



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on July 4, 2016

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Taft vs. Eisenhower 1952: The GOP Loses Its Soul

In recent American history both the Republican and Democrat National Party Conventions have nominated presidential candidates who garnered the most delegates and were presumed to be the nominee prior to the first bang of the gavel at the convention. In fact, recent conventions have typically been well-scripted events intended to give the party's choice a major public-relations boost going into the fall election campaign. But the conventions have not always been beauty pageants for the presumptive nominees, and may not be this year for either presumptive nominee, Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton.



In 1968, for instance, the public-relations benefit that Democrat presidential nominee Senator Hubert H. Humphrey might have derived from the convention in Chicago was marred not only by contentious controversy inside the convention hall, but even more so by the riots outside. And 16 years earlier, at the 1952 Republican National Convention in Chicago, the expected standard-bearer for the Grand Old Party failed to get the nomination after many of his delegates were disqualified and others were convinced to switch sides. The candidate whose nomination was stolen that year was Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio, one of the most qualified men ever to seek the presidency. And the Grand Old Party's nominee was General Dwight D. Eisenhower.

It was the contest in which the Republican Party sold its soul, surrendering its principles in exchange for a "victory" at the polls.

Taft: Mr. Conservative

The 1952 contest between Taft and Eisenhower ended with defeat for those who wanted the Republican Party to restore the Republic to a nation of limited government, individual liberty, constitutionalism, free enterprise, and a traditional American foreign policy of America First. Technically, the Republican Party "won" back the White House in 1952, but it did so at the cost of transforming itself into a pale imitation of the big-government Democratic Party. And by so doing, Americans were often left with election contests where neither major-party candidate genuinely supported rolling back the size and scope of government, the campaign rhetoric notwithstanding.

When Senator Taft announced his candidacy in the Republican Conference Room at the U.S. Capitol for the Republican nomination in 1952, he explained his campaign would be about "liberty rather than the principles of socialism," and the "restoration of a government of honesty and integrity."

In the "wilderness years" of the Republican Party from the Great Depression through World War II, Taft had been the undisputed leader of the opposition to the ever-increasing size of government led by the Roosevelt and Truman presidencies, earning him the adulatory titles of "Mr. Republican" and "Mr.



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Conservative.” When, in 1946, the Republicans ran a congressional campaign of “Had Enough?,” after nearly 20 years of uninterrupted Democrat rule in Congress, and won both houses, it was Taft who emerged as the unquestioned leader of the triumphant Republican Party.

The Republican-led 80th Congress of the United States was derided by President Harry Truman, in his 1948 presidential campaign, as the “do-nothing” Congress. But in reality, the 80th Congress was one of the most productive in American history. This Congress reduced taxes, balanced the federal budget, reduced the national debt, and laid the groundwork for the postwar economic boom. The Congress accomplished much of this by removing wartime price controls, and by removing much of the regulatory burden that had hampered business for years. And Congress did this under the able leadership of Taft.

With an eye toward limiting the alarming growth of presidential power under Franklin Roosevelt, who had been elected four times, shattering the strong two-term tradition going back to George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, the Congress enacted the 22nd Amendment in 1947, limiting the president to two terms in office. The states ratified the proposal in 1951.

Perhaps no piece of legislation is more closely associated with Taft, and has had more lasting influence in the country, than the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947. This law outlawed the practice of the “closed shop,” where workers must belong to the union as a condition of employment, by allowing states to become “Right to Work” states, where each individual worker in a “union shop” has the freedom to choose whether or not to join the union. This contrasted sharply with the New Deal-era Wagner Act, which practically insured closed shops.

Taft, the son of President William Howard Taft (1909-1913), had won election to the Senate in the important “swing state” (they did not call them “purple states” back then) of Ohio in 1938. He was reelected in 1944 and 1950. But in the latter campaign, Taft’s authorship of the Taft-Hartley law had made him the number one enemy of the labor union bosses, who unleashed their wrath against him in much that same way that, in more recent years, union bosses tried unsuccessfully to unseat Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin.

