

THE DEFEAT OF GEORGE W. NORRIS IN THE 1942
NEBRASKA SENATORIAL ELECTION

by

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PREFACE

My purpose in preparing this study is to present an account of the senatorial election of 1942 in Nebraska and significant political trends within the state, and in so doing explain the political background of George W. Norris up to the time of his defeat. The primary campaign and the activities of both the Republican and Democratic senatorial nominees are also a vital part of the paper. The thesis is not, however, intended to be merely a relating of events, but is designed to present an analysis of the defeat of the central figure, George Norris. It is my sincere hope that it will in some way contribute both to a more profound understanding of an evolving political pattern in Nebraska and to a greater insight into the political career of George W. Norris, one of America's most able and dedicated public servants.

There are a number of people to whom I would like to express my thanks for their help during the writing and the preparation of this thesis: Dr. Jerome Tweton for encouraging me to pursue this particular topic; Dr. James Olson, who was instrumental in helping me gain access to the Wherry papers; Eugene Johnson, who allowed me to use the facilities of Love Library; and the library staff at Omaha University for their fine cooperation. I am also grateful to my advisory committee at Oklahoma State University, Dr. Norbert Mahnken and Dr. Theodore Agnew who gave of their valuable time and knowledge. I am especially appreciative of the assistance my wife, Ardith, rendered in enduring the many hours I spent in research, for aiding with the laborious task of typing,

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CHAPTER I

NORRIS AS A PUBLIC SERVANT

The public career of George Norris spans almost half a century and is filled with numerous events that set him apart from the average congressman. His legislative accomplishments during his forty years as a representative and senator from Nebraska are the tangible and lasting results of long, hard-fought battles on the floor of the Capitol. Norris's philosophy of government, his political contests (accented by extraordinarily successful campaigns), and his energy and political integrity serve to make him a striking political figure.

Relatively unknown throughout his first few years in office, Norris quickly gained a reputation as an insurgent Republican and as an astute parliamentarian when he led the fight to reduce the power of the Speaker of the House, Joseph G. Cannon. Before 1910, Cannon had ruled the House with an iron hand, but on St. Patrick's Day of that year Norris shrewdly introduced a resolution which stripped the "Czar" of much of his power and returned the House to democratic rule.¹ Cannon had ruled that a census bill should be considered before other bills already on the House calendar because the Constitution conferred a privileged status on this type of legislation and that the rules of the House did not have to be followed in this particular case. Norris stated that, "This was the hour for which [he] had been waiting patiently . . . when the Cannon machine

¹U.S., Congressional Record, 61st Cong., 2nd Sess., 1910, LV, 3292.

would overreach itself."² Norris thought that if a census bill could take precedence over the general House rules, then surely, "the constitutional provision giving both branches of Congress the right to make their own rules must receive the same recognition."³ He immediately gained the floor and introduced his resolution which said that the House, not the Speaker, should be allowed to select the members of the powerful Rules Committee. After lengthy debate the Democrats and liberal Republicans succeeded in passing Norris's resolution. As Norris stated in his autobiography, they were not out to destroy Cannon personally but only to limit the power of his office.⁴ Later, upon leaving Washington, Cannon showed his appreciation of the wholesome spirit in which Norris had conducted the debate by telling Norris that, "throughout our bitter controversy, I do not recall a single sentence in which you have been unfair."⁵ It was because of Norris's parliamentary conduct in the battle against Joseph Cannon and in later legislative maneuvers that Richard Lowitt, a recent biographer of Norris, writes, "He was one of the best parliamentarians in American political history," and "a master of legislative process."⁶ This particular skill enabled Norris to push through Congress much legislation that the ordinary legislator could not, and it helped him throughout his political career.

In the years that followed, Norris became known for his honesty and ability and consequently was appointed to several important congressional

²George W. Norris, Fighting Liberal (New York, 1945), p. 113.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 118.

⁵John F. Kennedy, Profiles in Courage (New York, 1955), p. 159.

⁶Richard Lowitt, George Norris: The Making of a Progressive, 1861-1912 (Syracuse, 1963), pp. i & xi.

committees. In 1910 he was named to the Judiciary Committee and later incurred the wrath of President Taft by seeing that a Pennsylvania circuit court judge, Robert Archibald,⁷ was impeached and removed from office. Because of a senate resolution, Archibald was never again allowed to hold a federal appointment.⁸ In 1913 Norris was selected to serve on the Public Lands Committee which consumed much of his time while in the Senate.⁹ He also was appointed to the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, and for five years was acting chairman. Norris enjoyed this assignment and worked long hours searching for ways to help America's farmers. Nebraskans benefited directly from Norris's influence on the committee when a large area of the northwestern part of the state was reforested and turned into Halsey National Forest in 1928.¹⁰

Despite his persistent efforts to aid labor and agriculture in the 1920's, it was not until the last year of the Hoover administration that some of his ideas began to be accepted by Congress. In the field of labor legislation the historic Norris-LaGuardia Act, which outlawed the use of injunctions in labor disputes, was passed in 1932.¹¹ Later, when asked about the effect of the Act, Norris stated that, "All it did was give the miner emancipation from the slavery that had prevailed for years in the coal mines of America."¹²

⁷ Archibald was first appointed by McKinley and later promoted by Taft.

⁸ U.S., Congressional Record, 62nd Cong., 3rd Sess., 1913, LIX, 1447.

⁹ Ibid., 63rd Cong., 1st Sess., 1913, LX, 20.

¹⁰ Ibid., 70th Cong., 1st Sess., 1928, LXXIX, 5570.

¹¹ Ibid., 72nd Cong., 1st Sess., 1932, LXXXV, 5019.

¹² Norris, p. 315.

As of 1968 Nebraska is still the only state which has a unicameral legislature. The system was begun in 1937 due to the efforts of Senator Norris. Citizens were compelled to rely on the initiative method to secure its adoption because on several occasions--1923, 1925, and 1933-- the state legislature failed to approve the bill that would have created the one-house legislative body.¹³ Norris strongly believed that a unicameral legislature would be less expensive and prevent good legislation from being held up in conference committees. In relation to this situation he stated that "as a matter of practice, it has developed frequently that through the conference committee, the politicians have the checks, and the special interests the balances."¹⁴ Norris felt that legislative salaries could be raised under the single chambered structure, which would allow individuals with lower incomes to become members. When his historic system was enacted, Norris urged that the legislature be operated as a "business institution" comparable to a corporation, not as an inefficient and uncoordinated organization.

On January 20, 1937, Senator Norris witnessed another of his efforts bear fruit as Franklin D. Roosevelt became the first President of the United States inaugurated in the month of January. All of Roosevelt's elected predecessors had assumed the duties of the office in March. Every year from 1923 to 1932, Norris had introduced a bill in Congress designed to shorten the period between the date when a president was elected and the time he took office. The proposal passed the Senate in every congressional session but was always defeated by the House. In 1932 a

¹³Robert F. Wesser, "George W. Norris: The Unicameral Legislature and the Progressive Ideal," Nebraska History, XLV (December, 1964), 309-321.

¹⁴Norris, pp. 351-352.

Democratic Congress finally approved the bill, and it became the Twentieth Amendment to the Constitution after three-fourths of the state legislatures had ratified it.¹⁵

Perhaps Norris's greatest achievement was in the area of public power development. The Tennessee Valley Authority came into existence in 1933 after being rejected several times by Republican presidents in the 1920's.¹⁶ The struggle to pass this legislation was a difficult one, and John F. Kennedy paid tribute to Senator Norris's efforts by pointing out that "there are few parallels to his long fight to bring benefits of low cost electricity to the people of the Tennessee Valley, although they lived a thousand miles from his home state of Nebraska."¹⁷

While Norris tried to provide greater quantities of electricity on the national level, he did not neglect his home state in the acquisition of public power. In 1933 he began to work for a "Little T.V.A." for Nebraska. Private power interests resisted his efforts, but eventually a number of projects on the Upper Platte and Upper Loup rivers were completed.¹⁸ The projects differed somewhat from those in the Tennessee Valley in that the Nebraska dams were not designed to promote navigation, but rather, their purpose was to improve irrigation, augment conservation, and increase electrical power.¹⁹

In 1935 Franklin Roosevelt created the Rural Electrification

¹⁵U.S., Congressional Record, 72nd Cong., 1st Sess., 1932, LXXXV, 1384.

¹⁶Ibid., 73rd Cong., 1st Sess., 1933, LXXXVII, 2808.

¹⁷Kennedy, p. 163.

¹⁸Norris, p. 374.

¹⁹Lincoln Star, October 31, 1942, p. 5.

Administration by executive order.²⁰ A federally financed electrical distribution project of this type had been advocated by Norris for at least a decade prior to the presidential announcement. Norris had hoped that the blessings of electricity would be extended from urban centers to meet the needs of the population in rural areas. This interest in the production and distribution of electricity seems to have stemmed from his life on an Ohio farm where he was forced to do his studying by candlelight, and from his experiences with poor farmers. After the establishment of the R.E.A., Norris kept a watchful eye on the program to guarantee its effective operation, and to insure its original purpose against antagonistic private utility interests and conservative politicians.²¹

The Twentieth Amendment and the T.V.A. undoubtedly overshadow a great portion of his work. However, in addition to these well-known pieces of legislation, Norris also advocated the extension of the civil service merit system, construction of federal roads, federal farm loans, adequate conservation of natural resources, direct election of senators, the abolition of the electoral college, and a prohibition against poll taxes as a prerequisite for voting.²²

This truly impressive record illustrates that "he has been primarily a doer, not a talker,"²³ as Allen Nevins pointed out in Saturday Review of Literature in 1939. Moreover, "In the long period since his election

²⁰Samuel I. Rosenman, comp., The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, IV (New York, 1938), p. 174.

²¹Norris, pp. 318 and 324.

²²Ibid., pp. 369 and 373.

²³Allen Nevins, "Practical Idealist," Saturday Review of Literature, XX (October 14, 1939), 5-6.

in 1902 he has probably been the most consistent, unshakable, and thoughtful progressive in politics,"²⁴ said Nevins. Although Norris is quoted as saying, "It is almost impossible to obtain effective legislation in the interests of the people,"²⁵ he was the type of congressman who could do just this. Richard L. Nueberger, a biographer of Norris, attributes much of his success in getting legislation approved to his popularity among his fellow senators. In relationship to this opinion, Life magazine in 1939 polled the United States Senate for the congressman with the most intelligence, industry, influence, and integrity, and Norris was put at the top of the list.²⁶

In view of his many solid qualities, accomplishments, and senate popularity, it seems strange that he never became a hero of the American people. "This is the riddle he presents this generation."²⁷ The answer may lie in the fact that Norris was much less than dramatic when going about his congressional duties. He attended to the daily routine of a senator, searching through the detail of all bills, researching documents, and generally attending to his business with a peculiar modesty. It is difficult to make heroes out of men who do not possess golden voices, handsome faces, a famous name, or the wish to captivate the public with their personal charm.

His philosophy of government also distinguished him from many of his fellow congressmen. Norris believed in both government ownership and

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Richard L. Neuberger, "Prairie Senator," Survey Graphic, XXVIII (December, 1939), 725.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷William Allen White, "Progressive Leader," Saturday Review of Literature, XVI (July 10, 1937), 5.

control of certain industries vital to the nation's economy. "The power trust," he said, "is the greatest monopolistic corporation that has ever been organized for private greed."²⁸ Norris thought the public should therefore control such natural resources as water power in order to prohibit monopolies from setting unfair rates and developing tremendous political power. Their power had been used to fight such projects as R.E.A., T.V.A., Bonneville, Grand Coulee and the "Little T.V.A." in Nebraska.²⁹ Norris hinted on one particular occasion early in his career that the public might benefit from government ownership of the railroads. In 1912, while campaigning for Robert LaFollette, he made the statement, "The government should take over the railroad to show the managers how it can be run and not have any trouble."³⁰

An important part of Norris's political philosophy revolved around the feeling that government should promote public welfare. "If the object of government," he said, "is to protect the happiness of the people, then there must be some humanity in government. It must become a religion, not beyond the grave, but in life."³¹ Both happiness and humanity in government to Norris meant attempting "to help all the people from . . . the tragedy of poverty."³² Norris had a particular compassion for the poor and a distrust of the rich. His compassion for the poor may

²⁸Norris, p. 160.

²⁹Ibid., p. 161.

³⁰Richard L. Neuberger and Stephen B. Kahn, Integrity: The Life of George W. Norris (New York, 1937), p. 77. See also Richard Lowitt, "George W. Norris, James J. Hill, and the Railroad Rate Bill," Nebraska History, XL (June, 1959), 138.

³¹George W. Norris, "What Democracy Means to Me," Scholastic, XXXII (March 19, 1938), 29.

³²Kennedy, p. 162.

have come from his humble beginning in Ohio, or from his attendance at a school known as the "Poor Man's Harvard," Northern Indiana Normal School, in 1880.³³ He often thought of ways by which the government could break up huge concentrations of wealth and give increased benefits to the masses. In 1914 he wanted the government to initiate a heavy inheritance tax to stop the accumulation of great fortunes.³⁴ He also found a certain appeal in the single tax theory of Henry George. In April, 1914, upon hearing that Colonel John Jacob Astor had perished in the Titanic tragedy and had left his son over \$80,000,000, Norris commented on how hard the people of his home state toiled for a fraction of that amount. At this time it is said he made the statement: "That fellow [Henry] George may have the solution after all."³⁵ Norris also advocated an income tax sharply graduated in the upper brackets, and a low protective tariff. He considered a high tariff to be a developer of flagrant nationalism and he believed it to be an indirect subsidy to special interest groups at the expense of the consumer.³⁶

Norris frequently showed his contempt for the wealthy by uttering extremely sarcastic comments. During the 1917 bread riots, he recorded in the Congressional Record that "the remnants carried to the garbage buckets of the rich would feed many poor, hungry, and starving. In the

³³Neuberger and Kahn, p. 17. Northern Indiana Normal School is now Valparaiso University.

³⁴U.S., Congressional Record, 63rd Cong., 2nd Sess., 1914, LXI, 16805.

³⁵Neuberger and Kahn, p. 52.

³⁶U.S., Congressional Record, 71st Cong., 2nd Sess., 1930, LXXXII, 7301.

midst of luxury, they are crying for food."³⁷ Another caustic remark was made when Norris was out for a walk along the Potomac River with a colleague of his. John P. Morgan had anchored his yacht in the river and Norris reportedly said, "I'm glad to see the government has moved to Washington at last."³⁸

It is obvious that Norris felt the government could not promote the welfare of its citizens if controlled by wealthy individuals and special interest groups. An example of this constant attempt to institute more democratic government was his attitude toward the Federal Reserve system. Norris favored giving the people control by removing banking interests from the board of governors.³⁹

Although government control of monopolies and promotion of welfare were important to Norris, he also felt that whatever the issue he had an obligation to the American public to make his views known. He was not an eloquent speaker, but this did not stop him from telling Congress and the people exactly where he stood.

Norris did not fit the image of the typical fence-straddling political personality. Many times he courted political suicide.⁴⁰ He liked to think he followed his own conscience and did what he thought was right, when on several occasions he took positions not popular with his party or his constituents.⁴¹ Most congressmen find it necessary to

³⁷U.S., Congressional Record, 64th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1917, LXIV, 3746.

³⁸Neuberger and Kahn, p. 57.

³⁹U.S., Congressional Record, 63rd Cong., 2nd Sess., 1914, LXI, 1136.

⁴⁰"Last of Willful Men," Time, XLIV (September 11, 1944), 21.

⁴¹Kennedy, p. 166.

attend church regularly in fear of public reaction. However, Norris and a close colleague of his, Harry Lane of Oregon, never attended church; their only religion was the advocacy of brotherhood and peace.⁴² Good politicians usually belong to every club in town, but Norris belonged to very few. They also very seldom speak out against members of their own party, as Norris did in several instances. Although elected as a Republican, he opposed President Taft and at times vehemently condemned the actions of Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover.⁴³ He also was not afraid to take an unpopular position. His most historic stand came on March 1, 1917, when President Wilson asked Congress for authority to arm American merchant ships. Although he was never an advocate of the filibuster, he participated in one from March 1 to March 4, and along with eleven others defeated Wilson's proposal.⁴⁴ The whole country seemed outraged by this incident. Norris was labelled by his critics as treasonable, reprehensible, a traitor, a moral pervert, a political tramp, and a Benedict Arnold. He was deeply saddened by these criticisms, especially by the name traitor, but he was most hurt by President Wilson's statement that "a little group of willful men, representing no opinion but their own, had rendered the great government of the United States helpless and contemptible."⁴⁵

Because of the outraged opposition in his home state, when Norris continued to antagonize Wilson by voting "Nay" on the war resolution, he

⁴²Neuberger and Kahn, p. 56.

⁴³"Last of Willful Men," 21.

⁴⁴U.S., Congressional Record, 64th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1917, LXIV, 4565-5034.

⁴⁵Kennedy, p. 167.

personally rented an auditorium in Lincoln to tell his side of the story. No reporters met him on his arrival in Nebraska, and he was urged by many of his close friends not to go to the auditorium and speak. He paid little attention to them, however, and walked out on the stage alone that night and told the people of Nebraska that he had "come home to tell the truth."⁴⁶ He explained that he had voted against a declaration of war because "we are going into the war upon the command of gold. We are going to run the risk of sacrificing millions of our countrymen's lives in order that other countrymen may coin their life blood into money. Unborn millions will bend their backs in toil in order to pay for the terrible step we are about to take."⁴⁷ He went on to criticize the steel and power corporations for advocating increased military expenditures. And he condemned those propagandists who asked such questions as, "Do you want a Hun to rape your sister?"⁴⁸

Over a decade later Norris remained true to the anti-war stand he took in 1917. In Freeport, Illinois, he reviewed the ideas of Abraham Lincoln at a ceremony commemorating the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858. In his address he recalled the words he had spoken just prior to World War I: "Take every financial gain and profit out of war and the universal race for military supremacy between nations would vanish as the dew fades before the morning sun."⁴⁹ He added, "One of the great evils which always springs from war is the enrichment of individuals and corporations

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 171.

⁴⁷Norris, p. 196.

⁴⁸Neuberger and Kahn, p. 69.

⁴⁹Nebraska State Historical Society, Norris MSS, 3298, clipping from the Lincoln Herald, August 30, 1929. Hereafter referred to as Norris MSS.

which profit by wars. You cannot harvest a crop of millionaires without making an army of paupers."⁵⁰ Although, as is evident, Norris was somewhat emotional and idealistic in his speeches, he did not "sin by silence" as he once accused Hoover of doing.⁵¹ He spoke out clearly and consistently on the issues.

Senator Norris also believed that a politician should be non-partisan, and, if he could not be non-partisan, he should be bipartisan. The roots of this unusual political idea can be traced back to the time Norris reached Washington, D. C., as a young freshman representative. Up to then he had been a stalwart Republican, but a striking change seemed to take place when Norris came into contact with the progressive spirit of Theodore Roosevelt.⁵² By 1910 he showed strong signs of independence, and after his first term in the Senate, he could definitely be classed as an insurgent.

In the presidential election of 1912, Norris chose to abandon his party's nominee and back "Teddy" Roosevelt. As the years moved by, Norris grew increasingly independent of his party, although he continued to run under the banner of the G.O.P. In 1924 when Senator LaFollette ran for the presidency on a third-party Progressive ticket, Norris supported his old friend. But it is interesting to note that he was not generally in favor of third parties, despite voting for them in 1912 and 1924. The Nebraska State Journal reported in 1922 that Norris was "opposed to the formation of a third party, which would grow corrupt as both

⁵⁰Ibid., September 6, 1929.

⁵¹Neuberger and Kahn, p. 176.

