared favorably to Chandler's seemingly ruthless ambition, exemplified by the effort to engineer a judicial appointment for Senator Logan. Chandler's depiction of Barkley as a man who took his constituents for granted while enjoying a regal out-of-state lifestyle had proved successful in other state races. However, Barkley maintained a distinctively Kentucky flavor that was born of his bucolic roots and nurtured by years as a country lawyer and politician.

177. J. W. Carrol to Chandler, July 4, 1938, Chandler Papers, Box 47.
Chandler also displayed a distinctively Kentucky aura, but to a much greater extent than Barkley, the Governor suffered from his propensity for generating bitter enemies to combat his loyal friends; it seemed there were few in between. "That race," recalled a contemporary politician, "brought to the surface all of the enemies that Chandler could possible have. They sought to discredit the Administration in so far as humanly possible." Thus John Y. Brown, to cite the most obvious example, won votes for Barkley by blasting Chandler unmercifully in speech after speech across the state. Chandler soon found his vision of invincibility shattered by the combination of his enemies, the New Deal, and an extremely formidable opponent.

The outcome of the Kentucky Senate primary gratified Roosevelt and saved him the embarrassment of losing his hand-picked Senate leader. Moreover, a Chandler victory would have exacerbated national Democratic Party factionalism, thereby jeopardizing the President's control of the party and his re-nomination in 1940. Despite Barkley's overwhelming victory, the Kentucky election also had negative implications for Roosevelt. As Jasper Shannon noted, Barkley's triumph "seems to have been a determining factor" in the President's decision to campaign against several entrenched anti-New Deal senators. The attempt to "purge" his foes proved disastrous, particularly in the South.

178. Frank Peterson interview.
where all of the President's candidates lost to the conservative incumbents. 179

Ironically, the 1938 Senate campaign, which the Courier-Journal then called "the most momentous in Kentucky's history," in a sense became meaningless the following year. 180 A few months after Barkley soundly defeated Republican John P. Haswell in the fall general election, Senator Logan died, creating the Senate vacancy Chandler had so vigorously sought. The Governor turned over the reins of state government to Keen Johnson and journeyed to Washington to serve alongside Barkley. By then the frightening specter of World War II had overshadowed domestic politics, and the memories of a remarkable Kentucky political campaign began to fade.


The President and "Dear Alben" on July 9, 1938.
EPILOGUE

Both Barkley and Chandler led active political lives for many years after the 1938 campaign. Barkley exercised leadership in the Senate for another decade, but Roosevelt dashed the Kentuckian's hopes for a Supreme Court appointment and for the 1944 Vice Presidential nomination on grounds that he was "too old." However, when Barkley revived torpid Democrats with a rousing keynote address at the 1948 national convention, the Vice Presidential nomination was his by acclamation. Barkley's sage advice and tireless campaigning then helped engineer the 1948 Truman upset.

Perhaps the most memorable event of Barkley's Vice Presidency was his marriage to a young widow in 1949 (his first wife had died in 1947). The seventy-five year-old "Veep," as he became known, sought the 1952 Presidential nomination, but lost it to a distant cousin, Adlai Stevenson. Barkley spent the next two years out of politics, an unhappy condition he remedied in 1954 by winning election as Kentucky's "junior senator." Barkley died, fittingly, while delivering a speech to college students in Lexington, Virginia on April 30, 1956.

After the 1938 campaign, "it looked like Chandler was pretty well washed up politically," a contemporary politician recalled.181 Like Mark Twain, the reports of

181. Ollie J. Bowen interview.
his death were greatly exaggerated. By the time Chandler claimed Logan's Senate seat in 1939, he already had mended political fences enough to secure the election of his chosen successor for governor, Keen Johnson. Chandler easily won a special Senate election in 1940 and re-election in 1942.

Chandler left the Senate in 1945 for the lucrative position of Major League Baseball Commissioner, winning acclaim for breaking the "color barrier" two years later. After the club owners fired him in 1951, Chandler returned to state politics, winning a second gubernatorial term in 1955. His campaign for the Presidency the next year failed to achieve a national following. Chandler lost badly in efforts to win a third gubernatorial term in 1963, 1967, and 1971. At the time of this writing, the eighty-three year-old Chandler enjoys an active retirement at his home in Versailles where he consistently shoots his age on a local golf course.
APPENDIX I

The following two items reflect the range of sympathies evoked by Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. The poem, "I'm Tired", found in Chandler's personal papers, expresses disgust with the President's program. Conversely, the July 1, 1938 Courier-Journal endorsement of Barkley is argued on behalf of the New Deal.
I'M TIRED

"I'm tired—oh, so tired—of the whole new deal;
Of the juggler's smile; the Barker's spiel;
Of the mushy speech and the loud bassoon;
And the tiredest of all of our leader's croon.

