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Article Summary: In 1948 in Nebraska, the first steps were taken toward having the public participate in the process of listing names on the ballot for Presidential Primaries. The result of this first testing of the automatic entry of presidential primary candidates was quickly absorbed into the current electoral practices of many other states.

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Photographs / Images: APPENDIX: Nebraska Bi-Partisan Presidential Committee by name, city, and occupation/position



1948 Nebraska presidential primary contenders: Harold Stassen (upper right), former governor of Minnesota; Thomas E. Dewey (lower left), governor of New York; Robert A. Taft, US senator from Ohio. Courtesy of Lincoln Journal-Star.



## **PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY REFORM: THE 1948 NEBRASKA "ALL-STAR" PRIMARY**

*By Robert F. Sittig*

***Introduction:*** Governmental reform invariably occurs in small and halting steps in any democratic society and electoral reform is no exception. The direct primary system of nomination of party candidates for public office has been a feature of American electoral politics for over three-quarters of a century, but controversy continues about its impact and efficacy. One of the boldest and most far-reaching changes which has occurred in the operation of the direct primary, as it applies to the presidential nominating process, concerns the automatic entry of all aspiring candidates into the contest, perhaps against their wills. Automatic entry is an electoral technique which deviates from democratic tradition and experience in that candidates alone had previously determined when their candidacies should be presented to the voters. In Nebraska in 1948, the first steps were taken which led to the establishment of the principle that the public too may have a role in the process of listing names on the ballot. The architects of the Nebraska experiment were evidently perplexed because the direct primary was failing to bring "democracy to the people" in regard to the nomination of candidates for public office, especially the presidency. Indeed, there was some danger the presidential primary might become a museum piece due to its increasing disuse, or in some cases, manipulation. Thirty years later, political observers are agreed the presidential primary is enjoying unprecedented popularity, and this revival can, in large part, be traced to events which took place in Nebraska in 1948.

***Background:*** The presidential primary had been introduced in a few states, including Nebraska, in the earlier 1900s.<sup>1</sup> Commonly it provided for the election by party voters of the national convention delegates, and perhaps for an indication of preference from among the presidential aspirants. Ideally, the delegates so chosen would take into account the wishes of the voters during the convention balloting. The presidential primary

is a variation of the direct primary system which was then in almost universal use and where the voters actually, or directly, nominated the party candidates. At the presidential level, the primary was merely an advisory or preference primary, since the actual nomination was bestowed later at a national convention. The presidential primary notion was a logical and desirable extension of the direct primary, but it was largely ineffective during these early years.

Then lightning struck in the form of Theodore Roosevelt in 1912.<sup>2</sup> Roosevelt challenged the renomination of the incumbent President William Howard Taft, and the few existing presidential primary states provided him an excellent vehicle to demonstrate and build his popular support. Roosevelt, and to a lesser extent, Senator Robert La Follette, who was initially in the contest, embarrassed Taft with uncontested victories in a number of primaries that spring.<sup>3</sup> Taft chose to remain in the White House, confident his managers had engineered his renomination in the non-primary states, where delegates were "hand-picked" by the party leaders in a complicated caucus and convention process. Finally, Taft felt it necessary to confront Roosevelt personally in Ohio—Taft's home state—but the results were politically and electorally disastrous, since Roosevelt won 31 of the state's 42 delegates. After the nomination went to Taft, Roosevelt formed the "Bull Moose" Party and made the November contest a three-way race. This so split the normal Republican majority that Wilson easily captured the presidency, and Roosevelt actually outpolled Taft and came in second. The Nebraska results were similar: Wilson led with 44 percent, Roosevelt received 29 percent, and Taft trailed with 22 percent.<sup>4</sup>

Roosevelt's "effective" use of the presidential primaries in 1912 seemingly would have alerted future challengers to the value of this approach, especially if they anticipated the party leaders would not be receptive to their candidacies. Instead, the presidential primary system gradually fell into disuse, and after 1916, the number of presidential primary states began declining since the party leaders in some states were powerful enough to abolish the device completely. In other states, the leaders devised schemes for influencing, and hopefully controlling, the presidential primary. Chief among these latter techniques was the "favorite son" game, where a popular state officeholder would be put forth as a "presidential candidate," in that state

only, and this would dissuade bonafide outside contenders from entering the primary. The favorite son game was so skillfully employed, especially in the strong party Eastern industrial states, it made a travesty of the laws which supposedly provided for a popularly controlled presidential primary; in effect, the party leaders dominated the delegate selection process, and the voters were reduced accordingly in role and influence.

During this period, Nebraska, and a handful of other states, maintained a rather lonely vigil with the presidential primary. The party leaders here were not influential enough to abolish the device, even if they were so inclined, and Nebraska's delegations to the conventions were not sufficiently large to attract to the state the few actual national contenders around. In addition, the favorite son bids of Gilbert M. Hitchcock (U.S. Senator, 1910-1922) in 1920 and 1928, and after that the commanding presence of Franklin Roosevelt pretty much foreclosed any choices for Democratic presidential primary voters in Nebraska much of the time. The Republicans were usually the "out" party nationally at this time, so opportunities for aspiring candidates were greater, since the presence of an incumbent discourages primary challengers severely when renomination time approaches. Despite the wider opportunity for Republicans, primary contests rarely materialized in Nebraska or elsewhere. From 1920-1944 only the 1940 primary was hotly contested and, as usual in 1944, the Nebraska Republican ballot offered only one viable candidate—Harold Stassen—the former Minnesota governor who was a regional favorite son of sorts.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the presidential primary system, despite the lofty objectives of its original proponents, was more a showpiece than an instrument of citizen involvement and control. This doleful summary of the early history of the presidential primary brings us to the events which occurred in late 1947 in Nebraska.

