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Article Summary: No state but Nebraska has been represented by as many as nine senators in three years. All nine were Republicans, and there was always a senator from Omaha.

Scroll down for complete article.

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NEBRASKA'S RECORD IN THE SENATE: NINE SENATORS IN THREE YEARS

BY JUSTUS F. PAUL

NEBRASKA holds the distinction of having been served by nine United States Senators within the space of three years. From the death of Kenneth S. Wherry in November of 1951 through the election of Roman L. Hruska and Carl T. Curtis in November of 1954, nine persons held the office of United States Senator from Nebraska. All nine were Republicans. Two were women. At no time during this period was the state's traditional division upset. Throughout this three-year span, the traditional pattern of one Senator being elected from Omaha was followed.

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NEBRASKA SENATORS, NOVEMBER 1951 -
NOVEMBER 1954

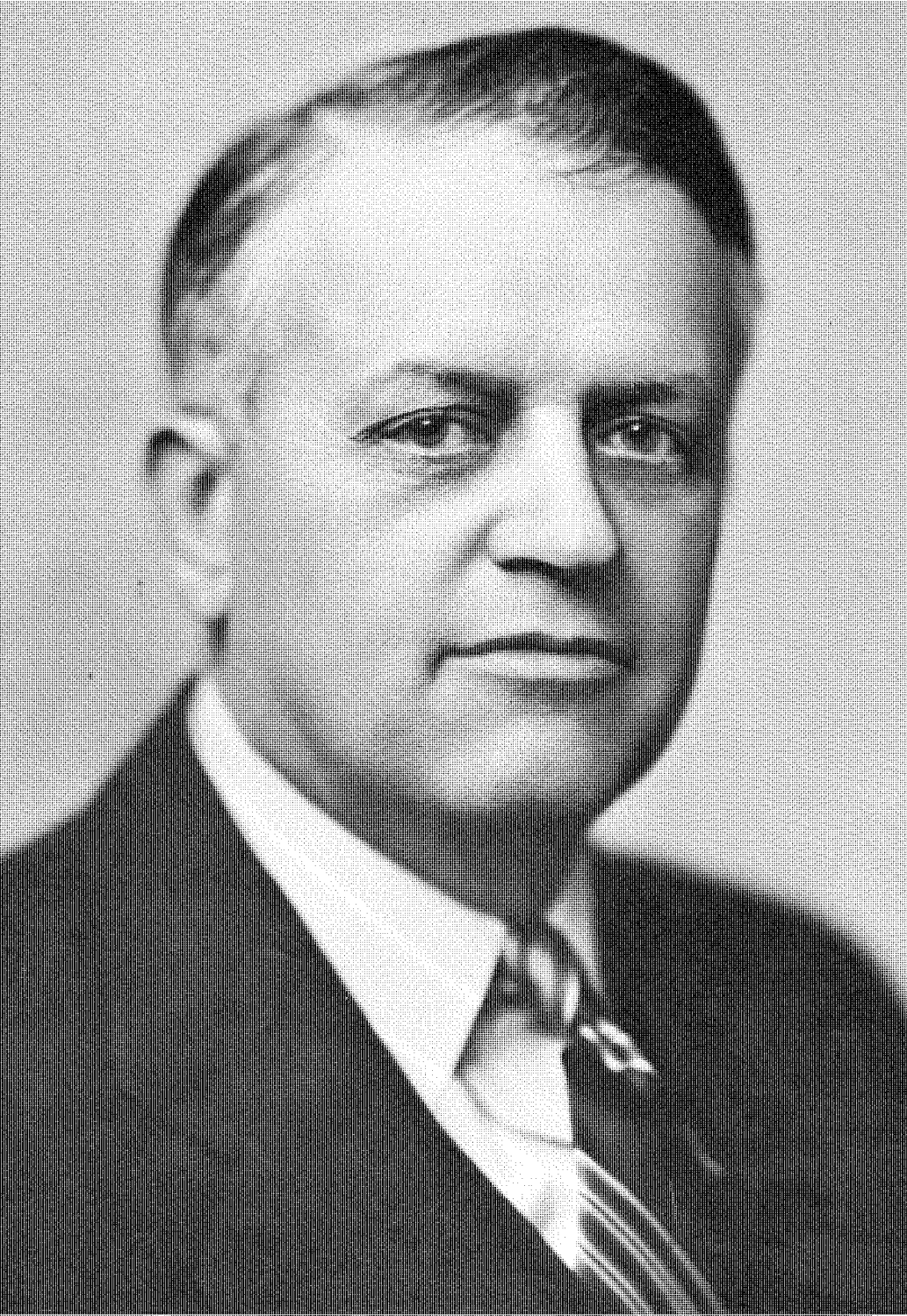
The Wherry Senate Seat, November 1951 to November 1954