I'm tired of taxes on my hams and eggs;
Tired of "payoffs" to political yeggs;
Tired of Jim Farley's stamp on my mail;
Tired of my shirt with its tax shortened tail.

I'm tired of farmers goose-stepping to laws;
Of millions of itching job-holders' paws;
Of "fireside talks" on commandeered mikes;
Of passing more laws to stimulate strikes.

I'm tired of the hourly increasing debt;
I'm tired of promises still to be kept;
Of eating and sleeping by government plan;
And calmly forgetting the "forgotten man."

I'm tired of every new brain trust thought;
Of the ship of state—now a pleasure yacht;
I'm tired of cheating the court by stealth,
And terribly tired of sharing my wealth.

I'm tired of Eleanor on page one;
Of each royal "in-law" and favorite son;
I'm tired of Sistie and Puzzie Ball;
I'm simply—completely—fed up with it all.

"I'm tired and bored with the whole new deal;
With its juggler's smile, its Barker's spiel;
Dear Lord, out of all thy available men
Please grant us a Cleveland or Coolidge again."

I ENJOY HAVING AND LEAVING NEW FRIENDS SO PLEASE KEEP ON MOVING ALONG. THANK YOU.
Barkley For Senator

The Courier-Journal does not customarily take an editorial position in party primaries in Kentucky, but the Senatorial primary in the Democratic Party this year transcends all ordinary bounds of importance. It is more vital than any usual party contest, more vital than any usual State election, for on its result hinges a good measure of the national prestige of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Governor Albert B. Chandler has made a good Governor. Up until the time when the fever of national political ambition began to cloud his vision and alter his standards of conduct, he had made the best record of any Kentucky Governor within a generation. Kentuckians would have been glad to see him finish his term of office as he began it, and they would doubtless have been happy to honor his record by electing him to the United States Senate at a later date.

But Governor Chandler, by injecting himself into a race against Senator Alben W. Barkley, has forfeited the support of many who had given him their backing in the Governor's Mansion. At a time when President Roosevelt and the New Deal face their most crucial test, Chandler seeks to displace the man who is the majority leader of the Senate and the President's first assistant in that body. He seeks to displace a man of long national experience, who holds a dominant position in Congress through length of service and personal ability, and to plunge himself into the national picture, a novice who would have no importance in Congress, no membership on vital committees, no standing beyond that of a freshman in the school of national politics.

Governor Chandler has taken to insisting in recent speeches that he is not opposed to President Roosevelt. Whatever may lie in the Governor's heart on the fundamental issues of the New Deal, the very fact of Chandler's candidacy makes him an opponent of President Roosevelt. Anti-New Deal newspapers and political observers all over the country have hailed Barkley as the man who may upset the New Deal in Kentucky and discredit the President before the whole Nation by defeating his Senate leader. Nothing Chandler can say will alter this condition. He is marked as the candidate of the people who hate Roosevelt, the people who are willing to spend money freely to ruin Roosevelt, and the people who want to use Chandler as a tool in their plot to destroy Roosevelt.

That is the issue of the Barkley-Chandler campaign. It leaves no choice to the liberal voters in the Democratic Party, and no choice to those who believe in the fundamental principles of the New Deal. Barkley has served the New Deal faithfully, sincerely and well. He deserves the renomination of the Democratic Party as United States Senator from Kentucky.
APPENDIX II

Both Barkley and Chandler inspired creative efforts from their followers. These two pieces of doggerel from the candidates' personal papers serve as examples. Note the postscript to "The Battle Hymn of 'Happy' Chandler."

WAKE-UP OLD KENTUCKY

"A BOOST TO ALBEN BARKLEY"

If you want to be happy
Just sing a little song,
And join the mighty army of the Alben Barkley throng.
Its an army for the right and all against the wrong.
Just fall into battle and help the cause along.

Chorus
Wake up, wake up dear old Kentucky
Why are you sleeping so long. Its no time for sleeping.
Wake up, wake up dear old Kentucky, and we all will be
Happy moving right along.

Two.
You know how Chandler promised everything he will do;
But when he is elected he never thinks of you, he borrowed the
Old age pension horse and rode right on in;
Now Happy you won't be able to do it again.

Three.
When you borrowed the old age pension horse. You saw that
You did need him; but when you was elected Happy you didn't
Water nor feed him; So now Happy his back is good and sore
You rode him in for governor, but you can't ride him in no more.

Chorus
Though the Republicans have gathered around on every side.
They're trying to make advancement in the ways that Barkley
Has tried. But the right will surely win.
We're waiting every day. Just fall into battle and cast your
Vote that way.