*The Bi-Partisan Presidential Committee:* On October 25, 1947, a group of civic leaders headed by the *Lincoln Journal's* editor, Raymond McConnell; Lieutenant Governor Robert Crosby; and Mrs. Sidney Smith of Omaha, the latter two, Republican and Democratic party leaders respectively, announced they intended to place the names of all presidential contenders on the 1948 Nebraska presidential primary ballot.<sup>6</sup> This announcement drew immediate attention to the Nebraska Bi-Partisan Presidential Committee and its activities.

The basic objective of the committee was clearly evident in their initial public statement: "We are interested only in stimulating popular participation and in establishing the principle that the preferential primary should be an instrument of the people themselves, not of the candidates' managers."<sup>7</sup>

The committee indicated that nominating petitions would be circulated for President Truman and Henry Wallace for entry into the Democratic primary; and for Republicans, Governor Thomas Dewey; General Dwight Eisenhower; Joseph Martin, speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives; General Douglas MacArthur; Senator Saltonstall of Massachusetts; Harold Stassen; Senator Robert Taft of Ohio; Senator Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan; and Governor Warren of California. A few additional members were put on the committee, and an invitation to join was extended to others interested in promoting broader voter involvement in public affairs. Ultimately the committee's size reached 35 (Appendix). Before long the committee's plan to enter candidates was provoking extensive commentary in the local and national media. This procedure, if actually implemented, would represent a sharp departure from previous electoral theory and practice, since candidates themselves, not supporters or outsiders, had always controlled the legal process for listing ballot names. The provision which allowed candidates to control their own entry was typically a requirement that their consent was necessary before they could be listed on a primary ballot. Prospective presidential candidates began to perceive how this might interfere with their particular campaign strategies, but for the most part, they maintained a wait-and-see attitude.

The Republican presidential contest, at the time the committee announcement was made, involved three major (Dewey, Taft and Stassen) and numerous other contenders. Dewey was the "front runner," and he planned to enter a few selected primaries and demonstrate his popularity with voters this way. Stassen was the challenger most likely to pursue the primary route, since his standing with party leaders was minimal, although as yet he had not become the "perennial" presidential campaigner of later years. Taft, it seemed, intended to control his home state delegation, through a favorite son bid, and avoid the primaries altogether.<sup>8</sup> These varying strategies depict the limitations of a system where popular participation is the goal,

but where candidates themselves are able to control whether or not their names appear on the ballot. Except for the Stassen candidacy, it appeared Republican voters in the nation would get little, if any, opportunity to respond to all the actual contenders, since they were shrewdly avoiding all or most of the 12 primaries then on the schedule. For decades, this gradual deterioration of the presidential primary had been overlooked or ignored, while the party leaders were quietly and confidently moving back into commanding control of the presidential nominating process. If successful, the Bi-Partisan Committee's gambit might even reverse this trend and revive the presidential primary system for the voters.

In Nebraska, the secretary of state ruled on the claim of the committee it could file petitions on its own and thus enter all presidential contenders. The ruling supported the committee and it turned on a small, but pivotal point. Candidate consent was required for those to be *nominated* in the primary, but since the presidential preference contest was *advisory* only, and not strictly a nominating contest, the existing law did not apply, and the petitions would be accepted if filed.<sup>9</sup> Any aggrieved candidate could pursue the matter in court—a remedy fraught with uncertainties, since the publicity would no doubt be unfavorable for any “masquerading” contender running in one or some states, but not in Nebraska.

In the months between the committee announcement and the filing deadline, a number of events transpired which gave final shape to the ballot choices Nebraska voters were finally treated to in the April 13, 1948, presidential primary. Two prospects were eliminated by their own actions: Henry Wallace, former vice-president and Cabinet member in the Roosevelt and Truman Administrations, decided on a third-party (Progressive) bid; this excluded him from simultaneous participation in the Democratic nominating proceedings since almost all states, to protect the two major parties, prohibit a candidate from seeking the nomination of more than one political party. Eisenhower, then president of Columbia University, bluntly stated that he would not accept the nomination in the unlikely event it might be offered. Ike's withdrawal came despite the fact his name kept cropping up as an attractive candidate, and not just in Republican circles. This, of course, increased the political pressures on President Truman, who was experiencing

considerable difficulty winning over the long-time Roosevelt supporters in the Democratic Party.<sup>10</sup> The Bi-Partisan Committee also narrowed the field by dropping Saltonstall, offering the quizzical explanation that he was not sufficiently well-known to potential Nebraska petition signers. Saltonstall, as well as any of the many other favorite sons could, of course, enter the Nebraska primary, or others, through the traditional method, but this was unlikely. Thus, the committee relegated Saltonstall into the rather arbitrary favorite son category; the committee evidently deemed it unnecessary to present these names to Nebraska Republican voters since they failed to "qualify" as national or regional candidates of stature.

Finally, the case of Vandenberg (and Taft, to a lesser extent) shows well the delicateness of the candidate qualification process, and how the committee played "cat and mouse" with some of the contenders. Vandenberg was getting increased public recognition for his successful efforts in updating American foreign policy in the post-WW II era. His role in the adoption and passage of the European Recovery Act (1947) helped to increase his stature in the moderate and liberal wings of the Republican Party.<sup>11</sup> When questioned about a possible presidential bid, he repeatedly said that he would not actively seek the nomination; but, at the same time, he declined to eliminate himself from the picture, as Ike had done. The committee dealt with this by circulating his nominating petitions, since it seemed unlikely Vandenberg would decide to enter any primaries. Action such as this kept bringing increased attention to the Nebraska ploy, and the reaction of the media and most political observers was very favorable, since it was such an uncomplicated attempt at reviving the entire presidential primary system for the benefit of the voters.

