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A Traveling Elk

The fact that Jim Farley devoted almost a third of his first autobiography, *Behind the Ballots*, to the story of the 1932 campaign to nominate and elect Franklin D. Roosevelt to the presidency strongly suggests that in 1938, when the book was published, Farley believed that this campaign was the most important period of his career. Farley's account is interesting both for its entertaining narrative and for the fact that he places more emphasis on the preconvention campaign than on the postconvention period. Farley's campaign story climaxes not on election night in November 1932 but four months earlier, in the sweltering heat of Chicago, where, deprived of sleep and desperate to find sufficient delegates to swing the convention behind their man, Farley and the rest of the Roosevelt team fought for and secured the presidential nomination. When Roosevelt triumphed (after four ballots and five days of intrigue and backroom deals), he became the first presidential nominee to address a major party convention in person. It was then, speaking shortly after seven in the evening on July 2, 1932, that Franklin Roosevelt pledged himself, famously, to "a New Deal for the American people."¹

Farley's narrative of the preconvention and postconvention campaigns falls foul of the usual autobiographical pitfalls. Rather implausibly, Farley contrives to place himself at the center of almost every incident of note on Roosevelt's road to the White House. As a result, his story is not always convincing, though it does provide one of the more valuable firsthand accounts of the 1932 campaign. It does not frame Farley's contribution to the campaign in its wider political setting, that of

the changing nature of the Democratic Party and its relationship to the New Deal. As Roosevelt's campaign manager and (after the 1932 national convention) as national party chairman, Farley operated at the hub of this vital relationship. His contributions to the Roosevelt campaign and his service thereafter to the New Deal administration are best seen in this broad context.²

The 1920s had not been a roaring decade for the Democratic Party. In the years during which Farley was rising through its ranks in New York State, the national Democratic Party was in disarray, struggling in vain to make any impact on a Republican Party buoyed by prosperity. Perhaps even more worrying for Democrats than the GOP's success was the fact that the Democrats were so divided among themselves. Deep-seated cultural, regional, religious, and class-based differences plagued the Democratic Party. How could the party of Alfred E. Smith and immigrant America also be the party of evangelicalism, prohibition, and William Gibbs McAdoo?

Such division and incoherence ensured that even if prosperity had ended or if the Republicans had faltered for some other reason, the Democratic Party would have been poorly placed to take advantage. There was a persistent vacuum in party leadership, many of the state organizations were on the point of collapse, and the national party apparatus was in ramshackle condition. In 1924, reporter William Hard compared the Democratic National Headquarters to "a Romish catacomb, or a Pompeian atrium, elegantly preserved but destitute." Franklin Roosevelt himself, in a moment of exasperation, described the national headquarters as comprising "two ladies occupying one room in a Washington office building." Again in 1924, following that year's disastrous national convention, Will Rogers quipped: "I belong to no organized party. I am a Democrat."³

In the 1920s, the Democratic National Committee was an unwieldy body with more than one hundred members. The party chairman received no salary and worked part-time. Al Smith pointed out that it was "the habit of the Democratic party to function only 6 months in every 4 years." Tennessee congressman Cordell Hull, who would later serve Roosevelt as secretary of state, helped to keep the party solvent between 1921 and 1924; but the party chairmanship fell into disrepute

under Hull's successor, Clement Shaver. Shaver was followed as party chairman by John J. Raskob, an ultraconservative businessman and antiprohibitionist who worked as a top executive for General Motors, Dupont, and Christiana Securities.⁴

Raskob significantly strengthened the party organization insofar as he poured one million dollars of his own money into setting up a permanent party headquarters, but his influence proved divisive. Perhaps one reason not everyone trusted Raskob was that he had been a Republican until 1928. When he took over the chairmanship, he immediately set about using the post to pursue an antiprohibition agenda, partly, it has been argued, as cover for the conservative economic views favored by him and his backers on Wall Street, in big business, and in the major utility companies. Raskob's hijacking of the party apparatus rendered futile any attempt to construct a broader organizational base.⁵