So intense was Big Labor’s opposition to Taft that there were media predictions he would lose his 1950 reelection bid. But not only did he emerge victorious, he was also seen as the odds-on favorite for the GOP’s nomination for president in 1952.

Despite the fact that he was the son of a president, and despite winning three Senate races in the key battleground state of Ohio, powerful forces despised and feared Taft. And they were not all within the opposition Democratic Party. Many elites within the Republican Party saw Taft as a threat to be stopped, not a political leader to elevate to the White House.

Like Father, Like Son?

To understand the animosity of those who would oppose, and ultimately block, a Taft nomination in 1952, we need to go back to his father’s presidency. When President Theodore Roosevelt — a progressive Republican — retired from the presidency, his secretary of war, William Howard Taft, was nominated to replace him in 1908. William Howard Taft governed as a person who was not progressive enough for the Big Government progressive movement of the time, yet too progressive for more conservative Republicans. He opposed two key pieces of the progressive agenda. One was the environmentalist agenda, which we have seen in our own time as something used by the Left to advance



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more government regulation and control, even to the point that some more radical environmentalists could be seen as “watermelon socialists” — green on the outside, but red on the inside.

But nothing angered establishment elites more than President Taft’s opposition to the creation of a central banking system for the United States — what would become the Federal Reserve System in 1913, the year after Taft left office. J.P. Morgan and other powerful banking interests were furious with Taft, and they coaxed the vain Teddy Roosevelt out of retirement in 1912 to challenge Taft for the Republican Party nomination.

The contest between William Howard Taft and Teddy Roosevelt proved very divisive. Archie Butt, a political operative who had been friends with both men, even left the country to avoid being caught between the two men. Other Republicans had to choose sides. For example, Warren Harding of Ohio won favor with more conservative Republicans when he sided with Taft. There were efforts by the pro-Roosevelt forces to even bring Democrats into the Republican nominating process, particularly in Texas.

But Taft controlled the party machinery, and efforts to overturn his nomination for a second presidential term, through such chicanery as using Democrats in the Republican process, were unsuccessful. Taft won all the procedural fights at the 1912 Republican National Convention, and he was renominated.

But Teddy Roosevelt did not withdraw from the race and accept the judgment of the Republican National Convention. Instead, at the urging of Morgan and others, he quickly launched his Progressive Party third-party ticket popularly known as the Bull Moose Party. The ensuing split of Republican support between Roosevelt and Taft handed the election to the Democrats and New Jersey Governor Woodrow Wilson, another progressive. With Wilson in the White House, the proponents of central banking won passage of their Federal Reserve System in Wilson’s first year in office.

The Establishment Opposes Bob Taft

Because William Howard Taft had opposed key establishment goals as president, it is not surprising that the elite forces that were generally in control of both parties by the 1952 presidential election would be suspicious that his son Robert might also oppose their interests. However, an incident that occurred 12 years earlier, the first time Robert Taft sought the GOP nomination for president, had already solidified their opposition to him.

In 1940, war was raging in Europe, and many in the United States believed the country should get more deeply involved, even to the point of entrance into the war. Despite Franklin D. Roosevelt’s protestations (“I hate war”), it is beyond dispute that FDR was in favor of a direct American role in the war. Pro-war elites of both parties worried that the 1940 Republican nominee would take the noninterventionist position favored by the public, and perhaps defeat Roosevelt in his run for a third term, largely on that issue.

Interventionist Republicans settled on a utilities executive, Wendell Willkie, who was just as much an interventionist as Roosevelt. As reported by Taft biographer James T. Patterson, shortly before the Republican National Convention opened in June, Senator Taft and his wife were invited to a dinner party in New York hosted by Ogden Reid, the publisher of the pro-interventionist *New York Herald-Tribune*. Other guests included Thomas Lamont, a senior partner of J.P. Morgan Company; Lord Lothian, the British ambassador to the United States; John Pillsbury of the Minneapolis milling family;



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and Wendell Willkie. Also attending were the wives of Reid, Lamont, Pillsbury, and Willkie.