Finally, as the filing deadline in early March approached, the Bi-Partisan Committee submitted completed petitions for Truman, Dewey, MacArthur, Joseph Martin, Stassen, Taft, and Warren. Vandenberg's status still had not changed, and he made one last attempt to keep his name off the ballot by claiming he was not an active candidate for the nomination. The committee held up his petitions temporarily, and offered him an opportunity to give a direct yes/no response as to whether he would accept the nomination, if it were offered. Vandenberg instead chose to elaborate on his "non-active" candidacy; this

failed to satisfy the committee, and his petitions were filed at the last moment. The entering of Warren and Martin, and perhaps MacArthur, must have caused the committee some uneasy moments since they were not acknowledged to be *major* contenders in the media. In MacArthur's case the committee's boldness was eventually proved correct because he "obliquely" announced in March, from Japan, his availability for "any public duty to which I might be called by the American people."<sup>12</sup> This late announcement was timed to enhance his dramatic entry into the Wisconsin primary campaign where his supporters intended to field a major effort. Warren was on the ballot only in California as a favorite son, but there was no question about his candidacy since he had formally announced months earlier. Warren's acceptance of an invitation to address the Nebraska Republican Founders Day banquet, just three weeks prior to the primary, could hardly have been happenstance, despite his subsequent denial of any duplicity.<sup>13</sup> Speaker Martin probably should not have been listed at all. Although Martin was the Republican house leader, and speaker of the House of Representatives since the Republicans were the majority party after the 1946 elections, and thus a potential candidate, he generated very little attention, support, or activity during the preliminary period.

The acknowledged "front runners" for the Republican nomination in 1948 were Dewey, Taft and Stassen respectively, and here the Bi-Partisan Committee probably performed its greatest service, both to Nebraska voters and to the entire nation.

Of the three, Stassen had the greatest odds to overcome; thus, the primary trail afforded him the best opportunity to develop his popularity. Taft, as elder statesman of the party, had gradually earned the title, "Mr. Republican," through a decade of diligent and effective leadership in the U.S. Senate. Although the evidence is fragmentary, most party leaders and organizational activists were for Taft, in spite of the nagging claim he could not arouse wide popular support, and was thus "un-electable." Dewey had lost a relatively close race to Roosevelt in 1944, but was still the top choice for the nomination, and leader, by a wide margin, in the early public opinion polls, which were just emerging as an important factor in election campaigns.<sup>14</sup>

The strategies of the three top contenders reflected their

respective chances for the nomination. Stassen announced his candidacy early (January, 1947), and said he intended to challenge wherever possible, using his home-state delegation as an anchor. Then he hoped to add presidential primary victories in the neighboring states of Wisconsin and Nebraska, and do relatively well elsewhere. This would keep his candidacy viable for the negotiating and bargaining stage at the national convention. Dewey indicated he would enter the primaries in New Hampshire, Wisconsin and Oregon; this would apparently allow him to "authenticate" his top ranking credentials. Of the primary states, these three represented a very limited regional and national cross-section. This was, no doubt, a shrewd strategy for Dewey, but it shows how the public can be thwarted if it is simply assumed that all candidates seeking the nomination will submit to all the voters for a popular evaluation. Although Dewey, and Stassen to a lesser extent, were being selective about which primaries they intended to enter, Taft's strategy was even more cavalier: he intended to avoid the primary route altogether, and take his chances with the party leaders and delegates at the convention.<sup>15</sup> This showed even greater disdain for the citizenry and their role in the nominating process.

*Early Primaries:* Events rarely turn out exactly as planned, and these initial strategies of the candidates were altered when major developments unfolded during the primary stage of the nominating cycle. The first primary, as now, was in New Hampshire, and Stassen had no choice but to confront Dewey there. Dewey was favored due to geographical and political factors, and he won his first test rather handily, getting six of the state's delegates, while Stassen won two. The next primary was in Wisconsin, but the initial two-way character of the contest was blurred considerably by MacArthur's announcement of his availability, and his simultaneous entry into the Wisconsin race. Observers seem agreed MacArthur's potential appeal was significant, and since he was officially a Wisconsin resident, in so far as any career militarist has a "home state," he was adjudged the favorite in Wisconsin, although Stassen spent considerable time campaigning there. MacArthur's campaign was being pursued in his absence by supporters, paramount of whom was the former governor, Phil La Follette, an erstwhile New Dealer.<sup>16</sup> The Wisconsin results, coming just one week

before Nebraska's primary, were quite surprising since MacArthur's alleged wide popularity failed to materialize. Stassen won easily and garnered 19 delegates, while MacArthur ended up with eight. Dewey's finish in the preference poll was respectable enough given his minimal two-day campaign effort, and it had little impact on his front-runner status. Overall, the verdict rendered by the Wisconsin voters was nearly fatal for MacArthur, whereas Stassen's candidacy was given a healthy boost.

The primary spotlight then turned to Nebraska, and it appeared that Stassen would do well in the state since he had considered it crucial to his pre-convention strategy, and had visited the state frequently. Additionally, he was the only contender to give enthusiastic support to the automatic entry or "all-star" feature of the primary, and he had lauded the novel approach from the start.<sup>17</sup> Stassen's campaign director was State Senator Fred Seaton, newspaper publisher of Hastings. Dewey adjusted to being entered without fanfare, and announced plans to organize a three-day campaign just prior to the primary under the local leadership of Lincoln attorney, J. E. Rankin. MacArthur and his supporters had hoped to use a Wisconsin win to spur their drive for the nomination, but now they somewhat stoically had to reappraise and prepare for Nebraska. Nebraska proved to be the only other primary where his name appeared, although his supporters claimed to be in the contest all the way to the Philadelphia convention.