⁵²Richard Lowitt, p. x.

old parties."⁵³ In this same article the outspoken Nebraska Senator declared that he believed "the independent voter is the salvation of the country"⁵⁴ and that only in the last election did he really begin "to come into his own and realize the power he possesses."⁵⁵

By the mid-1920's Norris had almost completely lost the spirit of partisanship. While vacationing in Waupaca, Wisconsin, he made a very sharp attack on partisan politics in a letter to Edgar Howard, editor of the Columbus Daily Telegram. He related to Howard that he was seriously thinking about running for the governorship of Nebraska so that he could work directly toward converting the state legislature into a non-partisan branch of government. After twenty years of witnessing the results of conference committees, buck passing, and machine politics, Norris was convinced that partisanship was "one of the greatest, if not the greatest evils in government."⁵⁶

By 1928 Norris had virtually abandoned the Republican party--except in name only. In the presidential election of that year, he gave his support to the candidate of the opposition party, Al Smith. The New Yorker was a representative of Tammany Hall, and a Catholic Democrat. Norris was midwestern, protestant, Republican, and prohibitionist, but the many differences did not stop Norris from campaigning for him. Critics vociferously condemned the Nebraskan for this decision and pointed out that it was unfortunate that he used the Republican party

⁵³ Norris MSS, Nebraska State Journal, November 21, 1922.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., Columbus Daily Telegram, July 8, 1927.

label to ride into office and then repudiated its standard bearer.⁵⁷ An editorial in the Overton Herald ridiculed his politics by stating: "When he is campaigning in Nebraska for himself he is a regular of the most regular type. At other times he is very prone to tell his party organization to go to hell."⁵⁸

Herbert Hoover easily won the 1928 contest, and many political analysts argue that the issue of religion was the major factor in determining the outcome. Both during the campaign and after the election, Norris attempted to blunt the arguments of the opposition by stating that the Hoover organization was using the issue of religion far too frequently when "the real problems were power and farm relief."⁵⁹ He also countered his critics' argument that it was unforgivable to switch parties by pointing out that in 1918 Herbert Hoover had been a member of the other party.

From the 1928 election until the end of his political career, Norris gradually moved away from association with any political party. In 1932 he again supported a Democratic presidential nominee, Franklin D. Roosevelt, after which Roosevelt commented that "through the years Norris had only one boss, his own conscience."⁶⁰ Also in 1932, Harpers carried an article by Charles Willis Thompson entitled, "Wanted: Political Courage," in which he wrote that "only George Norris could be called

⁵⁷ David Fellman, "The Liberalism of Senator Norris," American Political Science Review, XL (February, 1946), 42.

⁵⁸ Norris MSS, Overton Herald, July 25, 1929.

⁵⁹ Kennedy, p. 177.

⁶⁰ Neuberger and Kahn, p. 6.

really brave."⁶¹ In 1936 and again in 1942, Norris ran for the Senate as an independent, and perhaps it was here that he found a degree of political comfort and satisfaction.

⁶¹Charles Willis Thompson, "Wanted: Political Courage," Harpers, CLXV (November, 1932), 719.

CHAPTER II

NORRIS AS A CAMPAIGNER

Over the years in which George Norris served in state politics, the House of Representatives, and the Senate, he engaged in fourteen campaigns. Of these contests he was fortunate enough to win all but the first and the last. This record of successful elections is extraordinary in view of his liberal political philosophy and insurgent behavior. But Norris was enough of a practical politician to realize that incumbents had to carry on energetic campaigns if they hoped to win reelection. Early in his career he created for himself an image of honesty, hard work, and a willingness to defend the interests of the common man which served to carry him through some of his more difficult campaigns.

Before Norris entered politics, he accumulated a variety of experiences as a teacher and lawyer. He taught school in Lucas County, Ohio, before he received his law training at Northeast Indiana Normal School in 1883 at the age of twenty-two. The next few years he spent in pursuit of a town in which to establish a law practice. He first settled in Washington Territory only to find that lawyers were not in great demand. His next home was Beatrice, Nebraska, where he remained unemployed for almost a year. In 1887 Norris moved to the bustling town of Beaver City, Nebraska. It was here that he really got his start. He became well liked in the community, and in 1890 he married Pluma Lashley, the daughter of a pioneer merchant. After his marriage Norris

showed an increased interest in law and politics.¹

In 1890 he made the decision to run for the office of prosecuting attorney of Furnas County, Nebraska. His opponent, also from Beaver City, was an outstanding lawyer, John T. McClure. McClure represented the Populist party at a time when they controlled the state legislature and had two Nebraska congressmen in Washington. Norris was soundly beaten, but it was not the end of his political career.²

Four years later, Norris won the judgeship of the Fourteenth Judicial District by a margin of two votes, 4,612 to 4,610, in a disputed victory over D. T. Welty. In the elections that followed between 1894 and 1902, Norris had to be content with relatively close margins although he was successful in each contest. His margin of victory, however, increased with each campaign as traditional Republican strength returned to the state and the Populist party passed from the American political scene.³

In 1902, because of his obvious ability to get votes, Norris was encouraged by the Republican party to seek a congressional seat against incumbent Ashton C. Shallenberger. Norris readily admitted that Shallenberger was an able campaigner, a good speaker, and "just as bitter a partisan"⁴ as he was. The contest quickly became one of Shallenberger the rich banker versus Norris, a poor but proud cornhusking lawyer and

¹Alfred Lief, Democracy's Norris: The Biography of a Lonely Crusade (New York, 1939), p. 39.

²Lowitt, p. 28.

³Ibid., p. 34. See also, Richard Lowitt, "Populism and Politics: The Start of George W. Norris' Political Career," Nebraska History, XLII (June, 1961), 75-94.

⁴Norris, p. 90.

judge. Norris unexpectedly received one thousand dollars and free campaign speeches from the Republican National Committee headed by William Babcock of Wisconsin. This was perhaps the strongest endorsement the G.O.P. gave him in over fifty years of campaigning. As the election results were totaled, it was apparent the Republicans would sweep almost every state office and Norris would be carried to Washington on the landslide. However, the contest certainly was not a runaway for the challenger. The final count was Norris 14,927, Shallenberger 14,746--a difference of only 181 votes. Norris would not easily forget this race, because of its closeness, and because of the public enthusiasm for Theodore Roosevelt which helped numerous Republican candidates into office.⁵ Roosevelt's progressive programs and popular appeal continued to aid Norris and other Republicans in the elections of 1904 and 1906. By the time Roosevelt left the White House, Norris had become deeply attached to the fiery President.

Roosevelt's retirement was an unhappy adventure for the Nebraska Representative, not only because he missed the President, but because he suffered through one of his closest campaigns in the election of 1908. William Jennings Bryan, a popular Nebraskan, was the Democratic standard bearer chosen to run against William Howard Taft in the presidential contest. The strength of Bryan made it extremely difficult for Nebraska Republicans to get elected in that year. An able Grand Island lawyer and a devoted party worker, Fred C. Ashton, was chosen to challenge Norris. The returns in the Fifth Congressional District were extremely close. Norris received 20,649, only twenty-two votes more than Ashton's

⁵ Neuberger and Kahn, p. 28.

20,627. The next election for Norris in 1910 saw a considerable improvement; he won this congressional race by a majority of 4,000 votes.⁶

By 1912, after a decade in the House, his partisanship had cooled measurably. With each succeeding year it seemed he became more progressive and more independent. In 1912 he sadly expressed his sentiments concerning the Republican party by stating that ". . . my party organization I had supported so vigorously was guilty of virtually all the evils that I had charged against the opposition."⁷

It was at this time that Norris seriously considered retiring from national politics. His spirit of public service, however, was re-kindled when in 1912 he was approached by conservative Republicans from Nebraska with the suggestion that he run for the governorship. This offer in itself was not particularly objectionable to Norris because he had contemplated returning to his home state. But when he was offered \$15,000 by the "liquor and railroad interests,"⁸ he decided that it was a direct attempt to get him out of Washington and eventually out of the road. Instead of retiring from national politics, Norris made the decision to run for the Senate. His opponent was Governor A. C. Shallenberger, whom he had narrowly defeated for a House seat ten years earlier. This time the outcome was not so close. Nationally the Republican party was split, and Roosevelt and Taft succumbed to Woodrow Wilson, the Democratic nominee, while Democrats swept the state. The one exception was in the race for the U.S. Senate; Norris, with very little assistance from the

⁶Norris, p. 91.

⁷Ibid., p. 92.

⁸Ibid., p. 150.

Republican party organization, defeated Shallenberger 126,022 to 111,946.⁹

After three successful years in the Senate many Nebraskans felt Norris was ready for the presidency. With over thirteen years of experience in national politics, Norris had gradually accumulated strong national support. Petitions were circulated about the state in hopes that Nebraskans would once again produce a presidential candidate. Norris, in December, 1915, squelched this attempt to place his name on the ballot by writing a letter to Secretary of State, Charles W. Pool, requesting that his name not be printed on the official presidential preferential ballot.¹⁰ Norris seemed to know that the presidency was one office he would never hold. He once made the statement, "I have no expectation of being nominated for President. A man who has followed the political course I have is barred from the office."¹¹

In 1918 competition for the Republican nomination to the Senate was extremely fierce. Norris had filibustered against Wilson's resolution to arm merchant ships and had opposed Wilson's war declaration. Due to this and his insurgency, his popularity had declined markedly within the Republican party. Republican rivals within the state knew this would be a prime opportunity to unseat the Senator, but because of division within the G.O.P. Norris won the nomination.

⁹Norris MSS, Nebraska State Journal, December 5, 1927. See also, Donald Danker, "Nebraska and the Presidential Election of 1912," Nebraska History, XXXVII (December, 1956), 284-309.

¹⁰Norris MSS, Nebraska State Journal, December 28, 1915.

¹¹Kennedy, p. 173.

CHART 1

PRIMARY ELECTION BALLOTING¹²

George W. Norris	23,715
Charles S. Sloan	17,070
Ross L. Hammond	16,948
William Madgett	4,301
David Mercer	4,089

The general election drew national attention. The Democrats nominated John H. Morehead. He had been governor since 1913 and was portrayed in the election as a super-patriot, with the obvious intention of casting Norris in the role of a traitor. By election time the country was swinging back to the Republicans and to the surprise of many, Norris won his second term in the Senate, 120,086 to 99,460.¹³

By 1924 the insurgent Republican from Nebraska was a well-known political personality. His personal popularity along with his work on the Judiciary and Agricultural Committees helped him easily win the 1924 primary and general elections.¹⁴

The presidential election of 1928 served to set the stage for perhaps Norris's most interesting race--the election of 1930. By supporting Al Smith he incurred the wrath of the Republican organization. And in 1930 a number of influential Nebraskans were quietly planning to oust him from office by using most any means possible. In the primary election a scheme was devised within the party to defeat Norris. The plot included the use of a grocery clerk from Broken Bow, Nebraska, with the

¹²James Olson, History of Nebraska (Lincoln, 1955), p. 272.

¹³Neuberger and Kahn, p. 133.

¹⁴James A. Stone, "The Norris Program in 1924," Nebraska History, XLIII (June, 1961), 125.

same name as Senator Norris. He was induced to file as a Republican candidate in order to confuse the voters and consequently give the nomination to W. M. Stebbins, state treasurer, or Samuel R. McKelvie, former governor.¹⁵ Fortunately for Senator Norris the plot was spoiled when "Grocer Norris" waited too long to file, and as a result his request to become a candidate was declared invalid by the Chief Justice of the State Supreme Court, Charles A. Goss. The application of "Grocer Norris" had been received two days after the deadline of July 4. Norris was so angry when the conspiracy began to unfold that he suggested a senatorial investigation, and subsequently launched out on the most vigorous campaign of his career. He spoke in every county in Nebraska, delivering as many as three speeches a day. His decision to meet the people and tell his story, along with the well publicized Republican intrigue and growing Democratic support for his political position, netted him an easy primary victory.¹⁶

In the general election, his opponent was one of the most formidable candidates he had yet met: Gilbert M. Hitchcock, publisher and owner of the Omaha World-Herald, and a distinguished Nebraskan with a fine congressional record. The campaign was one of the most ruthless in the annals of Nebraska history. Norris was faced with both state and local Republican central committees that did not want him, an unfavorable press, an extremely wealthy opponent, and the Ku Klux Klan, which distributed over a quarter of a million copies of defamatory literature throughout the state. However, despite this caliber of opposition the

¹⁵U.S., Congressional Record, 71st Cong., 3rd Sess., 1931, LXXIV, 6451.

¹⁶Norris, p. 300.

final count showed Norris 247,118, Hitchcock 172,795, and a mysterious independent candidate, Mrs. Jesse Craig, 14,884.¹⁷ The outcome clearly pointed out that the people of Nebraska would not stand for the use of underhanded methods in political campaigns. A senate investigation into election procedures prior to November had implicated many prominent Republicans and the National Republican Committee, but resulted in the sentencing of only two; Victor Seymore, western regional director for the G.O.P., was given the maximum penalty of six months in jail for perjury resulting from his failure to tell the federal investigation committee the truth about his part in the conspiracy. The store clerk from Broken Bow was sentenced to ninety days for lying about his part in the plot.¹⁸

For some time after the election, Norris remained dejected over the abortive effort by his own party to oust him from office. Because of the circumstances created by the Republican stand in 1930, when it was time for Norris to run again in 1936, he was faced with an important decision: should he try again to gain the Republican nomination or should he switch parties and run as a Democrat? Should he denounce partisan politics and enter as an independent, or should he retire from politics and return to Nebraska? When asked what he thought Lincoln would do in this situation, he replied, "Lincoln would be just like me. He wouldn't know what the hell to do!"¹⁹ Norris actually made two decisions in the course of the campaign. At first he reported that he would not run, but

¹⁷Ibid., p. 301. Mrs. Craig had allegedly filed in an attempt to draw votes from Norris.

¹⁸U.S., Congressional Record, 71st Cong., 3rd Sess., 1931, LXXIV, 6452.

¹⁹Neuberger and Kahn, p. 359.

then, after a good deal of prodding from his friends, he chose to run as an independent. It appeared that Norris had a genuine desire to retire from public life. He stated in 1936 that he would "under no circumstances accept a Democratic nomination," nor "could he be induced to become a Republican candidate."²⁰ All evidence at the time supported the idea that Norris would not run. Nevertheless, petitions were circulated by his backers in Nebraska, of whom the most important was James Lawrence, editor of the Lincoln Star. When it appeared to Norris that enough people in his home state really wanted him to run, he then made the decision to file as a candidate.²¹ The idea of running as an independent was not something new to Norris. He had considered such a candidacy in 1924 and again in 1930, but not until 1936, when his progressivism was perhaps at its peak, and the circumstances the most opportune, did he take the step which gave him untold satisfaction. Norris was at last through with party labels, and in his autobiography he explained why he ran as a man without a party.

I became convinced firmly there is in reality no difference between a Republican political machine and a Democratic political machine. Gradually it came to me that the evils in American life, the corruption that takes its toll of American people, uses political parties for its conveniences. When I became convinced that the corruption which existed in my party was just as great, or seemed to be just as great, as that which existed in any other party, I became a disappointment to many of my Republican friends. It was impossible for me to draw any difference between a Republican political machine and a Democratic political machine. The methods were identical; their purposes, the same. The corporations and monopolies furnishing the sinews of war, putting up finances which brought Republican victories, were obnoxious and detrimental to public good, and I could not abstain from fighting them,

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Norris, p. 369.

even though I believed and still believe, that one ought to be more careful, desirous and anxious to expose wrong or evil in his own party than in the opposing party.²²

The Republican nominee in the 1936 election was Robert G. Simmons, a well-known lawyer and former Nebraska Representative. Norris's other opponent was a fiery young Democratic party worker from Scottsbluff, Terry Carpenter. All the candidates campaigned energetically, although hampered somewhat by severe heat and an extreme drought. Both the Republican and independent contestants found finances for the campaign ample, with Norris receiving all but three thousand dollars from out-of-state sources. Carpenter, on the other hand, had difficulty in procuring funds, especially from his own party. The Democrats, including the state central committee, endorsed Norris, leaving their original nominee in a rather embarrassing position.²³ For three weeks Norris stumped across Nebraska in a strenuous effort to meet the people. Again to the frustration and surprise of his opposition, Norris was returned to Washington for another six years by a margin of 35,000 votes; Norris received 258,700, Simmons 223,770, and Carpenter finished a poor third with 108,391.²⁴

The outcome delighted Norris and his supporters; he had run as an independent in one of his toughest campaigns. Before the election many individuals throughout the country, including the Chief Executive, had been deeply concerned about the fate of the veteran Senator. President Roosevelt, whom Norris greatly admired, had said in September, 1936, that

²²Ibid., p. 371.

²³Henry C. Luckey, Eighty-five American Years (New York, 1955), p. 103.

²⁴Norris, p. 370.

he was "frankly a little worried about George Norris's chances in Nebraska," while ". . . the rest of the country was going fine--except in Maine and Vermont."²⁵ On election night "the last thing Roosevelt did before going to bed at three was to call Nebraska to inquire about Norris."²⁶ In a letter to Norris shortly after the election, Roosevelt said that "of all the results on November 3, your re-election gave me the greatest happiness."²⁷

As the election year of 1936 came to a close, the unorthodox political campaigner, George Norris, had been in Congress for thirty-four years. Four times he had won re-election to the House of Representatives and four times he had been returned to the Senate. His entire political career dating back to his first campaign in 1890 was an almost unheard of story of successful campaigns, when on many occasions political experts gave him little chance of survival. In 1902 he won by only 181 votes, in 1908 by the slim margin of twenty-two votes, and in 1910 by only 4,000. In the senatorial primary of 1918 he faced four Republican hopefuls; if there had been only one or two opponents, he probably would have been defeated. He was fortunate the plot involving "Grocer Norris" did not work in 1930, and in 1936 all political precedent was broken when the Democratic Central Committee repudiated their own candidate. In view of this record, it would appear that Norris was indeed lucky more than once. However, he undoubtedly had an uncanny

²⁵Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Roosevelt, III, The Politics of Upheaval (Boston, 1960), p. 635. See also, Elliot Roosevelt, ed., F.D.R. His Personal Letters, 1928-1945, I (New York, 1950), p. 622. Franklin Roosevelt to Hiram Johnson, October 26, 1936.

²⁶Schlesinger, p. 642.

²⁷Roosevelt, p. 628.

ability to attract voters, and in several elections won by substantial margins.

The key to Norris's extraordinary success seems to center around two major items, of which the most significant was his reputation for honesty and integrity. Throughout his career he had constantly proclaimed his loyalty to the common man and to public interests, and on numerous occasions had demonstrated a dedication to the promotion of their cause. He challenged his own Republican party, the Democratic party, and any individual or institution he thought violated his concept of justice, brotherhood, and peace--the idealistic principles that guided his conscience. By these actions and attitudes he conveyed to his constituents in Nebraska the feeling that he was close to them and always looking out for their interests.

A second important reason for his apparent magnetism was his ability and willingness to carry on a strenuous and effective local campaign, especially when the race appeared to be close. He would come to Nebraska for several weeks before the election and visit the voters throughout the state. There is no substitute for personal contact, and it was this very thing that drew a good many voters to the Norris side of the ballot. This particular factor became increasingly important as his reputation grew. The voters wished to see the man who served them since the turn of the century and who had accomplished so much.

A number of possible additional explanations exist. Norris had the ability to appeal to both major political parties. In 1930, when he ran on the Republican ticket, strong Democratic support contributed to his victory. He also projected the image of being an extremely hard worker and dedicated public servant. This resulted from the fact that he labored long hours at his office with no hobbies except an occasional

walk and an annual vacation to Wisconsin. Drafting legislation, debating bills, and keeping informed on public questions was his whole life. Furthermore, Norris was not a typical politician. He used a very frank, simple, direct, unsubtle approach in his speeches, with the exception of a few satirical stories. He was not a baby kisser, church goer, scripture utterer, ribbon cutter, or Washington socialite; he was plain George Norris, with sloppy clothes and bowstring tie.

Another factor which may have been a key to success was his growing national reputation, which over the years had been fostered by the press. Indeed, by the mid-1920's he was considered by many journalists to be America's best known Republican. And by the end of 1937, after he had introduced the unicameral system of government in Nebraska and the Lame Duck amendment, he was well-known across the country.

It is possible that during his last term Norris believed he would never again run for political office, but this feeling did not make him less eager to fulfill his responsibilities. He continued vigorously to pursue solutions to a variety of vital problems which threatened the nation's health. Little did he know that despite his hard work and successful career, he would be defeated in 1942.