Lord Lothian was invited to make a few brief remarks on the situation in Europe. He implored the dinner guests that it was the duty of the United States to intervene on the side of the British. Lamont added his support for Lothian's plea. Willkie rose and added that he believed the United States should go to war at once.

The message to Taft, who was called on next to speak, was quite clear. If he wanted serious consideration for the nomination, he would have to ingratiate himself with the powerful financial interests that were beating the war drums. Demonstrating the courage of convictions that marked his political career, Taft directed the guests to his recent remarks in the Senate, in which he said that Americans did not want to go to war to beat a totalitarian system in Europe if they were just going to end up getting socialism in America at the end of the war.

A few days later, just prior to the opening of the convention, the *Tribune* announced its support for Willkie, as "Heaven's gift to the nation in its time of crisis." Willkie got the Republican nomination but went down to defeat in November.

Senator Taft again sought the Republican nomination eight years later, in 1948, but the Republicans passed over their leader for New York Governor Thomas E. Dewey, who was the GOP nominee in 1944. Over the years, Dewey had evolved from a noninterventionist Republican into an interventionist Republican. While Taft was the clear choice of Republicans across the country who admired his staunch support of limited government and free enterprise, the argument was put forth and repeated many times that, "We like Bob — but Taft can't win," causing many who would otherwise support Taft to support Dewey instead, despite the fact that Dewey lost to FDR four years earlier. In 1948, running against President Truman, Dewey ran an uninspiring campaign, mouthing such inane statements as "The future lies before us." The Republicans lost again, albeit just barely. (Remember the famous Chicago Daily Tribune headline "Dewey Defeats Truman"?)

But many believe Taft would have *won* if given the opportunity. Perhaps Harold Ickes put it best in summarizing why the Republicans lost with Dewey in 1948: "With the bases loaded, the Republicans sent to the plate their bat boy. They could have sent their Babe Ruth — Bob Taft." The word "they" as opposed to "we" is very apropos in this instance, since Ickes was a Democrat in FDR's administration. But why not send the party's best hitter to the plate? Could it be because Taft was not about to score a lot of runs for the progressive wing of the Republican Party — and the progressives knew it?

Enter Eisenhower

By 1952, it appeared that perhaps the Republicans had learned their lesson, because by then, Taft was widely seen as the obvious nominee. But rumblings of opposition to Taft began even before Taft won his huge Senate reelection victory in 1950. The Democratic Party was being pulled left by the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), and some within the Republican Party wanted a similar organization that would move the GOP to the left as well. The Republican variant of the ADA was created, thanks to the financial backing of Nelson Rockefeller, who would soon become the acknowledged leader of the liberal Republicans, and thus the creation of the name "Rockefeller Republican." The "Republican" variant was called Republican Advance, since Republicans for Democratic Action would be nonsensical, though fairly accurate.



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A former attorney general for Franklin Roosevelt, Francis Biddle, approvingly explained that the ADA's influence within the Republican Party, through Republican Advance, had been "rather striking." The goals of Republican Advance included getting the Republican Party to accept the premise of the welfare state that had been created by the Democratic Party. However, the Republican Party's most likely nominee for president in 1952 was an arch-opponent of the welfare state, Robert A. Taft. Taft had outlasted the logical left-leaning Republican opponents. Willkie was dead, and no one could reasonably expect the Republicans to nominate Dewey for a third time — not after his losing effort in 1948.

What Republican Advance and like-minded "Rockefeller Republicans" needed was someone who could stop the Taft nomination — and almost certainly win election to the presidency — in 1952.

The man they thought might be able to wrest the nomination away from Taft was in Europe, heading up the military forces of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO): Dwight David Eisenhower.

Literally millions of voters had served under Eisenhower in the European theater of the Second World War, and he was clearly popular and he possessed what every politician desires — nearly universal name recognition, which came from his famed military career.