The automatic entry device in Nebraska had its greatest impact on Taft since it forced his hand, and thrust him into an arena he had intended to avoid.<sup>18</sup> While deliberating over his Nebraska "problem," Taft was impolitic enough to refer to the all-star aspect of the primary as "foolish" and "a tricky kind of popularity contest."<sup>19</sup> Gradually, Taft's strategy for Nebraska was devised with the counsel of Senator Hugh Butler. Butler was the acknowledged leader of the Nebraska GOP and he admired his Senate colleague immensely.<sup>20</sup> After rejecting some advice to ignore the Nebraska primary completely, a plan was devised to have Taft personally campaign in the state for three to four days, with the objective of transferring to him Senator Butler's wide voter support. This would at least allow Taft to hold his own in the preconvention jockeying, and perhaps even win the state, since an early private poll of Nebraskans showed him within striking distance of the leader, Dewey. Taft visited Omaha in February for a Lincoln Day address, and in a lunch-

eon speech to a group of farmers and ranchers at the Livestock Exchange, much to the dismay of both his listeners and his managers,<sup>21</sup> he came out *against* increased farm support prices. He spent much of his subsequent campaign here trying to "clarify" this candid, but widely unpopular stand he had taken.

Viewing the entire primary cycle, Nebraska's campaign turned out to be the only one where all three top contenders directly appealed to the voters. Dewey, Stassen and Taft barnstormed throughout the state just before the primary. There were no joint appearances or debates; there were no major issues on which they disagreed; and each candidate conducted a quite orthodox campaign. Taft spoke primarily to Republican Party activists, and thus addressed fewer people than did Dewey and Stassen, who both concentrated on general public appearances. Stassen did benefit from numerous forays of Minnesotans intent on helping their hero.<sup>22</sup> Taft surely weakened his chances when he blundered again on the all-star feature of the primary, by alluding unfavorably to it before a Wyoming Republican group, in a sidetrip to that state; he told them he was glad they "elected delegates at a state convention rather than at a direct primary."<sup>23</sup> Observers and reporters covering the campaign agreed that Taft's audiences were considerably smaller and less responsive than they were for the other two contenders, and that Taft was stiff and self-absorbed in manner in his public appearances, whereas Dewey, and Stassen especially, were able to relate to listeners in more personal ways. Dewey created a minor stir at the last moment when he added another day to his itinerary in order to campaign in the Panhandle; and Stassen hastily arranged to return to the state on the eve of the primary. The strenuously waged campaign stimulated large numbers of Nebraskans to register, and the election office in Lincoln had to be kept open an extra hour to accommodate more than 2,000 people on the final registration day.<sup>24</sup> Due to the uniqueness of the campaign, an unusually large contingent of national news media representatives covered the activities of the candidates.<sup>25</sup> All three candidates, either directly or through their managers, predicted victory, either in Nebraska, or later at Philadelphia, or both, the primary curtain came down.<sup>26</sup>

The primary results were, as usual, not without some surprises. First, voter turnout, one of the best tests of citizen in-

terest and involvement, was just over 185,000 in the Republican primary; this was the highest turnout ever of Republican voters in a presidential primary. In regard to the candidates, Stassen with 44 percent of the vote was clearly the major winner, and his gradually emerging campaign was helped accordingly. Dewey at least maintained his credibility with 35 percent, a quite satisfactory showing, everything considered. The results were ominous for Taft—he polled only 12 percent of the vote, and to run this far behind the other two was discouraging in itself, but Vandenberg attracted almost half as many votes as Taft, and no organized efforts at all were made in his behalf in the state. MacArthur and his supporters were rebuffed again by the voters and he won only 4 percent of the vote. For Warren and Martin, who were out of contention from the start, the results were poor but unimportant.<sup>27</sup>

Beyond the immediate impact of the votes in Nebraska, the primary's greatest effect was negative in that it practically ruined any chances Taft had for the nomination.<sup>28</sup> The poor showing of Taft seemed to confirm the persistent charge that he was an uninspiring candidate despite his impeccable credentials. Finally, there was considerable uncertainty about the outcome of the convention delegate part of the contest since the delegates were elected separately from the presidential preference vote, and no indication of support appeared by their names to guide the voters. Besides, the Supreme Court had much earlier ruled the preference vote was merely advisory. Most delegates had publically indicated they would vote for the preference winner, and based on this it appeared Stassen had won 12 delegates, Dewey just one, and the remaining two were uncommitted. Stassen's popular vote margin in the preference race was not, of course, anywhere near this wide, and this problem of inequity still plagues the presidential primary system in the states where delegates are elected separately from the advisory vote, or where winner-take-all arrangements in some form are still in effect.

*Late Primaries:* Before returning to the origin of the automatic entry device and its subsequent growth, the rest of the 1948 nominating and election cycle can be summarized. After Nebraska, the candidates shifted their attentions to various other states. Stassen, as the deadline approached, had entered the West Virginia primary, but no other contender did, so it passed by relatively unnoticed. A minor write-in effort for

Stassen and Dewey in Pennsylvania resulted in a standoff. Stassen then moved on to Ohio since he had earlier decided to challenge Taft on his home field—a decision fraught with danger. Stassen's supporters thought the action was courageous, but it was decried by the Taft forces.<sup>29</sup> This was a very rare flaunting of the favorite son game by an outside contender and shows well the basic conflict inherent in the candidate recruitment process in the U.S. since the introduction of the direct primary. Most candidates have their major base of support among the party leaders (e.g., Taft, Hubert Humphrey); increasingly though, candidates are "self-starters," and they seek to build their support among the public and individual party voters (e.g., Stassen, George McGovern, Jimmy Carter). This invariably leads to major intra-party struggles with high costs in terms of finances and damaged reputations, yet no satisfactory scheme has been devised to accommodate both types of candidates and still maintain internal party harmony. At any rate, Stassen entered delegates in about half the districts in Ohio, especially in the urban areas where he anticipated he would do well. Although Taft was expected to win most of these contested races, and he eventually did, the results had the political effect of slowing down both candidates, since they lost important ground to Dewey who had been stumping in Oregon.<sup>30</sup>

