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KEEPERS OF THEIR PARTY: HAPPY CHANDLER, ALBEN BARKLEY AND FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT'S FIGHT FOR THE SOUL OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

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KEEPERS OF THEIR PARTY:
HAPPY CHANDLER, ALBEN BARKLEY AND FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT'S
FIGHT FOR THE SOUL OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
in the College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By

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2019

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

KEEPERS OF THEIR PARTY:
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FIGHT FOR THE SOUL OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

This thesis argues that the 1938 Kentucky Democratic primary was a critical moment for the New Deal and the Democratic Party. Furthermore, it demonstrates the fractures forming within the southern wing of the party. Through this primary the paper examines peoples' perceptions of a changing democracy. One that they believed included a much more powerful president and meddling bureaucracy. It details the major points of the campaign, including Franklin Roosevelt's visit to the state the famous poisoning accusations, and the corruption within the Works Progress Administration.

KEYWORDS: Liberalism, Conservatism, Democratic Party, Kentucky, New Deal

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DEDICATION

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Introduction

As the train entered Cincinnati Ohio, President Roosevelt was resting in preparation for a full day of travel and speeches on behalf of Alben Barkley, one of his most ardent supporters, who was in the midst of an intense battle for the Democratic nomination for the senate. When the train entered the station, his challenger, a charismatic and always smiling, A.B. "Happy" Chandler boarded and contently took his seat in the dining car. The six-mile trip to Covington, Kentucky, where the president's first speech was set to be given, was cordial and quiet, however; this would only last a short time. The train arrived at its destination and the occupants filed out. There was a car waiting to take the three men to the racetrack where Roosevelt would make his speech. The president entered first, sitting in the far-right seat. Happy saw his chance to insert himself into the spotlight, nearly leaping over him to claim the middle seat. This ensured that he would be seen by everybody lining the streets and captured by every photographer sitting next to the president. Chandler's smiling face would be on the front page of many newspapers the next morning.

It was a long and winding road that lead to the president's interference in the 1938 Democratic primary. Throughout the 1920s, Kentucky politics were incredibly factional and controlled by groups of prominent men. The governor was not at all an unchecked ruler of the state. Much of the true power lay behind the scenes with various powerful bosses, the most prominent among these in the nineteenth century was William "Percy" Haly. They often gained their influence through the practice of distributive politics. During an era of little government involvement, these bosses provided needed relief to a

Kentucky that struggled for much of the 1920s. If one wanted to take power in Kentucky, they needed to gain the support of as many of the bosses as they could. Chandler was able to garner the attention of a group of powerful bosses, John Talbott, Ben Johnson, Robert Bingham, and William Haly, that would be critical to his ascent to power. As the 1936 gubernatorial race was nearing, J.C.W. Beckham, a well-known and powerful Kentucky politician, pulled himself out of the running. This cleared the way for Chandler to be entered the race on behalf of the Beckham-Haly-Bingham faction.^{1 2}

After Ruby Laffoon took office many of the issues that Kentucky had been experiencing since the Great Depression were exacerbated. Over 1932 the state's deficit increased by \$2,000,000. This caused him to struggle to meet matching fund thresholds for any New Deal programs. Laffoon would attempt to solve some of these fiscal issues by raising the liquor tax, however; he also significantly lowered the property tax and spent \$250,000 to make Mammoth Cave a national park. All of this contributed to Kentucky's fiscal crisis. In his attempt to alleviate the financial woes of Kentucky Laffoon committed a cardinal sin. He instituted a three percent sales tax. With the 1935 gubernatorial race approaching the bosses decided to put forth Thomas Rhea as the replacement candidate for Laffoon.³

As Charles Roland would put it, "Chandler was fresh; he was fun; he was different. And still, in the dark Depression days of the 1930s, he made a tremendous impression on the voters who wanted someone new and sought a change from the old

¹ Klotter, *Kentucky: Portrait in Paradox*, 204, 304-305.

² Lowell Hayes. Harrison and James C. Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 274-276, 368; James C. Klotter, *Kentucky: Portrait in Paradox, 1900-1950* (Frankfort, KY: Kentucky Historical Society, 1996), 204, 304-305

³ Klotter, *Kentucky: Portrait in Paradox*, 304-305.

politics of despair.” He utilized a unique and new style of oratory where his speeches were shorter and he called people in the crowd out by name. Most importantly, he promised to save the state from “Ruby, Rhea, and ruin.”⁴

As lieutenant governor of Kentucky under Ruby Laffoon in 1935, Chandler used a provision from the state constitution that allowed him to become governor if Laffoon left the state. Once the governor took a trip to Washington, Happy sprang into action, called a for a special session of the legislature to enact a new primary law, a law which would eventually help him become governor in 1936. Soon after his ascension to the highest office in Kentucky politics, the only thirty-eight-year-old Chandler quickly made his mark. Taking after Huey Long, whom Happy reportedly spent some time shadowing in Louisiana just before his death in 1935, he began to push out those who refused to take secondary roles, which included many who helped him get elected to office and allowed him to construct a powerful political machine. He would go on to take after another mentor in his policy: Harry Byrd. Chandler quickly reorganized the state government and balanced the budget, which brought needed stability to Kentucky. However, believing he was destined for more (including the presidency), was already looking for his next move. Since Kentucky governors could not succeed themselves, and Chandler would not accept a step back and set his eyes on the senate in 1938.⁵

⁴ Klotter, *Kentucky: Portrait in Paradox*, 304-305.

⁵ Urey Woodson Colonel Robert M. Gates, June 27, 1938, Urey Woodson papers, 1876-1943, Box 5, Folder 7, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY; James C. Klotter, *Kentucky: Portrait in Paradox, 1900-1950* (Frankfort, KY: Kentucky Historical Society, 1996), 306-09. James K. Libbey, *Alben Barkley: A Life in Politics* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2016), 51, 64, 89, 174-75, 185.

The incumbent, Alben Barkley, had a record in Kentucky politics dating back to the late 1890s. Early in his career, he gained the support of two pivotal groups, rural and labor, by championing various reforms in the early 1900s. As a congressman during the Wilson administration, Barkley watched as the president exercised strong leadership over the party. During World War I, he created the Food Administration, Fuel Administration, and the National War Labor Board, all of which Barkley had a hand in passing. He would also, during the Wilson administration, promote better roads for the rural population of Kentucky. The resulting unity, purpose, and success that this strong national leadership brought to the Democratic Party taught Barkley a lesson that he would carry with him for the rest of his career. He was predisposed to supporting the New Deal from its inception.

Starting from his very first day as Senate Majority Leader, he used his booming voice to trumpet his support for the New Deal. As soon as he took office, he played a critical role in pushing through much of the legislation that defined the Second New Deal. He sat on the committees that drafted the Social Security and the Revenue Acts in 1935, and also devised a compromise that allowed the passing of the Public Utility Holding Act in the same year. This valuable Barkley was integral in many other struggles, such as defending the Agricultural Adjustment Act after portions of it were deemed unconstitutional. He, with Roosevelt's blessing, became Senate Majority Leader. He would continue to become one of the president's most vital allies in the senate by helping push through more critical New Deal legislation like the Fair Labor and Standards Act in 1938 and he criticized the Supreme Court for resistance to many of Roosevelt's plans. He exemplified a New Deal Democrat.

The question remains: Why would Roosevelt break tradition and get between these two colossal figures? There was significant division developing within the Democratic party. The New Deal's shifting of the Democratic Party's objectives toward solving the problems of the Great Depression caused dissolution among certain Democrats. First and foremost, Southerners felt particularly threatened by the New Deal's increase of executive powers. The New Deal brought more federal control causing fear that the *laisse faire* treatment that they had received, particularly regarding race, may be coming to an end.

However, there was more widespread dissent due to several other reasons. The supreme court had begun to apply pressure to the New Deal, declaring several major pieces of legislation unconstitutional. Therefore, Roosevelt attempted to reorganize the judiciary in his favor with his infamous court-packing plan in 1937. This, coupled with an executive reorganization bill, made many fearful that the president was seeking to acquire dictatorship. The president attempted to justify his plan by asserting that he would expand the Supreme Court to lessen the workload of the older members. Nobody was fooled by this, and congress, including many Democrats, shut it down. A final factor that exacerbated the strife that was boiling beneath the Democratic Party was the Roosevelt Recession, which cast doubts about the efficacy of the New Deal.⁶

These issues are what much of the dissent in the Democratic Party crystalized over, however, tensions had been rising since as early as 1935, beginning with Roosevelt's Revenue Act. Furthermore, the rift between North and South, which veiled

⁶ David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 332-333

the true conflict between urban and rural, interest had been festering for some time. Due to the court-packing fiasco Southern fears of federal encroachment through many New Deal programs, and the Roosevelt Recession many now gained the courage to challenge Roosevelt openly. Fate allowed the president to gain a favorable court through the death of a justice, however; due to the rift developing within the Democratic party, he had no vehicle to put legislation through.⁷

Roosevelt realized that the momentum of the New Deal may have been running out. His solution: create a truly liberal Democratic Party. A Party which believed in the interconnectedness of society, and thus in attempts to protect communities, individuals, and the government itself from corporate power, the state would get involved to ensure a basic level of subsistence. If this was to be achieved, the new liberal Democratic party would need to be purged of its conservative elements and made to follow a more national program. It is important to note that he did not want a one-party system, but two clearly defined parties, with one being a liberal party that he could utilize to continue his New Deal. The president saw his opportunity with the midterm elections of 1938. He would attempt to remove the conservative elements of the party and defend the liberal New Dealers from being ousted from their seats. While Roosevelt was unsuccessful in purging those unsupportive of him and, ultimately in his attempts to reorganize the party, he was successful at protecting seats that were already occupied by supportive senators.⁸

⁷ Ibid, 338.

⁸ Sidney Milkis, "Programmatic Liberalism and Party Politics: The New Deal Legacy and the Doctrine of Responsible Party Government," in *Challenges to Party Government* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 106; Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 9; Susan Dunn, *Roosevelts Purge: How FDR Fought to Change the Democratic Party* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 7; Sidney M. Milkis, *The President*

Many have studied these various topics at length. Histories of Kentucky have been composed by James C. Klotter and Lowell H. Harrison, which both give the Democratic primary a treatment of a few pages and view it primarily from a state context. Even more have studied the New Deal, its discontents, and the attempts to build a consensus liberal party. Many of these authors relegate the Kentucky primary to a few sentences. Walter Hixon wrote both an article and thesis about the Barkley-Chandler contest, demonstrating that support Roosevelt and the New Deal were still high despite his political blunder of attempting to pack the courts. However, much is still left unsaid about massive changes to party politics and this rift between many in the democratic party.

This work will argue that Kentucky was center stage in the fight to save the New Deal and build a liberal Democratic party. The 1938 Democratic primary was one of the most important single moments the presidents attempt to save a sputtering New Deal, which had undergone several hardships. Its prestige had been damaged by the Roosevelt Recession and the court-packing plan. Like the rest of the country, Kentuckians had become skeptical of the New Deal. Despite this skepticism, many still voted in strongly in its favor. What about the New Deal was making Americans uncomfortable? How successful were Roosevelt's attempts at creating a liberal Democratic party? How were Americans dealing with the increase in executive power? These are all significant issues that rose to the forefront of citizens minds. Examining this critical battle in Kentucky

and the Parties: The Transformation of the American Party System Since the New Deal (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 62; Anthony J. Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years*(London, UK: MacMillan, 1989), 271-272.

may help answer some of these questions. This was also a vital fight for the New Deal for another reason. Barkley was the president's most important ally in the Senate. This was Roosevelt's majority leader. He had broken tradition and openly supported his nomination to the post, and with many beginnings to lose faith it would have been a major embarrassment to have his majority leader unseated by a more conservative Democrat.

Chapter one will tackle the early stages of the Kentucky campaign and the changing perceptions of the president's role in American politics. Roosevelt had greatly expanded what many considered to be within the realm of presidential powers. He had pushed to create public work program where workers were paid to do anything from building public libraries to composing music. Many felt that the national government was overstepping its bounds, especially as the national debt rose to unimaginable heights. Furthermore, the national government was now taking responsibility for the wellbeing of its people. This sparked debate over where this was the government's duty or not. Liberal Democrats would argue that it was the very "heart and soul of Americanism" to help the public during times of extreme economic stress. Conservative Democrats believed that the national government was overspending and that it would be detrimental to the economy as well as the work ethic of the population.⁹

Chapter two, "Copperheads Among Us," will investigate Roosevelt's attempts to purge the party of its conservative elements and his visit to Kentucky. The president's trip to the Bluegrass State was particularly interesting in that Chandler would attempt to hijack it and use its publicity to his own advantage. He would adeptly utilize the photo

⁹ "Support Sought By Two Rivals In Senate Race," *Lexington Herald*, April 23, 1938.

opportunities and somewhat neutral statements from the president to present a favorable picture to weary Democrats. This chapter argues that the battle to keep Barkley in the Senate was the most important of the purge due to his status as senate majority leader. The importance of this victory was also magnified by the failure to win other races and a rising conservative sentiment amongst the electorate. This chapter will also examine the increasingly vocal calls for fiscal conservatism.

The final chapter, titled “Poison Water, Poison Victory,” will discuss the final stages of the campaign. One of the larger controversies of the primary would occur in its last days when Chandler fell ill and decided to assert that this was due to the poisoning of a pitcher of waters at the hands of the Barkley organization. This had drastic implications for the outcome of the campaign that many fail to acknowledge. Chandler went into election day looking weak, as the newspapers had published pictures of him sick in bed with his wife by his side for several weeks prior. This would soften the claims that Chandler had made that he was the young and hearty candidate while Barkley was old and weak. This event also came at an opportune time for Barkley, as he was struggling to gather funds. This became such an issue that Harry Hopkins took an interest in the situation, though he saw little success in remedying it. As August 6th drew near, there were concerns that Barkley would completely run out of money and cease making speeches. This episode allowed for a much-needed relief for the Barkley campaign and certainly contributed to his victory.

Neither side would come out of the campaign unscathed. In the final months of the primary, it would be discovered that both the Chandler and Barkley campaigns would be accused of using patronage to gain support and funds. The Barkley organization was

found to have used the WPA to gain support, which dealt another blow to the New Deal at a crucial time. It was alleged that workers jobs were threatened if they did not vote for Barkley, drawing concerns that the very idea of government work programs was tainted from the beginning. This gave firepower to anti-New Dealers during a time when the New Deal was already struggling to rally support in the South. Kentucky would be entangled in and exemplify not only in this controversy but the political climate surrounding this attempt to gain a foothold and the struggles that came with it.

Chapter 1: “The Heart and Soul of Americanism:” The Early Campaign and the Expansion of Presidential Powers.

As early as January, the main themes of the election would be brought to the forefront. It became clear that this election would represent a fight to shape American democracy. Alben Barkley, a long-time supporter of the president and his New Deal, would go to battle to defend the principles that allowed their ascent. He would fight to continue an American Democracy that allowed for an executive that had exponentially more power than ever before. Roosevelt had expanded presidential powers through his work programs and increasing of the national debt. Barkley represented a faction of the Democratic Party that subscribed to the idea of a strong executive who could utilize the office to solve the pressing issues of the Great Depression. The party was supposed to face these problems under the supervision of the president. This was, as Barkley called it, the “heart and soul of Americanism.”¹⁰

Chandler’s campaign captured the backlash to this increase in the power of the executive spurred on by the Roosevelt recession in 1937, occurring after many New Deal programs began to be reduced in size. This economic downturn shook the confidence of the much of the American public and left many feeling that “priming the pump” was now a permanent function of the government. They had been frightened by the immense debt that the government was racking up and this burden may have all been for nothing. Chandler would balance the budget of Kentucky and tout a fiscally conservative message thorough the campaign, specifically attacking the philosophy of pump priming. These

¹⁰ “Support Sought By Two Rivals In Senate Race,” *Lexington Herald*, April 23, 1938.

philosophies would represent the rift within the Democratic Party, but they also demonstrate a shift in the American system to a more powerful executive.