In these fallow years for the Democrats, Franklin Roosevelt was keenly interested in improving the state of the national party organization, though his power to do anything about it was limited. On December 5, 1924, Roosevelt sent a letter to three thousand local party leaders, including hundreds of Democrats who had attended the national convention in Madison Square Garden the previous summer, asking for responses to his proposals to improve the fortunes of his party. As well as expressing his genuine concern, the letter helped Roosevelt maintain the high profile he had established with his "Happy Warrior" speech for Al Smith in the midst of the convention fiasco. It also presented its recipients with a chance to vent their frustration at their party's parlous state.⁶

While many of the replies Roosevelt received contained positive suggestions for reform, they also tended to confirm that the party was ailing. The four most prominent themes that emerged from the letters were the weakness of the party's organization, the lack of positive publicity for the party, the persistence of sectional differences within the party, and the division within the party on the question of prohibition. Robert M. Switzer of Cook County, Illinois, for example, complained, "in the last campaign our national committee was not organized and ready to do business until the opposition had proceeded so far along the campaign highway that we were obliged to eat their dust for the rest of the journey." Another correspondent, Minneapolis lawyer A. E. Helmick, wrote

of the 1924 campaign: “We were absolutely stranded and cut off from communications. This bred apathy, lethargy and an indifference that broke down our whole state party morale.” Similarly, Daniel Carrington Imboden of San Mateo, California, bemoaned the poverty of the Democratic organization, especially in the western states, explaining that the “organizations broke down completely in California.” J. L. Andrews of Sheffield, Alabama, described the party factions of the West, East, and South as representing “three schools of political thought, which are a thousand miles apart in their political doctrines.” The party’s organizational problems, he said, were “fundamental [*sic*],” and “incurable.”⁷

In fact, though the Democratic Party’s problems were fundamental, they were not incurable. The Great Depression proved a powerful palliative; it destroyed the notion that the Republicans were the fail-safe guarantors of prosperity, made a reinvigorated Democratic Party easier to imagine, and thrust the question of economic recovery to the fore, thus substantially submerging the cultural and sectional squabbles that had dogged the party in the 1920s. Yet the Depression alone is not a sufficient explanation either for the success of Roosevelt’s presidential candidacy in 1932 or, more importantly, for the changing composition and durability of the coalition of voters that backed Roosevelt and the Democrats after 1932. Part of the explanation also lies in how Farley and Roosevelt, replicating the strategy they had pursued effectively in New York State, cleverly combined programmatic appeals with a concerted assault on the party organization. The result in national politics, as before at the state level, was that Roosevelt achieved a crushing electoral victory, allowing Farley to take command of the party machinery.

The parallels between the strategies Farley and Roosevelt adopted in 1930 and those they pursued in 1932 are striking. In 1930, Roosevelt had used Farley as an organizer, administrator, and mediator, seeking to build support in formerly forgotten rural counties, where basic structures were not in place and where leadership was weak. This organizational drive, in tandem with policies on such issues as water power and agricultural reform, helped to bridge the divisions—between upstate and downstate and between rural and urban—that had limited the Democratic Party’s vote-winning potential for years.

The presidential campaign followed a similar pattern. In the pre-convention period, Farley became Roosevelt's emissary to previously neglected areas, especially the western states, where he made vital links with prominent politicians and community leaders. Meanwhile, Roosevelt used his speeches and public appearances to present himself as a man capable of bridging the gulf between the party's agrarian and urban wings, while also reaching out to those independent progressives and Republicans who blamed President Hoover for the nation's economic woes.

The Roosevelt campaign's decision to single out the western states for special attention paid handsome dividends. In presidential elections, Roosevelt would carry all the western states in 1932 and 1936, losing only Colorado in 1940 and Colorado and Wyoming in 1944. Woodrow Wilson had won a majority of electoral votes in the West in 1912 and 1916, but in the three elections that had followed, Democratic presidential nominees had failed to pick up a single western state, despite mounting agrarian discontent due to the sluggish performance of the farm economy in the 1920s.