The Oregon primary from the start had loomed large due to Dewey's early entry there, its late date, and the fact that no favorite son was involved. Given the mixed results of the delegate races up to Oregon, and Stassen's gradual improvement in the polls, the primary came to be billed as the pivotal event in the 1948 Republican preliminaries. This type of media buildup of a particular primary occurs frequently, although the votes involved are only a small fraction of the total. Dewey, after Nebraska, had concentrated most of his attention on Oregon, and ultimately campaigned there for 19 days, and expended \$100,000—a remarkable investment of time and resources.<sup>31</sup> Stassen had been a frequent visitor in Oregon before the primary season began, and switched there after the Ohio standoff with Taft, for the final week. The stakes had been raised even higher when Dewey finally responded favorably to Stassen's repeated calls for a debate. A national listening audience benefited from the broadcasted exchange on

one of the few issues they differed on—whether the Communist Party should be outlawed.<sup>32</sup> Dewey, arguing the negative side, was generally acknowledged to have won the debate. The campaign was reported as the “most spectacular and exhausting primary” in the history of Oregon, and it was the scene for some rather bizarre conduct, since a victory was essential for both candidates.<sup>33</sup> Dewey ultimately eked out a 9,000 vote margin (52 percent), in the preference contest, and won all 12 of the convention delegates. Given the buildup, the results were widely interpreted as a Dewey landslide, and this perhaps sealed Stassen’s fate for the 1948 nomination.

The primary route technically ended in Oregon. The California and South Dakota primaries came later in the schedule, but were pre-empted by Warren and Stassen respectively, and no contest developed in either state. The scramble for delegates, after the primary season, shifted to the few remaining states where the caucus or convention system for selecting delegates was in effect. No significant changes in the relative standing of the leading candidates occurred during this period, and at the conclusion of the delegate selection process, Dewey was conceded to be the leader with about 300 expected first ballot votes; Taft followed with 200 delegates, a very respectable number given his avoidance of the primary states; and Stassen could count on about 175 delegate votes.<sup>34</sup> Since the remaining 400 or so delegates were committed to favorite son candidates, a deadlocked convention remained a distinct possibility, so the interest and intrigue continued apace.

*Republican Convention and General Election:* In the few weeks before the convention the top three contenders directed most of their appeals to the large favorite son delegations in Illinois, Michigan, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Except for Vandenberg, the various favorite sons had little chance for the nomination even if a stalemate occurred at the convention since his name was now monopolizing the “dark horse” speculation.<sup>35</sup> Vandenberg edged even closer to becoming an active candidate, which confirmed the inklings of the Nebraska Bi-Partisan Committee back in March, and this kept the Michigan delegation absolutely intact.<sup>36</sup> In the other three states, the party leaders “hosted” numerous sessions with the contenders in order to maximize their maneuvering ground. Just when it seemed the convention might begin with the nomination

still up in the air, some commitments were changed and the tide began to swing to Dewey. It was reported that most New Jersey delegates favored Dewey as their second choice, and then the Dewey camp won a crucial preliminary vote on the seating of a contested delegation from Georgia. Taft's strategists reacted to these dismaying developments by having Colonel Robert McCormick, the conservative spokesman and publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*, propose that Stassen accept second place on a Taft ticket.<sup>37</sup> Stassen declined, and then the biggest shift of all occurred when Senator Martin of Pennsylvania withdrew as a favorite son and announced his support for Dewey; this releasing of the Pennsylvania delegation split it deeply, but it was expected to bring Dewey at least half of the state's 73 delegates.<sup>38</sup> The once firm favorite son ranks were now wavering, and a number of other pro-Dewey shifts occurred, and although newsworthy, they are largely anti-climactic. The Dewey bandwagon was steadily turning into a Dewey steamroller.

In the actual convention voting, Dewey's first ballot strength (434) almost doubled that of Taft (224), his nearest rival; the number necessary for nomination was 548. On the second ballot, with a large number of delegates now freed of earlier commitments, Dewey ended up close enough to a majority that the third ballot's outcome was never in doubt. Thus, Dewey with only two close wins on the primary route (New Hampshire and Oregon) had become the nominee. It was a history-making event since the Republicans had never before bestowed their top prize, the presidential nomination, on a previously defeated nominee. The convention concluded when Warren of California was tabbed as Dewey's running mate, although he had declined exactly the same opportunity four years earlier when it was offered by Dewey.<sup>39</sup>

The American voters were treated to an exciting and strenuous general election campaign in 1948. Truman, in a driving and slashing finish, and largely on his own, edged out Dewey who had been favored all along.<sup>40</sup> The Democratic victory came despite the fact that the Dixiecratic and Progressive candidates diverted about five percent of the popular vote away from Truman. This leakage helped to make the 1948 election the first really close presidential election since 1916. In Nebraska, only Dewey and Truman were on the ballot, and the former won, but with just 54 percent of the vote. The large ma-

jorities polled by Republicans for the top offices in the state throughout the 1940s failed to materialize for Dewey.<sup>41</sup> This concludes the major aspects of the 1948 nominating and general election campaigns, and now this paper returns to the automatic entry feature of the presidential primary system.