Roosevelt was also applying pressure to the Supreme Court, which caused people to fear the future of the relationship between the executive and judicial branches of government. His court-packing plan from 1937 had also created a split in the party. Roosevelt's attempt to gain a massive amount of influence over the supreme court made many see him as a tyrant who was attempting to gain control over every aspect of government. There would also be a brief controversy over a court seat early in the primary that would ironically see Roosevelt being pressured by his opposition to make a judicial appointment that would benefit them and avoid a fight. This would not be the last time that the issue of judicial appointments would come up and it would be an issue from the beginning to end it would be one of the driving issues of the campaign.

Kentucky was a microcosm of this struggle over the direction of American democracy, and it would quickly be thrust into the national spotlight. The debate over the building of a dam in Gilbertsville, Kentucky revolved around all of these issues. It brought to the forefront many concerns over the president's powers to appoint and, in this case, remove personnel of New Deal programs. Many also used this project as an example of the excessive spending of the government. This was because it was to be the crowning achievement of the TVA and the most expensive dam the organization was to produce. The Gilbertsville Dam, however, also brought to light another issue of presidential power, because it would displace thousands of people from the town, which it would flood once it was built. The executive was now removing thousands from their homes and destroying farmland in an area filled with farmers by claiming it was for a

greater good. This concerned many in the Tennessee Valley and Gilbertsville and would become an outlet for their dissent. The early stages of this campaign were filled with debate about the direction of American Democracy and many of the events depict the uncertainty of the place of the executive in American democracy.

Once January of 1938 had arrived, the time left for Governor Chandler to make a decision about how to proceed in his political career was running out. Kentucky's state constitution did not allow governors to succeed themselves, therefore he began to eye a seat in the Senate. Alben Barkley's seat was up for reelection in August; however, he was a very popular and seasoned political veteran. Chandler knew that beating him would be extremely difficult, in fact, it would be nearly impossible. The other seat, occupied by M. M. Logan, would not be available until 1942, which was too long to wait for the impatient governor, and would put his career in limbo for several years.

Knowing that that he would most likely be facing a tough opponent in Chandler, Barkley also began preparing for his campaign. He announced a dinner scheduled for January 22nd where he would declare that he was running for reelection, which caused much debate amongst the Chandler camp of how to react. Chandler, along with Lieutenant Governor Keen Johnson, was sent an invitation. Chandler was even slated to introduce Barkley. This was most likely a last-minute extension of good will toward the governor, allowing him a final chance to back down and not enter the Democratic primary. Chandler decided to decline to attend the dinner under the pretense that he had conflicting obligation on that Saturday evening. He then scrambled to put together a dinner of his own hosted by Frederick A. Wallis, where he would be the guest of honor. However, Johnson asserted that he chose not to attend the dinner because he believed that

Chandler would soon be opposing Barkley, revealing the real motivations behind their decision. These dinners set the tone for the upcoming elections.¹¹

At the Barkley dinner, Roosevelt took his first opportunity to get involved, sending a letter to be read to the crowd. The president went on to say in this letter that “These are critical times” and the best men are needed in congress to deal with these issues. He then writes that Barkley exhibited a host of favorable qualities, these included patriotism, integrity, and courage, which “give him exceptional equipment as legislator and as leader.” After the recession of 1937-1938, there was a dramatic increase in works programs. If these were to be pushed through congress Roosevelt would need his trusted senate majority leader to be reelected. Surprising no one, Roosevelt had made his choice in the primary before the race had even began, and he had chosen Alben Barkley.¹²

The attendees of Barkley’s dinner remained surprisingly quiet about Governor Chandler. He was only mentioned once when Senator Sherman Minton from Indiana when said, “We can’t fish in the Ohio River without getting a license from Happy Chandler.” Rather, the focus of Barkley’s speech was the same as it would be throughout the campaign. He proceeded to discuss the difficult times that Americans were facing, his experience as a legislator, assess the limits of democracy, and propagated the messages of the president. He did all of this while also declaring that he would run for reelection. The

¹¹ “Chandler Declines Barkley Bid,” *The Courier-Journal*, January 16, 1938.

¹² “Testimonial Dinner Given Senator Alben W. Barkley,” January 24, 1938, Box 45, Folder 3, Happy Chandler Collection 1920-1974, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY; Alonzo L. Hamby, *Man of Destiny: FDR and the Making of the American Century* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2015), 272.

calm tone of this meeting differed from the luncheon that took place earlier, with the subject of Chandler's speech being "Kentucky Has Lead and Will Lead Again."¹³

The Chandler luncheon was a more fiery affair, and left few doubts about the Governor's future plans. Chandler declared: "When I go back to Frankfort this afternoon, and I am going back this afternoon..." The audience of over 1000 members of the government broke out into cheers before Chandler finished by saying, "I won't call on any senators or any other fellows from the North to come help me." He would continue throughout the campaign to attempt to make Barkley seem like an outsider, focusing on his lack of time spent in Kentucky and his cooperation with Northern senators.¹⁴

The governor would begin by telling those at the luncheon that if they wanted him to "serve at any other capacity" he would be confident in leaving the reins to Lieutenant Governor Johnson, and since he had taken care of business in Frankfort he "may see it fit to take a hand in theirs," referring to Barkley and the crowd at his dinner that was comprised overwhelmingly of federal employees. Although it was not made official, Chandler was now in the fight for the democratic nomination and everybody knew it. Regardless, he would again attempt to maneuver his way into the Senate without having to go through the messy political battle that was to take place. Barkley's organization would begin preparing for a bout with the Governor, telling him about the "great

¹³ "Chandler Says Johnson Can Handle His Job," *The Courier-Journal*, January 23, 1938; "1,400 Invited To Luncheon," *The Lexington Leader*, January 16, 1938.

¹⁴ Ibid

pressure” being placed on Chandler to run against him and that “he ought not entertain hope of getting by without Chandler opposition.”¹⁵

Judicial appointments would be at the forefront of peoples’ minds throughout the election. Roosevelt had battled with the Supreme Court since his election. Once New Deal legislation made its way through Supreme Court many pieces were deemed unconstitutional. This included many major programs, namely the National Industrial Recovery Act and important parts of the Agricultural Adjustment Act. This would spur much of the second New Deal, as its goal was to amend some of the pieces of legislation that the courts took issue with. Roosevelt’s struggles with the supreme court were only beginning. After Roosevelt achieved a landslide win in 1936, his confidence soared. He would attempt to use this wave public support to wash away his largest roadblock. He then launched his infamous court packing plan in an attempt to achieve a more favorable court. He had also argued that life tenure for judges “was not intended to create a static judiciary.” Roosevelt immediately attempted to quell the fears of those he anticipated resistance from. He argued to Congress that “since the early days of the republic...the problem of personnel of the courts has needed the attention of Congress” and that life tenure for judges “was not intended to create a static judiciary.”¹⁶

Southern Democrats were particularly uneasy about this intervention in judicial branch, in fact, they viewed as a fight for their very survival. Amongst the shifting tides

¹⁵ Ibid; J. J. Greenleaf to Urey Woodson, January 10, 1938, Urey Woodson Papers, 1876-1945, Box 5, Folder 6, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY.

¹⁶ Jeff Shesol, *Supreme Power: Franklin Roosevelt vs. the Supreme Court* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2011), 294; Roger Daniel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: Road to the New Deal. 1882-1939* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 325; William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Supreme Court Reborn: The Constitutional Revolution in the Age of Roosevelt* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), 134.

of a Democratic Party that was becoming increasingly more diverse, Southern Democrats felt that they were becoming a smaller minority. They were often at odds with the union members, immigrants, and urbanites that were flooding the party. Their more frightening opposition, however, came from African Americans that were now becoming increasingly more comfortable abandoning the party of Lincoln. Roosevelt's message was well understood: If they were not willing to change, they should leave the party. The battle for control of the Supreme Court was seen to be Southern Democrats' last stand.¹⁷

Roosevelt's pressure on the court was, therefore, seen as a serious affront to Southerners. The president was seen as attempting to extend his power over the judicial branch, which frightened them enough, but he seemingly doing this to push them out of the party. The court packing issue was more than just an ideological battle between Roosevelt and the judges. A law had been passed in 1932 that severely cut the retirement of the judges. Roosevelt's proposed plan had a very particular wording. It designated that the president would be able to appoint a judge for everyone over seventy years old, but it also added that they need to have held a "commission as judge of any such court or courts at least ten years." This was included because the requirement to receive a full pension. This plan was the result of a longstanding debate surrounding the retirement of judges that was exacerbated by the 1932 revisions to pensions. Roosevelt's plan was not to pack the court, but to get older judges who were able to receive a full pension to retire.

¹⁷ Ibid, 315.

The ideological motivation behind this, however, became the focal point and caused alarm to many during the 1938 primaries.¹⁸

Many Kentuckians were among those who feared this intervention, and once the campaign was underway letters began to flood in to Chandler that demonstrated dividing lines between the candidates and the party. Democrats who felt this way and attempted to distinguish themselves from Roosevelt Democrats by creating new political identities. One man wrote to Chandler saying “i am a 100 percent Democrat. O.K. believe me.” These people saw and understood the fundamental change that was taking place in the American political system, and their political self-identification reflected this. The Democratic Party was split by more than just the typical identifiers of conservative or liberal, and they would attempt to distinguish themselves by their support of Roosevelt’s attempts to expand presidential powers.¹⁹

Many particularly made clear their anger and resistance to the president’s meddling in state affairs. Letters came from all over to voice their opinion on the now highly visible and pivotal Kentucky Campaign. One Massachusetts woman wrote that “we are anxious to get going, to show the NEW DEALERS by our ballot what we think of them. We hope to show them whoes ‘baby has the measles.’” In her eyes, New Deal democrats represented an “UNAMERICAN pressure” on the legislative and judicial process. Another emphasized that when he saw the president interfering in state elections he ceased “being a Roosevelt Democrat,” and declared that he wanted return to “old time

¹⁸ Judge Glock, "Unpacking the Supreme Court: Judicial Retirement and the Road to the 1937 Court Battle," www.Buffalo.edu, March 2017, 4, 24, accessed February 27, 2019, [https://www.buffalo.edu/content/dam/www/baldycenter/Spring17/Retirement Act Glock 2017 \(3\).pdf](https://www.buffalo.edu/content/dam/www/baldycenter/Spring17/Retirement%20Act%20Glock%202017%20(3).pdf).

¹⁹J.E. Willett to Albert B. Chandler, March 13, 1938, Box 46, Folder 9, Happy Chandler Collection 1920-1974, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY.

democracy.” This Kentuckian understood that there was a clear split within the Democratic Party, but they also grasped that there was a fundamental change taking place to the American government. To them, the president was overextending his reach with the New Deal and what they saw as its excessive spending. They also viewed Roosevelt’s pressuring of the Supreme Court to pass his legislation as an attack on the very foundations of American democracy.²⁰

Judicial appointments would directly affect the campaign several times. The first would come with the death of Federal Circuit Judge Charles H. Moorman. This provided another opportunity for Chandler and many predicted that Kentucky Senator M. M. Logan would be given the seat and Chandler would take his place in the Senate, allowing for Roosevelt to avoid a messy battle between Barkley and Happy. Others saw this as well, and speculation began to run rampant once the seat opened up, many assuming that Chandler would again make a push for Logan to be appointed. They were right, however; the Governor would take a more direct approach. A few prominent Democrats arranged a meeting between him and President Roosevelt at the White House to discuss the matter. Chandler traveled to Washington in early February hoping to make a deal for a Senate seat. In his half hour conversation, he supposedly asked, “You want Barkley renominated and reelected don’t you?” Though he would not leave with a deal, he would tell a crowd “I wasn’t bluffed and I wasn’t scared.”²¹

²⁰Wallace Bacheller to Albert B. Chandler, February 11, 1938, Box 45, Folder 1, Happy Chandler Collection 1920-1974, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY; James W. Butts to Albert B. Chandler, July 6, 1938, Box 45, Folder 1, Happy Chandler Collection 1920-1974, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY.

²¹ “Governor, Back From Capital, ‘Wasn’t Bluffed’,” *The Lexington Herald*, February 3, 1938.

Barkley stated that he was unwilling to enter into a “conspiracy” to give Logan the federal court seat and create the vacancy in the Senate. He stated, “For months I have been threatened from Frankfort with opposition in my race for re-election to the senate unless I entered into a conspiracy which would have involved Senator Logan, the president and me.” Barkley called this possible deal “contemptable” and argued that in all of his years of governance he had never “entered into a bargain, trade deal, or conspiracy, either to obtain any man’s vote, or to prevent any man from running against [him].” He capped off his statement to the people by saying, “I value my own self-respect and the respect of the people of Kentucky above any consideration of political or official titles.”²²

Chandler would push back against these accusations of immorality. He told a crowd after being informed of Barkley’s statement, “I don’t care if he makes any deal.” He then took it farther by stating that “He [Barkley] issued a statement bragging about his integrity. I am so well known I don’t have to issue any statement to brag about my integrity.” Chandler would also call back to the familiar dividing line developing in the party. He argued the “The southern senators are helping me,” mentioning that he had the support of many top conservative democrats, like Harry Byrd were on his side. The governor would also deny that the meeting had anything to do with the judicial appointment. When asked if he was satisfied with his visit with the president, he told reporters that “I have nothing to be ‘satisfied’ about. I didn’t come to ask for aid.” Chandler did, however, allude that he would challenge Barkley. When a reporter asked him if he was joining the fight Chandler replied, “He’ll have an opponent,” and if a

²² “Senator Barkley Says That He Will Not Sidestep Election Fight With Chandler,” *The Lexington Herald*, February 1, 1938; “Judge’s Death Opens Way To Senate Shift,” *The Lexington Leader*, January 27, 1938.

campaign was to develop “there won’t be any grass growing in place where we travel.” The impatient young governor was convinced that he was destined for national politics, and his early successes may have made him believe he was invincible. After this trip to Washington and the eventual appointment of Stanley Reed there were certainly few doubters about whether the governor would oppose Barkley.²³

As Chandler returned to Louisville, his confidence sored. He told all the attendees of the luncheon that he had not made his mind up as to whether he would run against Barkley. But Chandler followed this statement up by telling the crowd “I may be elected president of the United States next time,” revealing his ultimate ambition. He also fired back at Barkley’s attacks on his integrity, telling the crowd he could “keep his head held high.” He even went as far as assuring the crowd that Lieutenant Governor Keen Johnson would easily take on the role of governor and continue his programs. Chandler then ended his speech by telling the members of the crowd that “Kentucky will see the biggest bandwagon it has ever seen. I am going to keep the tailgate down, and all of you who want to get on can climb on.” Demonstrating that he was confident that he could ride this wave of conservative sentiment that was rising throughout the country.²⁴

While New Deal policies continued to fracture the Democratic Party, Chandler was hardly a unifying force. Early in the campaign he would grasp for the Republican vote and advocate for a voter registration and purgation law. The measure called for ineligible voters to be removed from the rolls. His support of this law prompted

²³ Ibid; “House Told of Parlay By Chandler,” *The Courier-Journal*, February 3, 1938; James C. Klotter, *Kentucky: Portrait in Paradox, 1900-1950*(Frankfort, KY: Kentucky Historical Society, 2006), 312; J. J. Greenleaf to Urey Woodson, January 15, 1938, Urey Woodson Papers, 1876-1945, Box 5, Folder 6, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY.