1. Kenneth S. Wherry—Pawnee City (defeated George W. Norris, McCook, 1942) January 1943 to November 29, 1951
2. Fred A. Seaton—Hastings (appointed) December, 1951 to November 1952
3. Dwight Griswold—Scottsbluff and Gordon (elected) November, 1952 to April 12, 1954
4. Mrs. Eva Bowring—Merriman (appointed) April, 1954 to November, 1954
5. Mrs. Hazel Abel—Lincoln (elected) November, 1954 to January, 1955
6. Carl T. Curtis—Minden (elected) January, 1955 —

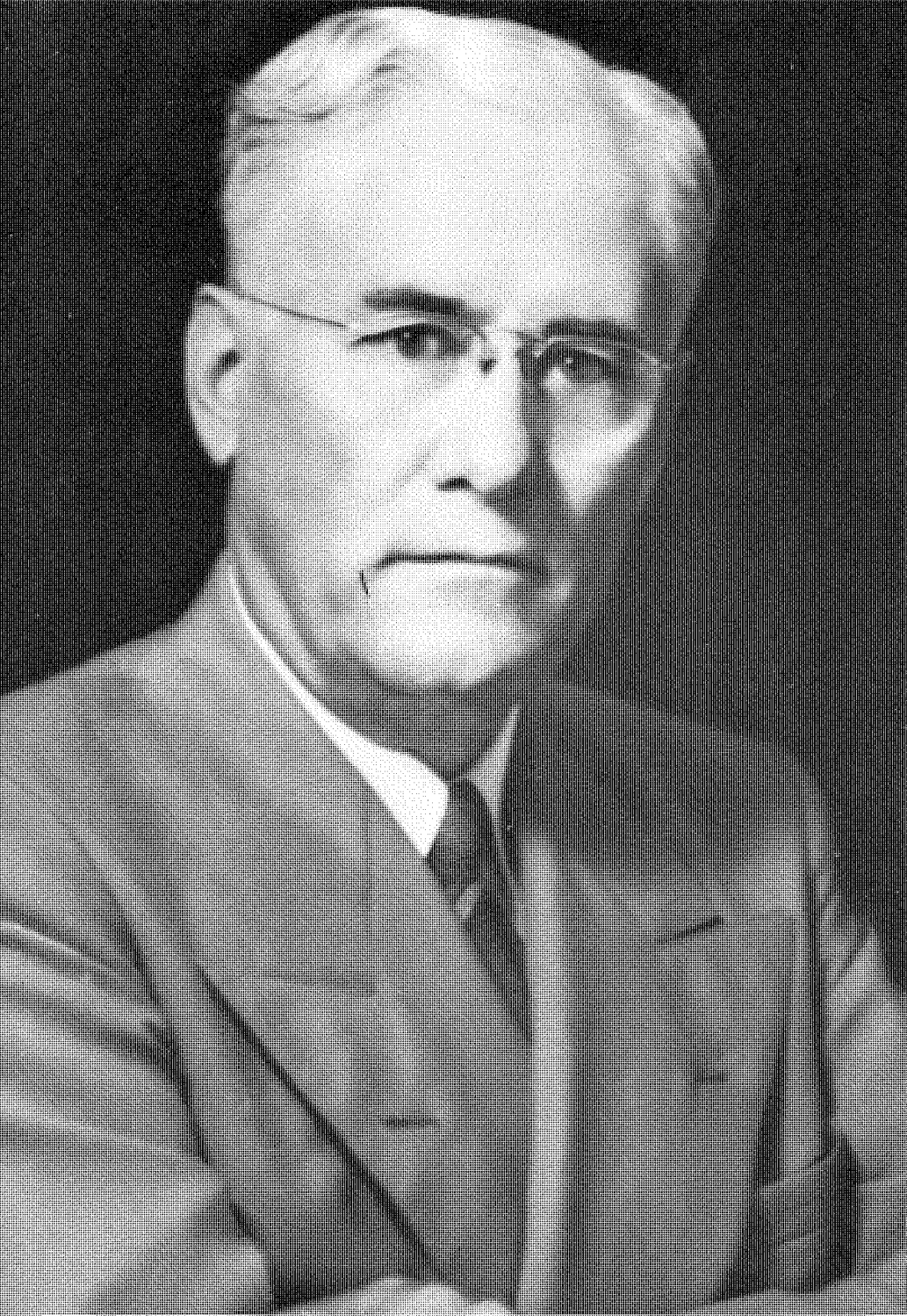
The Butler Senate Seat, November 1951 to November 1954