*Automatic Entry Since 1948:* The responses in the media during the 1948 campaign to the automatic entry experiment in Nebraska were overwhelmingly positive, and since then the innovation has come to have a significant impact on presidential nominating politics. There was, however, a historical gap in the record since the Nebraska Unicameral Legislature despite the favorable publicity, closed the candidate consent "loophole" in 1951.<sup>42</sup> As a result, the presidential primaries from 1952-1964 in Nebraska were, with few exceptions, lacking in voter appeal since the major contenders almost always avoided entering the preference contest. Specifically, in 1952, Estes Kefauver and Robert Kerr did contend for Nebraska's Democratic delegates, but Stevenson, the eventual nominee, was not even listed on the ballot; the Republican ballot was similar—Stassen was again listed, but Taft edged Eisenhower in a late developing battle of write-ins between the two. In 1956 Kefauver and Eisenhower won uncontested races, although Stevenson again won the Democratic nomination. In 1960, no candidate entered the Republican primary, and John Kennedy was the sole Democratic entrant, although there were numerous active candidates elsewhere. Finally, in 1964, only Barry Goldwater, of all the contenders, was on the Republican ballot; and no one was listed in the Democratic primary. Automatic entry added zest and excitement to the Nebraska primary in 1948, but the next four nominating cycles were low key in Nebraska (and practically everywhere), although there were major contenders in at least one of the parties, and occasionally in both, during this period.

The re-introduction of the automatic entry device occurred in 1964 when Oregon made it a part of its presidential primary. Oregon is probably the leading American state in regard to the pursuit of the progressive ideal of increased citizen participation in public affairs, so it is not surprising this state would pick up on the automatic entry notion.<sup>43</sup> Oregon's major contribution was that it made automatic entry a part of the *official* election system by empowering the secretary of state to enter the names

of all presidential contenders who were generally advocated or recognized as such in the national news media. Another refinement was included, in that the law allowed entered candidates to avoid the listing, provided they executed an affidavit disclaiming any intention of seeking or accepting the nomination. Both these features improved on the rather risky procedure used in Nebraska in 1948, where a private group of citizens were determining who the candidates actually were. The disclaimer provision where adopted has proved interesting because practically no candidates have been willing to execute these official "non-candidate" documents. Perhaps this explains why Oregon, in a bold step, struck the provision from the law just before the 1976 primary. Evidently the Legislature believed it is now possible to decide with finality exactly who is, or is not, a candidate; thus, in Oregon's view, the disclaimer provision is now superfluous.

The system in Oregon worked so well in 1964 to maximize choices for citizens, that Nebraska re-adopted, and Wisconsin added the same basic provision in time for the 1968 primary season. The result was immediate: both states' primary ballots were bolstered significantly, and the share of the national spotlight and candidate attention they received was significantly greater than in previous primaries. After 1968, innovation became common practice when another eight states adopted the approach for either the 1972 or the 1976 presidential primary cycle. Thus, cautious experimentation has developed into widespread use, and there seems little doubt that automatic entry is now well established in the electoral traditions of these states.

The rapid rise in the number of automatic entry states since 1968 coincides with the similar spurt in the number of presidential primary states—from 14 in 1964, to 31 in 1976. For the first time since 1916, over one-half of the American states now have presidential primary laws in effect. In regard to automatic entry, most states now using it are states which adopted (or in some cases, readopted) the presidential primary since 1968. This, no doubt, stems from the rather pragmatic evaluation which occurs when states are considering electoral, or other, innovations then in use in other states. States which have adopted the reform are affirming that automatic entry is a valuable device for ensuring the presidential primary accomplishes what it intended to do—offer voters the widest possible choices from

among those candidates seeking, or available for, their party's presidential nomination.

Currently, the number of states using the automatic entry system has remained stable; thus, a major adaptation of an important political institution has occurred in the past few years. In addition to maximizing voter choices in the presidential primaries, automatic entry has had some unintended consequences. For one, the role and influence of favorite son candidates has been diminished in the nomination process. This is a quite desirable development though, since the favorite son game, on balance, tended to undercut the effectiveness of the presidential primary system because it thwarted candidate participation and this in turn diminished voter interest and turnout. Second, the automatic entry device has also reduced, but not completely eliminated, candidates with bonafide national credentials, who seek to avoid the primary route and yet stay in contention. Previous examples of candidates in this category would include: Taft in 1948; Lyndon Johnson in 1960; and Hubert Humphrey in 1968 and 1976. This should cause some pause since it is conceivable that a party, after the primaries, might be so divided it must turn to a "new face" in order to field a strong ticket in November. The availability of any untested "compromise" candidate in the future is quite unlikely since all announced, recognized or even *advocated* candidates will be entered in about a dozen primaries. This virtually forecloses the possibility of any candidate ignoring the primaries, or running in a select few, in order to be available to the party leaders and delegates at a deadlocked convention. Automatic entry systems have no magical way of discriminating among numerous active and non-active candidates, so all are entered to allow the voters a full choice. About the only option these non-active candidates have is to decide on the exact effort, if any, they wish to make to persuade the voters once they have been entered.

Thus, a somewhat whimsical and rather adventuresome first step was taken by a few private citizens in the 1948 Nebraska presidential primary.<sup>44</sup> The results of this first testing of the automatic entry of presidential primary candidates proved so valuable, that the innovation was subsequently introduced in Oregon, and then quickly absorbed into the current electoral practices of a considerable number of other states, including

Nebraska. The device has become an integral part of the entire presidential selection system, and the Nebraska Bi-Partisan Presidential Committee can take credit for originating this technique for reviving candidate and voter participation in a crucial segment of the democratic electoral process.