From 1937 to 1942, Norris was engaged in debating a number of important questions, one of which was the Tennessee Valley Authority. Norris had been the leading congressional advocate of the T.V.A., and because he had been responsible for conceiving the idea, he felt it his duty to see that the program functioned properly. Several times he found it necessary to propose resolutions that would strengthen the agency. On one occasion, in the spring of 1938, he inaugurated a Senate investigation backed by \$50,000 to probe allegations by Arthur Morgan, chairman of the T.V.A., of pressure from private companies, inefficient

administration, and jealousy between board members.²⁸

Another serious question that occupied the Senate, and one in which Norris was very interested, was the attempt by President Roosevelt to enlarge the Supreme Court. Norris was against any change in the structure of the court, although he had frequently criticized its decisions. He, like many others, was also upset over the abrupt way Roosevelt introduced his court plan without previously soliciting advice from important congressmen.²⁹

As the world moved closer to war in 1937, the country and Congress shifted their interest from the New Deal to the question of whether the nation should begin to prepare for war or remain neutral. Norris showed the same hatred for war and the same pacifist caution he had exemplified in 1917; this attitude prevailed almost up to December 7, 1941. Only the bombing of Pearl Harbor really convinced Norris that the United States should enter the international conflict.

In defense of his pacifism, Norris often spoke of the thousands of American graves in France and of the injustice of the Versailles Treaty.³⁰ Nevertheless, he favored the Lend-Lease agreement because he was convinced it would not take the United States into war or require sending American troops to foreign soil. Norris pointed out that "no single piece of legislation attracted [his] attention more than the program of Lend-Lease."³¹

²⁸U.S., Congressional Record, 75th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1938, LXXXIII, 3010.

²⁹Schlesinger, p. 448.

³⁰U.S., Congressional Record, 75th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1938, LXXXIII, 5853.

³¹Norris, p. 392. See also, U.S., Congressional Record, 77th Cong., 1st Sess., 1941, LXXXVII, 1975.

Norris was likewise concerned about peacetime conscription. A large standing army would, he believed, make the United States more warlike, result in higher taxes, and increase the possibility of war. In the Senate debates he states: "I am opposed to it [peacetime conscription] and I would vote against it if every citizen in my state, from the cradle to old age, came forward and confronted me now and told me I had to vote for it."³²

Throughout his last term in office, Norris had to deal with many more problems. He kept a vigilant eye out for opportunities to aid his agrarian constituents who had suffered continuously from depressed farm prices since the end of World War I. He introduced a bill to "expedite the prosecution of the war by making provision for an increased supply of rubber manufactured from alcohol produced from agriculture or forest products,"³³ and he tried his best to find a solution to the problem of farm labor shortage in 1942. He also favored legislation that would give the federal government the power to stop pollution of the nation's streams, and a bill to eradicate poll taxes.³⁴ In the voter tax controversy he posed the question: "If the states can tax a federal function such as the right to vote, why can they not tax federal post offices, courthouses, and other government agencies?"³⁵ Perhaps his primary interest during the war was the formulation of a postwar peace plan.

³²U.S., Congressional Record, 76th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1940, LXXXVI, 10119.

³³Ibid., 77th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1942, LXXXVIII, 5317.

³⁴Ibid., 76th Cong., 1st Sess., 1939, LXXXIV, 4913.

³⁵Ibid., 77th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1942, LXXXVIII, 9045. See also, Norris, pp. 358 and 361.

He felt, as did many others, that it was important to establish a lasting peace, a "peace without hate."³⁶

³⁶"Winning the Peace," New Republic, CVII (July 27, 1942), 119-120.

CHAPTER III

DEPRESSION POLITICS IN NEBRASKA

Many states find themselves firmly entrenched in one political category or another; either they are staunchly Republican or staunchly Democrat. Nebraska, on the other hand, finds itself in a somewhat different political position. Although it is generally considered to be a Republican state, there have been times since its founding when it has reacted against the Republican party, has broken its traditional pattern of voting, and to one degree or another has voted either independent or Democratic. When the people of Nebraska have done this, however, it has usually been during a period of economic crisis.

One of those periods of economic discontent came in the 1890's. At this time Nebraska voters elected several Populists and also turned to William Jennings Bryan and the Democrats. Although Bryan remained popular for many years after he ran for the presidency in 1896, in local politics most of the offices were filled by Republicans.¹

In the 1920's when farm prices declined in Nebraska, once again there was a pronounced increase in Democratic strength. In 1924, for example, the Democrats scored victories in the governor's race and in the First, Third, and Fifth Congressional Districts.² This political protest

¹Olson, p. 285. See also, Walter Johnson, "Politics in the Midwest," Nebraska History, XXXII (March, 1951), 3-15.

²Olson, p. 285.

was prevalent in other midwestern states also, as was described by the Minnesota Farm-Bureau News, August 1, 1926, when it said:

Under the operation of economic conditions created and fostered by one-sided fiscal legislation, the American farmer has been denied the benefit of existing tariffs and compelled to operate at accumulative loss so that Eastern industrialists might continue to reap benefits in foreign trade. The West cannot withstand indefinitely the drain upon its capital resources by Eastern industry, and the waning purchasing power of the farmer must inevitably drag in ruin Western commerce and industry depending upon it. It is for that reason that Western business, banking and manufacturing are vitally interested in the solution of the agricultural problem, and are joining with the farmer in demanding prompt and adequate redress.³

Despite a tendency in the 1920's to vote for the Democrats, all three Republican presidential candidates, Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover, won their respective contests in Nebraska by substantial margins. Also, the G.O.P. remained in control of most state and local offices. The depression was to bring, however, a dramatic change in Nebraska politics.⁴

The 1930's was a time of crisis and despair, and also it was the most successful period in Nebraska history for the Democrats. In 1930 there was evidence of apprehension in Nebraska over the conduct of the Hoover administration, but despite a progressively worsening depression, Republicans held off a Democratic onslaught until the presidential election of 1932. In the election of 1932, in most of the state contests, Republicans were removed--with the exception of a few state legislators. All five congressional seats were filled by Democrats and even the popular Robert G. Simmons was replaced by Terry Carpenter in the conservative

³John D. Hicks and Theodore Saloutos, Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 1900-1939 (Madison, 1951), p. 396.

⁴Svend Petersen, A Statistical History of the American Presidential Elections (New York, 1963), pp. 80-90.

Fifth District by a close vote of 53,586 to 49,200. Charles Bryan in the governor's race defeated the Republican candidate Dwight Griswold by approximately 36,000 votes.⁵ The same pattern was evident in the presidential contest. Roosevelt rolled up an impressive win by getting 62.98 percent of the vote--359,082--while Hoover fell far behind with only 35.29 percent of the ballots cast, or 201,177.⁶

Nationally, Franklin Roosevelt swept to victory by polling over seven million more votes than Hoover who received approximately 15,750,000. The electoral college count came out to be 472 for Roosevelt and 59 for Hoover. "Every state south and west of Pennsylvania including 282 counties that had never gone Democrat before,"⁷ went for Roosevelt. In contrast to Hoover, "Roosevelt seemed attractive enough to induce a whole regiment of Republican progressives to bolt the party,"⁸ relates William Leuchtenburg, and this was indeed the situation. Roosevelt had secured the support of such personalities as Hiram Johnson of California, Robert LaFollette, Jr. of Wisconsin, Bronson Cutting of New Mexico, as well as George Norris from Nebraska.⁹

Norris had spoken out early in favor of Roosevelt and campaigned vigorously for the Democratic candidate. Undoubtedly Norris's stand

⁵Nebraska Legislative Reference Bureau, comp., Nebraska Blue Book, 1932 (Lincoln, 1932), p. 498.

⁶Petersen, p. 91.

⁷William E. Leuchtenburg, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal (New York, 1963), p. 17.

⁸Ibid. See also, Theodore Saloutos, "William A. Hirth: Middle Western Agrarian," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXVIII (September, 1951), 215-232.

⁹Roosevelt, p. 310, Franklin D. Roosevelt to George W. Norris, December 14, 1932 and editor's comments.

served to draw a good many independents and liberal Republicans into the Democratic column despite strong arguments by the Republican party that Hoover had done a commendable job. Nebraska Republicans pointed out in the 1932 campaign that throughout the crisis the President had displayed great courage and confidence in the institutions and economy of the country and that this was the most important thing needed if a return to prosperity were to be achieved. They also reiterated that: (1) the Versailles Treaty had been unjust; (2) both state and federal government should be simplified; (3) Republicans were friends of labor; (4) women of the state and nation should be commended for the "intelligent and patriotic interest" which they had taken in political affairs; (5) Senator Norris should be congratulated for his work on strengthening the Constitution; and (6) all Republican members of Congress should be commended "for their efforts in securing the passage of the anti-injunction bill sponsored by American labor."¹⁰

The Democratic party effectively expounded its arguments. They spoke of special interest groups, monopolies, and mergers, all of which had "ruined the American farmer, pauperized labor, bankrupted the banker and the small businessman, paralyzed industry and filled the land with suffering and woe."¹¹ Moreover, they condemned the Hoover philosophy of government and paid tribute to those Democrats who had sought to reverse the government's policies.¹²

Other political parties also offered solutions, criticism, and

¹⁰U.S., Works Projects Administration, Nebraska Party Platforms 1858-1940 (Lincoln, 1940), pp. 464-465.

¹¹Ibid., p. 462.

¹²Ibid.

candidates. The Socialists put Norman Thomas on the ballot in Nebraska, while the Communist party backed William Foster. Both did relatively poorly in the Midwest, but nationally the Socialist representative polled 884,781 votes and the Communist candidate mustered approximately 103,000.¹³

Many staunch conservatives were alarmed at the rise in radical parties and altruistic plans, but a brief look at farm prices from 1929 to 1932 illustrates why extremists like Huey Long and Father Coughlin appealed to thousands of people.

CHART 2

FARM PRICES 1929-1932¹⁴

Crop	1929	1930	1931	1932
corn	\$.67	\$.52	\$.36	\$.13
wheat	1.00	.54	.39	.27
oats	.38	.27	.23	.10
barley	.49	.33	.27	.13
hay	8.80	6.90	6.90	4.10
potatoes	1.20	.75	.50	.31
beef cattle	10.50	8.50	5.40	4.10
hogs	8.20	7.10	3.30	2.30
chickens	.148	.122	.112	.065

Purchasing power was down considerably from its 1920's level.

Prices that farmers had to pay for farm implements decreased slower than prices paid for their products. Based on a parity of 100 for the period from 1910 to 1914, the following chart indicates this downward trend.

¹³Petersen, p. 91.

¹⁴Olson, p. 300.

CHART 3

FARM PARITY RATING 1920-1932¹⁵

1920's	87.22
1930	83.00
1931	65.00
1932	54.00

Rainfall in 1931 and 1932 was also below normal and proved to be the beginning of the worst drought in Nebraska history. The only year during the five years after 1931 to register a normal rainfall reading was 1935.

As the depression deepened wages went down while unemployment went up. In Nebraska from 1929 to 1933, wage payments declined from \$36,648,000 to \$18,872,000. In the city of Omaha several thousand workers went on the relief rolls and quickly drained the county treasury. In rural areas farmers found it impossible to pay off mortgages and were forced to transfer their land to a new owner.¹⁶

As a result of the poor economic conditions, one of the greatest protest votes in the history of the state and of the nation took place in 1932. The citizenry accepted the only alternative presented to them, and although it was the first time many of them had ever marked their ballot for a Democrat, they cast their vote for Franklin D. Roosevelt.

In the congressional and state elections of 1934, the Democrats repeated the pattern begun in 1932 by winning a landslide victory. Republicans in Nebraska, however, cut into the Democratic majority in the state legislature and managed to elect the Commissioner of Public Lands and Buildings. Karl Stefan, a Norfolk radio announcer and Republican

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 301.

nominee from the Third Congressional District, also contributed to the mild G.O.P. gains by defeating the colorful Edgar Howard of Columbus. In all other races Democrats were elected. Edward Burke won over Robert G. Simmons in the senatorial contest, 578,764 to 305,958, and in the governor's race Dwight Griswold lost by approximately 18,000 votes to Roy L. Cochran, 284,095 to 266,707.¹⁷

On the national scene in 1934, Republicans were not so fortunate as in Nebraska. Results showed Republicans losing a number of significant congressional seats. The final count in the House brought Democratic strength up to 322 members, Republican representatives were reduced to 103, and there were ten Progressives. Republican strength reached an all time low in the House. The story in the Senate was an even gloomier one for the G.O.P. Democrats picked up enough seats to command a two-thirds majority, "the greatest margin any party had ever held in the history of the Upper House."¹⁸ The election returns clearly reflected the unrest and distress that was present in the country. But interestingly enough Roosevelt "continued in 1934 to take a more moderate and conservative stand on policy than did the majority of congressmen."¹⁹

The presidential election year of 1936 brought with it little political relief for the outcast Republican party in Nebraska, although there were signs that pointed to an increase in G.O.P. strength in the near future. Roosevelt was still very popular and was given fifty-six percent of the vote--six percent less than what he had received in 1932. Democrats in all state offices were re-elected and Republicans Leonard

¹⁷Nebraska Legislative Reference Bureau, 1934, p. 516.

¹⁸Leuchtenburg, p. 116.

¹⁹James M. Burns, Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox (New York, 1956), p. 187.

N. Swanson, Commissioner of Public Lands, and Karl Stefan, Congressman from the Third Congressional District, won again.²⁰

Across the country the story was similar to that in Nebraska. The prophetic statement of Jim Farley that the Republican presidential nominee, Alfred Landon, would carry only two states, Main and Vermont, did indeed prove itself true. Roosevelt received the electoral votes of every state except two and overwhelmed Landon electorally 523 to 8; the popular vote stood at 27,751,000 for Roosevelt while Landon trailed by eleven million votes.²¹ The grand sweep by the Democrats strikingly showed itself in the Senate. When Congress returned to Washington D.C. to open a new session, there were so many Democratic senators--seventy-five in all--that some had to sit on the Republican side. The situation was so decidedly one-sided that in many parts of the nation "the G.O.P. had become the butt of the jokes of politicians and radio comedians."²²

Radical parties also lost some of their political strength. From 1932 to 1936, the number of Socialist votes was reduced by about 700,000. In 1932 Thomas had polled 884,000, but in 1936 he was capable of mustering only 187,000.²³ The secret of Roosevelt's appeal is partially explained by the nature of his campaign.

In 1936 Roosevelt portrayed himself as the captain of a new non-partisan crusade. He mentioned his own party's name only incidentally

²⁰Nebraska Legislative Reference Bureau, 1936, p. 458.

²¹John Flynn, The Roosevelt Myth (New York, 1956), p. 92. See also, Roosevelt, p. 623, Franklin D. Roosevelt to Hiram Johnson, October 26, 1936, and p. 624, Franklin D. Roosevelt to James A. Farley, November 4, 1936.

²²Leuchtenburg, p. 196.

²³Flynn, p. 92.

and stressed the importance of a Democratic alliance with Farm-Laborites. He appealed to progressives to lend a hand in the battle to bring to the country needed programs that would fulfill their hopes as well as the dreams of countless others.²⁴ Throughout the campaign Democrats grumbled about the peculiar absence of their party label in the speeches of their standard bearer, and wondered how the President could entice Hiram Johnson, the LaFollettes, and George Norris to actually campaign for him. Norris came out strongly for Roosevelt by stating that his defeat would be a "national calamity," and that "not within my recollection has there been a president who had taken the advanced ground which President Roosevelt has taken to free the common man from the domination of monopoly and human greed."²⁵

Nature also seemed to cooperate in Roosevelt's non-partisan campaign by staging a crisis atmosphere throughout the Midwest. Before the election the President went into the interior of the country to have a "look-see," and all the while he was there he never once mentioned the campaign, except, as J. M. Burns points out "in an offhand, humorous way, and never did he mention the Republican opposition."²⁶

Independents, liberal Republicans, and Democrats in Nebraska responded to the President's non-partisan position by re-electing George Norris to the Senate as a petition candidate running as an independent. In pre-election ceremony, Roosevelt had come out bluntly for Norris. Speaking in Omaha, the President endorsed him by calling Norris "one of

²⁴Rosenman, pp. 280-281.

²⁵Leuchtenburg, p. 191. See also, Roosevelt, pp. 618-619, Franklin D. Roosevelt to George W. Norris, September 19, 1936, and editor's comments.

²⁶Burns, p. 277. See also, Rosenman, pp. 413-503.

our major prophets,"²⁷ and stating that "outside of my own state of New York I have constantly refrained from taking part in state elections. But to this rule I have made--and so long as he [Norris] lives I will always make--one magnificently justified exception. George Norris's candidacy transcends state and party lines."²⁸ He went on to urge everyone to aid in re-electing Norris as an independent.

As a result of Roosevelt's support for Norris, the state Democratic organization abandoned their Democratic nominee, Terry Carpenter, in favor of the President's choice. Partly because of their decision to back Norris, Carpenter was denied adequate campaign funds and ran a poor third. The repercussions of this type of party behavior were evident in the elections which followed. Party workers and officials became apathetic and less interested in party affairs. In the Republican camp Robert G. Simmons had run well against Norris and the G.O.P. strengthened their organization in each succeeding election year.

After the 1936 election Henry C. Luckey, Representative from Nebraska, stated that "the political atmosphere in the country began a gradual change. The farmers felt there was too much regimentation, others felt that there was too much boondoggling in the relief program, and too large a trend toward control by the executive branch of the government."²⁹ By 1938 the political pendulum had begun to swing back toward the Republican party in Nebraska. In the spring of that year, as prices dropped, a boisterous minority began to mount an attack on Roosevelt. The Farmers Independent Council and the Corn Belt Liberty League, along with articles from the Chicago Tribune, demanded that the farmer be

²⁷Rosenman, p. 431.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Luckey, p. 100.

given "a free rein in agriculture . . . because the farmer does not want politicians telling him how to run his farm."³⁰ The farmers seemed to agree that they could not make a profit if farm prices continued to be set by the laws of supply and demand. It was strictly against their tradition to cooperate in price fixing programs, but "the swing in industry and labor toward greater price regulation . . . made it necessary that agriculture have corresponding price protection."³¹

In the election of 1938 in Nebraska, Democrats were returned to only four partisan offices: the governorship, the office of secretary of state, the Second Congressional District, and the Fifth Congressional District.³²

Nationally, Republicans made heavy gains in both congressional and gubernatorial races. Eighty-two new G.O.P. members entered the House and thirteen governorships were captured. In the Senate, Republicans won eight new seats, all without losing a single congressional office.³³ Roosevelt's New Deal program and Democrats on every level suffered a notable defeat. The election of 1938 marked the return of the G.O.P. as a national political power.

Observers of this trend to Republicanism pointed out a variety of reasons behind the growing discontent with the Roosevelt administration. They explained that there were new faces in the Republican party, a recession had occurred in 1937, millions remained jobless, wheat and corn

³⁰Hicks and Saloutos, p. 519.

³¹Ibid., p. 525.

³²Nebraska Legislative Reference Bureau, 1938, p. 529.

³³Burns, p. 365. See also, Roosevelt, pp. 827-828. Franklin D. Roosevelt to Josephus Daniels, November 14, 1938, and editor's comments.

prices were low, people were irritated "at relief spending and alarmed by the bludgeoning power of labor."³⁴ Also many middle class voters had "lost confidence in the administration's ability to restore prosperity."³⁵ As the depression persisted, farmers and businessmen began to feel that the Republicans could run the government with greater efficiency and effectiveness than the Democrats. The New Deal ironically had created just enough prosperity that the property owner and the people who had been oriented in individualism returned to their old value system. As the country became even more prosperous, the citizenry--especially in the Midwest--became even more reactionary. On the other hand, the 1938 election vividly demonstrated that Democratic strength rested heavily among the low income, urban groups--particularly labor unions and minority groups.