1. Hugh Butler—Omaha (elected, replaced E. R. Burke, Omaha) January 1941 to July 1, 1954
2. Samuel W. Reynolds—Omaha (appointed) July, 1954 to November, 1954
3. Roman L. Hruska—Omaha (elected to remainder of Butler term) November 1954 —

In October of 1951, two stalwart Republicans, Hugh Butler of Omaha, and Kenneth S. Wherry of Pawnee City,



Senator Kenneth S. Wherry



Senator Hugh A. Butler



Senator Eva Bowring



Senator Hazel Abel

were firmly entrenched in their respective Senate seats. Butler, an Omaha grain dealer and Republican National Committeeman from 1936 to 1940, was elected to the Senate in 1940, at the age of sixty-two. In that election he defeated three-term Governor Robert LeRoy Cochran. Cochran had defeated the incumbent Senator, Edward R. Burke of Omaha, in the Democratic primary. Butler was reelected in 1946 after surmounting a serious challenge from three-term Governor Dwight Griswold in the Republican senatorial primary. Wherry, a small town businessman and chairman of the Republican State Central Committee from 1939 to 1942, was first elected to the Senate in 1942 by defeating Senator George W. Norris of McCook and Foster May of Omaha. He was reelected in 1948 with only token opposition, and succeeded in gaining for himself the position of Minority Leader in the Senate in January of 1949, in a hotly contested battle with Senator William Knowland of California. Wherry's election to this position was largely due to the strength of the midwestern and western conservative wing of the Republican Party in the Senate and its predominance over the eastern liberal wing of the party.¹

The "Wherry seat" was the first to change hands. Wherry's death on November 29, 1951, caught the state's Republican leaders somewhat by surprise. Although Wherry had been ill for several months the gravity of his condition had been kept a secret and little thought had been given to a possible successor to the state's junior Senator.²

The selection of a successor to Senator Wherry became entangled immediately with the current political warfare within the state's Republican circles. Senator Butler, who faced reelection in 1952, found himself challenged again by

¹Harl Adams Dalstrom, "Kenneth S. Wherry" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1965), 821. Dalstrom's work is a comprehensive study of the fiery Nebraska Senator. For a study of Senator Hugh Butler see Justus F. Paul, "The Political Career of Senator Hugh Butler, 1940-1954" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1966).

²Dalstrom, *op. cit.*, 979.

a three-term Republican Governor, as Governor Val Peterson filed for Butler's Senate seat on October 31, 1951.³ With Wherry's death, Peterson was urged to resign and let himself be appointed to Wherry's Senate seat, in order that the pending intra-party primary struggle with Senator Butler might be avoided. He announced on December 7, however, that he would not take this route to the Senate.⁴ He quickly followed this pronouncement by appointing Hastings publisher Fred A. Seaton to fill the vacant seat until the general elections of 1952. Seaton promptly declared that he would not be a candidate to succeed himself, and Peterson admitted that he was considering the possibility of switching to the short-term race in the upcoming primary.⁵ Before Peterson could make a further decision, former Governor Dwight Griswold, admitting his disappointment over the Seaton appointment, filed as a candidate to succeed Seaton.⁶

Peterson's filing for the Butler seat forced Senator Butler to make some serious decisions. Butler had always planned to run again in 1952, but a severe stroke in July of 1951 had caused him to reconsider his future plans. After a period of soul-searching, Butler decided to make his move. On December 4 he completed his filing for renomination.⁷ Butler continued to hope that Peterson would change his mind and file for the short-term seat rather than stay in the race for the full term after Butler had filed for reelection. His hopes were short-lived, however, as on January 8, 1952, the Governor announced that he would stay in the race against Butler.⁸

Butler defeated Peterson in the Republican senatorial primary on April 1, 1952, and Griswold won the nomina-

³ *The Lincoln Star*, October 31, 1951.