²⁴ “Chandler Says He May Be President,” *The Courier-Journal*, February 13, 1938.

damaging opposition from Louisville Democrats, some of whom argued that Chandler was attempting to take advantage of “the almost limitless patronage attached to the office of governor,” because it undermined the city’s current registration act. The state’s largest urban center would pose stiff opposition to Chandler from the earliest part of the campaign. The mayor even gave a speech where he stated, “I charge the Governor with tampering with our election laws to their debasement and to his aggrandizement” and asserted that Chandler was trying to establish a Soviet government.”²⁵

The registration law was a particularly strong ammunition for anti-Chandler Democrats to use against him. Chandler had built his campaign by decrying the expansion of presidential powers. Yet, he was, as many Louisville Democrats would argue, centralizing his power and spreading his influence into other areas of the state government. The mayor told a crowd that he offers us a return to political conditions that made of Kentucky a “dark and bloody ground of discord.” They were able to argue that he was not being true to his campaign promises and that, with the removal of the old registration laws he would be setting the states government back many years.²⁶

Once April came, the two candidates’ paths would cross for the first time and have their first opportunity to go head to head. They were both scheduled to address the Democratic Women’s Club of Kentucky, during the final session of their annual two-day convention. Barkley spent much of his time at the podium praising Roosevelt and the national administration’s efforts to relive American citizens of the pains of the Great Depression while “preserving the substance of Democracy.” He called for “every

²⁵ Walter Hixson, *The 1938 Kentucky Senate Election: Alben Barkley, the New Deal, and the Defeat of Governor A. B. "Happy" Chandler*, Master's thesis, Western Kentucky University, 1981, 46.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Kentuckian who knows how to fight for what he believes,” and to vote not only for the Democratic Party, but for the “heart and soul of Americanism.” Barkley then declared that “Loyalty to the President is the way to build a greater Democracy,” concluding that he was proud to be a Democrat, because of the “way the Democratic party faced the issues of the Great Depression under the supervision of the president.” Barkley was appealing to those who believed that the increase in the powers of the president were beneficial to them. He also acknowledged the result of this fundamental change was that “The Democratic party has convinced the American people that the government is set up to guard and guide them.” The very idea of the role of the federal government was influx. While some believed that it was “unamerican,” the New Dealer faction believed that it was the governments job to look out for the wellbeing of the public. This also meant that it should regulate the economy and even go into debt if it would help the public. This notion was the very guiding principle behind the New Deal and the speech was given with all of the “Barkley brand” of tenacity that he had become so famous for, receiving cheers throughout. Applause broke out particularly loud near the end of the speech, but not for him, it was for Governor Chandler as he entered the ballroom where the convention was being held.²⁷

Barkley abruptly ended his speech, telling the audience that he did not want to “take up time that ought to be occupied by someone else.” Chandler forced his way through the cheering crowd and approached the podium with his usual wide smile. The two candidates shook hands and muttered a few words as they passed each other. Happy again used this opportunity to take jabs at his opponent and promote a state-centric

²⁷ “Support Sought By Two Rivals In Senate Race,” *Lexington Herald*, April 23, 1938.

message. He began by attempting to make Barkley seem like an outsider to Kentucky by stating, "I have not been to North Carolina and I haven't been to Europe," which was a reverence to Barkley's recent vacation. However, Chandler would later go on to discuss some of the larger issues of the campaign, saying pointedly that even though he was "a friend of the president" he could not support the idea of a rubberstamp congress. In his eyes, the president should not be extending his reach into the legislative and judicial branch. The governor would also tell people that Barkley had ignored Kentuckian's welfare while collecting ten thousand dollars a year. It was only when Roosevelt came along that any measures were taken to improve the situation of the state.²⁸

People reacted in different ways to this idea of a congress built to simply pass the legislation of the president. While there were some that agreed with Chandler and argued that Barkley was a not "a man of his own ideas," many also saw the senator as more of an advisor to the president, and any disagreement that they may have is resolved in private before it is presented to the public. One person made the argument that Barkley cannot be fired by the president, therefore; he has no incentive other than his own convictions to support the president. They also asserted that the job of the majority leader was to keep order within the party and advocate for the president. This person concluded that the defeat of Barkley in the primary would mean turmoil for the party. They further stated that "Kentucky Democrats have the destiny of their party in their keeping. Their action at the primary, August 6, will either avert or precipitate a disastrous party crisis." This

²⁸ "Kentucky's Senate Race Foes Shake Hands At Convention," *The Courier-Journal*, April 23, 1938; "Support Sought By Two Rivals In Senate Race," *Lexington Herald*, April 23, 1938; A. B. Chandler to John Burnett, June 27, 1938, Box 11, Alben W. Barkley papers, 1900-1956, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY.

assessment demonstrates the acute awareness that the American public had of the importance of this election. It was understood that the party system was undergoing intense and expansive changes.²⁹

Happy would continue attempting to appeal to those “one hundred percent Democrats” throughout the speech, however, he also touched on his record as governor and touted a fiscally conservative message. He began by remarking, “I am a man of action, not a man of words,” which would become somewhat of a campaign slogan. He continued by claiming federal spending should be reduced and quoted a speech by Barkley from 1932 where he stated, “We propose to reduce the expenses of the Government not only for its own sake and that of the people, but as an example to smaller units throughout the Nation.” He further emphasized that Kentucky “took that advice” and he reduced the state budget till they were “living within [their] means.” He further argued for fiscal conservatism by addressing his critics claims that social security payments in Kentucky should be raised. Happy claimed that “Colorado gave more than we are giving, and now has gone \$4,000,000 in debt.”³⁰

He would also emphasize to his constituents that he was not averse to helping those in need. Chandler sent a letter to one man that pointed out all he had done to help disabled servicemen and “war orphans,” while also asserting that Barkley had been “partly responsible for denying thousands of deserving veterans compensation.” He then ended the letter with the statement “Replace a man with a record of years with a man with a record of accomplishment.” Statements like these would continue throughout the

²⁹ “Keepers of a Party’s Destiny,” *The Courier-Journal*, August 2, 1938.

³⁰ Ibid

campaign, as Chandler attempted to straddle a line that would place him as opposed to the extent of the New Deal but not still willing to provide relief and take action. Both candidates had argued effectively to their respective constituents, and the issues that would surround the campaign were becoming clearly visible. His organization would also begin to level their first accusations of foul play within the WPA. Chandler's campaign manager asserted that WPA funds were being used for political purposes. An investigator would be sent to look into these claims and determined that he could not prove that there was any wrongdoing. However, these claims would come back to haunt both candidates in the future.³¹

Kentucky would be placed in the national spotlight several times during this debate over the bounds of American democracy. Throughout the early part of the campaign debate raged in Congress over a prospective dam to be built by the Tennessee Valley Authority on the Tennessee River near Gilbertsville Kentucky, a small town around twenty miles from Paducah. The TVA had elicited controversy. When it was being passed, Roosevelt was asked what the political philosophy behind it was and answered that he would "tell them it's neither fish nor fowl, but whatever it is it will taste awfully good to the people of the Tennessee Valley." While the people of the Tennessee Valley often appreciated the TVA, this ambiguity often drew concern. The conversation around the Gilbertsville Dam almost always revolved around the overextension of executive powers. The dam had been in the works since 1933, but in 1938 tensions would

³¹ A. B. Chandler to Mr. Shuff, June 27, 1938, Box 11, Alben W. Barkley papers, 1900-1956, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY; "T.V.A. Called a Dictatorship With Lillienthal Its Fuehrer," *The Courier-Journal*, March 10, 1938; "Charges Made By Brady Stewart Are Investigated," *The Lexington Herald*, June 13, 1938.

boil over. In March, Roosevelt fired the chairman of the TVA, Arthur Morgan, igniting controversy over the president's ability to control these organizations.³²

After a period of turmoil among the board members of the TVA, Morgan began to publicly accuse his colleagues of "improprieties." One Republican senator equated the TVA to an "Authoritarian State" and called David Lilienthal (another board member of the TVA) a "Hitler in short pants." He also argued that Morgan was being "liquidated" for not following the administration's orders. The president organized several meetings at the White House where Morgan would refuse to answer his questions and eventually to participate in the proceedings at all. Morgan would go so far as to tell Roosevelt that the executive held no authority over his position, stating that "No action on my part is necessary at the present moment." A time later, on March 22, it was announced that he had been fired by the president. Roosevelt listed several reasons for this, among them was "Refusing to submit to the demand of the Chief Executive" and to provide "any reason" why he should not be removed. This led many to now question the extent of the president's appointive and removal powers.³³

The same day that Morgan's removal was announced, the bill to appropriate \$2,613,000 to begin work on the Gilbertsville Dam was in front of the House. After news of Morgan's removal spread, the House voted the bill down 186 to 157. Many expected

³² H.W. Brands, *Traitor to His Class* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2008), 338.

³³ Bernard A. Gannon, III, *Monument to Power: The Political Struggle for Kentucky Dam*, PhD diss., Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 1997, 213; "T.V.A. Called a Dictatorship With Lilienthal Its Fuehrer," *The Courier-Journal*, March 10, 1938; "House Rejects State Dam as T.V.A. Head Ousted By Roosevelt," *The Courier-Journal*, March 23, 1938; "T.V.A. Called a Dictatorship With Lilienthal Its Fuehrer," *The Courier-Journal*, March 10, 1938; "Morgan Ignores Order To Show Cause Why He Should Not Leave TVA," *The Lexington Leader*, March 22, 1938.

the issue of Morgan's firing to go to the Supreme Court. The House had decided to pull back on the dam and promoted a congressional investigation into TVA spending. Roosevelt and other supporters of the dam began damage control immediately. Many noted that this was supposed to be the TVA's crowning achievement. One senator even argued that the completion of this project was necessary for the "proper rounding out of the program." While Roosevelt would acknowledge that Congress was well within their rights to investigate and undertake a "fair" legislative inquiry, but he also argued that he fired Morgan to avoid setting a precedent that would slow government administration. As president, it was his job to make sure the law executed swiftly, which was a guiding principle of the New Deal as well. Barkley would join in the fight by ensuring a "fair" investigation. He blocked immediate consideration of a resolution for a senatorial investigation that was put forth by several rivals of the TVA before the president's message was even read. On March 31, the resolution for a joint probe was sent to Warm Springs Georgia for Roosevelt to sign.³⁴

Many senators argued that the internal issues of the TVA could not be separated from the Gilbertsville Dam proposal. Senator John Ditter was perhaps the most vocal in his disdain for the TVA, opening his statement regarding the dam by saying, "We are called upon today to pass on a most controversial subject--the proposed extension of the now rather notorious T. V. A. project." The dam at Gilbertsville was envisioned by Morgan to be a "superdam," the largest in the TVA system, costing around 300,000,000

³⁴ Ibid; "T.V.A. Probe By Congress Is Promised," *The Courier-Journal*, March 24, 1938; "House Rules Body Approves T.V.A. Probe," *The Courier-Journal*, March 30, 1938; "Roosevelt Sent T.V.A. Probe Resolution," *The Courier-Journal*, April 1, 1938; "House Defeats Gilbertsville Fund 186-159," *The Paducah Sun-Democrat*, March 23, 1938.

dollars. While certain ambitions may have been scaled back, many senators felt that this was the perfect opportunity to voice their displeasure. This was their chance to deal a heavy blow to the TVA and the president. Ditter would go on to argue that the very idea of the TVA was verging on socialism, stating, “Even if the general scheme of Government ownership of power producing units, with its attendant aspects of a socialistic state, were desirable, this extension of generating electricity for a comparatively small section of the country at the expense of other sections cannot be justified without a careful scientific study of all the pertinent and material facts and he urged the rest of congress to vote against the dam until they could find out the “real purpose of this colossal Federal investment.” This would not be the last time Kentucky would be thrust into the national spotlight.³⁵

Many in congress, including Barkley, believed that the aversion toward Gilbertsville was due to the actions of Morgan and his squabble with the board. They waited a short time, then reintroduced the bill to congress. The dam in Gilbertsville would be approved by the House on April 25 by vote of 158 to 152. It was close, but a sharp turn from a month earlier. It was then sent to the president on May 1. Once the initial controversy of Morgan’s removal blew over, the dam received its funding, but controversy was not completely over, and it would find its way into the Kentucky campaign. It was also imperative for the dam to be approved because the TVA had

³⁵ *Congressional Record*. 22 March 1938, 3870; Gannon, *Monument to Power*, 232; Anthony Gannon, "Vision or Obsession? Arthur E. Morgan and the Superdam," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* Vol. 97, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 45, accessed March 3, 2019, Jstor.

already bought over three hundred and fifty acres of land, which would have been a colossal waste if they were not able to begin work any time soon.³⁶

Some brought to Chandler's attention that dam might be an issue that Chandler may be able to capitalize on, and it quickly became apparent that Gilbertsville would be a focus to some long into the campaign. One Kentuckian, under the alias "Committee Democratic Taxpayer," wrote a letter to *The Courier-Journal* that outlined some concerns with the building of the dam. They argued that millions of acres of fertile farmland would be destroyed, and thousands of families displaced. Their final point of concern was the destruction of mussel beds that provided many jobs for poorer Kentuckians. Another writer, who went by "Discouraged Democrat" went on to say that the "Democratic Administration" was "starting another pump priming process." This, to them, meant "bigger debts and increased taxes, which will be paid mostly by the 'little fellow.'" The dam had stirred up tensions and became a lightning rod of controversy. It would not be long until Chandler would begin to evaluate whether this was an issue he should push.³⁷

The discussion behind the scenes revolved around the same concerns, but mainly focused on the displacement of around 20,000 families. One letter stated, "It will displace and require the removal of twenty-thousand inhabitants of this valley," and concluded that, "It is an absurdity, ridiculous and fantastic, and ought never to be considered." Chandler's secretary, Walter Mulbry, sent him these comments with a note that they may

³⁶ "House Votes Gilbertsville Dam Money," *The Courier-Journal*, April 26, 1938; "T.V.A. Called a Dictatorship With Lilienthal Its Fuehrer," *The Courier-Journal*, March 10, 1938; "TVA Acquires 358.4 Acres; Cost \$21,269," *The Paducah Sun-Democrat*, March 6, 1938.

³⁷ Copy of Letter Written to *Courier Journal*, Box 45, Folder 3, Happy Chandler Collection 1920-1974, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY; Article Prepared for *Courier Journal*, Box 45, Folder 3, Happy Chandler Collection 1920-1974, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY.