While Eisenhower had never held public office, his rapid rise from lieutenant colonel to five-star general of the Army was indicative of his being a masterful politician and having friends in powerful places.

His meteoric rise began with a dinner in Seattle, Washington, at the Olympic Hotel in 1940. The hotel manager invited Eisenhower and some other military officers to share a meal with him and John Boettiger, and Boettiger's wife, Anna, the daughter of President Franklin Roosevelt. When Eisenhower realized who she was, he asked to be seated next to her at dinner. He commenced to tell her, for the rest of the evening, just how great he believed her father was. The next morning she called her father about Colonel Eisenhower. Within a few days, Eisenhower was called to the White House, and was made chief of staff of the 3rd Infantry Division. By September 1941, he was made a brigadier general. By February 11, 1943, less than two years from the time he was just a lieutenant colonel, Eisenhower was made a full general. Ten months later, without having ever been in combat command of even a battalion, and having never seen a battle, General Eisenhower was made commander in chief of all Allied forces in Western Europe.

How did a Republican win such rapid promotions from a Democratic president? Actually, during this time, there is no indication that he was a Republican at all. In 1909, Eisenhower had spoken to the Young Men's Democratic Club of Abilene, Kansas, and offered his opinion that any "intelligent young man" should become a Democrat.

Certainly leading Democrats looked upon General Eisenhower as one of them. In 1948, leading Democrats urged him to run for president on the Democratic Party ticket. These included Adlai Stevenson, James Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, Jr. (vice president of Americans for Democratic Action), Helen Gahagan Douglas, Claude Pepper, Chester Bowles, Walter Winchell, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Sidney Hillman. An Eisenhower presidential bid even had the support of David Dubinsky, who had raised money for the communist forces in the Spanish Civil War.

Moreover, Eisenhower, who had voted for Franklin Roosevelt in the 1944 presidential election, sounded like a Democrat — and a very liberal one at that. In 1947, he told the "F" Street Club in Washington that "inflation could be licked at any time, by a simple action on the part of the industrialists and other business leaders of the nation. They merely needed, by joint and voluntary agreement, to forgo profits



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for a year — or for two years, if necessary.”

Hardly the type of rhetoric one would expect from a rock-ribbed conservative Republican. Or even a “moderate” Democrat, for that matter. Such leftist rhetoric even from the mouth of avowed socialist Bernie Sanders would be jolting.

Even Democrat President Truman thought Eisenhower was a Democrat as late as the fall of 1951. But with Taft seen as the almost-certain nominee of the Republican Party, Republicans who detested Taft’s conservative political philosophy began to seriously eye Eisenhower as their champion to save them from “Mr. Conservative.” In *Look* magazine of September 11, 1951, Thomas Dewey wrote, “I am an internationalist. That’s why I am for Eisenhower. Eisenhower is a Republican at heart — but more important than that, he is an internationalist.”

Warren Moscow wrote in the *New York Times* on April 15, 1952, “There is some degree of similarity between the Willkie drive and the movement to nominate General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower. The same financial and publishing interests or their counterparts are behind the Eisenhower movement.”

No doubt.

Scholar Frank Chodorov summed up what was happening for *Human Events* in its April 9, 1952 edition. “Why is Big Business backing General Eisenhower for the Presidency? Things being as they are in this country Big Business looks to Washington for its living.”

Taft, on the other hand, “is of doubtful value to Big Business,” because “he has shown a distaste for the policy called internationalism,” Chodorov explained. Columnist George Sokolsky agreed, explaining General Douglas MacArthur’s support for Taft was because of MacArthur’s dislike of international bankers who were backing Eisenhower over Taft.

Human Events, then a very important voice in conservative circles, explained in January 1952 why they would do all they could to favor Taft over Eisenhower: “Bankers and financial interests which play ball with and profit from the Fair Deal (in contrast to those who engage in ‘straight’ banking) are just as much a menace to the weal of the country as Socialists, Communists and corrupt practitioners. These elements of high finance played a role, and a big one, in getting us into both World Wars.”