Copyright and composed by G. T. Ballard
Bardstown, Ky.
THE BATTLE HYMN OF "HAPPY" CHANDLER

TINT EYES HAVE SEEN THE GLORY OF THE COMING OF THE DAY,
WHEN THE REIGN OF ALBIE HARLEY SHALL RISE AND PASS AWAY.
I'VE SEEN OUR GOVERNOR AT FRANKFORT WITH HIS BRIGHT AND
SHINING EYES.
OUR STATE IS MARCHING ON.

GLORY, GLORY TO CHANDLER.
GLORY, GLORY TO CHANDLER.
GLORY, GLORY TO CHANDLER.
OUR STATE IS MARCHING ON.

WE ARE PROUD OF "HAPPY" CHANDLER AND THE WORDS THAT HE HAS
DON.
"GLORY IN THE GREAT NAME OF THIS TRUE AND LOYAL SON.
HE WILL WORK FOR ALL OUR CHILDREN TILL HE EDUCATES EACH
ONE.
WHILE HE GOES MARCHING ON.

CHORUS

I HAVE READ A PEACEFUL GOSPEL IN THE SCHOOLHOUSE ON THE
HILL.
I HAVE MARKED HIS STEPS OF PROGRESS IN THE FACTORY AND
HILL.
KENTUCKY MEN AND WOMEN YOU HAVE A DUTY TO FULFILL,
SINCE HE IS MARCHING ON.

CHORUS

HE HAS SOUND'ED FORTH HIS TRUMPET THAT SHALL NEVER CALL
RETREAT.
HE HAS CALLED UPON HIS PEOPLE TO GATHER AROUND HIS FEET.
TILL HE PLACES ON EACH FOREHEAD EDUCATION'S CROWN
COMPLETE.
AS HE GOES MARCHING ON.

CHORUS

GOOD OLD "HAPPY" WILL PROTECT US FROM OLD RUBY'S SALES
TAX GANG.
HE WILL BALANCE OUR STATE BUDGET, SHOOT US FORWARD WITH
A BANG.
WHEN WE SEND HIM TO THE SENATE, HE'LL REMEMBER EVERYTHING.
AS HE GOES MARCHING ON.

CHORUS
SO LETS VOTE FOR "HAPPY" CHANDLER AND BOOST HIM SO FAR AHEAD.
OF THAT GANG OF COAT-TAIL RIDERS, THAT THEY'LL WANT TO HANG THEIR HEAD,
AND SAID BOY'S OLD "HAPPY'S" GOT US, AND IT'S DONE JUST WHAT HE SAID,
AND STILL HE'S MARCHING ON.       Dawson Johnson

Happy:
I think this deserves that State Patrolmans job which I applied for, June 1st. I am going to distribute as many of these copies as I can.

Dawson Johnson


James K. Libbey, *Dear Alben: Mr. Barkley of Kentucky* (Lexington, Ky., 1979) is the most complete account of Barkley's life and political ascendancy. Polly Ann Davis, *Alben W. Barkley: Vice President and Senate Majority Leader* (New York, 1979) also provides valuable information,

Terry Birdwhistell, "A. B. "Happy" Chandler," Fred J. Hood, ed., *Kentucky: Its History and Heritage* (St. Louis, Mo., 1978) provides the best account of Chandler's gubernatorial administration in the mid-1930s. Birdwhistell also taped several interviews with Kentucky political figures; these are extremely useful in analyzing Chandler's career. The best of these interviews, which are part of the University of Kentucky's Albert B. Chandler Oral History Project, are with Tyler Munford, Ollie J. Bowen and Frank Peterson. In addition, Chandler gave an interview to the writer which offers the Governor's version of the 1938 campaign.

Newspapers, especially the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, are an invaluable source. Straight news articles, political columns and editorials in the *Courier-Journal* help trace the rise of Chandler's senatorial ambitions and the
campaign itself. The New York Times offers regular coverage of the campaign as it emerged into the national spotlight. The Lexington Herald and Lexington Leader, the Cincinnati Enquirer, and the Knoxville News-Sentinel are among the other dailies which closely monitored the Kentucky campaign.


The personal papers of several political figures, including Barkley and Chandler, greatly enhance analysis of campaign improprieties. The papers of Barkley, George Goodman and Urey Woodson provide valuable information on the role of WPA and other federal agencies in the Barkley campaign. Chandler's personal papers reveal the manipulation of the state machine to back the Governor's campaign. The University of Kentucky Department of Archives and Special Collections houses all of these papers.

Although information on the "poisoning" stems primarily from newspapers, interviews also help illuminate the incident. Barry Bingham, Sr. and Edward F. Prichard gave wide-ranging interviews which include discussion of