In the context of the 1932 campaign, the western states were important to Roosevelt not only because of the electoral college votes they could provide—and not just because the West was a reservoir of progressive sentiment of the kind he had long admired in such politicians as the indefatigable Nebraskan senator George Norris. The West was also important because the specter of Al Smith making another bid for the presidential nomination haunted the Roosevelt campaign. As long as Smith was in the race, Roosevelt could not be certain of winning a majority of convention delegates in the Northeast.

The Roosevelt team's attack on the western states was carried out on two fronts simultaneously. One front was Roosevelt's programmatic appeal to western progressives; a second was Farley's attempt to sound out and then strengthen Democratic Party support in the West. It was convenient for these twin thrusts to be perceived as separate, but they were not. Roosevelt knew that if he were to thrive in the long term, he needed a strong, nationwide organizational platform as well as the capacity to attract non-Democrats to the cause.

Of course, considerable potential for conflict was inherent in this

twin-track approach. One of the defining characteristics of western progressivism, after all, was its hostility to precisely the kind of politics Farley embodied. Farley's world was oriented around a strict code of party loyalty and the belief that party patronage was not just necessary but the very lifeblood of politics, the essential lubricant of effective political organization. Western progressivism, in contrast, privileged independent-mindedness and government efficiency, portraying the spoils system as morally iniquitous.⁸

After Roosevelt was elected president, these tensions soon bubbled to the surface. In October 1933, for example, when Farley, as postmaster general, was staffing government departments and agencies with Roosevelt loyalists, Senator George Norris—a progressive Republican who had supported Roosevelt the previous year—wrote to another pro-New Deal Republican, George N. Peek, stating that the whole process was “nauseating and disgusting to honest, patriotic citizens.” Continuing his tirade, Norris said, “it is particularly disgusting to those Progressives who supported Roosevelt, and are still supporting him, to realize that while he is doing everything he can to save the country from this terrible depression, men under him, from top to bottom, are not giving a single thought to the county or its welfare, but are doing nothing but trying to pull jobs from the political pie-counter.” In the immediate context of the Roosevelt team's efforts to round up delegates for the 1932 national convention, the clash of political philosophies between Farley and Norris was of little consequence: Norris was not a Democrat, so Farley never had reason to make any overtures in his direction. In this sense, they moved in two completely different worlds. But their early antagonism was a sign of things to come. Throughout the New Deal, Farley was caught in the cross fire between his commitment to the Democratic Party, on the one hand, and the ideological convictions of Roosevelt's diverse supporters, on the other. This contest between the party institution and New Deal liberalism defined the arc of Farley's career.⁹

Roosevelt began courting western progressives, both Democrat and Republican, in the 1920s, when he was seeking support for policies on public power that he had advocated in New York State. When he began his second term as governor of New York State, he already had powerful support from George Norris, Burton K. Wheeler of Montana, and

Clarence C. Dill of Washington. He had Norris's explicit support as early as March 1929, when Roosevelt proposed a trusteeship scheme for the development of hydroelectric power on the Saint Lawrence River, under which private companies would be forced to adhere to rates set by the trustees and accept the regulatory authority of the Federal Power Commission. Norris, who favored the provision of power at cost, a much more radical proposal, nevertheless welcomed the governor's speech, describing it as "a very brave step in the right direction." Norris plied Roosevelt with statistics on public power to help the governor make his case and discussed Roosevelt's plans with other western leaders, including Senator Thomas J. Walsh of Montana, the man who, had he not died en route to the inauguration, would have become Roosevelt's attorney general.¹⁰

In May 1930, Senator Dill wrote to Roosevelt asking that he publicly support a referendum in Dill's home state to provide public power in country districts. Dill was one of Roosevelt's strongest advocates in the Senate. In conjunction with Cordell Hull and Connecticut's well-connected national committeeman Homer Cummings, Dill helped persuade twenty-four Democratic senators to come out openly for Roosevelt by mid-February 1932. By July, when delegates gathered in Chicago for the national party convention, Roosevelt was able to bring several important western politicians into key positions on his campaign team, among them Wheeler, Walsh, and Nevada's Key Pittman. Another Montanan, J. Bruce Kremer, was selected by Farley to chair the Rules Committee. Gilbert M. Hitchcock of Nebraska and Joseph C. O'Mahoney of Wyoming sat on the Resolution Committee, which wrote the party platform, and Arthur F. Mullen of Nebraska acted as Roosevelt's floor manager.¹¹