Taft clearly understood the stakes. He told Katharine Kennedy Brown, Ohio’s national committeewoman, “If we get Eisenhower, we will practically have a Republican New Deal Administration with just as much spending and socialism as under Mr. Truman.” He told friends that the “main Ike men seem to be international bankers, the Dewey organization allied with them, Republican New Dealers, and even President Truman. Apparently they want to be sure that no matter which party wins, they win.”

It was no half-hearted campaign by Taft. Between October 1951, and May 1952, Taft made 550 speeches to two million people. He pushed for a constitutional amendment to limit non-military spending to five percent of national income. Demonstrating an understanding of future hopes of the Republican Party, he adopted what a future generation would call a “Southern strategy” to win the nomination, pointing out that his father had appointed three southerners to the Supreme Court. Perhaps more significant, Taft opposed control by the federal government of offshore oil deposits, favoring state control over those vast resources in the Gulf of Mexico.



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Against his better judgment, Taft entered the New Hampshire primary despite the opposition of Governor Sherman Adams, an Eisenhower supporter. Eisenhower won the state 46,661-35,838 over Taft and took all 14 delegate contests.

But Taft dug in and spent 22 days in Wisconsin, delivering 250 speeches and capturing 24 of 30 delegates. He then won Nebraska's primary over Eisenhower 79,000-66,000. Despite Eisenhower's "hero" status for much of the American public, and his crossover appeal to Democrats, the anti-Taft forces found Taft a much tougher opponent than they had originally imagined. Taft won Illinois on April 9, followed by an Eisenhower victory in New Jersey on April 16.

Taft's home state handed him a resounding victory with 56 delegates, and he went on to defeat the general at state conventions in West Virginia, North Dakota, and Wyoming, while Eisenhower took Oregon, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

By this time, both the Associated Press and United Press International gave Taft a slight lead in delegates. But the *New York Times* revealed its bias with its reporting of Taft's resounding victory in West Virginia. After Taft captured 15 of 16 delegates in early May, their headline transformed this into some sort of defeat: "Taft Sweep Fails in West Virginia."

Foreign policy was a stark point of contention. With the Korean War winding down, some advocated intervention in French Indochina. Taft was adamant that "no United States troops should be sent" there. Arthur Schlesinger disagreed with Taft's noninterventionist views, dismissing his foreign policy as representing the "last convulsive outbreak of an old nostalgia."

These issues played a key role in Taft winning the last primary contest of the campaign — in South Dakota. The Eisenhower forces tried very hard to win it, with the contest so close. Taft spent five days there, and denounced universal military training to the pacifistic Mennonites. "Draft Ike and Ike Will Draft You," read Taft literature to the Mennonites. Not surprisingly, one heavily Mennonite County went 4-1 for Taft, and Taft edged Eisenhower in the state, 64,695-63,879.

After taking 30 delegates at the Indiana State Convention in May, Taft finished the primary and caucus season up, 462-389 in committed delegates. It appeared that Taft was poised to break the chokehold that nefarious forces had exercised over the Republican Party for a generation.

But it was not to be.

On July 1, 2, and 3, the *New York Times* ran editorials arguing that Republicans should not nominate Taft, because after all, "Mr. Taft Can't Win." Republicans should have been suspicious of such advice, coming from such a liberal newspaper. After all, as a staunch pro-Democrat newspaper, one would expect the *Times* would hope the Republicans would nominate the candidate who could not win.

The *Times* was, however, not the only media outlet expressing such sentiments, and many Republican delegates were nervous, some even echoing a variation of the media line: "I like Taft but he can't win." They wanted to win, desperately, having been shut out of the White House for the past 20 years. There is little question that the hearts of the delegates were with Taft, but given the hunger among the GOP activists for victory, the concern over whether Taft could win in November played a significant role in his ultimate demise.

What the Eisenhower forces needed to do was to somehow break the emotional hold that Taft held over the grassroots. While Taft had worked his "Southern Strategy" well, it was in the South that the anti-



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Taft forces found an opening.