“make use of the opposition” as a “white elephant that Barkley is foisting on Kentucky.” He also cautioned that the issue needed further investigation. Mulbry wrote that if “it is found that the majority of people living in the district that will be flooded are in favor of the dam on account of the price they would get for their farms, then of course it would be well to lay off the subject.” Chandler never seemed to pounce on the issue, but there certainly was a base of his supporters up in arms. The dam engulfed the politics of the region and placed Kentucky in the national spotlight. It also brought up much of the same debate that was at the core of the rift in the Democratic Party.³⁸

The early part of this campaign was rife with debate over the meaning American democracy. There was intense discussion around the excessive spending of the New Deal. Both candidates immediately made their positions on the new direction that American democracy was taking. This election became a battleground for the New Deal and its ramifications. Barkley represented the president and a more powerful executive and a government that took responsibility for the welfare of the people. Barkley was a figurehead for a faction of the Democratic Party that subscribed to the idea of an executive that would take an extremely active role in lawmaking. At the center of this debate was the shaping of the American democratic system.

Chandler capitalized on the fear and dissent caused by this change. They had been frightened by the immense debt that the government was racking up and that it may have all been for nothing. Chandler would balance the budget of Kentucky and tout a fiscally conservative message thorough the campaign, specifically attacking the philosophy of

³⁸ Walter W. Mulbry to Albert B. Chandler, Box 45, Folder 1, Happy Chandler Collection 1920-1974, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY; Unknown to W. Hume Logan, Box 45, Folder 1, Happy Chandler Collection 1920-1974, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY.

pump priming. The recession caused by the reduction of many of Roosevelt's work programs caused many to fear that "priming the pump" was no longer a temporary strategy. The concern of many around these issues caused many to speak out against a president that many frequently refused to speak out against.

While many were concerned with spending, Roosevelt's relationship with the court may have been most frightening. This was yet another arena where he was attempting to expand his reach. His court-packing plan had widened the rift within the party and among his own advisors. His attempt to vastly change the makeup of the supreme court would be a driving theme of much of the election. There would also be a brief controversy over a court seat early in the primary that would ironically see Roosevelt being pressured by his opposition to make a judicial appointment that would benefit them and avoid a fight. This would not be the last time that the issue of judicial appointments would come up from the beginning to end it would be one of the driving issues of the campaign.

Kentucky was a microcosm of this struggle over the direction of American democracy, and it would quickly be thrust into the national spotlight. The debate over the building of a dam in Gilbertsville, Kentucky revolved around all of these issues. It brought to the forefront many concerns over the president's powers to appoint and, in this case, remove personnel of New Deal programs. Many also used this project as an example of the excessive spending of the government. This was because it was to be the crowning achievement of the TVA and the most expensive dam the organization was to produce. The Gilbertsville Dam, however, also brought to light another issue of presidential power. It would displace thousands of people from the town, which would

flood once the dam was built. The president was now removing thousands from their homes and destroying farmland. This concerned many in the Tennessee Valley and Gilbertsville would become an outlet for their dissent. The early stages of this campaign were filled with debate about the direction of American Democracy and many of the events depict the uncertainty of the place of the executive in American democracy.

Chapter 2: “Copperheads Among Us:” Roosevelt’s Purge

The sputtering of the New Deal furthered Roosevelt’s ambitions to create a liberal Democratic Party. The fractures within the party over the expansion of presidential powers and the increasingly more vocal critics of the president’s plans caused him to take action. He decided that the best course of action would be to remove these conservative elements from the party. This would be critical not only for the New Deal but for American politics as well. The president would now attempt to shape the party into a model fashioned by the White House. This was one of the most divisive moments of Roosevelt’s presidency. His attempted maneuvering of party guidelines would not only divide the American public but the president’s closest advisors as well. Jim Farley would advocate for a hands-off policy, stating that he “was fond of both Barkley and Chandler.” He would even tell Roosevelt: “I wish they could both win,” but the president would decide to intervene anyway.³⁹

The arrival of summer brought with it one of the most important fights of the New Deal. The Democratic primaries were fast approaching, and Roosevelt prepared for battle. In July, he announced that he was going to break with tradition and interfere in the democratic primaries. He would attempt to fight back against the “Copperheads” who were enacting a “campaign of defeatism” against his programs. This would be the most critical battle in his attempt to create a liberal Democratic party and to save a New Deal that was losing steam. He had decided to intervene in several primaries to replace conservative Democrats with their more liberal counterparts. Roosevelt would take on

³⁹ Lester G. Seligman, "The Presidential Office and the President as Party Leader," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 21, no. 4 (1956): 728; Jean Edward Smith, *FDR* (New York, NY: Random House, 2007), 412.

some of the more powerful conservative strongholds of the party in areas like Virginia, Georgia, and Florida. In most of these cases, he would launch a direct assault. While Roosevelt's main goal was to remove conservative elements through removing these conservative Democrats through the primaries, the opportunity did not always present itself. Virginia did not hold a primary in 1938, but the state was home to a conservative machine, led by Harry Byrd, that concerned the president deeply. He would attempt to extend his influence more subtly in this case by using judicial appointments. He would also have to defend some of his most important supporters from these insurgents.⁴⁰

The most important battle, however, was a defensive one. As the summer approached, Roosevelt saw the need to defend one of his most ardent supporters. The souring of sentiment toward the New Deal meant that the president not only needed to spread the influence of liberal supporters, but he also needed to protect them as well. Chandler's popularity and defiant nature made the Kentucky race a national spectacle and a microcosm of the national debate over the New Deal. It would also make it a focal point of the president's purge.

During the summer, the economy would see a slight boost, but severe damage had already been done to the confidence of many New Dealers. Harry Hopkins announced in 1937 that it was reasonable to expect a "probable minimum of 4,000,000 to 5,000,000 unemployed even in future 'prosperity' periods." Senator Fiorello H. La Guardia would come to the conclusion that "instead of considering the situation as an emergency, we should accept the inevitable, that we are in a new normal." The Roosevelt Recession had

⁴⁰ On Party Primaries, June 24, 1938, Box 38, Franklin Roosevelt Presidential Library, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY, <http://docs.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/041438.html>

demonstrated to many that the New Deal had eased the pains of the depression but failed to provide a cure. This caused some conservative Democrats to break with the president and form a bipartisan conservative coalition. This alliance was comprised of many southern Democrats, border-state Democrats, and northern senators. Their goal was to not only slow reform legislation but take control of the party from liberals. They also assumed that Roosevelt would run for a third term and another New Dealer would be nominated to take his place. They would defeat the president on the floor of congress then they would be able to defeat him in a bid for the White House.⁴¹

Roosevelt would quickly begin to fight back against conservative Democratic outcries. He would dedicate a fireside chat to defending his New Deal. The president pointed out that the dire circumstances of 1933 were in the past reminding people that “Your money in the bank is safe; farmers are no longer in deep distress and have greater purchasing power; dangers of security speculation have been minimized; national income is almost 50% higher than it was in 1932; and government has an established and accepted responsibility for relief.” He acknowledged that the country was in distress, but the proper reforms could pull it from its current state. He would also continue his advocacy of the expansion of works projects. He called for measures that would address the current recession and touted his commitment to upholding the spirit of democracy. The very idea of the government and its responsibilities had changed. It now took responsibility for the state of the economy and the welfare of its people.⁴²

⁴¹ William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal: 1932-1945* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1963), 252, 263.

⁴² Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Political Life* (New York: Viking, 2017), 304; Franklin Roosevelt, *On Economic Conditions*, April 14, 1938, Box 38, Franklin Roosevelt Presidential Library, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY, <http://docs.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/041438.html>

While many were becoming disillusioned with the New Deal and the changes that were happening within American democracy there were still many that supported it. By April of 1938 Roosevelt's popularity was waning, but he was still favored. A Gallup poll reported that 54 percent of voters supported him, and 46 percent disapproved of him, while 70 percent of people also reported that they opposed a third term. This could hint at peoples' uneasiness in the growth of presidential powers. Republicans and (more troubling to Roosevelt) conservative Democrats would capitalize on this disappointment and fear. They began to feel more comfortable speaking out against the president and his New Deal. One of the core concepts of the New Deal that many began to criticize was "priming the pump." Republicans and conservative Democrats alike began associating the president with socialism and even dictatorship. Chandler would not take his claim this far, but he would make these fears a focal point of his campaign and promote fiscal conservatism.⁴³

As March came and went, the governor began to criticize the president and his New Deal more openly, "becoming bolder in his criticism of the President and the National Administration." He very routinely criticized the national administration's philosophy of "priming the pump," which is the concept of using federal spending to stimulate the economy. "Contrary to the beliefs of some, it isn't possible to spend your way into prosperity," Chandler snapped during a speech at Centre College. He further argued that many of those who were unemployed were not going to find jobs, regardless of how much the government spent on them. The governor frightenedly concluded that

⁴³ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 305-06; Michael A. Davis, "Politics of the 1930s and the New Deal" in *Interpreting American History: The New Deal and the Great Depression*, edited by Aaron D. Purcell. (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2014), 46.

society was burdened by a “government that is rearing a generation which believes it is the government's duty to provide for it.”⁴⁴

With these calls for fiscal conservatism, Chandler began to distance himself slightly from the New Deal in an attempt to gain the support of those who had become disillusioned with what they perceived was excess spending by the national administration. Many Kentuckians had sent him the “Song of the New Dealers, which voiced their displeasure:

Oh what does it matter that the taxpayers groan
That the burdens oppressive? It isn't our own
Precious dollars we squander on priming the pump.
They come out of your pocket, you hard working chump!

This poem gets at one of the larger frustrations of the people toward the New Deal. The Roosevelt Recession shook Americans confidence that “priming the pump” was a viable way to solve the issues of the Great Depression. Many now believed that the next time the government would attempt to balance the budget another recession will follow. What many essentially believed was that the New Deal had provided two of the professed goals: relief and recovery, but not reform. The governor had walked this line for much of his career so far. He would continually attempt to paint himself as favorable to the New Deal, while also appealing to those who had become unhappy with it. This eventually became much of the story of the “Kentucky New Deal,” Chandler would profess

⁴⁴ Chandler Assails Federal Relief And Pump-Priming Policies In Address To Students At Centre, *Lexington Herald*, April 29, 1938; Chandler Raps Pump-Priming And Relief Policies of the U.S., *The Courier-Journal*, April 29, 1938; Urey Woodson to Thos. S. Rhea, May 5, 1938, Urey Woodson papers, 1876-1943, Box 5, Folder 7, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY.

sympathy with the national administration but do very little within the state to prove it. In fact, Chandler's affinity for fiscal conservatism led Kentucky to be one of the most frugal in appropriations for relief and welfare.⁴⁵

Chandler would also attempt to capitalize on people's fears that Roosevelt was creating an American dictatorship. A song that was frequently sent to the governor, called "I'm Tired," captures this frustration and uncertainty quite well:

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

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

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

⁴⁵ "Song of the New Dealers," Happy Chandler Collection 1920-1974, Box 45, Folder 3, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY; James T. Patterson, *The New Deal and the States: Federalism in Transition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 160.

Chandler, at this point, most likely went too far in an anti-New Dealer direction to come back to the middle ground that he intended to occupy.⁴⁶

All of this mudslinging happened before the race was officially underway, and it would only continue to become more bitter and personal as both the campaign and the weather heated up. Chandler and Barkley both signed their candidacy papers in July. Chandler, almost uncharacteristically, failed to cause a scene or ignite any commotion. He simply filed the papers and they were signed by a county judge. There were no reports in and major newspapers of any speech or comments made. Barkley, however, made quite the official entrance into the race. On the same day that Chandler filed his candidacy papers, Barkley announced that a speech would take place on June 18th to officially kick off his campaign. He fought back against many of Chandler's attacks against him. One of the governors most prominent charges was that Barkley was too old for a job so difficult, giving him the nickname of "Old Alben," He would assert that fresh blood was needed in Congress, the younger candidate asserted. The old guard had had their chance. Chandler had also thought he could out campaign Barkley and do more speeches during the campaign based on their⁴⁷

Barkley now went on the offensive: "If there are persons in Kentucky who think the iron in my blood has rusted away, let them follow me from now until August 6" This was a reference to his nickname of "iron man," which he was given due to his reputation for being able to give many speeches in a single day. Up until this point in the campaign, he was occupied with work in Washington, however, he would now become fully

⁴⁶ "I'm Tired," Happy Chandler Collection 1920-1974, Box 45, Folder 3, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY.

⁴⁷ "Chandler Candidacy Becomes Official," *The Courier-Journal*, June 7, 1938.

invested in the race and would attempt to prove that he could keep pace with the young and energetic governor.⁴⁸

Barkley would also touch on corruption, which was another major issue of the campaign. He proclaimed to his audiences, “If the road to the senate is paved with gold...I cannot travel it.” Barkley may have claimed to not be involved in any corruption, however, both his and Chandler’s campaigns were stained with it. The national organization behind Barkley would begin to meddle in this election attempting to use their influence with various New Deal Programs to secure votes for Barkley. The most prominent program that the national administration attempted to use to influence the primary election was the Works Progress Administration. Chandler’s campaign manager, J. Dan Talbott, charged that federal relief programs had become entirely political organizations, and they were now working in Kentucky to reelect Barkley.⁴⁹

George Goodman, the Kentucky Works Progress Administrator, vehemently denied these allegations, stating that “There is no truth in the Chandler campaign manager’s statement that ‘meetings and conferences have been held in practically every county of the state by key men in places of importance with the Works Progress Administration.’” However, this statement by Goodman was halfhearted at best. He referred to Barkley as a “close friend throughout a lifetime,” and even went on to say, “I personally feel that persons who have been assisted through this program would be justified in supporting Senator Barkley.” Key men in the Democratic Party certainly were attempting to use the WPA to their advantage, including Chandler. Thomas Rhea, a bitter

⁴⁸ “Barkley Promises Strenuous Drive in Opening Campaign,” *The Courier-Journal*, June 19, 1938.

⁴⁹ “Charges Sent To Chandler By Miller,” *The Courier-Journal*, May 28, 1938.

enemy of Chandler, sent a letter to Urey Woodson, Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, telling him, “we are having one hell of a time getting any action out of the W.P.A. In many instances, the Chandler people have control and are trying to take the W.P.A. over.”⁵⁰

Federal relief programs could be used in a multitude of ways to influence the election. The main way that the organizations used these programs to their advantage was by threatening needy employees with firing if they did not vote in the correct manner. Another tactic was to make known who supported the creation of that program. In Laurel County, bags used to distribute relief commodities were emblazoned with the message: “PAPER BAGS Donated By FRIEND OF Sen. Alben W. Barkley.” Chandler, while he may have trumpeted a disdain for these political tactics, was not above using this type of political persuasion. The governor reportedly increased the number of state employees and had employees hand out campaign materials He also made sure that some social security checks were hand-delivered. There was a concerted effort on behalf of those involved with both campaigns to use relief programs to their advantage, however, it is difficult to tie this corruption directly to either candidate. There are many instances where those such as Rhea and Woodson comment that they rarely see Barkley; therefore, this could all have been happening outside of his realm of knowledge, but it is difficult to assume that he had no awareness of what was happening, and the same went for Chandler.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Thos. S. Rhea to Urey Woodson, Box 5, Folder 6, Urey Woodson papers, 1898-1939, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY.

⁵¹ “Paper Bag Used to Distribute Federal Relief Commodities in Laurel County Kentucky,” Box 11, Alben W. Barkley papers, 1900-1956, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY; “Charges Made By Brady Stewart Are Investigated,” *The Lexington Herald*, June 13, 1938.