By the end of 1939, it was apparent which direction the country was moving. Congress cut appropriations, rejected several Roosevelt appointments, and in general disagreed with Roosevelt's Keynesian ideas.³⁶

The trend back to Republicanism in Nebraska continued through the election of 1940, and when the results of the presidential election were in, the Democrats had lost control of the state. Wendell Willkie won Nebraska's electoral votes by a substantial margin. He received 352,201 popular votes and Franklin Roosevelt was given 263,677. The percentage of the total votes cast ran 57.19 percent for Willkie, 42.81 percent for Roosevelt.³⁷ Out of the four important political positions the Democrats

³⁴Leuchtenburg, p. 271.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶U.S., Congressional Record, 76th Cong., 1st Sess., 1939, LXXXIV, 2843.

³⁷Petersen, p. 98.

held in 1938, they retained only two. These were congressional seats occupied by Charles McLaughlin, in the Second Congressional District, who won by 10,000 votes, and Harry Coffee in the Fifth Congressional District.³⁸

In the contest for the presidency, Willkie ran a strong race but could garner only 22,334,413 votes, enough for 82 electoral ballots. Roosevelt won an unprecedented third term with 449 electoral votes and 27,243,466 popular votes.³⁹ Many in the Midwest wondered how Roosevelt could win so overwhelmingly across the country and lose so easily in the farming areas. The truth of the matter was that Roosevelt won in many areas by a relatively close vote. Willkie was a strong advocate of private enterprise and private power. He had fought the T.V.A. in the courts and criticized it in his speeches. He was a businessman, lawyer, and farm owner.⁴⁰ With these qualities he naturally ran best in the Midwest.

It was also plain to see that opposition to Roosevelt was rapidly increasing on a number of different fronts. Isolationists called for the maintenance of a neutral policy. Sentiment of this sort was especially noticeable among Irish, Italian, and German ethnic groups. It also found favor with college students and with members of the Republican party. Added to this, there was a great amount of opposition to Roosevelt because he had run for a third term, and there was slight opposition in the ranks of labor. The Republicans gained strength from their long absence from political power and criticism of the New Deal.

³⁸Nebraska Legislative Reference Bureau, 1940, p. 408.

³⁹Petersen, p. 98.

⁴⁰Leuchtenburg, p. 321.

Although there was growing apathy in the Democratic party in Nebraska and the Midwest, this was not true in the South nor in urban areas.⁴¹ Roosevelt received strong support from both these areas and from liberal Republicans. Norris had spoken against the third term in 1928, but he thought 1940 was a critical year and thus supported Roosevelt.⁴² He also vehemently denounced Willkie as a spokesman of private power interests. All of this was at a time when Nebraska was solidly back in the Republican column and a time when many of Norris's constituents vigorously backed the Republican presidential nominee. As the situation appeared in November, 1940, Norris was either positive he would not seek re-election in 1942 or he was a man of conviction and rare political courage.

⁴¹Nebraska State Historical Society, James Lawrence MSS, 1675, Lawrence to John P. Robertson, September 21, 1940.

⁴²Leuchtenburg, p. 315.

CHAPTER IV

PRIMARY ELECTION AND CONVENTION

ACTIVITY IN NEBRASKA, 1942

Because of the distraction of the war and the fact that 1942 was not a presidential election year, interest in politics in Nebraska was considerably less than what it had been in 1940. Nevertheless, the race for Norris's Senate seat gradually captured the voters' attention.

Norris had for some time indicated a desire to retire from public service. Before the 1936 election he had stated that he definitely would not seek another term. However, due to the efforts of his close friends--James Lawrence, John Robertson,¹ Christian A. Sorensen, and others--he was persuaded to accept an independent candidacy.

During the early part of 1942, he repeatedly told the press that he would not be a candidate for re-election. Apparently he realized that he was growing old--he was eighty-one--and that he could no longer keep up with the work that his office demanded. Throughout his last term he had not been in good health, and in the spring of 1942 he spent over a month in the hospital.²

As candidates began to file for the August 11 primary, Norris remained silent and seemingly content. The many programs he had advocated

¹Robertson was Norris's son-in-law and secretary.

²Norris MSS, James Lawrence to John P. Robertson, April 8, 1942, and Lawrence to Robertson, April 21, 1942.

had been enacted into law in the 1930's, and he now felt that his work was done. And, although Norris never stated this publicly, he undoubtedly realized that the upcoming election would be a very difficult one for him to win. Partisanship was returning to the country, and he would probably not have the support of the state Democratic party.

As the primary campaign began not many political observers thought Norris would enter the race. But still the question of "will Norris run?" hung squarely over all those aspiring to take his place in the Senate.

In the Republican primary three candidates filed for the senatorial position. Of the three the most popular personality was Kenneth Wherry, state chairman for the party and a veteran political worker. His strongest opponent was Hugh Ashmore, a Palisade farmer. The third man to file was Voyle Rector, a resident of Tobias, Nebraska, and manager of a creamery.³

According to statements made by the press, it was generally expected that Wherry would easily defeat Ashmore and Rector. It appeared that the two less well-known candidates had not filed in earnest, but were simply interested in acquiring political experience. James Lawrence, editor of the Lincoln Star, pointed out that Ashmore, "although active in the taxpayer league, has no extended acquaintance over the state and he is more or less a joke to all who know him."⁴

The lack of aggressiveness by both Ashmore and Rector in the primary campaign further emphasized their pessimism in regard to gaining

³Omaha World-Herald (morning edition), August 2, 1942, p. 5.

⁴Norris MSS. James Lawrence to John P. Robertson, February 21, 1942.

the Republican nomination. Of all the candidates, Ashmore did the least amount of advertising, but in his meager comments he seemed to stress that "wasteful spending should be taken out of the war."⁵ Rector campaigned a little harder than Ashmore, but he made very few comments to the press. His campaign was limited to frequent purchase of space in the Omaha World-Herald for small advertisements. Generally, Rector emphasized his service with the American Expeditionary Force, and that he favored the "protection of private business and property, opposed political pressure groups," and wanted "farm products to be made into industrial goods such as alcohol, rubber, explosives, plastics, and motor fuel--NOW--not after the war."⁶

The most articulate primary candidate was undoubtedly Kenneth Wherry. He spoke on numerous occasions as he led a caravan of state and national candidates from city to city. Admittedly, few veteran onlookers had ever heard of anything like this before. Wherry seldom spoke about himself, but talked at length on behalf of those accompanying him. His technique of campaigning prompted Edgar Howard, editor of the Columbus Daily Telegram, to say that: "Wherry is one of the oddest of odd campaigners."⁷ This shrewd, modest approach netted him strong support both in the primary and later in the general election. Wherry also began a relentless attack on the Democratic administration and especially President Roosevelt's use of executive powers. In an address to a group of Negroes in Omaha, he emphasized that "the structure of government

⁵Omaha World-Herald (evening edition), August 9, 1942, p. 12-A.

⁶Ibid., August 6, 1942, p. 18.

⁷Columbus Daily Telegram, August 3, 1942, p. 2.

must not be changed. The American people now insist that the legislative and judicial branches check the executive branch."⁸ Several days later, in a radio address on August 6, he again hit at Roosevelt for his inefficiency and for playing politics when his chief thought should have been winning the war.⁹

As returns from the August 11 Republican primary began to come in, Wherry took an early lead over his two opponents. The final count put him far out in front with 59,303 votes. Ashmore ran a poor second receiving 21,000, and Rector collected 10,493 votes.¹⁰ After the election the Republicans closed ranks behind Wherry and formed a strongly united organization.

The Democratic primary was perhaps more exciting than the Republican contest. This stemmed from the expectation of a close battle for the senatorial post between Harry Coffee, Representative from the Fifth Congressional District, and Foster May, an Omaha radio announcer. Also, Terry Carpenter of Scottsbluff could not be counted out of the winner's circle. Four other candidates were also hoping to win, two of whom had absolutely no chance at all--Lawrence W. Moore, a young Omaha attorney who had no political experience, and George W. Olson of Plattsmouth, who was a perennial candidate. William Ritchie and John C. Mullen were also interested in becoming their party's choice, but they were not expected to figure strongly in the August 11 balloting. Ritchie, from Omaha, had unsuccessfully run for political office in 1940 and had at that time supported Wendell Willkie. The Democratic organization was extremely

⁸Omaha World-Herald (evening edition), August 3, 1942, p. 8.

⁹Ibid., August 7, 1942, p. 18.

¹⁰Plattsmouth Semi-Weekly Journal, August 13, 1942, p. 1.

critical of this bipartisanship and did not want to see him elected. John Mullen from Falls City, on the other hand, had not offended the organization but was not well-known outside of southeastern Nebraska. His brother, Arthur Mullen, however, had been a congressional representative and a prominent member of the Democratic party.¹¹

As the campaign swung into high gear, few observers would predict who was going to win, Coffee or May, because both had strong support. Coffee received outspoken endorsement from several large Nebraska newspapers, especially the Omaha World-Herald edited by his father-in-law, Harvey M. Newbranch. The Norfolk Daily News, the McCook Daily Gazette, and the Nebraska City News-Press were also extremely active in keeping Coffee in the news. Support also filtered in from the Nebraska Power Company and the Nebraska Farm Bureau.¹² Although Coffee did not have the backing of many of the prominent Nebraska Democrats, he did get help from former Nebraska Governor, Keith Neville, who pointed out that Coffee had a good congressional record and was above all, "honest and sincere."¹³ John J. Thomas of Seward, Nebraska, Federal Reserve Board member, former Democratic party chairman, and former candidate for the Senate, surprisingly came out for Coffee. While in Washington he had urged Norris to run for re-election, but on August 1 he stated that he thought Coffee was the "best qualified" candidate.¹⁴

As the contest progressed, Coffee sensed his political future was in

¹¹Omaha World-Herald (evening edition), August 5, 1942, p. 7.

¹²Norris MSS, James Lawrence to John P. Robertson, July 9, 1942. See also, Lawrence to Robertson, August 10, 1942.

¹³Omaha World-Herald (evening edition), August 7, 1942, p. 3.

¹⁴Norris MSS, James Lawrence to John P. Robertson, August 1, 1942.

danger and began to use every method available to him in order to reach the people. In his radio addresses, press comments, and public speeches, he vigorously defended his past congressional record. On only a few occasions did it seem he was able to take the offensive. As a congressman he had urged the United States to remain out of the war, and after Pearl Harbor he had been branded an obstructionist because of his former statements.¹⁵ Although he spent most of his time refuting arguments leveled against him, he did emphasize his efforts to promote efficient government by curbing unnecessary expenditures and his attempts to protect the Nebraska farmer from low prices and depressed conditions.¹⁶

Despite Coffee's aggressive campaign, his chief opponent, Foster May, seemed unusually popular throughout the state. May did little or no advertising in newspapers, but relied almost solely on radio addresses to reach the people. He had been an announcer in Omaha for station WOW since 1935, and before that he had announced for a short time at a Lincoln station. His voice and pleasant personality made him untold friends across the state.

The Democratic organization had at first frowned on May's candidacy, but as his strength became apparent they readily lined up behind him. James Quigley, Democratic National Committeeman, was especially perturbed over Coffee's stand on foreign relations before Pearl Harbor and therefore drifted toward May.¹⁷ Roy Brewer, president of the American Federation of Labor in Nebraska, gave his support to May in a surprise move

¹⁵Omaha World-Herald (evening edition), August 3, 1942, p. 8.

¹⁶Ibid., August 10, 1942, p. 2.

¹⁷Norris MSS, James Lawrence to John P. Robertson, April 21, 1942.

just four days before the election. Prior to this time it was thought that labor favored Ritchie. For several days before Brewer was to give a radio broadcast, Ritchie spread the word that everyone should be sure and tune in Roy Brewer's address. The night of the broadcast, Brewer went through a long list of qualifications he thought necessary for service in the Senate and at the conclusion of his speech shocked his listeners, especially May, by stating that "Foster May best fit these qualifications."¹⁸ Ritchie's campaign was obviously crushed.

In speeches delivered to a live audience, as well as over radio, May showed himself to be more of a politician than people had realized. He shrewdly stayed on the offensive, constantly attacking the newspapers, moneyed interests, and Coffee. On several occasions he remarked on what he called a "whispering campaign" against him. He declared:

I found that things are being slyly whispered that haven't a shred of truth. In the campaign they are beginning to see I'm going to win it. They are doing it because they know I am not a crook and stooge for big corporations or newspapers.¹⁹

He also called Coffee's congressional past a "record of disservice to Nebraska,"²⁰ because Coffee had voted against Lend-Lease and an increase in armament spending.

The press persistently criticized May on every available opportunity. The Omaha World-Herald quoted May as saying, "Elect me to the Senate and I shall take my microphone to Washington,"²¹ and then pointed out that Nebraska did not need another news bureau in Washington because it

¹⁸Omaha World-Herald (evening edition), August 8, 1942, p. 1.

¹⁹Columbus Daily Telegram, August 3, 1942, p. 8.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Omaha World-Herald (evening edition), August 4, 1942, p. 14.

already had one. With tongue in cheek this same article said that "maybe what we need most in Washington is a little innocent fun and comedy for excitement instead of serious minded legislators."²² The Pawnee Republican cautiously presumed that May would drop out of the race in favor of Norris after he had defeated Coffee. An editorial stated:

This is the season for last minute campaign stories, and here is the best one we have heard, brought to town this week by a visiting campaign worker. Foster May, so the story runs, was brought out as a candidate by those who hope for the defeat of Harry B. Coffee in the Democratic primary. Certain Democrats desire Coffee's defeat only upon the stipulation by Foster that, if and when he is nominated, he will withdraw from the general election contest in favor of George W. Norris, thus, giving the latter a clear field against Kenneth S. Wherry.²³

The candidate who straddled the issues less than any of his opponents was Terry Carpenter. An effervescent personality, he had been defeated in the 1936 senatorial contest. After the war broke out, Carpenter joined the Air Corps and had Howard Nims of Kearney handle his advertisements and recorded speeches. The advertisements were infrequent but they were often full page spreads. Despite his disillusionment with Roosevelt's support for Norris, he stated he was "100 percent in support of President Roosevelt's all out, win the war program."²⁴ He also advocated "wage control, freezing rents, freezing commodity prices, freezing farm prices at 100 percent of parity, . . . and limiting income to \$25,000 per year."²⁵ Although many Nebraskans disagreed with his ideas, certainly they respected him as a fearless campaigner and serviceman.

²²Ibid.

²³Pawnee Republican, August 6, 1942, p. 6.

²⁴Columbus Daily Telegram, August 8, 1942, p. 5.

²⁵Ibid.

Results of the primary showed Foster May winning the election with 36,648 votes--ten thousand over his nearest rival, Harry Coffee, who received 25,953. Far down the line was Terry Carpenter--13,752; William Ritchie--5,774; John C. Mullen--5,211; George Olson--1,105; and Lawrence C. Moore--784.²⁶ Republicans and Democrats, as well as the press, asked themselves, "How did he [May] do it?" The Pawnee Republican explained:

Coffee was defeated because he failed to rubber stamp New Dealism and the 'social gains' gang turned out in mass in the Democratic primary strong enough to beat him in a spindly vote.²⁷

Coffee, however, did not agree with the Pawnee City editor's analysis of the contest, but rather, he felt his voting record on war measures before December 7, 1941, had been repudiated.²⁸

As a resident of Chadron, Nebraska, Coffee had been re-elected in 1940 by the people in the Fifth Congressional District because he was somewhat of an isolationist. But when he ran for the Senate on a state-wide basis, he was beaten substantially in eastern Nebraska where sentiments more closely paralleled those of the New Deal. He also did not have the full backing of the Democratic organization, and in an election where only forty percent of the eligible voters turned out, this was of considerable importance.

After the election was over, May announced that he believed the Democratic party was behind him and that he would "make one of the most

²⁶Omaha World-Herald (evening edition), September 1, 1942, p. 4.

²⁷Pawnee Republican, September 17, 1942, p. 5.

²⁸Omaha World-Herald (evening edition), August 12, 1942, p. 7. In this press release Coffee fully explains why he had voted against preparation for war.

vigorous campaigns ever witnessed in Nebraska."²⁹ He also stated that he was happy the campaign had been "clean and open and above-board."³⁰

By the end of the Democratic primary, there was very little doubt in the Norris camp that the aging Senator would run for re-election. Although there is no available evidence of the specific date when Norris made his decision to enter the race, James Lawrence indicates that Norris had given his permission for a petition drive sometime around August 12. In a letter to Robertson, Lawrence said: "Senator Norris wants Abe [C. A. Sorensen] to be an intricate part of the organization."³¹

The reasons why Norris changed his mind about running are sketchy, but it is apparent that he came under a great deal of pressure from a number of individuals during the early summer months. James Lawrence was the most active in this respect, and in numerous letters to Washington and in a personal visit with Norris in June, he insisted that Norris run again.³² Lawrence was optimistic about the political atmosphere in Nebraska. Early in the year he wrote that it was "gratifying that there are many difficulties which were present six years ago, that will not arise this time."³³

Other friends also encouraged Norris to seek another senate term.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Norris MSS, James Lawrence to John P. Robertson, August 12, 1942.

³²Nebraska State Historical Society, Christian A. Sorensen MSS, 2951, John P. Robertson to C. A. Sorensen, June 23, 1942. Hereafter referred to as Sorensen MSS.

³³Norris MSS, James Lawrence to John P. Robertson, February 21, 1942.

John Robertson, Ralph O. Canaday,³⁴ and C. A. Sorensen, told the Senator that they thought "he should forget his personal wishes and do what had to be done."³⁵

There is also evidence that President Roosevelt wanted Norris to run in 1942. He felt that the Republicans would probably capture the state if Norris did not become a candidate. And, although Norris disagreed with Roosevelt on a number of issues, he was undoubtedly influenced by the President's political wishes.³⁶

Some prominent Nebraska Republicans, most notably Senator Hugh Butler, encouraged Norris to continue in office. Butler, in the latter part of July, called James Lawrence and told him that he hoped Norris would "run as a petition candidate . . . because a victory in 1942 would serve as a glorious end to a fine career."³⁷ Later, however, after Norris was on the ballot, Senator Butler publicly opposed Norris. Possibly he had hoped that with Norris in the contest the Republican candidate would have a greater chance of being elected.

In addition to the many people who wanted Norris in the race, Norris was not altogether opposed to an independent candidacy. His health had improved, and he found it almost impossible to bow out of public life. He often stated that there was so much work left to be done, and that he was particularly interested in helping to write the peace treaty.

A number of Democrats, especially James Quigley, privately favored

³⁴Canaday was an attorney for the Nebraska Power and Irrigation District.

³⁵Sorensen MSS, John P. Robertson to C.A. Sorensen, June 23, 1942.

³⁶Norris MSS, James Lawrence to John P. Robertson, July 31, 1942.

³⁷Ibid.

the re-election of Norris. However, he and other party members would not come out publicly in Norris's behalf.³⁸

In the middle of August, Scott W. Lucas, a Democrat from Illinois, spoke in the Senate and urged "the grand old man of Congress [Norris], . . . to reconsider his decision against running for another term in the upper chamber."³⁹ On August 21, Michael M. Kearney of Nebraska, who had been defeated in a bid for a congressional seat in 1940, stated he would begin circulating petitions to put Norris's name on the ballot, and that "never before has there been a more desperate need for statesmanship."⁴⁰ It would take 1,000 signatures to place his name before the public, and if within ten days after the petition was filed Norris did not reject it, he would be up for re-election as an independent candidate. On August 26, official notification came out of Lawrence's office that he would head the circulating of petitions. He stated that the petitions would be sent out on a non-partisan basis.⁴¹

After the filing fee for Norris had been paid by C. A. Sorensen at McCook, there was increased talk of an endorsement of Norris by the Democratic Convention. However, the fears of senatorial hopeful May were somewhat dispelled when Lawrence publicly stated:

We do not want and will not seek an endorsement of Senator Norris from either the Democratic or Republican parties. As a matter of fact we recognize the rights of men who have won party nominations in the primaries.⁴²

³⁸Ibid., James Lawrence to John P. Robertson, June 20, 1942.

³⁹Omaha World-Herald (evening edition), August 17, 1942, p. 1.

⁴⁰Ibid., August 21, 1942, p. 10.