## APPENDIX

### NEBRASKA BI-PARTISAN PRESIDENTIAL COMMITTEE

| Name                             | City          | Occupation/Position                    |
|----------------------------------|---------------|--|
| R. A. McConnell, Chairman        | Lincoln       | Newspaper Editor                       |
| Robert Crosby, Vice-Chairman     | Lincoln       | Lt. Governor; Attorney                 |
| Mrs. Sidney Smith, Vice-Chairman | Omaha         | Omaha Improvement Commission           |
| James Ackerman                   | Lincoln       | Attorney                               |
| John Ames                        | Lincoln       | Insurance Executive                    |
| James Anderson                   | Scottsbluff   | County Attorney; former Legislator     |
| Chauncey Barney                  | Lincoln       | Attorney                               |
| Ivan Blevens                     | Seward        | Attorney                               |
| Guy Cooper, Jr.                  | Humboldt      | Feed and Grain Dealer                  |
| Mrs. Fritz Craig                 | Lincoln       | President League Women Voters          |
| John Frahm                       | Lincoln       | Labor Union Official                   |
| Charles Greenlee                 | Oshkosh       | Newspaper Publisher                    |
| Stanley Hall                     | N. Platte     | Insurance Agent                        |
| P. J. Heaton                     | Sidney        | Attorney                               |
| Lynn Hutton                      | Norfolk       | Attorney                               |
| Lloyd Kain                       | Lexington     | Newspaper Publisher; former Legislator |
| W. Wallace Keenan                | Omaha         | Business School Owner                  |
| Otto Kotouc, Jr.                 | Humboldt      | Banker, former Legislator              |
| Kenneth Lewis                    | Lincoln       | Labor Union Official                   |
| E. Ross Martin                   | Lincoln       | Accountant                             |
| W. N. Neff                       | Fremont       | Automobile Dealer                      |
| E. F. Noble                      | Grand Island  | Labor Union Official                   |
| Thomas Pansing                   | Lincoln       | Attorney; City Councilman              |
| Floyd Pohlman                    | Auburn        | Automobile Dealer                      |
| Mrs. Harold Prince               | Grand Island  | State Board Control Member             |
| B. R. Rothenberger               | Beatrice      | Newspaper Publisher                    |
| Norris Schroeder                 | Hoskins       | Former Legislator                      |
| Joe R. Seacrest                  | Lincoln       | Law School Student                     |
| G. P. Spence                     | Franklin      | Attorney                               |
| Arthur Sweet                     | Nebraska City | Newspaper Editor                       |
| J. Hyde Sweet                    | Nebraska City | Newspaper Publisher                    |
| Winslow VanBrunt                 | Omaha         | Insurance Agent                        |
| Arthur J. Weaver                 | Lincoln       | Insurance Agent; City Councilman       |
| Albert Witzling                  | Omaha         | Labor Union Official                   |
| John Zeilinger                   | York          | County Attorney                        |

## NOTES

1. James C. Olson, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 242-243.
2. Walt Anderson, *Campaigns: Cases in Political Conflict* (Pacific Palisades, California: Goodyear Publishing Co., 1970), 59-76.
3. In Nebraska where the progressive faction of the Republican Party was dominant, the Taft vote in the preference race was a mere 17 percent. Roosevelt, with Representative George Norris' support, polled 60 percent, and La Follette had 22 percent. C. L. Hartman, "The National Election of 1912 in Nebraska" (Master's thesis, Department of History and Government, Omaha Municipal University, May, 1940), 3-35.
4. *Ibid.*, 27.
5. Wendell Willkie, an active candidate early in 1944, was on the Nebraska ballot, but had withdrawn from campaigning after losing in the Wisconsin primary. Thomas Dewey of New York benefited from a modest write-in vote in his behalf. Don D. Dick, "The Speaking of the Candidates in the 1948 Republican Presidential Primary in Nebraska" (Master's thesis, Department of Speech and Dramatic Art, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, July, 1957), 9.
6. The precise origin of the committee is difficult to ascertain. Evidently the deputy secretary of state in 1944 casually referred to the vagueness of Nebraska's law for listing names on the presidential primary ballot to a *Lincoln Journal* news reporter. Subsequently, the reporter convinced his editor (McConnell) that the entering of candidates was a project worth pursuing. Dick, "The Speaking of Candidates. . . ." 9-10.
7. *Lincoln Evening Journal*, October 25, 1947, 1.
8. Herbert Eaton, *Presidential Timber: A History of Nominating Conventions* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1964), 410-411.
9. The instances where reluctant or modest candidates might be spontaneously "drafted" by supporters seem far-fetched in this day of "self-starters" who fund, organize and conduct their campaigns completely on their own. This is, however, what happened to Senator Norris at the peak of his career in 1936 (and again in 1942), when he announced his retirement, only to have fervent supporters circulate nominating petitions in his behalf, which he reluctantly consented to, and then ran as an independent candidate for reelection. Norris was the easy winner in 1936 over Republican Robert Simmons, and Democrat Terry Carpenter; however, Kenneth Wherry, a Republican, soundly defeated Norris in the three-way contest in 1942. George W. Norris, *Fighting Liberal* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1945), 356-370. Barbara P. Jones, "The Speaking in the 1942 Nebraska Senate Campaign" (Master's thesis, Department of Speech, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1958), 12-3, 96-100; Harl A. Dalstrom, "The Defeat of George W. Norris in 1942," *Nebraska History*, 59 (Lincoln; Summer, 1978), 231-258.
10. Truman's standing among Democrats kept sagging as the convention approached and it reached perhaps its lowest point at the 1948 National Jackson Day Dinner, an annual party ritual. National Chairman Howard McGrath, alluding to Truman's "sincerity and courageous battling" for his proposals, rhetorically added, "Can we ask for more than this?" He was greeted with loud howls of "yes, yes!!," from many in the crowd. *Lincoln Evening Journal*, April 13, 1948, 1, and Eaton, *Presidential Timber*, 427. In addition to the Wallace bolting, the right wing of the Democratic Party was threatening to withhold its support from Truman, and this too, materialized into a fourth-party entry in 1948, much to the delight of the Republicans.
11. Edwin Hoyt, Jr., *Jumbos and Jackasses: A Popular History of the Political Wars* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1960), 393-394.
12. *Lincoln Evening Journal*, April 8, 1948, 1.
13. Dick, "The Speaking of Candidates. . . ." 2. Warren said he would not have accepted the invitation had he known he would be on the Nebraska ballot. However, the committee's plan had been well publicized long before the invitation was extended.