The South was of particular interest to Roosevelt due to three advantages they held: the uncommon longevity of their congressional careers, their disproportionate numbers, and their commitment to a racial hierarchy. By 1938, many conservatives had begun to speak out against the president, which included many Southern Democrats. Their plan for the 1938 primaries was to “take the initiative away from the president.” There had even been talks about them moving to the Republican party, and the door had been left open by some Republicans themselves. Arthur Vandenberg extended an invitation for conservative Democrats to bolt to his party and supported other conservative senators, but this was not an option for most Southerners. The Civil War had caused “Republican” to be a dirty word for most in the south. This would mean that they would have to stay and fight for their party. Roosevelt would, in return, largely target the South in his purge of the Democratic Party, setting the stage for a bitter battle that would last decades.⁵²

This “purge” is mostly remembered as the president’s failed attempts to meddle in several senatorial primaries in 1938 where Roosevelt challenged conservative incumbents by supporting liberal candidates in the Democratic primaries of 1938. While these certainly were the most public clashes, the purge extended beyond the removal of conservative senators. Roosevelt would go to several states and attempt to dismantle their conservative power structure and create liberal ones for himself through judicial appointments. One of the larger instances of this was in Virginia. Before the court-packing fiasco, he had kept his appointments in the state uncontroversial. The major

⁵² Susan Dunn, *Roosevelts Purge: How FDR Fought to Change the Democratic Party* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 81, 84; Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself - The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton &, 2012), 149.

conservative leaders, including Harry Byrd, never felt the need to challenge them.

However, by late 1937 this would begin to change, and Roosevelt would begin to attempt to steer the Virginia government in a more liberal direction.⁵³

In 1938, Roosevelt's frustration boiled over. The president nominated Floyd H. Roberts as a federal judge for Virginia's Western District. He was a New Dealer that would be "above all things ... loyal and faithful." This incensed Harry Byrd and the other conservative leaders in the state. This began a fight that would carry over into 1939 and was mostly led by Carter Glass, Byrd's Conservative colleague. Byrd would later join in the fight after he was assured by advisors it would not have a negative effect on his senatorial bid in 1940. Both sides would lobby with members of the senate judiciary committee and use the local newspapers to make their case. The Byrd machine would succeed in denying the president's nomination, but the most important battle was yet to come.⁵⁴

While the president failed to dismantle conservative power structures in several key areas, the time came to defend one of his most influential liberal supporters in Alben Barkley. Chandler had become more critical of the New deal entering the summer, making a final attempt at gaining the support of the disaffected Democrats who were not quite happy with the president's grasp for power and the lack of recovery they had seen. With the arrival of July, the Chandler-Barkley contest reached its peak. Roosevelt announced that he would visit Kentucky while on his national tour to support various New Dealers who were up for reelection. It was well known that the president was

⁵³ A. Cash Koeniger, "The New Deal and the States: Roosevelt Versus the Byrd Organization in Virginia," *The Journal of American History* 68, no. 4 (March 1982): 881.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 886.

stopping in the commonwealth to support Barkley, however; Chandler would attempt to wring any positives he could out of Roosevelt's visit, and it was imperative that he did so. Chandler's chances to win the senate seat looked bleak by this point in the election. Barkley was in the lead 64% to Chandler's 34%, a slight increase from a lead of 2-1 in April. The president's visit would represent the governor's last chance to steal the election, which he felt was so rightly his to take. There was a solid opportunity to do this because polls also showed that 14% of Kentuckians had not made up their mind as to who they would vote for, and he could win these people over it would make for a close race. It was improbable but allowed for a glimmer of hope.⁵⁵

For President Roosevelt, Kentucky would be the most important fight of his purge, though he would carry on similar battles in other states such as Georgia, which provided a similar situation. The incumbent was Walter F. George, who had supported some of the earlier measures of the New Deal that he believed would be particularly helpful to his state, such as the TVA, National Labor Relations Act, and Social Security. This did not last, however, and George began to vote against major legislation, which included the executive reorganization, court reform, and the Wages and Hours Bill. This positioned Senator George as a "New Deal ally," rather than a member of the president's Democratic Party. This is a category that Chandler would certainly fall under this as well.⁵⁶

The challenger was Lawrence Camp, a newcomer to the national political arena. He had been the U.S Attorney for Atlanta and Attorney general for Georgia (a

⁵⁵ "America Speaks: Poll Shows Barkley Still Leading By 2 to 1," *The Courier-Journal*, July 8, 1938.

⁵⁶ Dunn, *Roosevelt's Purge*, 158

nonelective post). He had seemingly not intended to run but was encouraged to do so by the president. He would attempt to defeat an opponent that had a long history in Georgia politics and a strong following in the state. This was too much for Camp to overcome, and he would be defeated. Roosevelt's purge was generally unsuccessful in its attempts to go on the offensive and install pro-New Deal candidates into seats occupied by anti-New Dealers. His defense, however; was surely better than his offense.⁵⁷

Susan Dunn places emphasis on this primarily due to Georgia's reputation as a Roosevelt stronghold. While this was an important battle, one that Roosevelt would lose, the fight in Kentucky was even more vital. Roosevelt was on the defensive and if he lost any more support in congress it would be incredibly detrimental to the New Deal. Also, Barkley was one of his more consistent supporters and his senate majority leader. Roosevelt had openly supported his nomination, breaking from tradition, furthermore; this would have not only been a loss of a seat in the senate, but also a major embarrassment for the president and his New Deal. This would only have caused more politicians who had previously refrained from speaking out against the New Deal to become more brazen in their criticism.⁵⁸

Shortly before the president's visit, however, Chandler's tone changed. He reminded a crowd: "In 1932, I led the delegation in Woodford County to the State convention and voted for Roosevelt. In 1936, I led the Kentucky delegation to Philadelphia, and it voted for Roosevelt and I made a speech seconding the nomination." He also called for a political truce while Roosevelt was in the state. In taking these

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 160.

precautions, he was setting himself up to soften the blow of Roosevelt's words of support toward Barkley and take full advantage of any kind statements directed at himself. He made note that he had always been a loyal Democrat. When the likes of Tom Rhea and Ruby Laffoon had bolted from the party ticket and supported King Swope, a Republican. Chandler's platform differed in no meaningful way from Swope's that year, but he could still charge Rhea with the unforgivable crime of crossing party lines. In essence, he insisted that he was a New Dealer but had returned "the state government to the people" and balanced the budget. Former governor and senator J.C.W. Beckham spoke on Chandler's behalf and added the president will learn of the "Kentucky New Deal idea of a balanced budget." Chandler would go on to assure his supporters that once the president left the state, he would "pour it on old Alben's sore back." Chandler would attempt to steal this moment as he had done with so many others throughout his relatively short career.⁵⁹

As the president boarded a train several carloads of national political observers were prepared to follow him to Kentucky, signaling the importance of this battle. The event had even been touted as the "years No. 1 affair," as the "dramatic possibilities" of the Bluegrass State intrigued the nation. The White House contacted Chandler beforehand to discuss the president's visit because, as governor, he planned to welcome the president to his state. This led many to speculate the scene that would unfold when the president arrived in Cincinnati and stepped on stage with the two candidates, with one expected to receive an "emphatic thumbs down."⁶⁰

⁵⁹ "Chandler Asks Political Truce For Roosevelt," *The Courier-Journal*, July 8, 1938; James C. Klotter, *New History of Kentucky* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 368.

⁶⁰ "Roosevelt Off For Kentucky Battleground," *The Courier-Journal*, July 8, 1938.

The charismatic governor quickly attempted to insert himself into the situation. He met Roosevelt's train in Cincinnati and rode with him to Covington. Once they arrived, the three colossal figures were all together for the first time during the campaign. One of the more well-known events of Chandler-Barkley contest was the car ride to the racetrack where Roosevelt would give his first speech. As they entered the car, Chandler, eager to be seen sitting by the president, reportedly leaped over Roosevelt into the middle seat of the car, leaving Barkley in the far-right seat. Chandler got his wish, there were now pictures of him and his famous smile right next to the president in every newspaper.⁶¹

Roosevelt made several stops in the state to remind Kentuckians of the good that the New Deal had done for them. At his first stop in Covington, the president painted a stirring image of Kentucky in 1932. He remembered a time when he stood on a train platform and looked over a crowd. He recalled: "Hunger stared out at me from the faces of men and women and little children." Roosevelt then told the crowd that a fellow Kentuckian had been instrumental in providing relief. The president made it clear that Barkley had been a friend to him from the beginning. He also asserted that the senator had fought "valiantly...against doing nothing and in favor of action to meet growing needs." This statement may well have been pointed directly at Chandler in an attempt to combat the image of Barkley that he had attempted to paint throughout the campaign. He had continually stated throughout the campaign that he was a "man of action" and that Barkley was a "man of words."⁶²

⁶¹ "Cheers Greet His Speeches in KY," *The Courier-Journal*, July 9, 1938.

⁶² Franklin D. Roosevelt, Address of the President in Covington, Kentucky, Box 40, Master Speech File, 1898-1945, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY.

The speech was filled the powerful imagery of poverty also touched on the New Deal, detailing its effects on Kentucky and the nation as a whole. Roosevelt told the crowd that “farmers are better off in a hundred ways” and that “many of our states, because of that help from the national government have got back to the ‘black’ again.” This was another topic that related to Chandler directly. He had touted his government reorganization plan that he pushed through the state legislature, which he argued balanced the state budget. Roosevelt’s main speech in Covington may not have been filled with direct attacks on Chandler, but it certainly touched on many of the issues surrounding the campaign. In discussing these issues, the president got his point across that he favored Barkley.⁶³

The president would also address another theme from the campaign, which was that of experience. Roosevelt entered into the Kentucky battleground telling his constituents that the liberal government, the party system, and the nation as a whole, needed grizzled veterans like Barkley in congress. In front of a massive crowd in Covington, he proclaimed that he had “splendid cooperation from the senior senator from Kentucky” and due to the “great national problems” that the country was facing “people of national experience” were needed. Many people saw this as a battle between an old and out of touch senator and a young fiery Barkley. The president took this opportunity to remind them of the advantages of Barkley’s experience and pointed out the work that Barkley had done in Washington D.C. that benefited his constituents in Kentucky.⁶⁴

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ “Cheers Greet His Speeches In Kentucky,” *The Courier-Journal*, July 9, 1938; “Roosevelt Letter Scored Chandler,” *The New York Times*, July 10, 1938; Franklin D. Roosevelt, Address of the President in Covington, Kentucky, Box 40, Master Speech File, 1898-1945, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY.

Though Roosevelt made it clear that he preferred Barkley, he was not too direct in his criticism of Chandler. He was also careful to not distance more Democrats than necessary by stating that the governor “deserves due credit for getting his state on a sound financial basis.” He did not stop there, and would go on to state, “I say to him and I say to you that I have considered him and do consider him a friend of mine and I think he has done a good job as chief executive of his state.” Unlike many of the stops on his purge campaign where he would be supporting a pro-New Deal candidate in a race against an opponent that was vehemently anti-New Deal, Roosevelt needed to be more gentle in his criticism. The New Deal was sputtering, and he could not afford to isolate any more potential supporters. In this case, Roosevelt used a similar tactic to what Chandler had been using through the campaign. He attempted to present himself as favorable to the governor but also express that he preferred a different course of action.⁶⁵

Roosevelt continued his trip through Kentucky with a stop in Louisville, where he would highlight the federal government’s role in rebuilding the city. He stated that “not only in the crisis of a great flood but also in the long process of rebuilding, you have exemplified the spirit of self-help and cooperation between citizens and with the agencies of government.” This was a major focus of his speech, and he attempted to quell the fears of federal intervention by demonstrating the good that it had done for them. He even went as far as telling the crowd “your Federal Government is assuming responsibility.” The president made an effort to show that the federal government now had a vested interest in the welfare of the states but was not taking their independence. He made it clear that

⁶⁵ Franklin D. Roosevelt, Address of the President in Covington, Kentucky, Box 40, Master Speech File, 1898-1945, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY.

“every community will do as much of its share of the work of flood prevention as the community can properly afford,” and that the federal government would help make up the difference.⁶⁶

The final two stops of the campaign were in Bowling Green and Russellville, where Roosevelt spoke from the back of his train. These appearances were incredibly short but garnered the attention of thousands. He took these opportunities to mention some Kentuckians that had been supportive of him. In Bowling Green, the president applauded Senator M.M. Logan for refusing to accept a federal court seat and not getting involved in the campaign when Chandler requested that Roosevelt appoint to a newly opened seat. He noted that the senator “stood firmly against dragging the Federal judiciary into a political campaign.” When he arrived in Russellville, he applauded Tom Rhea’s efforts to relieve the pains of the Great Depression. Rhea was one of Chandler’s gravest enemies, who he nicknamed “Sales Tax Tom.” These were more examples of veiled attacks on Chandler, whether they were intentional or not. His speeches in Kentucky were filled with these types of comments. He refrained from attacking Chandler directly, but he made it clear that he favored Barkley and disagreed with the governor on certain points. Chandler would do his best to find ways to take advantage of these statements, maneuvering to make them seem more positive than they actually were.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Franklin D. Roosevelt, Informal Remarks of the President in Louisville, Kentucky, Box 40, Master Speech File, 1898-1945, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY.

⁶⁷ Franklin D. Roosevelt, Speech of the President Boling Green, Box 40, Master Speech File, 1898-1945, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY; Franklin D. Roosevelt, Informal Extemporaneous Remarks of the President Russellville, Kentucky, Box 40, Master Speech File, 1898-1945, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY.

The president also touched on the accusations of corruption against both the state and federal organizations involved in the campaign. He told Kentuckians to vote for their convictions and that he would be against “direct and forceful orders from Washington” for federal employees to attempt to influence voters, and he expected state workers to do this as well. Roosevelt also commented on Chandler’s attempt to make a deal to get M.M. Logan appointed to a court seat. He told the Bowling Green audience that “Senator Logan, with possible great sacrifice, refused to inject the Judiciary into a political campaign.” He also mentioned Chandler by name when he said that he “never left Washington empty-handed.”⁶⁸

Chandler quickly began damage control, asserting that Roosevelt complimented him on balancing the state budget and some of his other successes, “yet, they didn’t invite me as Governor of Kentucky to say any words in welcome to the President.” He admitted: “I took it on the chin or wherever else they wanted to put it, and now I want them to take it.” Chandler then began to fire back at some of the president’s statements. One of the first instances he brought up was Roosevelt’s kind words directed at Tom Rhea. He told a crowd that in 1935 Rhea “refused to get on President Roosevelt’s train and insulted the president.” He went even further and said that “the president helped me balance the budget,” but when Rhea was the governor “these two never seemed to be able to balance the Kentucky budget.” His most direct and biting criticism was his claim that Kentucky had paid in \$520,000,000 and received only \$370,000,000. He argued that “If every state had paid in as much and got back as little, the National budget would now be

⁶⁸ “Cheers Greet His Speeches In Kentucky,” *The Courier-Journal*, July 9, 1938; “Roosevelt Letter Scored Chandler,” *The New York Times*, July 10, 1938.

balanced.” These statements again put the focus on fiscal conservatism and were more overtly directed at the president and his administration than previous ones. He also continued his attacks and warned that Barkley was attempting to increase the power of the central government.⁶⁹

The governor would also push back against Roosevelt’s assertion that he would make a good senator but would prefer Barkley to be renominated. He would, of course, leave out the latter part of the statement and emphasize the fact that the president admitted that he would make a good governor. He would fight back against Roosevelt’s comment that a senior senator was needed, remarking that “You can’t be a senior senator until you’ve been a junior senator.” This touched on one of the larger themes that was present throughout the campaign, which was experience. Chandler had often used the moniker of “Old Alben” as an attack against Barkley. Roosevelt, however, would use this to his advantage.⁷⁰

Chandler also capitalized on the president’s lack of attacks on him. “Any time the president can’t knock you out, you’re all right,” declared the governor. Chandler would twist the narrative to his advantage as much as he possibly could, and the visit went about as well as he had hoped for. Once the president boarded the train to leave Kentucky, the governor made this evident by stating, “We’re in.”⁷¹

Roosevelt’s attempts to replace ornery conservative Democrats were largely unsuccessful and remain a blemish on his record as president. Many were often unhappy

⁶⁹ “Chandler Says Roosevelt Was Friendly,” *The Courier Journal*, July 9, 1938.