⁴¹Ibid., August 27, 1942, p. 4.

⁴²Ibid., (Sunday edition), August 30, 1942, p. 8-A.

May's apprehension about being dropped by his own party was further reduced when he was asked to keynote the Douglas County Democratic Convention on August 28. In that address he attacked certain elements of the press for being critical of the administration. He said:

With their barrage of petty, destructive criticisms they would have us believe Washington today is filled with nothing but a bunch of nitwitted nincompoops, imbeciles, gangsters, and bureaucrats.⁴³

Nebraska Democrats held their convention at the State Theater in Omaha. The meeting opened on September 3 with the re-election of William A. Schell, an Omaha attorney, as chairman. Following the election of party officials, endorsements of candidates who had won in the primaries were made. With the endorsement of May, delegates responded with thunderous applause, indicating that the organization would support him almost 100 percent in the general election.⁴⁴ Throughout the entire proceeding there was conspicuously no mention of Norris.

Keynote speaker for the convention was Senator James Tunnell of Delaware. He attacked the Republicans on a number of different issues and warned delegates "not to be misled by G.O.P. declarations of unity."⁴⁵ Tunnell joined other speakers in denouncing the opposition for "voting against war preparedness measures prior to December 7."⁴⁶ He also claimed that the Republicans were responsible for the failure of Wilson's peace plan after World War I.

The adoption of the platform ended a relatively uneventful meeting.

⁴³ Ibid., (evening edition), August 28, 1942, p. 11.

⁴⁴ McCook Daily Gazette, September 4, 1942, p. 5.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

It was so lifeless in fact that the speaker had to remind the delegates that it was still "Democratic to fight."⁴⁷ The Democratic platform was expressly designed not to make the mistake of 1936. Party unity seemed to be the theme of the document. It urged Democrats to get behind Foster May because it was "virtually necessary" in order to back the Roosevelt administration's war programs. The platform also congratulated the farmer for his perseverance during the depression decade, and it mentioned the rights of labor, the need for an increase in old age assistance, and the importance of good educational facilities.⁴⁸

It was evident, both during and after the convention, that the Democrats were not happy about their chances in the November election. But as always they plunged ahead, went through the necessary political motions, and hoped that in the future they would have a better organization, better candidates, and a better opportunity to elect some of their members.

Just prior to the Republican Convention interest was aroused over who was going to succeed Wherry as the new state Republican party chairman. Governor Griswold and Wherry did not have a cordial relationship, and Hugh Butler reportedly shared Griswold's sentiments. There was talk of Butler and Griswold getting together in a strategy meeting to plan a way they could get one of their friends elected to the state chairmanship. They denied any undercover work, but slowly it emerged that Ira D. Beynon, a Lincoln lawyer, was their choice. Late on the night of

⁴⁷Omaha World-Herald (evening edition), September 4, 1942, p. 6.

⁴⁸Nebraska Legislative Council, 1942, pp. 403-406. See appendix for full text. (Nebraska Blue Book up to and including 1940 was compiled by the Nebraska Legislative Reference Bureau).

September 2, the day before the convention opened, Griswold called a meeting of a large number of delegates and publicly announced that he hoped Beynon would get the chairmanship. Although the governor gave him strong endorsement, there was considerable evidence of resistance to his choice.⁴⁹

Wherry, throughout his campaign, kept as far from controversy over this matter as possible. In June he had resigned from the state chairmanship, but his resignation had not been accepted. Wherry's strategy was to promote party unity at almost any cost. His friends, however, actively supported Joseph Wishart of Lincoln, and it was thought that this would produce a "real political brawl"⁵⁰ on the convention floor. Beynon was not so outspoken about his desire for the office as was Wishart. Wishart pointed out that "Griswold was attempting to set up one-man control of party machinery" and that he "would fight tooth and nail for the job unless it would hurt the chances of his friend Kenneth Wherry."⁵¹

When the Republican Convention opened in Omaha, rumors of a great split in the party brought a few extra spectators into the city. But the hope of the Democrats that such a thing would happen died suddenly as a compromise candidate was chosen for the office of chairman. Albert T. "Bert" Howard was elected on the fourth ballot over his two challengers.⁵² Beynon had maintained his original strength throughout the two hour balloting period until the Wishart forces finally gave the victory to Howard.

⁴⁹Omaha World-Herald (evening edition), September 3, 1942, p. 1.

⁵⁰McCook Daily Gazette, September 3, 1942, p. 2.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Omaha World-Herald (evening edition), September 4, 1942, p. 5.

CHART 4

REPUBLICAN CONVENTION BALLOTING⁵³

Nominees	First*	Second	Third	Fourth
Ira Beynon	27	28	28	26
Joseph Wishart	25	26	20	11
Albert T. Howard	12	12	29	40

*14 votes had been cast on the first ballot for other nominees.

Keynote speaker for the convention was Republican National Chairman Joseph Martin from Massachusetts. In his address he pointed out that he was not sure if his party could pick up fifty-three seats in the House, the number needed for a majority, but he did say that "since 1940 there have been five contests, and the G.O.P. has won four of them. This indicates that the party is gaining momentum."⁵⁴ He went on to say that "The President has had the patriotic and active support of the Republican administration in the Congress on all his defense measures."⁵⁵ And he concluded his political remarks by stating that he thought Wherry would win the election to the Senate no matter who ran against him.

Before the convention adjourned, the Republicans joyously accepted Wherry as their senatorial nominee and ratified a platform designed to promote party unity and denounce the Democratic opposition. In the platform the Republican party pledged itself to aid in successfully

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴McCook Daily Gazette, September 4, 1942, p. 1.

⁵⁵Ibid.

prosecuting the war and commended the state Republican administration for its efforts in this area. Most of the statements in the platform, however, were condemnations of Roosevelt's policies. The President was castigated for his agricultural policies, for allowing labor to strike, for wasteful spending, for reducing freedom and liberty, and for his inability to solve the farm labor crisis.⁵⁶

After the convention closed Republicans left Omaha in an optimistic mood; the party was unified, a solid slate of candidates had been chosen, and a reasonably good platform had been constructed. Also, at the time there were signs about the state and in certain parts of the nation that this was going to be a Republican year. As early as April, 1942, Lawrence expressed his concern over growing Republican strength.

If conditions in many sections are what they are throughout the Midwest region, the conduct of the war and its necessary steps in the different states are going to make inevitable a Republican victory next November in the congressional elections. I have been so distressed about it in recent months that I am afraid I have been pretty much of a nuisance.⁵⁷

Voter registration figures also illustrated a substantial trend back to the Republican party. Wherry's prognostication that Republican strength would be greater in 1942 than in 1940 was reinforced by voter registration statistics in Lincoln.

In the primary election of 1940 the Republicans had succeeded in getting out 26,000 more voters than had the Democrats, and in 1942 they retained approximately the same margin.⁵⁸ This clearly served as a

⁵⁶Nebraska Legislative Council, 1942, pp. 397-399. See appendix for full text.

⁵⁷Norris MSS, James Lawrence to John P. Robertson, April 21, 1942.

⁵⁸Omaha World-Herald (evening edition), August 10, 1942, p. 1.

warning to the Democrats that it was not going to be a victory year for their party.

CHART 5

REGISTRATION OF VOTERS IN LINCOLN, NEBRASKA⁵⁹

New Registrations:	Republican	249
	Democrat	167
Change from Democrat to Republican		27
Change from Republican to Democrat		1
No affiliation to Republican		4
No affiliation to Democrat		2

In addition, political polls taken by George Gallup indicated that the Midwest was hostile to the New Deal and that the Republican party was stronger than at any time in the previous twelve years. In a Gallup poll on August 15, information gathered showed that the G.O.P. had a greater partisan feeling than the Democrats and would do better on the state and local level because more Democrats than Republicans had been dislocated by the war. The poll emphasized the point that sixty percent of the men in the army were Democrats and of these, only a few would take the trouble to cast absentee ballots.⁶⁰

A national Gallup poll, September 2, found the President's popularity at its lowest point since America entered the war. The poll also illustrated, to the discomfort of the Democrats as they looked forward to the general election, that voters were frustrated over the war effort and

⁵⁹Pawnee Republican, August 6, 1942, p. 4.

⁶⁰Ibid., August 15, 1942, p. 12.

perturbed because programs had not been "drastic enough at home, or aggressive enough abroad."⁶¹

CHART 6

ROOSEVELT'S POPULARITY RATING FROM PEARL HARBOR TO SEPTEMBER, 1942⁶²

Pearl Harbor.	72 percent
January	84 percent
March	78 percent
May	78 percent
July.	78 percent
September	70 percent

*Sharpest drop in Midwest, West, and South.

⁶¹Ibid., September 2, 1942, p. 24.

⁶²Ibid.

CHAPTER V

SENATORIAL CAMPAIGN AND GENERAL ELECTION

In early September after convention activity had ended, May and Wherry were both optimistic about the general election. Norris had not officially declared his candidacy, nor did many people really know if he would accept the petitions that were being circulated once they were filed at the state capitol. Of course, May sincerely hoped that Norris would stay completely out of the race because he knew Norris's entry would ruin his chances of winning.

In addition to the interest focused on May, Norris, and Wherry, some attention was given to another candidate, Albert F. Ruthven. Ruthven was a lawyer and a resident of Lincoln. He became an independent candidate by telling the public that he had a plan that would "lift America from the door of any and all trouble"¹ provided he should reach the Senate. But, he would not disclose his plan until after the election. In 1936 he had run as an independent and polled 8,982 votes. In the 1942 election he was not expected to do much better than in his previous bid for political office. The editor of the Columbus Daily Telegram, Edgar Howard, however, thought that he might draw a sizable vote because:

Most folks enjoy solving mysteries, and perhaps . . . might vote for the mysterious Mr. Ruthven in hopes of having him solve the mystery of his plan to put two chickens in every American pot and two rubber girdles in every woman's boudoir.²

¹Columbus Daily Telegram, August 31, 1942, p. 2.

²Ibid.

Throughout the month of September Wherry continued his aggressive campaign. With the exception of Norris, Wherry appeared to be the best qualified. He graduated from the University of Nebraska and attended Harvard University graduate school where he studied political science and history. After returning to Nebraska from Harvard, he joined the Wherry brothers' furniture store, where he remained until 1917. During World War I he served in the armed forces as a Navy Flying Cadet, and upon completion of his tour of duty he became a licensed embalmer. Also in the 1920's he managed a cattle ranch.³

In 1929 he decided to run for the state legislature because, as he put it: "It took a strong team of mules and a lot of patience to travel the roads of Pawnee County,"⁴ and he wanted to do something about it. After serving two terms in the state senate, he was defeated in a try for the governorship. During this campaign, Norris was quick to realize that Wherry had a promising political future. In a speech at McCook College commencement exercises, Norris introduced Wherry as:

. . . one of the most promising young statesmen to honor Nebraska, having served as an outstanding member in two sessions of the Nebraska Senate, he has demonstrated himself to be a forceful representative of the people's interests, a man of outstanding ability, always fighting for what he conscientiously believes to be right.⁵

In 1934 Wherry became mayor of Pawnee City and kept that office until 1942. As mayor he displayed good leadership and administrative ability, and in 1940 he was elected state chairman of the Republican Central Committee. As chairman Wherry hoped to breathe new life into the

³Omaha World-Herald (morning edition), October 30, 1942, p. 3.

⁴Ibid.

⁵McCook Daily Gazette, November 6, 1942, p. 2.

party by establishing a strong organization throughout the state. He said of the party as it existed in 1940:

You never saw anything so dead. Of ninety-three counties in the state, only thirteen had any sort of Republican organization at all. In 1938, Nebraska had elected a Democratic governor by a majority of about 80,000. In 1940 the Republicans went in with a vote turnover of 200 percent.⁶

Lyle E. Jackson, former state Republican chairman, disputed Wherry's analysis of the party's organization in 1940 by claiming that a "total of seventy-three counties were organized and eleven others had skeleton organizations."⁷ He also pointed out that "Cochran won in 1938 by 17,000 votes, not 80,000" and that "from 1932 to 1940 Wherry had nothing to do with organization, neither directly nor indirectly."⁸

Despite Jackson's charges, during a period when the political pendulum was swinging back to the Republicans, Wherry strengthened the party to a point not enjoyed in the 1930's. He did this by bringing in well-known Republican speakers from outside the state and by urging Republican candidates to travel and meet the people. Such personalities as Theodore Roosevelt Jr., Wendell Willkie, Thomas Dewey, Robert Taft, Herbert Hoover, Alfred Landon, and Harold Stassen were brought to the state in 1940. As Wherry accompanied his speakers from one town to the next, he made sure that he left behind a good county chairman. Through 1940, 1941, and part of 1942 he showed an interest in the problems of people and continuously built a stronger organization. His energy and organizational ability won him the office of Republican regional director. During the time he held this position, he spoke on numerous occasions to

⁶Omaha World-Herald (morning edition), October 30, 1942, p. 3.

⁷Norris MSS, Lyle E. Jackson to Omaha World-Herald, October 30, 1942.

⁸Ibid.

various Republican organizations, and the thing he most emphasized was partisan politics and party discipline. He said:

We need a Congress of two parties that can maintain their party relationship, yet can get together as real Americans to legislate for the best interests of all. We need an independent Congress of party men . . . not a Congress of independents.⁹

In July, 1942, Wherry's campaign organization began to take shape. A "Wherry for Senator Club", headed by Clyde T. Barton of Pawnee City was formed, and every citizen in the county was asked to join in helping mail out letters to their friends and relatives throughout the state in support of Wherry.¹⁰ A good organization existed by the time of the primary balloting, and Pawnee County went for Wherry 1,140 to 43.¹¹

Beginning on September 23, he traveled through the northern and western parts of the state making as many as five speeches a day. After each vigorous tour through a particular section of the state he would then stop momentarily to rest and recuperate. He often gave the same speech over and over again, hammering away at certain basic issues.

He attacked the New Deal on almost every conceivable front, but he most often discussed the tremendous power of the President. "The President," he said, "does not delegate power, but keeps it for himself and has surrounded himself with weak leaders . . . like Perkins and Ickes."¹²

Wherry also recognized the necessity of congressional dissent and the value of criticism.

⁹Omaha World-Herald (morning edition), October 30, 1942, p. 3.

¹⁰Pawnee Republican, July 23, 1942, p. 1.

¹¹Ibid., August 13, 1942, p. 1.

¹²Scottsbluff Daily Star-Herald, September 30, 1942, p. 3.

Necessarily in wartime, a great deal of responsibility must be delegated to the administration, but that is all the more reason why Congress must exercise with the utmost care the authority it retains. Both the administration and the people should have the considered and reasoned support and constructive criticism of the Congress.¹³

Nebraska in September and October was in the middle of its harvest season. There was considerable concern by the farm population as to whether crops could be harvested before the weather made work in the fields impossible. The war had drained Nebraska of a large portion of its farm labor, causing the farm labor shortage to be perhaps the biggest single issue in the 1942 campaign.

Wherry shrewdly took advantage of this economic situation and on several occasions assailed Norris and Roosevelt for not supporting the farmer on this issue. He felt that the Roosevelt administration had completely "failed to provide for essential farm labor under the provisions of the Selective Service Act."¹⁴

About two weeks before the election Wherry telegraphed General Lewis B. Hershey, director of Selective Service, and Paul McNutt, head of the War Manpower Commission, to see if something could be done about the farm labor shortage in Nebraska. In his correspondence he proposed a five point plan as an "emergency measure" if the situation continued to deteriorate.

1. In the next forty-five days take no more Nebraska men than necessary.
2. Allow long furloughs for Nebraska men close to home.
3. Give a leave of absence to men in defense plants and insure them of their positions when they return from the farms.
4. Give federal civilian employees a leave and pay their transportation so that they can work on farms.

¹³Omaha World-Herald (morning edition), October 15, 1942, p. 4.

¹⁴Ibid., October 5, 1942, p. 9.

5. Establish a placement bureau in certain counties for those not having farms to return to.¹⁵

Another farm problem that drew frequent comment from the Republican candidate was the President's farm production policies. Wherry urged an elimination of all acreage restrictions and indicated that he believed:

The philosophy of an economy of scarcity is all wrong The United States must produce, as it has never produced before, all the materials of war from food to ships. We must build up a surplus--just as our enemies built surpluses in preparing for war. If we want to subsidize the farmer, pay him to produce, and don't pay him not to produce.¹⁶

Yet another issue projected by the G.O.P. nominee centered around the old traditional political controversy over the maintenance of free enterprise and the protection of the small businessman. During the 1930's and the war, there was necessarily a sizable amount of government regulation and restriction placed on the American economy. Many individuals, among them Wherry, feared what they thought to be an alarming growth in the power of the federal government. Wherry wisely used this long standing issue to his advantage in the campaign. On one occasion, as politicians are inclined to do, he exaggerated the government's intentions when he declared: "Under the guise of war--there is advance notice today that 300,000 small business firms are to be liquidated so that business and industry can be placed in large units where they can be more easily controlled by the state."¹⁷

Throughout the campaign Wherry was also deeply concerned with winning the war, which he believed to be the most important election issue.

¹⁵Ibid., October 21, 1942, p. 8.

¹⁶Scottsbluff Daily Star-Herald, September 30, 1942, p. 3.

¹⁷Alliance Times and Herald, October 2, 1942, p. 4.

He made this topic into an item of controversy by contending that "the greatest bottleneck in winning the war is the desk of President Roosevelt. One man cannot manage a war."¹⁸ In Wherry's estimation the people were "much farther along the road to war than the management. They almost seem to be leading Washington."¹⁹

Wherry's favorite topic of discussion was the charge that his two opponents were both New Dealers and "rubber stamps" of the President. In a radio address just three days before the election, he re-emphasized Norris's close association with the Roosevelt administration:

Senator Norris has the support of New Deal bureaucrats in Washington. He has been given the blessing of their leader. He has received and published the editorial praise of the New Deal brain trusters. He has back of him, attempting to force his re-election, one of the most powerful organizations, taken from a purely political point of view, that ever existed in American history; an organization with unlimited command of money and personnel and which is unscrupulous and clever in using them.²⁰

As Wherry closed his campaign the night of November 2 at a Republican rally in Omaha, he was almost positive he would win the election. Throughout the campaign he had shown himself to be a tough campaigner, shrewdly using the techniques that result in political success.

He kept the morale of his party high and successfully promoted party unity--ingredients necessary to any victorious candidate. He had been able to get through the convention without a major split in the ranks, but during the campaign the Democrats tried to sabotage G.O.P. unity by using Governor Dwight Griswold as a wedge. The first rumor that was circulated had the governor urging Norris to run for re-election, so that

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., October 31, 1942, p. 2.

Griswold could have the lieutenant governor appoint him to the Senate after Norris's expected death. In reply to this rumor the state executive stated that Norris was in good health, as far as he knew, and that he was backing Wherry. In another attempt to split the Republican party, Katherine Duerfeldt, editor of the Gordon Journal, a newspaper once owned by the governor, ran an editorial favoring Norris. The rumor was then started that Griswold still owned the newspaper and had come out for Norris. The governor immediately refuted this charge. He pointed out that he did not own the newspaper anymore and that Norris had appointed Clifford Duerfeldt, brother of Miss Duerfeldt, to Annapolis.²¹

So, despite attempts to disrupt Republican unity, the party retained its original cohesiveness. Wherry even countered attempts at disunity by running advertisements in which he and the governor were pictured together. One such advertisement appeared in Norris's chief propaganda outlet, the Lincoln Star, two days before the election.²²

Another technique employed by Wherry in his campaign was that of "killing Norris with kindness." After hearing of Norris's decision to accept petitions filed on his behalf, Wherry complimented Norris on his many years of public service. He said: "Senator Norris's long service to the people of Nebraska certainly entitles him to a place in the senatorial race."²³ A month later, as he heard that Norris was coming back to Nebraska, he again showed his respect for the Senator by encouraging the people of Nebraska to give the veteran legislator a good welcome and

²¹McCook Daily Gazette, October 24, 1942, p. 8.

²²Lincoln Star, November 1, 1942, p. 5.