⁴ *The Lincoln Star*, December 7, 1951.

⁵ *Ibid.*, December 11, 1951.

⁶ *Ibid.*, December 12, 1951.

⁷ Paul, *op. cit.*, 331. An interesting sidelight to this filing is that Butler is listed as a "write-in" candidate in the *Official Report of the Nebraska State Canvassing Board, 1952*, 18.

⁸ *The Lincoln Star*, January 9, 1952.

tion for the short-term Senate seat. Butler's margin over Peterson, although not overwhelmingly large, was impressive given his age and health.⁹

1952 was a banner year for Nebraska Republicans. General Dwight D. Eisenhower and both Republican senatorial nominees carried all of the state's ninety-three counties in leading the party to a record-setting triumph in the November elections.

With the nationwide Republican victory in 1952, Senator Butler again became the chairman of the Senate's Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, a post which he had held during the Eightieth Congress. Although he had been an ardent Taft booster prior to the nomination of General Eisenhower, Butler relished the prospects of serving under a Republican administration. He and his new colleague, Dwight Griswold, worked closely together during 1953 and early 1954.

On April 12, 1954, Griswold passed away after having suffered a heart attack the evening before.¹⁰ Griswold's death came as a blow to Butler who had enjoyed the cooperation given him by Griswold. He told Sherman Adams that "Dwight Griswold . . . and I cooperated one hundred percent and it is a sad loss to me as well as to the Senate, State and Nation that he should be taken."¹¹

Griswold's death precipitated another intra-party scramble. Following the precedent set earlier by Governor Peterson, Governor Robert Crosby announced on April 14 that he would not resign to seek the Senate appointment for himself, and stated that he would make his choice for the vacancy known soon. A number of potential nominees were suggested, from both out-state and Omaha.¹²

⁹ *Official Report of the Nebraska State Canvassing Board, 1952*, 18. Butler received 125,701 votes compared with 91,676 for Peterson.

¹⁰ *The Lincoln Star*, April 12, 1954.

¹¹ Hugh Butler to Sherman Adams, April 20, 1954, Butler MSS, Nebraska State Historical Society. See Paul, *op. cit.*, 380-381.

¹² *The Lincoln Star*, April 15, 1954.

Governor Crosby announced his decision on April 16. Mrs. Arthur (Eva) Bowring, widow of a Merriman rancher, and Republican state vice-chairman for eight years, was his choice. Mrs. Bowring became the first woman ever to represent Nebraska in the United States Congress. She promptly announced that she would not be a candidate for reelection.¹³

A number of candidates filed for the seat held by Mrs. Bowring even before her appointment was announced. Terry Carpenter filed on April 14, followed by Governor Crosby and state Republican chairman David Martin on April 15. Congressman Carl T. Curtis, the personal choice of the state's senior Senator, Hugh Butler, told *The Lincoln Star* that he was waiting for "the assurances from some of my friends as to their assistance . . ." ¹⁴ That assurance came, and Curtis, from Minden, entered the race and won. Curtis freely admits that much credit is due to Senator Butler for his victory in this race.¹⁵

Further chaos ensued following the death of Senator Butler on July 1, 1954. Butler suffered a fatal stroke, the third or fourth stroke he had suffered since 1947, and died without regaining consciousness at Bethesda Naval Hospital. Governor Crosby was thus faced with another senatorial appointment, becoming the third governor in modern history to appoint both members of the Senate from his state.¹⁶

Butler's seat in the Senate had traditionally been considered as the "Omaha seat", and Republican leaders were indisposed toward upsetting that situation in 1954. *The Omaha World-Herald* reported that in discussing the prospects of a replacement for Butler, leading Republicans had mentioned several persons from somewhere other than Omaha. *The World-Herald* concluded, however, that "an

¹³ *Ibid*, April 17, 1954.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, April 16, 1954.