⁷⁰ “We’re In, Says Chandler After F.D.R.’s Speech,” *The Lexington Herald*, July 9, 1938.

⁷¹ “Chandler Cites F.D.R.’s Speech,” *Sunday Herald-Leader*, July 10, 1938; “Cheers Greet His Speeches In Kentucky,” *The Courier Journal*, July 9, 1938.

with his interference in the primaries and would use it as another example of him expanding presidential powers and interfering in state and local politics. Roosevelt's subversion of state politics not only angered many conservatives, it also infuriated many New Deal Democrats as well. There were very few positives that could be taken away from the purge. One of the only moments of the summer that could be viewed in a good light (though Roosevelt's influence in the outcome is debatable) was the Kentucky primary.

Kentucky was placed in the national spotlight with the president's visit. The national media clearly took notice of the importance of this primary. The president was fighting to keep his favored son of the Senate in his seat. If he was unsuccessful, it would be an incredibly humiliating defeat. The decision to intervene was clear, but how effective his intervention was is debatable. Chandler's campaign would only continue to sputter from this point on. It is hard to assess whether it was Roosevelt's visit that caused this decline or the numerous other issues that the governor faced at the end of his campaign.

Another one of the most intense changes that Roosevelt and his New Deal brought to American democracy was what was perceived as excessive spending. The concept of "priming the pump," or spending in order to get the economy back on track was now being questioned more than ever. This concept was the very core of the New Deal. Many people's confidence in "pump priming" had been shaken by the recession of 1937-1938, or the "Roosevelt Recession." The president had begun to reduce the size of many New Deal programs. The WPA, one of the most successful in the nation and beloved in Kentucky, had cut its rolls nearly in half, from 2.5 million to 1.45 million.

When a recession quickly followed these changes, many began to wonder if the New Deal had solved underlying problems of the Great Depression or simply masked them. Americans became fearful that “priming the pump” was becoming a permanent function of the government. The recession of 1937-1938 was fundamental to the subsequent course of New Deal liberalism.⁷²

⁷² Robert Shogan, *Backlash: The Killing of the New Deal* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), 223.

Chapter 3: Poison Water, Poison Victory: The Final Months of the Campaign

As the campaign came to an end both candidates would see their fair share of struggles. Barkley was running out of money to the point that there were concerns about whether he would be able to finish the campaign. Chandler's campaign, however, would completely spin out of control. A seemingly unimportant announcement of the governor's illness would balloon into accusations that Barkley had poisoned him. This episode would engulf much of the final weeks of the campaign. An investigation would find these claims to be false and many would come to see this for what it was: a publicity stunt. This would go on to have a larger effect than many would realize. It allowed the faltering Barkley campaign respite, which allowed for it to slow down and finish despite its lack of funds. Furthermore, it quelled any concerns that the sixty-year-old Barkley would look fragile, as photos of his opponent in bed recovering were on the front page of the newspaper.

Both campaigns were not able to escape the controversy that would envelop the end of the campaign. Thomas Stokes uncovered an immense amount of corruption within the primary and published articles containing numerous charges that the WPA was being used by the Barkley campaign for both support and funds. George Goodman, the director of the WPA in Kentucky, would investigate these claims and claim them to be false. Despite this, there was a sense of dissatisfaction and the Hatch Act would be pushed through Congress years later.

Barkley, Roosevelt, and the New Deal would come out on top in the campaign, but its victory was tainted. They had merely survived the most pivotal of the 1938 primaries. These claims of wrongdoings only deepened the fractures within the

Democratic Party. Conservative Democrats would not lay down their arms and give up on their pursuit for power within their party. While they lost this battle, Chandler put up a strong fight and posed the first real challenge to a liberal Democrat in several years. Chandler would even go on to gain a seat in the Senate after Logan would pass away. Conservative Democrats would continue to make waves and the fractures within the party would continue to deepen despite their loss in this campaign.

Chandler would become even more desperate as the campaign would draw to a close. The governor would level one of his more outlandish attacks on Barkley in late July. On July 22, the governor reportedly fell ill. A few days later, was eventually driven by ambulance from his hotel room back to Frankfort, where he made a speech at his bedside. He simply thanked those in his campaign and reiterated that he had not taken money from anyone outside of Kentucky. Despite some being disappointed that this would cut into Chandler's final drive for the nomination, the situation was seemingly not a large issue. However, the governor's illness would quickly become one of the more memorable issues of the campaign.⁷³

The day after Chandler's bedside address, his doctor dropped a bombshell on the people of the commonwealth. He asserted that the governor's sickness was caused by poisoning and accused the Barkley campaign of trying to remove him from the race. The story revolved around a pitcher of water. The pitcher was delivered to Chandler, who was speaking at Kentucky Hotel and mingling with State Finance Commissioner J. Dan

⁷³ "Physician Says He Believes Someone Put Poison In Water Governor Drank," *The Courier-Journal*, July 26, 1938; "Poisoned Water Caused Chandler's Illness, Doctor Asserts," *The Lexington Herald*, July 26, 1938; Sworn statement by Dr. J. W. Bryan, Happy Chandler Collection 1920-1974, Box 45, Folder 3, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY

Talbott, State Lieutenant Jesse Wyatt and B. C. Lee, by a waiter. The three men drank the water as usual. However, the next morning, Dr. J.W. Bryan, resident physician of the Kentucky Hotel, was called to the room of Talbott, who had fallen “violently ill.” While dressing to go tend to the finance commissioner, Dr. Bryan received a second call asking him to immediately come to the governor’s room. Upon examining the governor, Dr. Bryan found Chandler dangerously ill. He was experiencing many symptoms, such as chills, a headache, extremely high heartbeat, and shakiness. He spent much of the day treating the two statesmen and was informed that Lieutenant Wyatt and Lee were also ill, although not as seriously.

The doctor pointed to a few particular pieces of evidence to prove that this was indeed a case of poisoning. First, blood, urine and stool samples showed evidence that toxic substances were ingested. Second, many other people drank the water at the hotel, but only the three men who drank from the pitcher fell ill. It was found through an investigation that the men were likely not poisoned. They deemed that the waiter who served the water had been loyal to Chandler and that he had no reason to betray him, and he was the only one who had access to the pitcher. It was acknowledged though, that the men were most likely made sick by some poisonous material accidentally getting into the water. The implication here is that some cleaning material may not have been thoroughly washed from the glass before its use. Their final conclusion was that “there is nothing in the evidence indicating any crime by anyone.”⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Ibid; “Investigation of illness of Governor A. B. Chandler, et al.,” Happy Chandler Collection 1920-1974, Box 45, Folder 7, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY.

This incident would shape the remainder of the campaign. During the first day or so of Chandler's illness, his wife fulfilled his scheduled speaking engagements. Furthermore, once he was well enough to get back on the campaign trail, he seemed weak and still a bit sickly. This allowed Barkley to continue giving speeches at his rapid pace and look more vibrant and healthy than his opponent despite his age. Chandler's accusations also gave the brilliant speaker ammunition. In his speeches preceding the poisoning incident, he would drink from a glass of water that was placed on his podium, shudder, and push the glass away, much to the delight of those in attendance. This was the final event in a campaign where Barkley had used his experience and skill to put himself in a strong position. Now only two weeks before the election he stated, "I have an opponent but no opposition."⁷⁵

The poisoning episode provided relief to an increasingly anemic Barkley campaign. While the Barkley camp was confident in their ability to win the campaign in May, there was more uncertainty during the final two months. The consensus come July seemed to be that Barkley had the edge, but that Chandler was making a serious push to tilt the balance of the primary. One Kentuckian warned, "This Race is much more dangerous than many of the Barkley's friends realize. With Chandler's patronage, money available, and aggressiveness of his campaign, the senator is in real danger." Chandler's abundance of money and the tightly run political machine led many in the Democratic Party to believe it was possible that Chandler could spend his way to victory.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ "Barkley Speaks At Winchester," *The Lexington Herald*, July 28, 1938; "Chandler Says Illness Won't Stop Campaign," *The Courier-Journal*, July 23, 1938.

⁷⁶ Dr. Milton Board to Urey Woodson, 1876-1945, Box 5, Folder 7, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY

Chandler had a grasp on every area of the state, extending patronage and extorting funds whenever he could. He deeply aspired to obtain power and control similar what Huey Long had over Louisiana. He had spent time with Long before his death and with his associates after his death. A lawyer from Paducah wrote, “I do not value the Barkley organization very highly. I think Chandler’s is one of the strongest that has been seen in the State in any Race known to me. He has the highways lined with weed cutters, and his followers beating the bushes, and leaving nothing undone. The report is that much is being used even now by the Chandler followers, and that the crest has not been reached in their flow of gold.” Some thought that the only way that he would win the seat was to buy it, and Chandler may have been well on his way to doing this. Urey Woodson would lament that “as a monumental liar, we have never had anything in Kentucky like Chandler.” He saw that the governor had accumulated a substantial following. This combined with “unlimited campaign funds and ingenious methods of campaigning,” he was “giving Barkley a strong race.”⁷⁷

This fear was compounded by a faltering Barkley campaign that was grasping for money to survive for a final month. Woodson began to scour the state for donors, but there were few found. Henry Ward took a vested interest in these struggles and was shocked to find that little effort had been made in Paducah, Barkley’s hometown. He assessed that the finance organization was “asleep at the switch.” Ward would also write to Woodson from the Barkley campaign in Louisville, “We are very handicapped here

⁷⁷ Urey Woodson to Joseph M. Hartfield, Urey Woodson Papers, 1876-1945, Box 5, Folder 7, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY; C. Grassham to Urey Woodson, Urey Woodson Papers, 1876-1945, Box 5, Folder University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY; Urey Woodson to William Wile, Urey Woodson Papers, 1876-1945, Box 5, Folder 7, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY

because of lack of funds and therefore not able to give proper attention to all the details of the election as we should.” Woodson would tell him that he had no knowledge of the situation in Louisville beyond what he was telling him. He went on to also tell him that Barkley never got much support from Paducah because all of the “bankers, lawyers, and others” were nearly all against him.⁷⁸

While funding was the main concern at the end of the campaign, there was also fear that Barkley’s age would catch up to him. There were concerns that he would not be able to keep up with the strenuous schedule, which sometimes included up to five speeches a day. One man wrote that “He is speaking six hours a day and with his 60 years, and lack of physical preparation if he can hold up at all I shall be surprised.”⁷⁹

Once Chandler was healthy enough to continue his campaign, the candidates took parting shots at each other. Barkley stated that “the great issue of this campaign is whether I have been loyal to that matchless leader in Washington, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and whether I have upheld and fought for the program which has been pushed forward under this administration.” He argued to a crowd that the issues were not as Chandler had attempted to paint them. They were not whether he had been to Europe or if his daughters married men that were in politics. He also addressed Chandler’s accusation that he was a coattail rider by saying “Maybe I am a coat-tail rider if to cooperate and follow the leadership of the president places me in that category, but if I had to choose

⁷⁸ Henry Ward to Urey Woodson, July 7, 1938, Urey Woodson Papers, 1876-1945, Box 5, Folder 7, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY; Urey Woodson to Henry Ward, July 12, 1938, Urey Woodson Papers, 1876-1945, Box 5, Folder 7, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY

⁷⁹ Dr. Milton Board to Urey Woodson, July 11, 1938, Urey Woodson Papers, 1876-1945, Box 5, Folder 7, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY

between the coat-tails of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the American Liberty League, give me those of Franklin D. Roosevelt.” Barkley’s invocation of the image of the president was an adequate summary of his campaign. He was Roosevelt’s candidate and he would continue his programs.⁸⁰

On August 5, the candidates wound down their campaigns with several speeches. Chandler would give a speech at the University of Kentucky, though it was originally slated to be given at Cheapside until he was pushed out for a John Y. Brown speech. He spent the last days of the campaign attempting to make up the time he lost from his illness and reiterating the message of his campaign. Chandler reminded people that he was “born between a railroad track in the middle of a tobacco patch” and promised that, “next year I’m going to straighten out this tobacco quota business.” He then accused Barkley of using the power of the federal government to override the state’s authority.⁸¹

Barkley closed this campaign that saw him travel 10,000 miles in 110 counties with a motorcade through twenty cities in Western Kentucky. He would then give a speech in Paducah, where he planned to receive the election returns the next night. He recounted his record to a crowd and told them that he was “now in a better position than ever to work for the benefit of Kentuckians.” He then assured them that riding the president’s coattails was better than riding those of any “New Deal hater” and asked to be returned to Washington “by the biggest majority ever given a candidate in Kentucky.” He understood fully the stakes of this election and its importance to the president and his New Deal’s future. Barkley wanted a large margin of victory to affirm the peoples’

⁸⁰“Barkley Scores A.B. Chandler,” *The Sunday Herald-Leader*, June 26, 1938.

⁸¹ “Stadium to be Scene of Huge Rally Tonight,” *The Kentucky Post*, August 5, 1938.

support for the direction that the current administration was taking the American government. His nomination would also be a recognition that emphasis had shifted from the local and state organizations to the White House. By voting for Barkley they were voting not just for the president, but for the increase in presidential powers and the federal government's intervention in state affairs.⁸²

Roosevelt took the push for fiscal conservatism very seriously and put a lot of effort into ensuring that they were defeated. Though Chandler was able to pose a strong challenge, he was not able to defeat the federal machine. Barkley led amongst those of nearly every geographic region and social category. He polled the strongest in Western Kentucky, where he gained around 60% of the votes, most likely due to his support of the Tennessee Valley Authority and the various the farm programs of the New Deal like the Burley quota. He also won by considerable margins in his, Ballard (69%), Caldwell (59%), Carlisle (73%), Muhlenberg (74%), and Logan (66%) counties as well as his home of McCracken Counties (78%). There are a few reasons for his success in these counties. Many of these counties fell under the jurisdiction of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), which had a profound effect on the region. The TVA could help control the floodwaters of the Tennessee River, provided better navigation of streams, thousands of construction jobs, inexpensive power, and recreational facilities. There were also auxiliary effects as well, such as attracting new industry and tourism; provide

⁸² "Motorcade to Visit 20 Towns in Purchase Region Today," *The Kentucky Post*, August 5, 1938; Daniel Scroop, *Mr. Democrat: Jim Farley, the New Deal, and the Making of Modern American Politics* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 167.

phosphate and nitrate fertilizers to farmers; improvement of the tax base; allowing better Schools, roads and bridges.⁸³

To Kentucky, much of this was speculative since most of the TVA's focus had been on Georgia and Alabama before 1938. The election, however, happened at a particularly opportune time for Barkley. He had worked hard to get appropriations for a TVA Dam to be built in Gilbertsville, which finally received approval, and by July of 1938 there would be nearly 800 workers employed (this would jump to 3000 jobs in the next fiscal year) and around 10,000 acres of land purchased. In fact, Barkley saw one of his largest victories in Marshall County (67%), where Gilbertsville is located. West Kentucky was receiving its first experiences with the TVA and could see its successes only miles down the river with the recently completed dam at Pickwick Landing. They also understood that the other TVA Dams lessened the effects of the floods that swept through the state only recently. The Gilbertsville Dam would not have become reality without Barkley's skillful lobbying to the president. Western Kentucky was ready for the TVA and showed this by voting for the man that would make it happen.⁸⁴

He also received some support from tobacco-producing areas, winning places like Bell, Crittenden, Ohio, and Logan counties. Some tobacco counties, however, also provided some of his largest losses. Chandler won Breckenridge (60%), Hardin (51%),

⁸³Julian E. Zelizer, "The Forgotten Legacy of the New Deal: Fiscal Conservatism and the Roosevelt Administration, 1933–1938," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* Vol. 30, no. 2 (June 2000): 332; Malcolm E. Jewell, ed., *Kentucky Votes Volume I, Presidential Elections, 1952-1960; U.S. Senate Primary and General Elections, 1920-1960* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1963), PDF, 30-32; George T. Blakey, *Hard Times and New Deal in Kentucky, 1929-1939* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 133.