²³Omaha World-Herald (morning edition), September 29, 1942, p. 1.

if possible, talk with him personally.²⁴

While one of Wherry's opponents remained in Washington and the other relied mostly on radio broadcasts, Wherry appeared before numerous groups and organizations. The importance of these personal appearances was brought out by a comment Wherry made on Omaha politics.

It is quite difficult for one to reach the voters in a city of a quarter-million without personally meeting the leaders of the wards, and selling yourself personally to these individuals. It does not get the publicity, but it really gets the personal contacts, which one must have to carry Douglas County.²⁵

Support for Wherry's campaign came from a variety of sources. Newspapers were the most evident means of assistance, but prominent Republicans and one or two Democrats also helped.

The most vocal newspaper in support of Wherry was the Nebraska City Daily News-Press, which attacked Norris and May continuously on a number of different issues. The editor said of May that his "knowledge of economics is nil and this coupled with his lack of courage makes him . . . unfit to represent a free people."²⁶ He also rapped Norris when he stated:

Senator Norris, as the record shows, has been one of the most valuable New Deal coadjutors of record. He voted for all the taxpayer-oppressing, leaf-raking, money-wasting, republic-damning appropriations whose sum total reached 40 billions up to the time of the war, thus handicapping the military effort and making necessary the most stupendous, back-breaking taxes in history, here or anywhere else.²⁷

The largest Nebraska newspaper, the Omaha World-Herald, praised

²⁴Lincoln Star, October 28, 1942, p. 7.

²⁵Love Library, University of Nebraska, Wherry Papers, Kenneth Wherry to Dr. and Mrs. S. A. Lutgen, Wayne, Nebraska, August 11, 1942.

²⁶Nebraska City Daily News-Press, September 3, 1942, p. 4.

²⁷Ibid., November 2, 1942, p. 4.

Norris for his work, but early in the campaign it chose to back Wherry. The editor explained that he was supporting the Republican party because the Washington "bureaucracy has expanded beyond all reason, mismanagement of manpower has hurt industry and agriculture, censorship has concealed from the people the truth about our military affairs."²⁸

Many other smaller newspapers supported Wherry for a variety of reasons. Some of the more outspoken were the Scottsbluff Daily Star-Herald, Alliance Times and Herald, Kearney Daily Hub, Norfolk Daily News, Fillmore Chronicle, Lexington Clipper, and Norris's hometown newspaper, the McCook Daily Gazette. Of these some said Norris was a New Deal rubber stamp, while others editorialized about his health, his age, and his 1917 vote against war. Norris's independent candidacy and non-partisanship was also criticized by the press. The editor of the Fillmore Chronicle said:

We blow quite a bit of our two-party system,
 Yet the George Norris methods are certain to twist 'em.
 As petition beggars continue to travel,
 And kick up much dust in political gravel,
 The time will soon come when parties knock under
 As more grabbers of all for this beautiful blunder.
 As candidates get the petitioning habit,
 And follow George Norris by starting to grab it,
 And as soon as in office, like Norris, each scamper,
 Right into the camp of New Deal rubber stamper.
 The two-party system this nation's defended
 In essential respects is decisively ended.²⁹

Henry C. Luckey, a Democrat and former congressman, also supported Wherry.³⁰ Luckey had been defeated in 1938 and again in 1940 by small margins, and he blamed his fate on Norris. Luckey claimed that after he

²⁸Omaha World-Herald (morning edition), October 29, 1942, p. 16.

²⁹Sorensen MSS, Fillmore Chronicle, October 8, 1942.

³⁰Omaha World-Herald (morning edition), October 30, 1942, p. 1.

voted against the T.V.A. project, Norris told him that he "did not want anything to do with him anymore."³¹

Prominent national Republicans, such as Wendell Willkie, Robert Taft, and Alfred Landon were brought to the state to bolster G.O.P. strength. Taft commented that: "He [Wherry] will not swallow whole New Deal policies."³²

Foster May did not have the degree of support that Wherry had, nor did he possess the political skill of his Republican opponent. He also differed markedly in his background from both Norris and Wherry.

May was the son of a Missouri minister, and in 1920, when May was fifteen years of age, his family moved to western Nebraska. After attending Sidney High School, he was married for a short time. His marriage ended in divorce, and May then moved to California. Here he worked for a biscuit company and took courses at the University of California in economics and sociology. From California he went to Denver, Colorado, where he worked as a newspaper reporter. Until 1933 he was employed with newspapers in St. Louis and Minneapolis, but because of the depression he lost his job and was not able to find employment. Upon his return to Nebraska he found work as a radio announcer and became a very popular broadcaster and interviewer.³³

Asked why he became interested in the Democratic party, he explained that his many hardships combined with other failures led him to work for the party in the 1930's. In 1936 and again in 1938, he entered the Democratic primary in an attempt to win a congressional seat, but on both

³¹Luckey, p. 101.

³²Lincoln Star, October 16, 1942, p. 1.

³³John Faris, ed., Who's Who in Nebraska (Lincoln, 1940), p. 362. See also, Omaha World-Herald, August 12, 1942, p. 7.

occasions he lost by relatively small margins.

As in previous campaigns, in 1942 May carried his campaign to the people over the radio. The issues he brought out were not discussed in depth nor were they as numerous as those discussed by Wherry. The theme of his speeches centered around his knowledge of the common man's problems. He felt that his varied experiences had, as he put it, "schooled him in human relations."³⁴ To him this was an important political quality. In a speech to the Chamber of Commerce at Kearney, Nebraska, he pointed out in reference to the senatorship that "the job demands that one know what makes people tick, and how to diagnose their current ills, and to weigh carefully prospects for improvement."³⁵

May, however, was criticized on a number of occasions for appealing for votes on the basis that he was a "common man." Such criticism was raised in a letter by Vernon J. Hoyt, published in the Columbus Daily Telegram:

Press association reports quote you [May] to the effect that on your trip to Washington you learned our congressmen, both senators and representatives are 'just common, ordinary, everyday people.'

We don't want everyday people in the Senate and ordinary men which you hint are there. If we were to elect common men to high office, we would be having Joe Nobody in the seat now occupied by George W. Norris. In the place of men like Carter Glass, we'd be having John Q. Nonentity in the Senate. Bankhead would be replaced by Henry K. Average, and the Senate would fall into even lower repute than it has, if that were possible.

Foster, you are not an average citizen yourself and should not appeal for votes in that manner.³⁶

Throughout the campaign May stood squarely behind the Roosevelt

³⁴Kearney Daily Hub, October 5, 1942, p. 1.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Columbus Daily Telegram, September 21, 1942, p. 4.

administration, but admitted that there was a farm labor problem. In an address to a small gathering at Humphrey, Nebraska, May pointed out that the fighting men "need food just as much as they need the weapons of war."³⁷ He then put forth a plan which he thought would solve the farm labor shortage. The plan called for army agricultural corps in which farm boys would do clerical work in the service during the winter months, and in the spring and fall months they would be given furloughs in order to work on the farm.³⁸

Much of May's campaign centered around a condemnation of the people who had talked Norris into running. May was well aware that Norris would draw heavily from the ranks of the Democratic voters. Early in October in a radio address he attacked Norris's campaign manager, James Lawrence, Nebraska bankers, and Val Peter, head of the Omaha Tribune, a German language newspaper.

I failed to reckon with the fierceness of my opposition, of those selfish, greedy people who are determined at all odds to bring about my defeat even at the expense of betraying this fine, tired, old man. When power-hungry, malicious, unscrupulous politicians and newspapers will even drag the venerable, eighty-one year old George Norris, who has finished his life's work into the rigors of a political campaign just to gain their ends, they deserve to be thoroughly trounced, and will be, if the sentiment I get from thousands of my Nebraska friends is correct.³⁹

In another radio address May attacked John P. Robertson when he said:

I am not running against Norris, but against the forces which manipulated him into the race. Norris's son-in-law has been on the pay roll for several years and from reports, virtually

³⁷Humphrey Democrat, October 15, 1942, p. 1.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Nebraska City Daily News-Press, October 5, 1942, p. 1.

runs his office recently; and he naturally doesn't want to give up the well-paid position he holds and relinquish the power which he wields.⁴⁰

From May's comments it is clear that he admired Senator Norris's liberalism and appreciated his legislative accomplishments. But he felt that Norris was too old to continue in office and should step aside and let a younger man take his place. The preservation of Nebraska liberalism in Washington seemed very important to May. He stressed his belief that Norris would die within two years and with him would die the "progressive liberal cause."⁴¹ In an interesting letter to Harold Kramer of Columbus, Nebraska, May said:

My election to the United States Senate would do nothing more than protract this condition liberalism. Frankly, I would like to go to the hills, to some isolated cabin far away from this God-damned war and suffering and killing--and like the mad philosopher--retire permanently to my cave and hurl invectives at an even madder world. I know that is what a lot of people would like to do. We cannot. All we can do is pursue the destiny which seems to lie ahead of us and which is inescapable--following a course lighted as brightly as possible by the lamp of reason and judgment.⁴²

In the campaign May characterized himself as the underdog faced with the awesome task of beating the moneyed class. To gain the sympathy of what he called the "plain people," he spoke of his lack of support by the Democratic national organization, which was headed by Norris's good friend Joseph F. Gaffey of Pennsylvania. He told his audiences that the only people he could really count on were the "common folks."

May was the type of campaigner who seldom answered his antagonists' charges, although he was constantly attacked. He frequently said that

⁴⁰Hastings Daily Tribune, October 27, 1942, p. 10.

⁴¹Norris MSS, Foster May to Harold Kramer, October 7, 1942.

⁴²Ibid.

his Republican opponent had not made any statements that were worth refuting, and he passed Norris off as a candidate who really did not want to run. On October 26, however, he did accept a challenge to debate Wherry at the Polish Hall in South Omaha. In this debate, which faltered at the beginning and then picked up rapidly, Wherry denounced New Deal bureaucracy and called for a revamping of the administration's farm policy. In rebuttal, May came back with a personal attack on the Republican candidate, charging that "since 1934 my distinguished opponent has been cooperating with that farm policy [New Deal] and while he denounced the marketing quotas he had AAA checks in his pockets."⁴³ Wherry replied to May by claiming that he never cooperated in the farm program, never took a check, and pointed out that "if my opponent thinks I have a check in my pocket, he can search me."⁴⁴

Near the end of the campaign, May appeared to become more disturbed by Norris's candidacy. He apparently thought that he could defeat Wherry if Norris had not decided to run and therefore used the argument that a vote for Norris is a vote for Wherry. Just before election day his enthusiasm seemed to wilt, and his campaign appeared to become completely disorganized.

Among those who supported May were the state Democratic organization, wealthy individuals in Omaha and Lincoln, and many of the women who listened to his WOW program, "Man on the Street." Halfway through the campaign the rumor that sixty-five percent of the women voters in Nebraska were going to vote for May grew so loud that it alarmed Republican headquarters. Robert Joyce of Lincoln quickly organized a women's corps

⁴³Omaha World-Herald (morning edition), October 28, 1942, p. 8.

⁴⁴Ibid.

to speak on behalf of Wherry in various parts of Nebraska.⁴⁵

The petition drive to put Norris's name on the ballot that had begun in August continued until September 21. On this day petitions containing over 15,000 names were filed with Secretary of State Frank Marsh. When Norris was informed of the filing, he made the comment: "I hope I don't have to accept them, but I'm afraid there is so great a demand that I will have to accept them. I will decide definitely after I see what has happened out there."⁴⁶

On September 26 Norris sent a letter to Marsh, accepting the petitions and officially declaring himself to be a candidate for re-election to the Senate. In a news conference several days later Norris gave the chief reason for his decision.

It would be like a soldier quitting the fight when it is but half finished. A defeat would be a repudiation of my forty years of public service. If I were younger a defeat would not bother me very much, but at my age when it is known that this is the last fight I would ever make it seems to me the approval of my life's work is at stake.⁴⁷

He announced at the conference that the uncertainty of legislative business would probably keep him out of Nebraska during the campaign, but that he would make a few radio speeches.⁴⁸

Norris's Republican opponent declared himself delighted to see Norris become a candidate. Foster May, however, did not share Wherry's enthusiasm. He remarked:

⁴⁵Sorenson MSS, Ralph O. Canaday to C. A. Sorensen, October 26, 1942.

⁴⁶Omaha World-Herald (morning edition), September 22, 1942, p. 1.

⁴⁷Ibid., September 30, 1942, p. 1.

⁴⁸Ibid.

I believe the venerable eighty-one year old Senator's acceptance of this relatively small petition means either that he has been playing politics with the people of Nebraska for the past six months or that because of his long absence from the state he is unaware of the true situation in Nebraska.⁴⁹

Norris held true to the statement he would probably not be spending much time away from Washington. He did not return to Nebraska to campaign until Friday, October 30, just four days before the election. His campaign during October was almost completely handled by Lawrence. On October 1, Lawrence called an organization meeting at Lincoln. He became chairman and C. A. Sorensen, Fred Seaton (publisher of the Hastings Daily Tribune), and Roy Brewer became vice-chairmen. The president of the First National Bank of Lincoln, L. C. Chapin, was elected treasurer. Their strategy, it was agreed, would be to put emphasis on Norris's experiences and not attack either Wherry or May.⁵⁰

The people of Nebraska were asked which they preferred, "experience or an experiment."⁵¹ In newspaper advertisements and editorials Norris was characterized as being fearless, honest and intelligent, and as a man who had done a great deal for Nebraska and for his country. In a transcribed radio broadcast to Nebraskans, Norris asked the people "to consider the record of what I have done and tried to do and to give that experience such weight as you feel it is entitled to."⁵²

Norris also appealed for votes on the basis that political unity was needed during a crisis period. He urged the voters to put partisanship

⁴⁹Ibid., September 29, 1942, p. 1.

⁵⁰Ibid., October 2, 1942, p. 1.

⁵¹Ibid., October 28, 1942, p. 8.

⁵²Ibid.

and criticism aside and as he put it, "examine your own hearts and souls and look for defects in yourself and not in others."⁵³

In response to the charge that he was a Roosevelt "rubber stamp," Norris pointed out that he had not always agreed with the President, and that several times he had voted against Roosevelt's proposals. He specifically cited the attempt by the Chief Executive to change the structure of the Supreme Court and a draft bill sent to Congress by the administration, as examples of the fact that he was not "a slave to the New Deal formulators."⁵⁴

The draft bill was designed to call up boys eighteen and nineteen years of age. Norris insisted that an amendment be added to the bill which would not permit the use of eighteen and nineteen year olds in combat until they had had one year of training. The administration and high ranking military officials argued against Norris's suggestion, and through October debate continued. Late in the month, Norris and his colleagues won their fight to put a "well trained army in battle."⁵⁵

During the campaign there were several other charges Norris and his staff were forced to try to refute. An editorial in the Lincoln Star repudiated the argument that Norris was too old:

His eighty-one years have mellowed the old prairie panther, but his prowl still has plenty of pep. For the first time in a double decade he really wants to be re-elected For the first time in most folks memory 'Old George' is not moaning, 'I am old, sick, tired, and at the end of my rope.'⁵⁶

⁵³Ibid., (Sunday edition), October 4, 1942, p. 3.

⁵⁴Lincoln Star, October 24, 1942, p. 4.

⁵⁵Omaha World-Herald (morning edition), October 24, 1942, p. 1.

⁵⁶Lincoln Star, October 24, 1942, p. 2.

On his return to Nebraska Norris reiterated Lawrence's earlier remarks:

I have heard reports that I am an old, feeble man--unable to go to my office or attend to business. That is rather discouraging. I admit to being 81, but after admitting it I feel that, like a woman, I would have been justified in not doing it. I didn't bring my wheelchair, and I lost my cane on the road.⁵⁷

In regard to the manpower shortage issue, Norris replied to his critics by pointing out that he had contacted General Hershey and Paul McNutt, requesting an investigation into the situation. He, like Wherry and May, also wanted deferments for farm boys.⁵⁸

Attacked by his opposition on a number of different issues, Norris struck back boldly, whether it be the problem of inflation, his stand on war in 1917, or the reasons why he did not return to Nebraska. But it appeared that he could not effectively refute the tide of criticism as long as he remained in Washington.

In a speech made at the Cornhusker Hotel in Lincoln, October 30, Norris stressed the point that he could not return to Nebraska at an earlier date. He also said he had heard that:

Foster May, with his splendid, beautiful voice has captivated all the women in Nebraska. Well, women may be led astray by May's voice and promises while electricity is doing the drudgery, but do they realize how they got electricity. I don't want to boast, but I thought I had something to do with it.⁵⁹

Norris also outlined a peace plan and challenged his opponents to come up with a better one. "The enemy," he said, "must be totally

⁵⁷Omaha World-Herald (morning edition), October 31, 1942, p. 2.

⁵⁸Norris MSS, George W. Norris to Major General Lewis B. Hershey, Director, Selective Service System, October 5, 1942, and Norris to Paul V. McNutt, Chairman, War Manpower Commission, October 4, 1942.

⁵⁹Omaha World-Herald (morning edition), October 31, 1942, p. 2.

disarmed as we did at the Treaty of Versailles."⁶⁰ On the same topic he went on to say that "the people who fear each other at the peace table must realize they are writing it for millions yet unborn, who are guiltless of any part in the acts of our present enemy."⁶¹

The next night Norris launched out on the offensive by attacking May for wanting to take his microphone to Washington to keep the people informed. "I am sure," Norris said, "for at least five years he will have more than he can do informing himself about the affairs of Congress and other offices at Washington."⁶² He then criticized Wherry. Norris believed that because of what Wherry had said about Roosevelt, he was "unworthy of public office."⁶³ Following his speech, a surprise appearance was made by William Jeffers of Omaha, head of the National Rubber Administration. He gave a strong endorsement to Norris because the Senator had aided him in the synthetic rubber controversy.⁶⁴

During the last two days of his stay in the state, Norris appeared in Kearney and Hastings. In speeches in these two cities he talked desperately of his willingness to use his experience in writing the peace, and once again he attacked Wherry for accusations made against the President. In the final statement of his campaign, he told his listeners:

I don't want my own people to turn me down now, when I feel that I can be of the greatest service to them, I have been struggling for the common people for forty years, but if you

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Hastings Daily Tribune, November 2, 1942, p. 9.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Lincoln Star, November 1, 1942, p. 1.

think a new man could do better send him there--if to you my experience is not of value, send someone else based on promises that he can do a better job.⁶⁵

It is evident that Norris's campaign taken as a whole was somewhat feeble. It was conducted by his close friends and prominent Republicans and Democrats, not by a grassroots organization.

Support for Norris seemed to come primarily from out-of-state sources, although there were several individuals and newspapers within the state that gave him relatively strong backing. Support from the press can be traced almost exclusively to three editors: James Lawrence--Lincoln Star; Edgar Howard--Columbus Daily Telegram; and Fred Seaton--Hastings Daily Tribune. All of these men wrote a host of articles praising Norris in one way or another.

Various newspapers from other states let it be known that they favored Norris. The Chicago Sun said: "We trust the people of Nebraska will show the good sense they have shown on five other occasions."⁶⁶ The Portland Oregonian pointed out that Carter Glass of Virginia was eighty-three, and from the Washington Post came an editorial entitled, "Tough at 81," which said: "The fact is George Norris becomes young again whenever he sees any attempt to tarnish the integrity of our government institutions."⁶⁷

Several Nebraskans also responded to Norris's call for help. C. A. Sorensen gave several speeches on behalf of Norris, and Julius C. Moore of Lincoln, Republican committeeman for ten years, and Adam McMullen of

⁶⁵Hastings Daily Tribune, November 3, 1942, p. 1.

⁶⁶Lincoln Star, October 14, 1942, p. 1.

⁶⁷Ibid.

Beatrice, former Republican governor, threw their influence behind Norris.

As Norris appeared to be in political danger, strong support from all over the nation began pouring into the state. Joseph Guffey cut off financial aid to May, and other Senate colleagues such as Lister Hill, Guy Mark Gillette, Robert LaFollette, Jr., Carl Hatch, George Pepper, Clyde Reed, and Robert F. Wagner gave Norris their eloquent stamp of approval. President Roosevelt reissued his 1936 declaration. James G. Patton, president of the Farmers Union of America, and Floyd L. Robinson, head of the National Committee for Agriculture, urged the citizens of Nebraska to re-elect Norris.