14. *Lincoln Sunday Journal-Star*, February 1, 1948, 5A.
15. Eaton, *Presidential Timber*, 412. Taft said the press of his floor and party leadership duties in the Senate would preclude running in the primaries.
16. More interestingly for Nebraskans, MacArthur's Wisconsin campaign was also assisted by A. L. Miller, longtime Congressman from western Nebraska. *Lincoln Evening Journal*, April 2, 1948, 1.
17. *Ibid.*, April 5, 1948, 1.
18. James T. Patterson, *Mr. Republican: A Biography of Robert A. Taft* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1972), 404-5.
19. *Lincoln Evening Journal*, April 6, 1948, 4, and Patterson, *Mr. Republican*, 405.
20. Nebraska's other top Republican elected officials, Governor Val Peterson and Senator Kenneth Wherry, were both seeking re-election in 1948, and carefully avoided getting involved in the turbulent presidential primary campaign. *Lincoln Evening Journal*, April 12, 1948, 3.
21. *Ibid.*, February 13, 1948, 1.
22. Hugh Butler reacted angrily to this and decried the "extravagant circus tactics of the Minnesota carpetbaggers," Eaton, *Presidential Timber*, 415.
23. *Lincoln Evening Journal*, April 5, 1948, 1. Taft's wife, who accompanied him to Nebraska and campaigned separately on his behalf, showed greater political savvy in trying to repair the damage. She said the primary was "awful interesting" and a "pretty good idea" but that it would be terribly expensive if every state did it. *Lincoln Evening Journal*, April 7, 1948, 2.
24. *Ibid.*, April 3, 1948, 2.
25. Dick, *op. cit.*, 22-23.
26. Stassen succumbed to temptation when late in the campaign he pledged to appoint a Secretary of Agriculture from "Nebraska, or a state like it." Stassen may have felt he was entitled to at least one mild fling at demagoguery since he was "greeted" with 21 degree below zero weather in Alliance in March when he kicked off his official campaign, and his traveling party was later mistaken for the Yankton Bohemian Band by a Scribner Cafe owner at a luncheon stop. *Lincoln Evening Journal*, April 9, 1948, 1 and Dick, *op. cit.*, 35.
27. Ironically, the Illinois presidential primary was on the same date as Nebraska's. However, Governor Green, Illinois' favorite son, and the Republican Party leaders, had prevented it from operating as intended, yet the potential reward for the numerous contenders was nearly four times as great there (56 delegates versus 15), as in Nebraska.
28. Taft's poor performance in Nebraska also shattered the reputed hopes Senator Butler had of being appointed Secretary of the Interior in the next "Republican" Administration. *Lincoln Evening Journal*, April 6, 1948, 2.
29. Taft on learning of Stassen's plans, twice took the unusual step of privately trying to keep him from entering in Ohio. Taft tried to persuade him it would be a major breach of political etiquette. Patterson, *op. cit.*, 405. After Stassen actually entered, Taft's campaign manager publically admonished him for coming into Ohio to challenge the "outstanding legislator of all times." *New York Times*, May 4, 1948, 1. Stassen much later indicated privately that he would have avoided the Ohio challenge of Taft had he not underestimated his strength in Wisconsin and Nebraska. James W. Davis, *Presidential Primaries: Road to the White House* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1967), 114.
30. *New York Times*, May 6, 1948, 1.
31. Davis, *op. cit.*, 207.
32. Stassen in his eagerness to confront Dewey personally, agreed to Dewey's ground-rules—no live audience and a closing statement by Dewey. Eaton, *op. cit.*, 417.
33. *New York Times*, May 21, 1948, 1, 6.
34. *Ibid.*, May 24, 1948, 1.
35. Hoyt, *op. cit.*, 393-5.
36. *New York Times*, June 20, 1948, 1.

37. Colonel McCormick drew on history to embellish his proposal noting that the Republicans in 1900 combined prestige (McKinley) with popularity (Teddy Roosevelt), and won the election handsomely; he argued a Taft-Stassen combination would have the same winning appeal. *Ibid.*, June 22, 1948, 1.

38. *Ibid.*, June 23, 1948, 1.

39. Nebraska's junior Senator, Kenneth Wherry, was mentioned as a vice presidential possibility as Dewey closed in on the nomination. Regional and ideological balance for the ticket enhanced the chances of a number of Midwestern and Western conservative vice presidential prospects. *Ibid.*, June 23, 1948, 5. Once Dewey won the nomination, Wherry evidently was not among those actually considered. Eaton, *op. cit.*, 424.

40. Hoyt, *op. cit.*, 391.

41. Other Democrats running in the farm states of the Midwest consistently outpolled Truman in 1948. This is the reverse of normal voting patterns. Farm prices did drop sharply during the year; corn, for example, fell from almost \$3 a bushel in January, to about \$1.50 in November. Truman's proposal for higher farm support prices was rejected by the Republican controlled Congress, and Truman hit hard on this issue during the campaign. It appears others in his party benefited even more from the voters, on this and other issues, than Truman did.

42. Olson, *op. cit.*, 334, and Dick, *op. cit.*, 151.

43. Oregon's attraction to the all-star feature began in 1948. A quick attempt was made to copy the Nebraska experiment, but legal and political complications precluded its implementation for that campaign. *Lincoln Evening Journal*, April 7, 1948, 2.

44. Whatever recognition Nebraska received at the time was quickly forgotten. One exception was the Pulitzer Prize awarded to the *Lincoln Evening Journal* in 1949 for distinguished political news reporting. Editor McConnell noted the award was largely based on the increased activity of the candidates which the automatic entry device stimulated, and which the media reported to the nation. Dick, *op. cit.*, 3.