⁸⁴Bernard A. Gannon, "Monument to Power: The Political Struggle for Kentucky Dam" (Master's Thesis, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 1997), 243; Blakey, *Hard Times and New Deal in Kentucky*, 133-134.

and Meade (54%) counties. The Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) probably had a major role in why the votes broke down this way. At its inception in 1933, It gained rapid support, with 90% of tobacco growers were signed-up under the AAA. There were issues with setting proper quotas for the small farms that were popular in Western Kentucky. Dissatisfaction with the quotas may explain some of these wins for Chandler.⁸⁵

Barkley's other largest victories came in Eastern Kentucky. He experienced great success in Letcher (79%), Pike (58%), and Perry (63%) counties. Many of Barkley's wins in Eastern Kentucky can be attributed to his support of the New Deal's efforts in securing the rights of labor. One of the major organizations in Kentucky had been the United Mine Workers of America (UMW), which had struggled to gain ground in Kentucky before the New Deal. The National Recovery Administration (NRA) bound many businesses to Section 7, which would allow mine workers to organize. Many mine operators found a loophole, so it was not till 1935, with the Wagner Act, that the UMW began to gain traction and a large portion of miners were in unions by 1935.⁸⁶

Unionization did not happen without conflict, in fact, there was plenty of conflict in a few counties. Harlan county had seen outbreaks of violence for years due to the mine operator's refusal to allow workers to join the UMW. Chandler had been seen as relatively friendly to labor, however; he did not support sit down strikes. He eventually sent the National Guard into Harlan to quell the violence. He had also made it illegal for private corporations to compensate peace officers. These measures eventually allowed miners to return to work in Harlan County, and the UMW would even recognize

⁸⁵ Blakey, *Hard Times and New Deal in Kentucky*, 115-116; Jewell, ed., *Kentucky Votes*, 30-32.

⁸⁶ Blakey, *Hard Times and New Deal in Kentucky*, 156-160; Malcolm E. Jewell, ed., *Kentucky Votes Volume I*, 30-32.

Chandler for his efforts in this endeavor. These actions may have been what allowed him to gain an impressive sixty-two percent of the vote in Harlan County. Chandler had taken several other actions that made Chandler seem favorable to some in the labor category. One Kentuckian pointed to Chandler's abolition of prison-made goods, which no business could compete with. He also touted that the governor worked to obtain a two hundred increase in the amount workers were allowed to receive in workman's compensation. The final point that was made was that Chandler also supported the Child Labor Amendment, which was greatly desired by Roosevelt. This allowed some to see the governor as pro-labor and pro-Roosevelt. This culminated in Barkley having closer battles in and losing some counties that he had originally foreseen winning.⁸⁷

The senator was also quite popular among farmers in general, gaining their support at about 55%. Chandler made his largest gains amongst the wealthy who favored him at 48%. Chandler's campaign was not a complete failure, however, he continuously cut into Barkley's lead each month since January. In fact, his largest increase in the polls came the month of July, after the president's visit. This could demonstrate that Chandler was able to manipulate the event to help his own cause. Kentuckians, and most Americans in general, already knew of Roosevelt's support for senator Barkley, therefore, Chandler's attempts to use some of the president's slightly positive phrases toward him to his advantage were most likely ultimately successful. However, while twenty percent of

⁸⁷ Blakey, *Hard Times and New Deal in Kentucky*, 157-158; Malcolm E. Jewell, ed., *Kentucky Votes Volume I*, 30-32; W.C. Edrington, "Chandler's Labor Record," *The Courier-Journal*, July 30, 1938.

incumbents were removed their seats, Barkley's victory went down as a record-setting first defeat for Chandler at 294,391 to 223,149.⁸⁸

Newsweek said of this result:

Once the New Deal issue and the president's personality had been injected into the fight, the Barkley-Chandler race resolved into a titanic test between the vote getting power of Federal funds—WPA and farm benefits—against the strength of a well-disciplined state machine. The New Deal won... In Kentucky, Senator Barkley had all the blessings the president could bestow, and New Dealers with some justification claimed it as a victory. Yet Barkley had a Federal fund machine... more powerful than Chandler's state counterpart.

This quote sums up the general essence of the campaign; however, it is too dismissive of the Chandler machine. The federal machine seemed to struggle against Chandler's impeccably ran state machine. Their victory would also cut short due to the measures they took to keep up.⁸⁹

During the latter part of the campaigns, charges were leveled that both Barkley and Chandler's camps attempted to influence the vote of New Deal employees. Much of this was uncovered by Thomas L. Stokes of the Scripps-Howard staff of the Cincinnati Post who reported on many of these charges. George H. Goodman, the state's WPA administrator would investigate these claims. He go on to tell the public that there had been no misuse of the organization: "I am convinced, after investigation, that these State and district administrative officials of the W.P.A in Kentucky have repeatedly made

⁸⁸ "Short Ballot Will Speed Tabulations," *The Courier-Journal*, July 23, 1938; "Election Results By Districts," Box 12, Alben W. Barkley papers, 1900-1956, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY; Jamie L. Carson, "Electoral and Partisan Forces in the Roosevelt Era: The U.S. Congressional Elections of 1938," *Congress & the Presidency* 28, no. 2 (2001): 162.

⁸⁹ Sidney M. Milkis, *The President and the Parties: The Transformation of the American Party System since the New Deal*(New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 93.

it clear to the W.P.A. workers that their jobs in no way depend upon who they vote for in a primary election.” The evidence, however, was quite convincing for some of these charges and would concern many, which would lead to the passing of the Hatch Act, in an attempt to prevent WPA patronage.⁹⁰

The WPA was the largest of the depression-era relief programs and came to symbolize the “alphabet soup” agencies of the New Deal. Many Kentuckians owed a fair bit to the WPA. It created jobs that often fit their skill sets, which freed them from asking for what they would have felt was a handout, rather than earning money through hard work. Louisville Mayor Joseph Scholtz also sang the praises of the WPA in Jefferson County. He said the city "would be far behind" in many different areas, such as welfare programs, health, and construction. While it was made with the same intentions as other work programs of limiting government influence within the economy by not doing construction projects that would take money from private businesses. The WPA, like other work programs, aspired to keep wages noncompetitive and by instituting wage and hour maximums. While these wage restrictions kept morale high, they were not enough to inspire workers to take much pride in their work. This eventually led to many people accusing the WPA of paying workers to loaf on the job, allowing it to garner the nickname We Piddle Around.⁹¹

⁹⁰ “Hunter Says W.P.A. Officials Needn’t Be Political Eunuchs,” *The Courier-Journal*, June 13, 1938; . “The ‘American Way’: The New Deal’s Work Relief Programs for the Unemployed” in *The New Deal: Conflicting Interpretations and Shifting Perspectives* Edited by Melvyn Dubofsky, (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1992), 207-209.

⁹¹ George T. Blakey, *Hard Times and New Deal in Kentucky: 1929--1939* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 71.

Kentuckians often shared these sentiments. *The Kentucky City* magazine asked for the opinions of local government officials, and seventy-four of them mentioned workers getting paid for “leaf-raking” and other seemingly nonsense jobs. Governor of Georgia, Eugene Talmadge recounted a complaint from one of his constituents who summed up much of the opposition from southerners: “I wouldn’t plow nobody’s mule from sunrise to sunset for 50 cents a day when I could get \$1.30 for pretending to work on a DITCH.” There were also criticisms of the quality of work done on many of the projects. These were overwhelmingly by unskilled workers who had little motivation to put in any extra effort. These new national programs created a federal machine that rivaled much of the local machines that were previously extremely powerful. This became critical in the rise to prominence of national politics but rubbed many the wrong way.⁹²

Many WPA workers came out and made sworn statements. Some of these contained large amounts of signatures from other workers as well. These charges often revolved around getting workers to change their registration. One man in McCreary County asserted that a foreman had around twenty Republican workers taken to the county clerk’s office in a WPA truck to change their registration. Goodman acquired a list of signatures of forty other workers who said they had not been intimidated into changing their registration. There were, however, similar cases reported in other counties. In Pulaski County, a foreman was seen in the county clerk’s office thirteen times checking on registrations. It was also noted that there had been over three hundred

⁹² James MacGregor. Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox*(New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1956), 379; Eric Rauchway, *The Money Makers: How Roosevelt and Keynes Ended the Depression, Defeated Fascism, and Secured a Prosperous Peace* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2015), 97; George T. Blakey, *Hard Times and New Deal in Kentucky: 1929--1939* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 72.

changes of registration from Republican to Democrat in the county, with around seventy-five of them were WPA workers.⁹³

While at times workers were told to “keep our friend in power,” some of the attempts to influence their votes straddled a legal line. In Edmonson County, it was alleged that WPA timekeepers were making “political checklists” with the goal of finding out their affiliation. Cards were sent out asking for names of legal voters in the family; addresses; registered, yes or no; and precinct where registered. The timekeeper admitted that he did send the cards out, but it was not to sway their political leanings. He wanted to “urge the workers employed by the W.P.A. to register so that they might exercise their right of suffrage and have a voice in the affairs of their country.” He went further to state that “the card which each of the workers filled out did not call for any information concerning political affiliation of said worker.” Many of the workers admitted that they were asked to fill out these cards, so there was no debate over this. The concern revolved around whether they were directly prompted to vote for a particular candidate. Never mind the simple fact that they asked the workers to register was an attempt to influence the outcome of the primary. The more WPA workers on the rolls, the more people that they could expect to vote for Barkley. It would also be easy to remind the workers that the federal government provided them with their jobs. This was, however, deemed acceptable so long as they were not directly asked to vote for a particular candidate.⁹⁴

⁹³ George H. Goodman and Edwin J. Paxton papers, 1911-1950, Box 11, Folder 2, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY; George H. Goodman and Edwin J. Paxton papers, 1911-1950, Box 11, Folder 3, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY.

⁹⁴ George H. Goodman and Edwin J. Paxton papers, 1911-1950, Box 11, Folder 8, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY; William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal: 1932-1945* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1963), 269.

One of the more interesting charges earned the headline “County Manager for Barkley ‘Lives’ at WPA Office.” Stoke stated that “A sign nailed beside the entrance reads: “No Loafing. This applies apparently to everyone except Caspar Ratts, the campaign manager for Jackson County.” Ratts was alleged to have been spending time in the McKee County WPA office though he has no connection to the organization. He was said to also have been working for Barkley amongst the employees and dictating policies. Ratts denied the charges however several others noted that he had been seen around work sites. One worker was adamant that he never felt that Ratts was “dictating the policies of the Works Progress Administration,” but he had been approached by him “in several instances with suggestions and criticism.” The worker went on to assure that “his suggestions or criticism have not been followed” and that Ratts had not been seen around the office for several weeks. Like many of these charges, it was clear that the Barkley campaign was bleeding into the WPA, but there was no conclusive evidence that anyone in the campaign was attempting to directly influence the worker’s vote.⁹⁵

Most of the charges would amount to hearsay and were accompanied by the drama of disgruntled workers who were looking to get back at foreman who had fired them. One of the most extraordinary stories was that of Carter County WPA worker, Volantus K. Burgin. Burgin had alleged that he had been injured and put on lighter work, per doctor’s orders. However, he was asked to resume his normal duties early because he

⁹⁵ George H. Goodman and Edwin J. Paxton papers, 1911-1950, Box 11, Folder 8, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY.

openly supported Chandler. Burgin also stated that the foreman told him if he would support Barkley, he would be given a higher paying position.⁹⁶

The head of the WPA project in Carter County recounted a very different story. Burgin apparently disappeared once the tobacco markets opened. WPA rules stated that if a worker did not report for five consecutive days they were to be released. The foreman, Lee Lawson, filled out a form 403 to have his employment terminated and sent it after Burgin returned to the worksite “half drunk,” flashed a roll of money and stated, “he could make more money playing poker.” When Burgin received a copy of the form in the mail, he supposedly got drunk and returned to the worksite again. This time, however, he proceeded to put a gun to Lawson’s stomach. After a brief struggle, Burgin went down the road to threaten the project manager in an attempt to get his job back. He would continue with routine visits for around six weeks until it was finally agreed transferred to another site.⁹⁷

While Burgin’s story may have been extraordinary, but it was not the only one. Affidavits surrounding the charges were filled with stories like these. Some began to believe that the Chandler campaign and its supporters were taking advantage of disgruntled employees to give a “black eye” to the WPA and, by extension, Barkley. One example of the Chandler administration’s possible influence in these charges happened after two WPA employees were overheard discussing the organization at a Chandler speech. One worker had mentioned that he would not be surprised if WPA workers did not vote for Barkley. A precinct chairman, and Chandler supporter, then asked one of the

⁹⁶ George H. Goodman and Edwin J. Paxton papers, 1911-1950, Box 11, Folder 8, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

workers if they had ever heard their foreman make any political comments at the jobsite. The man replied that he had made some innocent statements. The next day, a lawyer that held a position under a federal judge and was a Chandler supporter showed up at the worker's home and asked him to make an affidavit.⁹⁸

At the time there were discussions of how to eliminate political influence within the WPA. The Wayne County Fiscal Court proposed a reorganization of the WPA in its county that would appoint an equal amount of Republican and Democrat foremen. They deemed that this was too drastic a measure and that they would be firing "good men" and it would be unethical to fire anyone based on their political affiliation.⁹⁹

This reluctance to remove workers led some to become unhappy with how the situation was being handled. One worker that had had been found guilty of "political activity" on behalf of Barkley was by many to have been promoted only weeks after his wrongdoings were discovered. The supervising compensation adjuster from the Bowling Green district was transferred to the position of supervisor of all government equipment, headquartered in Madisonville. Those who heard this felt that he had been promoted and even rewarded for his helping Barkley. Harry Hopkins had ordered that this worker be punished, but he did not say how. A site manager would argue that he had been moved to a position where he would have no contact with the public and that this was in no way a promotion. There seemed to be no punishment even for those that were found guilty.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ George H. Goodman and Edwin J. Paxton papers, 1911-1950, Box 11, Folder 13, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY.

⁹⁹ George H. Goodman and Edwin J. Paxton papers, 1911-1950, Box 11, Folder 22, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, KY.