The Southern delegations at that time were tiny parties, and in Texas, there was a considerable amount of infighting. Henry Zweifel of Fort Worth was the national committeeman, and strongly pro-Taft. The man Zweifel had bested for that post was Jack Porter of Houston, and Porter saw the presidential contest as a way to strike back. The Taft campaign was expecting 30 of the 38 delegates in Texas, but the Porter faction developed a strategy of inviting pro-Eisenhower Democrats and Independents to the Republican precinct meetings.

This tactic was illegal under Texas law, which restricted participation in party precinct meetings to party members. Zweifel developed a pledge for precinct-goers to sign, promising that they were truly Republicans. Porter, displaying an attitude that would make Machiavelli proud, countered by telling Democrats to go ahead and sign the pledge. "DO NOT BE INTIMIDATED!," read the advertisements sent to Democrats. He told Democrats that they could sign, participate in the Republican precinct meetings for Eisenhower, then return to participating in Democratic politics.

James Patterson wrote of what this led to in his book *Mr. Republican: A Biography of Robert A. Taft*: "Republican regulars in San Antonio and in some rural areas controlled matters as they had in the past. But in most urban precincts they were overwhelmed by droves of newcomers pledging themselves Republican and trumpeting their affection for Eisenhower. Some of Zweifel's men even tried to hold the conventions in their homes, only to find hordes of people overflowing into the warm Texas darkness. At some such meetings, where rival partisans shoved and punched each other, the atmosphere grew ugly."

Zweifel and other regular Republicans, staunchly pro-Taft, refused to accept that Democrats could choose delegates to Republican conventions. So they responded by sending delegates chosen by exclusively Republican meetings to the county conventions. Thus, rival delegations were elected to the state conventions.

With state credentials committees accepting the argument that the Eisenhower delegates were actually Democrats after 20 hours of work sorting out the opposing arguments of the two factions, the pro-Taft Zweifel partisans won 596 of 606 disputed seats, leading to a Taft majority at the state convention of 762-222. The Eisenhower forces waved signs such as "Rob With Bob" and "Graft with Taft," and chanted "We Like Ike," before they stormed out of the state convention. As Patterson noted, the regulars then named a delegation to the national convention that was expected to be overwhelmingly for Taft. The Democrats who were backing Eisenhower then held an alternative session, which, of course, elected mostly Eisenhower delegates.

Taft said the Eisenhower people's tactics would bring an end to the two-party system. He compared Porter's strategy of using Democrats to win Eisenhower delegates to a minister who urged his flock to attend another church the following Sunday and name his friends as deacons.

But the national media and the pro-Eisenhower forces used what had happened in Texas to portray Taft as dishonest, charging him with "stealing" delegates. Columnist Joseph Alsop called what Taft's forces had done in Texas "grossly dishonest," and "anti-democratic."

"Soon the Eisenhower managers were talking of nothing else," Patterson wrote. Some compared what Taft was doing to how his father had "stolen" the nomination from Teddy Roosevelt in 1912. For his part, Taft retorted, "The Eisenhower people are shouting about Texas, but all over the country they have used the most ruthless methods of eliminating Taft delegates."



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Governor Dan Thornton of Colorado and Governor Thomas Dewey of New York, Eisenhower supporters, convinced the 23 Republicans at the annual governors' conference to sign a statement that the Republican convention should not permit contested delegates to vote on the seating of other delegates. Even Taft supporters reluctantly signed the statement.

As the convention opened on July 7, the AP stated that Taft led Eisenhower in committed delegates 458-402. Half of the nation's top political writers predicted a Taft victory. As Taft arrived at the Conrad Hilton Hotel in Chicago, a sound truck circled the building, blaring, "Thou Shalt Not Steal."

Governor Dewey ordered Taft delegates in New York to support Eisenhower or else, reminding them that he was still governor, and would be "for the next two and one half years." Then, for effect, he added, "I mean that." Most of Taft's delegates despised the eastern "Dewey wing" of the party. As Patterson noted, "They considered Taft the epitome of integrity, dependability, and undying hostility to the Fair Deal." But these threats had the desired effect of holding the Empire State for Eisenhower.