By November 3, as voters began marking their ballots, the contest (which had been one of the mildest in history) was thought to be a toss-up between Wherry and Norris. A national Gallup public opinion poll, October 25, showed the Democrats gaining strength as the election approached. The poll indicated, according to Gallup, that:

The trend toward the G.O.P. in congressional voting came to a halt early in October and today the Democrats seem to be gathering strength. Despite probable Republican victories in gubernatorial races in many of the large states, the election nationally will result in no great political upheaval. The Republicans may pick up a few additional seats; indeed there may be sizable G.O.P. gains in some areas in the East and Middle West.⁶⁸

A poll taken by the Omaha World-Herald just shortly before the election, predicted a close race between Wherry and Norris.

⁶⁸Omaha World-Herald (Sunday edition), October 25, 1942, p. 3-A.

CHART 7

OMAHA WORLD-HERALD OCTOBER 20 POLL⁶⁹

Kenneth Wherry	37%
George Norris.	36%
Foster May	27%

As the ballots were tallied election night, it became evident that Republican strength was greater than anticipated. Surprisingly, the G.O.P. cleanly swept every state and congressional office. Wherry won the senatorial election by an overwhelming margin, carrying every Nebraska county except two and piling up a total of 186,207 votes or 49 percent. Norris finished a poor second with 103,851 or 29 percent, and Foster May drew a total of 83,763 votes--21 percent. Ruthven, who in 1940 received two percent of the total vote, found that his popularity had diminished, as he accounted for only 1,348 or 0.4 percent of the votes.⁷⁰

For Foster May and his supporters the election results were, in a certain sense, gratifying. May was only thirty-seven years old and had run against two extremely able campaigners. He did not have the qualifications that are normally asked of a man who runs for the United States Senate, nor did he have the financial support of the national Democratic organization. Yet, the former "Man on the Street" ran only 25,000 votes behind George Norris.

For Norris the outcome of the 1942 election was indeed a sad one. To him the results were simply unbelievable and a repudiation of his entire congressional record. In the days that followed, many observers,

⁶⁹Ibid., (morning edition), October 20, 1942, p. 1; statistics derived from 535 interviews in twenty-six towns.

⁷⁰Nebraska Legislative Council, 1942, p. 409.

including Norris, Wherry, and May, tried to explain what had happened. Yet for over two decades men who have read the political history of Nebraska and stories of the "Fighting Liberal," George Norris, are still somewhat mystified by his defeat.

CHAPTER VI

ANALYSIS OF THE DEFEAT OF GEORGE W. NORRIS

George Norris stepped from a railroad train at Washington's Union Station on the morning of November 4, 1942. As he walked with his daughter, Mrs. John P. Robertson, the lines on his face told the sad story of what had happened in Nebraska. "His eyes were moist," said one reporter, and the only words he could utter were: "Well--there is no hope."¹ Although the veteran Senator had been through numerous struggles during his congressional career, the struggle to maintain his composure at that particular moment, while suffering from the agonizing experience of defeat, was perhaps his most demanding.

The next day Norris regained some of his old fighting spirit. In an interview with the press he angrily denounced the voters of Nebraska for rejecting his bid for re-election. He declared that the voters of his state had:

. . . thrown in my face every effort to make Nebraska one of the nation's leading states and to make America the leading nation of the world. All my life I have fought at every turn for the underdog, the man on the street, and those who found themselves in unfortunate circumstances, and now for the first time in my life my efforts have been thrown into the dust and trampled on by the people whom I love more dearly than life itself.²

In a letter to James Lawrence on November 4, Norris commented:

¹McCook Daily Gazette, November 4, 1942, p. 1.

²Ibid., November 5, 1942, p. 1.

I feel just a little like I felt when I voted against our entrance into the First World War. I met men upon the street who had been my friends, and when I expressed . . . a gladness at meeting them again, I looked into faces that were not friendly. Some of them were extremely unfriendly. Some of them refused to accept in friendship my extended hand and gradually I became filled with hesitation at even speaking to those who had been my closest and dearest friends. I did not know whether I would meet with a scornful ingratitude. So I was in rather an unfortunate condition. I am in that condition again. I know that many of those who were supposed to be my friends have helped to cut the cord of affection that bound me to my people. I do not know who they are, but I know there are thousands of them.³

In another letter to Lawrence the following day, Norris expressed the feeling that he could not explain his defeat:

I could not understand--and I confess I do not yet understand the situation. I do not know why it was or how it came about that I received such an overwhelming defeat--a defeat so overwhelming that it seems to me to be almost disgraceful. Naturally, I was very much shocked, not because I was losing the office, but because I did not believe it was possible that my people for whom I have worked and whom I have learned to love by an experience of over forty years in public life should turn against me. . . . although it is sad--bitterly sad--for me, yet I believe we were right. I have lived according to my philosophy of government, and now I am passing out of the political picture with the flag of that philosophy trailing in defeat. My only hope is that after I am gone and forgotten, this philosophy will rise again. I have faith it will. It is true--it is eternal.⁴

Despite his despondency, Norris pointed out several reasons for his defeat. One of the causes, as he saw it, was the publicity he gave Wherry by referring to him on a number of issues, but especially "when I answered a speech Wherry made . . . in which he said Roosevelt wouldn't let MacArthur fight because it would hurt Roosevelt's popularity."⁵ Another reason he gave dealt with Foster May. If May had not been in the

³Norris MSS, George W. Norris to James Lawrence, November 4, 1942.

⁴Ibid., November 5, 1942.

⁵Lincoln Star, November 4, 1942, p. 10.

race, Norris reported, "I might have received ninety-five percent of his votes."⁶ He also accused Democratic National Committeeman, James Quigley, of "hiding out" during the last week of the campaign, and that the lack of support from the Democratic party contributed substantially to his defeat. In his autobiography, Norris explained that because "Nebraska had become strongly Republican in its political faith,"⁷ and because he stayed at the Capitol too long, he did not win the 1942 election.

Foster May was not so disturbed about his political fate. He said of Wherry: "I am sure that Mr. Wherry is an able, capable gentleman who will serve the people of Nebraska and the nation to the limit of his ability,"⁸ and he also sent his condolences to Norris. However, before leaving Nebraska for a job in California, thus bowing out of politics altogether, May pointed out that Norris had split the Democratic vote and made it impossible for either of them to get elected.

The elated candidate of the three major contestants was naturally Kenneth Wherry, and sharing his joy was his home town of Pawnee City. Fire sirens and plant whistles announced the victory for their favorite son. The high school band turned out to play several numbers, and Wherry made what he considered to be his "hardest speech,"⁹ voicing thanks to the community and the many people who had supported him. He then explained why he felt he had won by listing four major points (abbreviated

⁶Omaha World-Herald (morning edition), November 5, 1942, p. 1.

⁷Norris, p. 370.

⁸Omaha World-Herald (morning edition), November 4, 1942, p. 1.

⁹Pawnee Republican, November 5, 1942, p. 1.

as follows):

1. The national swing away from the New Deal.
2. Dissatisfaction with the farm program and the whole food program in general.
3. The confused manpower situation, especially drafting of men from farms and ranches.
4. Organizational work conducted by the Republican party during the last three to four years.¹⁰

In concluding his victory speech, he said of Norris, who had begun his political career before Wherry was born, "He has been a great statesman."¹¹

Others besides the three central figures in the election rendered their opinions on what had happened to induce the defeat of the "Grand Old Man of the Senate." Newsweek magazine stated: "It was conceded that if Democrats had followed the President and had not made it a three way race, Norris might have attracted enough G.O.P. support to squeeze through."¹² Several prominent newspapers commented on the increase in midwestern Republican strength. The Detroit News said of the election: "Our voters cast their ballots with the thought of the war and its successful prosecution first in their minds."¹³ The Philadelphia Evening Bulletin pointed out that: "The Republican victory was a warning to the administration. The chief administration failing has been lagging behind popular sentiment on critical issues connected with the war."¹⁴ Echoing these same sentiments, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported that:

¹⁰Lincoln Star, November 4, 1942, p. 10.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Norfolk Daily News, November 5, 1942, p. 6.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

The protest vote was aimed, in our view, at the mistakes and delays that have characterized the war effort. The people want to get on with the war, and yesterday's results mean they are prodding the leaders by furnishing the nation with a stronger opposition.¹⁵

The New York World Telegram reiterated this theme by stating: "The election has given new life to our two-party system. It was a protest vote, and by and large the people who switched were not voting for the Republicans, but against the administration."¹⁶

Newspapers in Nebraska were for the most part in agreement with out-of-state press releases, but in certain cases they gave different reasons for Senator Norris's defeat. The Nebraska City Daily News-Press blamed Norris for vacationing in Wisconsin instead of coming back to his home state to rekindle old friendships and make new acquaintances. To Hyde Sweet, the editor of this newspaper, Norris "didn't really know the people of Nebraska."¹⁷ Sweet declared:

People are sensitive and jealous concerning their representatives and their rights. Also they forget . . . populations almost entirely change in the course of a generation of voters . . . and thousands of people in Nebraska apparently had forgotten Senator Norris.¹⁸

The Norfolk Daily News pointed to the Democratic party in Nebraska as the chief reason behind Norris's loss. "Entrance of Norris," it declared, "ruined all Democratic chances, wrecked party organization, destroyed financial support of party candidates, and many Democrats therefore . . . considered him a menace to party strength."¹⁹ Another Nebraska

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Nebraska City Daily News-Press, November 9, 1942, p. 4.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Norfolk Daily News, November 12, 1942, p. 6.

newspaper, the Alliance Times and Herald, charged Norris with forgetting the common man.

Senator Norris learned early in his reign to cater to the common man because there are more of him and numbers are comforting when you seek public office. As he grew in power he became increasingly indifferent to the rights of the minorities and, in the end, this was his undoing.²⁰

The Omaha World-Herald analyzed the situation somewhat differently. The reason it gave centered around Norris's close association with the New Deal. It related that Norris had asked the people of Nebraska during his campaign to be non-partisan, but they felt that the Senator was not being quite honest with them because when he went back to Washington, "he acted more like a Roosevelt Democrat than an independent."²¹ Hence, "the halo of sincerity which had given him great popular appeal before and allowed him to win, was tarnished."²² James Lawrence of the Lincoln Star recorded several reasons for Wherry's triumph, but generally emphasized the fact that: "Everybody on the Republican ticket was elected by an overwhelming majority no matter who he was, or what he stood for."²³

A host of individuals in Nebraska and in other states commented on the election results. Among them were Albert S. Goss, head of the National Grange; Edward A. O'Neal, president of the American Farm Bureau; and Ezra T. Benson, executive-secretary of the National Council of Farm Cooperatives. All of these men jointly issued a statement charging that the Democratic defeat in the Midwest was due to the "misdirected efforts of government agencies to fasten far reaching bureaucratic controls

²⁰Alliance Times and Herald, November 6, 1942, p. 6.

²¹Omaha World-Herald (morning edition), November 6, 1942, p. 5.

²²Ibid.

²³Lincoln Star, November 4, 1942, p. 6.

and restrictions on farmers and farm workers."²⁴

One of Nebraska's most prominent Democrats, Arthur Mullen, was discouraged over Norris encroaching on his party. He claimed: "He [Norris] has been as much of a liability to us Nebraska Democrats as has Henry Wallace, who appointed Republicans as county agents."²⁵ Another Nebraskan, United States District Attorney from Omaha, Joseph T. Votava, wrote to Norris and explained that:

Undoubtedly, probably the bulk of the Republican vote consists of regular, sincere Republicans, who are anxious to carry on this war to a definite victory, as there may be on the other side, but the great increment which was taken from the Democratic side and added to the Republican vote, consisted of what we call the 'pro-German' vote, the 'pro-Fascist' vote, the 'Coughlin' vote, and finally of the great bulk of the citizenry who are opposed to the war because it interferes with their usually comfortable, normal life.²⁶

Ralph Canaday and Christian Sorensen contributed their analyses of the election results. Canaday explained to Norris that "Nebraskans got the impression you did not want to run and thought misguided friends were telling you to. Only you could have corrected this feeling by spending a couple weeks in Nebraska, not a few days."²⁷ Sorensen attributed Norris's defeat to his association with the New Deal. In a letter to James H. Frandsen of Amherst, Massachusetts, he said:

Because of the fact that Senator Norris has as to most matters supported the administration, he was labeled a New Dealer. Foster May, the Democratic candidate was also labeled a New

²⁴Omaha World-Herald (morning edition), November 5, 1942, p. 16.

²⁵Arthur Mullen, Western Democrat (New York, 1940), p. 318.

²⁶Norris MSS, Joseph T. Votava to George W. Norris, November 6, 1942. For a similar discussion see, Walter Locke, "Independent," Antioch Review, V (January, 1945), 274-284.

²⁷Norris MSS, Ralph Canaday to George W. Norris, November 3, 1942.

Dealer. The result was that the administration vote was divided between May and Norris. Their combined vote was slightly more than that of Wherry.²⁸

Political scientists have also made statements which aid in explaining Norris's demise. Richard Bain, in a book entitled Convention Decisions and Voting Records, illustrated how in 1940 the popularity of Roosevelt was greatly diminished by the issue of the third term, and how Wendell Willkie revived considerably the spirit of free enterprise. This was especially true in Nebraska where the citizenry gave Willkie an overwhelming vote of confidence. Willkie's popularity in 1940 was a powerful stimulant to the revival of Republicanism.²⁹

Paul Lazarsfeld in The People's Choice, a political survey of the 1940 election in Erie County, Ohio, made several observations which apply to Nebraska in 1940. He found that "Republicans had more funds and had been out of office so long that they felt keenly the need to organize, and . . . to a large extent they did it on the strength of the women's organizations."³⁰ The survey showed that women were much more willing to work and had more time to work. This was true to an even greater degree in the election of 1942 in Nebraska. Lazarsfeld's survey also brings up another interesting possibility in the Nebraska senatorial contest. Did the people of Nebraska already have their minds made up before Norris entered the race? If so, it would have been a difficult task to change their thinking. The survey indicated that most people make a decision far in advance of the election as to who they are going to vote for. In

²⁸Sorensen MSS, C. A. Sorensen to James H. Frandsen, December 12, 1942.

²⁹Richard Bain, Convention Decisions and Voting Records (Washington, D. C., 1960), p. 252.

³⁰Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, The People's Choice (New York, 1948), p. 13.

fact, Lazarsfeld found that fifty percent knew in May who they wanted in office.³¹ Most people in Nebraska did not think Norris would enter the senate race and therefore probably decided to vote for either Wherry or May before Norris accepted a place on the ballot September 26.

Out of all the candidates in the 1942 election, Wherry had perhaps the most diversified background. He was a successful farmer, businessman and lawyer. And in relation to this, Lazarsfeld pointed out that the "voter sort of identifies his occupation with the candidates."³² It only stands to reason that many Nebraska voters saw in Wherry a man who would personally look after their interests because he was engaged in "their" occupation.

A third political scientist, Richard Neuberger, perhaps made the most applicable statement when he suggested, and rightly so, that Norris was fortunate to have remained in office as long as he did.

By all standards of modern political combat, the voters of Nebraska should have retired Norris long ago to his little home in McCook. He has consistently refused to submit to the various pressure clans which roam the arena of public affairs in search of timid statesmen to terrify. He regards the spoils system as a scourge of American politics, and he has never built up a following by the disbursement of government jobs, while he repeatedly bolted his party in presidential years. Senator Norris belongs to no church, and he claims as his religion merely the brotherhood doctrine of the mythical Abou ben Adhem. He has never surrounded himself with the hocus-pocus atmosphere of aloofness and Olympian wisdom dear to most statesmen. He has not hesitated to antagonize important men, whether they be captains of industry, cabinet members, or residents of the White House.³³

Neuberger's idealistic account of Norris's political career explains

³¹Ibid., p. 87.

³²Ibid., p. 85.

³³Neuberger and Kahn, p. 361.

in part, as do many of the preceding statements, the reasons for the defeat of Senator Norris. However, from the varied comments, both by contributing thesis and by other analysts, certain conclusions emerge which give a more comprehensive explanation.

The long and faithful political career of George Norris is undoubtedly a bright spot in the history of Nebraska's congressional representation. In his lifetime he rose out of obscurity to defeat "Uncle Joe" Cannon, stood strongly against a nation ready for war, saw the T.V.A. and R.E.A. become a reality, and survived the trials of partisan politics to become one of the nation's number one senators. But despite his many constructive accomplishments, as time passed, the people of his home state forgot about his historic record, as most people naturally tend to do. In 1942 there were many voters who knew little of what Norris had done or tried to do for his state, and during the campaign the old white-haired Senator could not make them understand that his experience and past record were worth something and that they needed to have the continued benefits of both.

The Norris philosophy of government was also on trial in 1942. As his life grew longer, his political philosophy gradually moved toward the "non-partisan" label. But a non-partisan is faced with the disadvantage of having no backlog of votes which he can draw on in each election, whereas members of political parties do. In essence, Norris had challenged the highly cherished American two-party system of government and lost. It was remarkable that he survived as long as he did while advocating such a foreign philosophy.

The political career of Norris was one of energy, aggressiveness, and most of all, rigorous personal campaigning. In 1917, after he had voted against Wilson's request for a declaration of war, he came back to

Nebraska to talk with his people and to "tell them the truth." He went all about the state elaborating his side of the story. In almost every election he returned to Nebraska to conduct a long campaign. Even in 1936 when he was seventy-five years old, he spent more than two weeks in the state. However, in 1942 he spent a total of about three days. He was old and had said several times that he wished to retire. In 1942, the voters appeared to feel that he really did want to bow out of public service and that he was only in the contest because of the tremendous pressure put on him to run. In 1942 he should have definitely returned home for several weeks to show Nebraskans he was not sick, or tired, or incapable, and that he really wanted to win.

Nebraska's political tradition is also a significant factor which in part explains Norris's defeat. Nebraskans do not have a political tradition of Democratic control. They have generally voted Republican, except during periods of economic difficulty. They vote that way today and probably will for many years to come. During the 1890's and 1930's, periods of farm depression, they protested the administration's policies --as Populists and Democrats respectively--but always they drifted back to Republicanism. Norris continued to be successful as long as he remained within Nebraska's traditional political framework, the Republican party. However, in 1936 he denounced the party and ran as an independent candidate with the strong endorsement of the President who also ran a non-partisan campaign. Obviously Roosevelt was at the peak of his popularity and Norris rode into office with him. In 1942 Roosevelt again sincerely endorsed Norris, but the situation was not the same. In the six years following 1936 the President's popularity had been drastically reduced in Nebraska. The state was on the path toward prosperity and on the road back to Republicanism. Norris meanwhile, although he disagreed

with some New Deal programs and Democratic party policies, did not adjust rapidly enough to a G.O.P. trend. He found himself in 1942 drawing most of his strength from the Democratic party which was not in the mainstream of normal, traditional Nebraska politics.

Although the vote in 1942 was not entirely a so called "protest vote," there were many individuals dissatisfied with the war and its effects. Up until November of 1942, United Nations forces had yet to launch anything that resembled an offensive. In short, Germany, Japan, and Italy were winning the war. Because of this fact, Americans across the country kept wondering if there was something wrong with civilian and military leadership and to a limited degree showed this discomfort at the polls. It is somewhat ironic that on November 5, the big North African offensive began, and from then on military successes became progressively more common. By mid-1943 North Africa, Sicily, Italy, and several islands in the Pacific had fallen to United States troops, and Republicans found it increasingly difficult to criticize the administration's conduct of the war.

There were also a good many sacrifices, stresses, and strains because of the war, and in 1942 it only seemed logical that the farm program, Roosevelt's third term, labor power, and executive power would come under heavy fire along with various individuals who had supported these policies.