¹⁰⁰ "Political WPA Man Promoted," *The Kentucky Post*, July 18, 1938.

Another aspect of this probe into the WPA that never seemed to attract much attention from the public or the Chandler campaign was the fact that George Goodman was a childhood friend of Barkley's. He was appointed to head the organization in 1935 after Thornton Wilcox was removed to become the state director of the Kentucky Emergency Relief Administration. Goodman had no prior experience in relief administration or public office but was chosen due to his connections to Western Kentucky and the electoral support he garnered there. The lack of charges may have stemmed from Wilcox being seen as a "vehicle for republicans." Hopkins had pushed for work relief to "save a worker's skills and restore his self-esteem." During his time in the WPA Goodman accrued a record of reducing direct relief and increasing work relief by tens of thousands in only a few months which, may have helped with the public's perception of him.¹⁰¹

Chandler also faced charges of using his position in the state government to gain votes. Barkley asserted that the governor was deciding where to build roads based on favoritism. He pointed out that some counties had been completely ignored while others had received large stretches of concrete roads. Barkley told a crowd that "In more than 100 counties the federal government through the WPA has built the people more roads than the state administration." Senator Barkley also alleged that he was doing the same thing with old age pensions. He had repeatedly refused to raise the allowance, telling

¹⁰¹ Anthony J. Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940* (New York, NY: Hill & Wang, 1989), 201; Robert J. Leupold, "The Kentucky WPA: Relief and Politics, May-November 1935" in *A Kentucky Sampler: Essays from the Filson Club History Quarterly, 1926-1976* edited by Lowell H. Harrison and Nelson L. Dawson. (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1977), 408-409.

legislators that the state did not have enough money but put members of his family on the payroll and spent over \$70,000 on the governor's mansion.¹⁰²

Circuit Judge, and former Republican candidate for governor, King Swope criticized both Barkley and Chandler for the "low-level" of their campaign and asserted that "neither candidate was fit to be a United States senator. Swope would also denounce the primary as nothing more than a "battle between the national and state treasuries." He would be particularly harsh toward Chandler (most likely due to their previous squabble over the governorship), stating that he "flaps his wings boastfully crows that he has all the essentials of a winning candidate," he is a "coward" for being first governor to "carry with him at all occasions an armed, personal body guard," and that he had not fallen ill but was merely taking a "double dose of the Roosevelt and Farley purge." Swope also pointed out his populist nature by reminding people that he used to proclaim that he was a "product of the coal mines of Western Kentucky" but now he was telling voters he "was born in the middle of a tobacco patch." Finally, the judge told his audience that Chandler's sudden influx in campaign funds might be explained with a review of his income taxes.¹⁰³

Swope found that both of them were as guilty as the other. His ultimate assessment was that neither candidate denied wrongdoing, but each "merely says that the other has done something worse." Barkley never denied that a letter was sent out by a Barkley lieutenant asking for PWA and WPA workers to contribute portions of their earnings to his campaign. He just argues that Chandler cheated the elderly out of their

¹⁰² "Old-Age, Road Record Scored," *The Lexington Herald*, July 23, 1938.

¹⁰³ "Judge Swope Raps Barkley And Chandler," *The Lexington Leader*, July 27, 1938.

pensions and was having field agents deliver checks. He exclaimed to his audience “Thank god the people of Kentucky will not be limited in their choice for United States senator this year to these two self-seeking, self-promoting, mud-slinging, professional politicians.”¹⁰⁴

Barkley also attacked Chandler for his handling of the old age pension. He pointed out that they were no longer delivered by mail but by state agents who reminded the recipients that “this money is being furnished by gov. Chandler, and unless you vote for him Aug. 6 your name will be stricken from the list.” He then lambasted Chandler by telling his crowd “I want to say to and I want you to tell him—I hope he is listening in tonight—that any man or woman who takes advantage of the old people of Kentucky to intimidate and coerce them into voting for any candidate is unworthy of any office in the gift of the American people.” While both candidates attempted to take the moral high ground, neither was able to gain it. They were both guilty of manipulating various federal and state programs to aid their campaigns. Barkley’s manipulation of federal programs, namely the WPA, was integral to his campaign. Though Chandler was seemingly outgunned, he masterfully utilized his powerful state machine to keep pace with the senator.¹⁰⁵

In one of the most important battles of the purge, Roosevelt reigned victorious. His favored son of the senate would eventually return to his seat. This primary fight brought to the forefront many of the issues facing the president in his quest to create a liberal, nationally led Democratic Party. Like many Americans, Kentuckians had become

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ “Barkley Scores State’s Old Age Pension Setup, *The Kentucky Post*, July 15, 1938.

skeptical of the radical changes that were taking place within the political system. The president was acquiring more power than ever before and, even beginning meddling in state elections. The focus of the Democratic Party was moving from local issues to national ones, leaving many to feel as though their politicians were forgetting about them.

Barkley came to be recognized as the embodiment of the sweeping changes, and when the people went to the polls, they cast their support for both him and the changes that had been occurring. Chandler represented for many a descent from what they perceived as intrusions by the federal government on their liberties. They saw that Roosevelt was spending their tax money on “priming the pump,” but the Recession in 1937 showed them that this would not solve the problems of the great depression. Chandler essentially promised to end many of these intrusions. Through this battle in Kentucky, Roosevelt defended his most important ally in passing New Deal legislation. The New Deal had prevailed in Kentucky.

The campaign’s end bought anything but a sense of completion. Barkley’s mad scramble for money and support would lead his organization to utilize the WPA to influence workers and gain votes. Chandler’s campaign would almost completely derail with his illness keeping him from making speeches. Furthermore, his accusations that Barkley’s campaign poisoned him became the focus of the public in the latter stages of the campaign, which ultimately stunted his progress and allowed for his opponent to make gains. Barkley would capitalize on this accusation that was seen by many to be a last-ditch effort by a desperate Chandler to gain votes. Photos of the sickly governor and his wife on the front pages of every newspaper would only become ammunition for Barkley.

Regardless of the outcome, both campaigns were enveloped in controversy after Thomas Stokes exposed much of the WPA corruption to the general public. Goodman would attempt to quell the surge of uncertainty caused by launching an investigation of his own into each individual charge leveled by Stokes. Though he seemed to have an answer for each accusation it was ultimately unsatisfactory to many and congress would go on to eventually pass the Hatch Act in an attempt to lessen the amount of political influence in federal work programs.

The New Deal would leave this campaign victorious, but not unscathed. The New Deal had merely survived the primaries, and the controversy over the WPA only deepened the fractures within the Democratic Party. It gave the Conservative elements more ammunition than ever to make a charge for party leadership. Chandler, while he lost this battle, would eventually, gain a seat in the after the death of M.M. Logan. Most of all, the New Deal suffered from the bad publicity caused by the controversy. The New Deal's largest and most controversial program was only looking worse to many. Roosevelt's purge was also seen by many as an embarrassing failure, as he lost almost every major battle of it. The New Deal had seen more opposition since 1937.

This victory in Kentucky was a bright spot, but it would not save a New Deal in decline. The program would be able to approve and build the largest TVA dam during this time, however; this victory would not stop the opposition from speaking out. This is not to say that anti-New Dealers won this purge. They defended their positions well, and a number of New Deal supporters won reelection. The real winners of the purge were Republicans. Democrats had become comfortable with their success, holding a healthy majority in both the House and the Senate. While they focused on fighting amongst

themselves Republicans began to capitalize and gain ground. This would be the first of several consecutive elections where they would gain seats. Republicans were due for a rebound of sorts due to the unsustainable amount of success Democrats had seen in the years leading up to 1938 and as distance from the Civil War and shifting coalitions made people more comfortable crossing party lines. The future success of Republicans was only aided by the often-ruthless infighting of Democrats.

Conclusion

The hijacking of this battle between two giants of Kentucky politics demonstrated how divided the Democratic Party was over the New Deal. There had been an intense debate for many years, but this all came to a head in 1938. The divisions within the party had deepened exponentially over the two preceding years, as Roosevelt had become exceedingly aggressive in his attempts to push his programs through. Many of the president's actions concerned Southerners in particular. This was mainly due to what they viewed as an increase in presidential powers. This caused many Southern senators to surmise that the federal government would no longer continue to turn a blind eye to many of their affairs, especially in regard to race.

There was also dissent for several other reasons as well. Roosevelt had begun a battle with the Supreme Court because they had struck down several major pieces of his New Deal. This would lead the president to attempt to reorganize the Court in a fashion that would benefit his program. His launch of the court packing plan in 1937 was the final straw for many. This and his executive reorganization plan made many believe that Roosevelt was grasping for dictatorial power. Democrats and Republicans alike began to unify to stop what they saw as the court from being tainted by the hand of the executive. Roosevelt argued that he was not just trying to fill the court with judges who agreed with his views, but he was attempting to uphold the very spirit of the court. His line of reasoning was that an appointment to the Supreme Court was never supposed to be a lifetime appointment and that turnover of judges was important. Without fresh blood, a previous generation would control the laws of the current one. These extensions of the executive branch were not the only things that frightened much of the American public.

Roosevelt had also pulled back on many New Deal programs in 1937, which resulted in a fear that the program had not cured the ills of the depression, but merely put a bandage over the wound. This shattered much of the previous confidence that many had in the New Deal.¹⁰⁶

These issues caused the fractures within the party to deepen and become permanent. They would come to symbolize the battle between North and South, which was ultimately rural versus urban, and the battle to make a cohesive liberal party for the president to push his program through congress. Many Democrats were now becoming comfortable speaking out against Roosevelt publicly, something they were reluctant to do only several years prior. This made these divisions explode and become the focal point of national politics for decades to come. Furthermore, without a unified party, Roosevelt would have no way of pushing New Deal legislation through congress or combating the Great Depression.¹⁰⁷

Roosevelt could see that the moment of the New Deal was slowing and that he would need to take action if it was to continue. He would decide to attempt to create a liberal Democratic Party by pushing the conservative elements out of office. He would begin to support what he saw as liberal ideals, such as the government ensuring a certain standard of living and accepting a certain level of responsibility for their citizens. This is not to say that he wanted to create a single-party state, but that he wanted a liberal and a conservative party rather than two divided ones. In his quest to achieve this, Roosevelt

¹⁰⁶ David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 332-333

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 338.

would decide to interfere in the 1938 Democratic primaries. He targeted several conservative strongholds to dismantle but was almost unanimously unsuccessful. Where he did succeed, however, was in his defense of his prominent liberal supporter, Alben Barkley. This was a critical period that would only do more damage to the president's reputation, but this key victory and the campaign surrounding it hold an important place in the purge and warrant study. The Kentucky primary, in particular, was at the center of American politics and driven by the issues surrounding the division of the Democratic Party.

Roosevelt's purge has received plenty of attention from historians as most works on his presidency and the New Deal or of Kentucky will discuss the primaries and the president's interference in them. There have also been works that dealt with the purge specifically, such as Susan Dunn's *Roosevelt's Purge*. She argues that the most important battleground was in Georgia due to the fact that it was one of the more powerful conservative strongholds. While this was an important moment, the situation in Kentucky eclipsed it and has seen relatively little attention. When many historians discuss the purge, it receives an honorable mention that lasts a paragraph.

For a short time, Kentucky was at the very center of American. It was a final battleground of sorts for a sputtering New Deal, Conservatives attempting to keep their stake within the Democratic Party, and even the very "heart and soul of Americanism." Kentuckians had become increasingly skeptical of the president's program, just as much of the rest of the country had become. This primary also involved a critically important ally to Roosevelt in Barkley. He was the president's senate majority leader who had helped push much of the New Deal through Congress. Out of all of the defeats, this

would have been the most embarrassing. Furthermore, while congress was becoming considerably more anti-New Deal the senate majority leader (one which was handpicked by the president himself) was still on the president's side. This episode also allows one to examine the expansion of presidential powers, the creation of a liberal Democratic Party, the altered concepts of American democracy, and how Americans coped with these massive changes.¹⁰⁸

Chapter one's discussion of the early part of the campaign has demonstrated that peoples' perceptions of the very meaning of American democracy were changing. Through the New Deal, the government was now taking responsibility for providing jobs to those who needed them. Many of these jobs had involved improving infrastructure, but there were other programs such as the interviewing of slaves and sewing circles. This caused many to fear that the government was overstepping its bounds, going farther than providing necessary improvements like roads and courthouses to spending excessively on what some felt were unnecessary jobs. This was what liberal Democrats would argue to be the "heart and soul of Americanism" and that a function of government should be providing help to those in need. However, some believed this concept was being taken too far and possibly damaging the work ethic of Americans.

Further into the campaign Roosevelt's purge enveloped both Kentucky and American politics as he made a trip to the Bluegrass State to support Barkley. Chandler's attempts to use the president's statements and the publicity of this event were successful in at least softening the blow of him endorsing his opponent. Chandler's eventual turn to

¹⁰⁸ "Support Sought By Two Rivals In Senate Race," *Lexington Herald*, April 23, 1938.

a more outwardly conservative stance was also indicative of many others' reactions to the president's interference in state affairs and the excessive spending of the federal government. Chandler capitalized on this by promoting a middle ground where the government would provide relief but not go into excessive debt. This moment of the purge was also important because Roosevelt was defending one of his most steadfast supporters and, after losing most of the other primaries that he intervened in, this victory would turn out to be a critical victory in continuing the New Deal. If Barkley was to have lost this campaign it would have been a near fatal blow to the program.

This victory did not come untainted and there were several controversies throughout the primary. Chandler came down with an illness in the final weeks of the campaign and, in a last-minute attempt to gain votes, accused Barkley of poisoning him. This was a blessing for the senators in more ways than one. These accusations made Chandler look desperate and weak, newspapers were filled with images of a sickly Happy in bed with his wife next to him. This did not bode well for someone who had made a major part of his campaign presenting himself as young and vital. It also allowed for the Barkley campaign to slow down in the final stages, because they had been running out of money and questioning whether they would even be able to make it to August 6th.

The largest controversy, however, came from both candidates using work programs to gain votes. Charges were leveled at Barkley that his campaign threatened the jobs of WPA workers if they did not support him in the primary. Chandler was not innocent either, as he utilized his influence over the State Highway Commission to employ people who voted for him or pave roads in an area that had more supporters. These charges led to federal investigations and eventually legislation. While there was

not sufficient evidence to garner any convictions, the public had more reason than ever to be afraid that the federal government was garnering too much power and was interfering in state affairs. Congress would eventually take action and pass the Hatch Act in 1939 to prevent patronage and the use of funds designated for relief. Kentucky was not the only state where the WPA was used as a political tool, but it certainly was one of the most egregious offenders and a major reason for the passing of the Hatch Act.

Many of the country's issues collided in Kentucky, exploding into a battle within a Democratic Party filled with the fear, anger, and resentment of splitting at the seams sewn by the Civil War. It was the culmination of the American public's struggle to cope with the growing power of the executive, federal interference in state affairs, and an increasing national debt. Liberal Democrats won this primary, but this victory caused its own issues with much of the controversy surrounding it, which ranged from patronage to accusations of poisoning. It did, however, exemplify the battle within the Democratic Party and the attempt of the liberal faction to take ownership of the South. World War II would soon garner the full attention of the public and pull the country from the Great Depression. Once the war ended, Republicans took advantage of Democrats not being able to quell the fears of Southerners and gain control of their party. By the end of the 1960s Republicans would eventually lay claim to the South and only tighten its grasp in the decades that followed.

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