¹⁵ Senator Carl T. Curtis, personal interview with the author, August 17, 1965. See Paul, *op. cit.*, 382-385.

¹⁶ *The Omaha World-Herald*, July 2, 1954.

outstater could be elected only if a bitter split developed among Omaha contenders."¹⁷ A number of prominent Omaha Republicans were mentioned, including friends of the Governor as well as of the late Senator. The appointment of an Omaha businessman, Samuel W. Reynolds, to serve until the fall elections was announced by Governor Crosby on July 3. On the same day, the Republican State Central Committee selected Congressman Roman L. Hruska of Omaha to seek election to the remainder of Butler's term. Democrats in caucus chose James F. Green, also of Omaha. These actions prompted *The Lincoln Star* to report caustically: "Party nominations and the interim appointment were in line with the tradition that the Senate seat held by the late Sen. Hugh Butler belongs to Omaha, the state's largest city."¹⁸

The primary elections of August 8, 1954, had the unusual distinction of giving the voters of Nebraska their choice of candidates for three seats in the United States Senate. Mrs. Bowring's decision not to seek election to succeed herself left that seat vacant after the November elections. Sixteen Republicans and three Democrats filed for nomination to the Wherry-Seaton-Griswold-Bowring seat for the interim period from the election in November until the beginning of the new session of Congress in January of 1955. Mrs. George P. (Hazel) Abel (Republican), and William H. Meier (Democrat) were the resultant nominees.¹⁹

The second Senate seat was the full term left vacant by the deaths of Senators Wherry and Griswold. Seven Republicans and three Democrats filed for this position. Former Governor Keith Neville (1917-1919) won the Democratic nomination, while Congressman Carl T. Curtis defeated Governor Robert Crosby, David Martin, Terry Car-

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, July 3, 1954.

¹⁸ *The Lincoln Star*, July 4, 1954. See Paul, *op. cit.*, 349, for more on the Omaha Senator tradition.

¹⁹ *Official Report of the Nebraska State Canvassing Board, 1954*, 1, 7.

penter, and three other candidates for the Republican nomination.²⁰

The third Senate seat to be determined was the Butler-Reynolds seat. The two nominees for this seat, Roman L. Hruska (Republican) and James F. Green (Democrat), both of Omaha, were unopposed in their primaries due to the fact that Butler's death came after the legal date for filing for office, and these two candidates were selected by their respective parties in caucus.²¹

Republicans swept all three positions in the November, 1954 elections. Mrs. Abel won the two-month interim term. Curtis won election to the full term by handily defeating Neville. Hruska was elected to the "Omaha seat" by virtue of an easy win over Green.²²

Immediately after the elections, Governor Crosby designated two of the winners, Congressman Hruska and Mrs. Abel, as Senator-designates, in order that Nebraska would be represented in the Senate prior to the time when the official state canvass would be completed. As both of the previously appointed Senators' terms legally expired with the November elections, Nebraska would have been without representation in the Senate had Governor Crosby not taken this action.²³ Hruska's early service aided in gaining seniority for him. Mrs. Abel became the ninth woman to have served in the Senate, and the third to have been elected to that body. She was also the first woman to have succeeded another woman in the Senate.²⁴

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Several other Republicans, including former Congressman Howard Buffett sought the Senate seat, but the Secretary of State ruled that their filings came after the legal deadline. Buffett's filing, at 10:30 p.m. on July 1 was denied, and Buffett threatened court action to force acceptance of his candidacy. After the party caucus chose Hruska, however, Buffett dropped his threatened action. *The Lincoln Star*, July 2 and 6, 1954.

²² *Official Report of the Nebraska State Canvassing Board, 1954*, 18.

²³ *The Lincoln Star*, November 6, 1954. The Senate was at that time in the midst of the McCarthy censure hearings.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

With the swearing in of Senator Carl T. Curtis in January, 1955, the sequence was completed. Nebraska's ninth United States Senator in three years was in office. All of these changes had been accomplished without a single change in party affiliation, and without once upsetting the traditional pattern that one of Nebraska's senators should be from Omaha.