The war also put Norris and the Democrats at a distinct disadvantage. Over five million men had been in one way or another taken into the armed services. It was figured that about sixty percent of these men were Democrats. It also stands to reason that a majority of them, because they were young and poor, would tend to be liberal in their political philosophy. Individuals who moved to a new location to seek a better job

are also in this same category. They were forced to cast absentee ballots if they wanted to vote, but because of the inconvenience involved in doing so, a great portion of them decided to leave politics to the people back home. The result was one of the lightest voter turnouts in twenty years of Nebraska congressional elections. The total ballots counted were about half of the 1940 total and approximately 150,000 below voting in 1938.

Norris was also faced with two tough campaigners in 1942. Wherry--like the Republican party--was energetic, effective, and optimistic. He had done an exceptional job of reorganizing the party and had successfully brought it through the primary election and the state convention without developing a split. In his campaign he continued to stress party unity and partisanship, and this, coupled with a long aggressive "person to person" election drive, undoubtedly contributed greatly to his election victory.

The Democratic candidate, Foster May, was seriously underrated by both Norris and the Republican forces. In the primary election he was expected to lose to Harry Coffee but he did not. He was not supposed to be able to politically "carry a candle" to Wherry or Norris in the general election, but he gathered in over 80,000 votes. His secret appeal was apparently his pleasant radio voice. During the war there was comparatively little mobility and this fact made the radio an even more effective communicative device than it had been in peacetime. May's political strength was also enhanced by the support of the state Democratic organization, something Terry Carpenter had not enjoyed in 1936. Moreover, May appealed for votes on the basis that he was a common man, and undoubtedly this factor was also important in sapping the strength of the incumbent who had also in the past drawn heavily from the politicians'

most favored target--the "common man."

It is obvious after an analysis of this type that ultimately George Norris's popularity was greater in the Senate and in the nation than in his home state of Nebraska. As Norris served out his last term in the Senate, periodicals, newspapers, and a host of friends let the country know they were sorry to see the Senator go.

The New Republic said about his career: "It was a lonely road: only you know how discouraged and lonely you were."³⁴ "He was not a great orator," reported Time magazine, "but everyone listened."³⁵ Another periodical, Nation, pointed out that "profoundness, unaffectedness, and modesty have colored his whole public life,"³⁶ in explaining that Norris had achieved a position of national leadership which had never occurred to him.

The Chicago Daily Times paid tribute to Norris by saying:

Old George not only loved his country but he worked for it harder and smarter than almost anybody else you can name during the stretch of forty years that he was in office. So, as a reward for loving his country, George Norris lost his job. He has no apologies to make for losing out. It's the people of Nebraska who didn't realize that he was making them look like the most advanced citizens of the nation, by his representation of them, who should blush. They don't look as bright now as old George made them look. When he was their man, the Nebraskans could boast of being people who accounted for many of the advances in government. Norris's record in Congress shows the old boy has been the standout performer of them all.³⁷

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch continued with this theme by stating: "We

³⁴"The Road of George Norris," New Republic, CVII (November 16, 1942), 629.

³⁵"Last of Willful Men," Time, XLIV (September 11, 1944), 21.

³⁶Freda Kirchway, "A Call to Action," Nation, CLV (December 26, 1942), 720.

³⁷Norris MSS, Chicago Daily Times, February 9, 1943.

venture that the history books of say, fifty years from now, will select a few men of comparable stature (such as the Clays, Blairs, Bentons, Websters, and Calhouns) from the present era and that one of these will be Norris of Nebraska."³⁸

Perhaps the greatest tributes were bestowed on Norris at a testimonial dinner given in his honor by Senator Joseph Guffey and recorded in the Congressional Record December 16, 1942, by Senator Harry S. Truman. William Allen White of Emporia, Kansas, could not be at the meeting, but he sent a letter which in part said: "I know of no other man in the United States who has done so much for his country in the last forty years as George Norris."³⁹

The most dramatic tribute came from Governor Matthew M. Neely of West Virginia, a former Senate colleague of Norris's. He indicated that Norris had a number of good years to look forward to. "It is not the end of the trail for Norris. It is not too late for him to render more service to his country in the days to come than the average statesman of half his years will be able to perform.

Nothing is too late
Till the tired heart shall cease to palpitate.
Cato learned Greek at eighty; Sophocles
Wrote his grand Oedipus, and Simonides
Bore off the prize of verse from his compeers,
When each had numbered more than
Fourscore years.
Chaucer, at Woodstock with the nightingales,
At sixty wrote the Canterbury Tales.
Goethe at Weimar, toiling to the last,
Completed Faust when eighty years were past.
And Theophrastus, at fourscore and ten,
Had but begun his 'Character of Men.'⁴⁰

³⁸Neuberger and Kahn, p. 360.

³⁹U.S., Congressional Record, 77th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1942, LXXXVIII, appendix, 4402-4407.

⁴⁰Ibid.

Governor Neely went on to express the refreshing atmosphere Norris brought to the Senate by relating that "an eloquent author must have unconsciously had him in mind when he said of another, he is:

'A spring of ice and cold water to the parched
and burning lips of thirst.
A palm that lifts its coronet of leaves
above the desert sand;
An isle of green in some far sea;
The purple light of dawn above the eastern hills.
A cloud of gold beneath the setting sun;
A fragrance wafted from an unseen shore;
A silvery strain of music heard within
some palace wrought of dreams.'⁴¹

Secretary of State Cordell Hull, showed his admiration for Norris in a letter to Guffey. He stated that: "No one has more greatly admired than I the courage, integrity, broad vision, and constructive statesmanship displayed by Senator Norris throughout his career. I shall always cherish my friendship with him."⁴²

Justice Hugo Black, in attendance at the dinner, displayed the feeling that Norris really had not been defeated. In part he said:

I was not particularly disturbed--I must say I was not even surprised--when I learned that in a long political career, George Norris, young as he is--and he is young--had progressed so far in advance of the spirit of many people that he had suffered what was called his first defeat. But you and I, of course, know as all the thinking people of Nebraska. They could not defeat him. He cannot be defeated. Nothing that they might do could defeat him because he is a symbol. As one man who wrote of him said, 'He is a symbol of that which, while all America may not possess it, all Americans love. He is a symbol of complete integrity--integrity of purpose, integrity of mind, and integrity of action.'⁴³

The Vice-President of the United States, Henry Wallace, had this to say about the Nebraska legislator: "Senator Norris has been one of the

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

far visioned social planners of our time. He has understood the fundamental importance of conserving soil, water, electricity, and people. And he has done something about it."⁴⁴

The President, although not present at the dinner, sent his best regards in the following statement:

Of all that you have done for your country and for your fellow citizens as a tireless champion of liberalism, I have spoken many times, publicly and privately. Through twoscore years you have been as a tower of strength in every storm. I can only reiterate what I have often said before--that in our national history we have had few elder statesmen who, like you, have preserved the aspirations of youth as they accumulated the wisdom of years.

In these critical days we need your counsel as never before and the youth of the land particularly need the force of your example which has been a beacon light of righteousness for more than a generation.⁴⁵

Franklin Roosevelt had brought out the essence of George Norris's career when in 1932 he made the following statement which long after the Senator's defeat was restated by another President, John F. Kennedy.⁴⁶

History asks:

Did the man have integrity?
 Did the man have unselfishness?
 Did the man have courage?
 Did the man have consistency?

Both Presidents thought Norris, in defeat as well as in victory, measured up to these questions more than most of America's great political personalities.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Kennedy, p. 178.

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¹Major newspapers from every section of Nebraska were systematically researched for information relating to the 1942 primary and general election with most emphasis placed on the three months just prior to November 3. In a few instances the publications in June, July, and November were also checked. The most useful newspaper was the Omaha World-Herald. Also helpful were the Nebraska City Daily News-Press, Lincoln Star, Pawnee Republican, and McCook Daily Gazette.

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Kearney Daily Hub.
Lexington Clipper.
Lincoln Journal.
Lincoln Star.
McCook Daily Gazette.
Nebraska City Daily News-Press.
Norfolk Daily News.
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A P P E N D I X

1942 Democratic Party Platform

In the midst of the greatest conflict at arms in all history--a contest between democracy and dictatorship--the Democrats of Nebraska behold in our President and commander-in-chief, Franklin D. Roosevelt, "the hopes of civilization." His humanitarian ideals, applied in affairs of government, have won the hearts of liberty-lovers in all lands, where men are free to live and love. His vision of the war in which we are engaged was the common vision of America and all Americans. Had his preparation plea been adopted, the shameful story of Pearl Harbor would be a different story than that which history must record. The Democrats of Nebraska send greetings of confidence complete in his leadership, and congratulations upon and thanks for his militant prosecution of the war. Particularly we applaud his success in carrying to the people in all countries now under the crushing Hitler heel the belief that we of America are indeed brothers with them in a common cause, and that when the victory shall have been won the voice of America will demand that the now exiled governments may be permitted to resume the function of government in their home lands.

The Democratic party views with pride and satisfaction the excellent choices made by the electorate in the naming of our national and state candidates.

The nomination of Foster May for United States Senator has met with wide popular response throughout the state of Nebraska. We feel his election to the United States Senate will contribute immeasurably to that unity and cooperation between the Senate and the administration, which is so vitally necessary to the successful conduct of the war. His deep understanding of human problems and values will be an asset to the peace councils which must readjust the world's society after the war and we unanimously endorse his candidacy and pledge him our united and unqualified support.

The selection of former Governor Charles W. Bryan for governor in these perilous times is a definite recognition of his outstanding ability as an efficient and economic administrator. His election will be most beneficial to our state and its taxpayers and we likewise pledge him our united and individual support.

We commend the voters of the state and urge the election of an entire congressional and state ticket.

We congratulate the farmers of Nebraska and pay tribute to the physical and intellectual stamina they revealed, which enabled them to conquer drought and depression for a decade. There was in that decade a struggle on the farms familiar and inspiring to farm people.

With the help of a thoughtful, sympathetic government, the rural communities of this state resisted temptation to give up the struggle. This was providential. Today Nebraska is contributing enormous quantities of foodstuffs for the winning of this war. The combination of government assistance and farmer stability results today in a populated farming region ready and willing to add the staff of life to the arsenal of Democracy.

We pledge our candidates for the Senate and our candidates for the House to call to the attention of the proper authorities the necessity for such administrative changes or legislative revisions as will enable Nebraska agriculture to meet more fully the needs of Nebraska.

It was the Democratic party which first gave practical consideration

to the farmer and his problem. It is to the Democratic party that the farmer should look for changes and revision either administrative or by legislation that may seem advisable. The Republican party had its chance to undertake a solution of the farm problem and failed. The people on the farms can look to the Democratic party for understanding, sympathy, and practical action to develop a continuing, secure farm program. In all price ceilings the relationship between farm income and industrial income must be fair and just to the farmer.

The people of this state are dependent upon agriculture for their support and we favor the state taking the lead in securing and providing permanent industries in Nebraska that will produce industrial alcohol and synthetic rubber, dehydrated corn, wheat, and other grains, consistent with the war effort.

The Democratic party pledges itself to struggle unceasingly for the establishment in Nebraska of such industrial activities.

We believe in the right of labor to organize and bargain collectively and we favor the extension of this principle. We recognize that with the influx of war industries into Nebraska, the industrial problems of our state are and will be increased. We believe that in recognition of this fact, and in order to secure for these new industries an adequate supply of competent labor, the labor department of our state should be increased in capacity to meet this increased need.

The Democratic party is the friend of labor. All beneficial legislation which has been enacted in behalf of labor was sponsored and passed by the Democratic party. We pledge to labor that we will in the future, as in the past, foster and enact such legislation as should be wholesome and beneficial, and in the best interests of labor.

Taxation becomes of infinitely greater concern to the people of Nebraska. We pledge a Democratic administration to the reduction of state taxes on farms and homes at least 25 percent. Governor Bryan did it three times before and can be depended upon to do it again. We believe this best can be accomplished by rigid economy in the administration of the affairs of the state. Every unnecessary activity should be abolished. The practice of loading down inspectional activities to provide jobs for political friends must be abolished. In addition to holding taxes to the minimum, they should be distributed equitably so that every individual company and corporation shall pay their just share of the cost of state government.

Our elderly people devoted their lives to the development of Nebraska. In a large measure it represents their labors. They must be provided with adequate support for their declining years. We advocate, and we pledge ourselves to enact legislation providing a reasonable increase in the monthly allowances based upon decent standards of health and ordinary comfort. In this connection we call attention to the fact that Governor Bryan is the author of the old age assistance law in this state and the proved ability of the Bryan administration to make intelligent economies, will provide the necessary funds for such an increase.

Within the past year the people of Nebraska have been confronted with the spectacle of a state administration seeking to inject petty partisanship in matters of education. It is a matter of concern when a state administration, against the unanimous opinion of the governing board of the normal schools of Nebraska, and in the breach of faith with the legislature, undertakes to place its own political selection in the post of comptroller of the normals. This is the diamond anniversary of Nebraska and through 75 years of statehood, education never before has

been subjected to partisan politics.

We further recommend adequate financial support to our educational institutions, particularly our state university and teacher's colleges.

Equally deplorable and unfortunate was that same development of party partisanship in the affairs of the game and fish commission. We take it to be self-evident that the restoration of conservation of wild-life in Nebraska is not related to political patronage.

We pledge the Democratic party to restore administration of the game and fish commission to the people of Nebraska who created it.

Trade barriers such as toll bridges, port of entry, and petty annoyances to commercial truckers must be abolished.

Nebraska's most valuable asset is its boys and girls. We believe that neither money nor effort should be spared in providing for these young people the very best education and preparation for their future responsibilities as citizens.

The state should see that employment is provided for all idle labor and that assistance is given to all needy unemployables.

All employment in federal and state agencies should be on the basis of merit without discrimination because of race, color, or creed.

It was a Democratic state administration and a Democratic national administration that gave practical force instead of lip service to the principle of the conservation of natural resources in Nebraska. In the program of soil conservation, of the expansion of irrigation, of flood control, and of the development of electricity for the farm homes and citizens of Nebraska through the efforts of the Democratic party, the people now enjoy the fullest use of the resources given to them.

We pledge our wholehearted support for the continuation of this program. There is one basically important unfinished job in Nebraska. It is the development of a comprehensive program of flood control and irrigation in the Republican River Valley. In June of 1935 there were 105 lives lost and millions of dollars in damage as a result of the overflow of the Republican River and its tributaries. Each year crops are jeopardized by spring and summer floods. A proper program of flood control and irrigation will add millions to the farm wealth of Nebraska and we pledge our candidate for senator, our candidate for the House and our candidate for governor to work unremittingly for the development of the Republican River Valley.

We favor a simple and expeditious plan by which the citizens of Nebraska serving in the armed forces of the United States, and their auxiliaries, can cast their ballots and thus participate in the expression and decision of that democracy of which they are such an important part.

We favor a modification of the present primary laws, to meet new and changing conditions.

There must be no discrimination, either now or after the peace, against any nationality, race, color, religion, and schools that are loyally American. We must have unity in Nebraska to protect and promote the welfare of the people. The people of Nebraska must give to the federal government full and complete cooperation so that the war may be won in the shortest possible time, and so that the state can adequately care for our returning soldiers and sailors now valiantly defending and preserving the rights of this great democracy. And, concurrently with that, we must guard against any revival of the persecution which marked the First World War. We note with satisfaction that no such hysteria has yet developed, and we pledge our candidates and ourselves to every possible effort to prevent recurrence.

1942 Republican Party Platform

The Republican party of Nebraska, in delegate convention assembled at Omaha, September 3, 1942, reaffirms its allegiance to this republic; to the people who make such a republic possible; to its basic laws, the constitution; and the freedoms of our American life. This nation will prove again to the world that such a government can function in war as well as in peace.

We pledge support to the successful prosecution of the war; the first and most important objective of all America. It must be brought to a virtuous conclusion with the minimum loss of life and suffering to our people. We oppose inefficiency and waste and deplore lack of cooperation and control of vital departments engaged in the war effort.

It is our patriotic duty to unselfishly tender our services in all matters relating to the successful conduct of the war. Use of extraordinary emergency powers, public monies, labor and industry incidental to the war for political advantage is unpatriotic. Controversial domestic issues, should, in faith be avoided by major political parties wherever and whenever they interfere with the war effort.

We pledge that our republican form of government and our liberties shall be preserved at home while our armed forces fight for freedom throughout the world. The freedom that we demand for ourselves and our posterity should be assured to all peoples now oppressed by brutal war lords. The sacrifices already made at Pearl Harbor, Bataan, Corregidor, in the Solomons, in China, Burma, Australia and elsewhere on land and sea, and the sacrifices yet to be made must not be in vain.

Our constitution guarantees a republican form of government. The Republican party stands for its main tenets against encroachment by those exercising emergency powers, and we demand that these powers be returned at the end of the war to the people from whom they come. Freedom must be a reality not a political phrase. We oppose every effort to make fundamental changes in our government while our forces are engaged in fighting our enemies.

Agriculture should be placed on an equal with industry and labor. This equality must not be evaded by subterfuge.

We condemn the present national administration for using desperately needed man power in unnecessary and politically inspired agencies, and at the same time ignoring the farm labor shortage. We also condemn the policy of refusing to use agricultural products for industrial purposes; such as rubber and plastics, while imposing restrictions upon production of needed products such as sugar beets.

The full utilization of our resources will result in the industrial development of the state. During the Republican state administration a law was passed to provide for research into the use of agricultural products in war industries. We pledge the continued efforts of the Republican party to develop and increase the use of agricultural products in industry.

We approve labor's right of free organization and collective bargaining. It should have representation on all governmental agencies handling questions directly effecting labor. Closer relationship between industry and labor, through voluntary labor and management committees, will help solve any economic differences.

Controversies between labor and industry now are detrimental to public interest and must be avoided.

We commend the entire Republican state administration and especially Governor Dwight Griswold for his foresight, wisdom, and leadership. Ten months before Pearl Harbor, he recommended the establishment of necessary defense activities in our state.

We especially commend our governor for his fair and temperate conduct of all the various defense and war activities of the state without the creation of any racial intolerance or prejudices among the various loyal and patriotic groups of our citizenry who are sons and daughters of the nations at war. Our governor has given the utmost cooperation to all of the war industries operating within our state, for which military and naval officials have expressed their appreciation.

All departments of state have been administrated in a capable, efficient and economical manner, and there will be no deficit to be met by a succeeding administration.

Assessments of all property, including that of large foreign corporations, equalizes the tax burden of all. Economy of state and local government, through budgeting and auditing, has reduced the tax burden. We are unalterably opposed to any new form of taxation.

We favor local control of relief and old age assistance, to the end that we shall have efficient, sympathetic and economical administration. The funds appropriated by the federal and state governments for these purposes should go to the needy people for whom they are intended, and the cost of supervision held to a minimum.

The efforts to obtain adequate flood control in the Republican River Valley and other sections of the state, had not been realized. We pledge our assistance to this program until it has been attained.

Under the guise of necessity to sustain our war effort, the New Deal policy of unnecessary interference with and arbitrary regulation of private business has attained an all time high, and is rapidly eliminating the small businessman from American life. Confiscation of private property without compensation through unfair bureaucratic action is nothing less than larceny. We pledge that, if given the power, this dangerous trend will be reversed.

We recognize that the present method of selecting candidates for public office can be improved. We do not desire to return to the old conditions which the enactment of the primary law eliminated. The people of Nebraska are determined, as they should be, to retain at all times an effective control of their government. The institutions of government must never come under the control of any special interest or special group, but political parties should be afforded an opportunity to draft public service men and women of known ability who are unwilling to become candidates under the existing conditions.

We are proud of our Republican candidates. We commend them to the voters of Nebraska. We heartily endorse Dwight Griswold for governor, Kenneth S. Wherry for United States Senator, Carl T. Curtis, Howard Buffett, Karl Stefan, A. L. Miller for Congress, and all candidates nominated by the voters at the Republican primary election.

For the promotion of better government, insurance of future rights and liberties, and for an uninterrupted war effort that must lead to victory, the Republican party of Nebraska asks for and hopes to receive the votes of Nebraska citizens in the election on November 3, 1942.

VITA

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Master of Arts

Thesis: THE DEFEAT OF GEORGE W. NORRIS IN THE 1942 NEBRASKA SENATORIAL
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