The credentials committee sided with Taft in the Texas dispute, and also with similar disputes in Georgia and Louisiana, and it appeared the Eisenhower gambit of using Democrats to secure a Republican nomination had failed. But on the opening night of the convention, Governor Arthur B. Langlie of Washington offered an amendment to the rules of the convention. It resolved that no disputed delegates be permitted to vote on any contests until the delegates from the non-disputed states had agreed to seat them permanently. This resolution was shrewdly called the "Fair Play" amendment, and was an attempt to place the statement from the Republican governors into the rules. Its acceptance deprived Taft of a net advantage of 32 votes on ballots to determine the permanent seating of delegations Taft presently controlled in Texas, Louisiana, and Georgia.

Patterson set the scene: "The Langlie resolution also threw the convention into a turmoil. The Taft partisans booed loudly, Eisenhower delegates shouted back." With delegates largely unaware of what had actually occurred in Texas, the "Fair Play" rule passed. The Taft momentum had stalled, and his delegate advantages in three Southern states soon evaporated. Without votes from the disputed states of Texas and Louisiana, the pro-Eisenhower delegation from Georgia was seated.

Then, the convention gave Eisenhower 33 of Texas' 38 delegates. Before the night was over, Taft had lost 47 delegates in three states. This loss caused the inevitable loss of even more delegates, the unprincipled type who wanted to be with the winner, and in such a close race, this proved to be decisive.

When the actual roll call nomination occurred, Eisenhower captured 595 to 500 for Taft, with 111 for other candidates. Eisenhower was nine votes short of the nomination. Then, Minnesota waved its standard to change 19 of its 20 votes from Governor Harold Stassen to Eisenhower.

Consequences of the Taft Loss

It was over. Once again, the Eastern domination of the Republican Party would continue. One state that could have overturned the Eastern control of the party was California, but the Eisenhower forces let it be known early on that their senator, Richard Nixon, was being seriously considered for vice president, and that their governor, Earl Warren, could expect to be nominated for the next seat on the Supreme Court. Taft had offered nothing to California. He told a supporter, "It is hard for me to see how any real Republicans could be for Warren." After all, Taft reasoned, "He certainly represents all the New Deal



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principles.”

“Men and women continued to weep in the hallway, the elevators, the lobby downstairs,” Patterson wrote of the emotional loss for the Taft forces. Ed Tate, one of Taft’s longest and most loyal supporters, saw Dewey in a hotel lobby, and had to be physically restrained from hitting him.

We often hear how this or that election is the “most important in our lifetime.” Certainly the result of the 1952 nomination battle between Taft and Eisenhower established that the Republican Party would “make its peace with the New Deal.” While the Republican grassroots is undeniably conservative, its party in elected office generally follows the pattern set by President Eisenhower.

Eisenhower called his form of Republicanism “Modern Republicanism,” in which he would accept the international role of the United States, while at home accepting the premise of the modern welfare state as a federal responsibility. Senator Barry Goldwater derided Eisenhower’s domestic program of providing a more efficient and cheaper welfare state as a “dime store New Deal,” but most Republican members of Congress have largely accepted Modern Republicanism. President George H.W. Bush called Modern Republicanism a “kinder and gentler America,” while his son, George W. Bush, termed it “compassionate conservatism.”

The reality is that Eisenhower actually *expanded* the welfare state by accepting the creation of the federal Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Eisenhower’s vice president, Richard Nixon, added the Environmental Protection Agency and OSHA while he himself was president. And of course, President George W. Bush was the father of the infamous “No Child Left Behind.”

The year after his defeat, Senator Taft was stricken with cancer that would quickly kill him. After his death, several memos were found left on his desk at the Capitol, where he had served as the Republican leader. One memo had the cryptic words, “No Indo China.”

Certainly the 1952 battle between the senator and the general was a battle for the soul of the Republican Party, the results of which still affect us today.

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