Farley had little to offer when it came to attempts to draw independent progressives into Roosevelt's camp. He was much better suited to the task of working on improving the existing party apparatus and to traveling the country doing the kind of glad-handing work that others found distasteful. His apprenticeship in the local, personalized, and service-oriented politics of upstate New York in the 1910s and 1920s meant that this brand of political salesmanship came to him as second nature. His great skill, during the Roosevelt campaign and beyond, was in trans-

ferring the face-to-face, man-to-man political style he had learned in Rockland County and making it work for him in the national arena. It could not and did not work indefinitely—the New Deal changed American politics too much for that to be possible—but, for a time, it was highly effective.

One of the finest and better-known examples of Farley's political effectiveness is his western trip of June and July 1931. This was a crucial stepping-stone for a politician whose previous experience of national politics was limited. The trip was intended to fulfill several objectives: to make a provisional survey of sentiment among Democrats in the West and Midwest, to begin to line up delegates for the national convention the following year, to make clear that Roosevelt was willing to work with the regular politicians and strong enough physically to last the course, and to discourage state leaders from supporting favorite sons. It was essential that the man charged with this task should be tactful, shrewd, and good-natured, someone capable of striking up an easy rapport with almost anyone he met. Farley was made for the job. As Louis Howe explained to a skeptical Colonel Edward House, Farley's "wholesome breeziness of manner" and his "practical and businesslike" approach made him "temperamentally and physically the ideal man to use in the Western states."¹²

There is some disagreement as to whose idea the trip was. In *Behind the Ballots*, Farley claimed that Howe suggested Farley combine his journey to the convention of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks in Seattle with a political tour. Ten years later, in *Jim Farley's Story*, Farley wrote that he himself had first proposed that he "mix fellowship with politics" in this way. Bronx boss Edward J. Flynn disagreed, writing that it was Roosevelt's idea and that Flynn had been offered the job, only to turn it down on the grounds that he was not an "easy mixer."¹³

Regardless of exactly whose idea it was, the western trip was a severe test of Farley's physical, as well as political, mettle. The itinerary, which Roosevelt devised with Farley over lunch at Springwood, Roosevelt's home on his Hyde Park estate, was extremely demanding. Following Roosevelt's instructions, Farley left Grand Central Station at 12:10 p.m. on June 29 armed with a Rand-McNally map, a book of train schedules,

and a list of Democratic National Committee members and state party chairmen. The next nineteen days took him to eighteen states. He checked in to the Hotel Claypool in Indianapolis on the morning of June 30 and stayed for a few hours before taking the train to Milwaukee (via Chicago), where he spent just under four hours before catching the sleeper to Saint Paul. After spending a night there in the Lowry Hotel, he moved on once more through Aberdeen, South Dakota, and Butte, Montana, to Seattle, where the Elks were waiting for him. He was now one week into his tour. Then there was Portland, San Francisco, Reno, Salt Lake City, Cheyenne, and Omaha—all in the next five days. From there, this time by motor car, he headed for the Hotel Cornhusker in Lincoln. Then he got back on the train to travel to the Jayhawk Theatre in Topeka, the Muehlebach Hotel in Kansas City, and Chicago's Hotel LaSalle.¹⁴

It was a brilliant exercise in political intelligence gathering, but few were fooled by Farley's disguise as a traveling Elk. When he passed through Missouri, the *Kansas City Star* carried a cartoon depicting a plump, confident Farley standing before a herd of elk—each one with the name of a state branded on its flank—taking a telephone call from Governor Roosevelt. The caption read, "What are the Elks saying?" The accompanying article, with a photograph of Farley speaking with leading Missouri Democrats, was sarcastically entitled "Just an Elk on a Trip." It reported that Farley had taken an unorthodox route to Seattle, that his Elks business had for some reason taken him through much of the West and Midwest and into the company of hundreds of Democratic bigwigs, and that Farley had declared himself "embarrassed by the overwhelming response of the western Democrats who have seemed to be under the impression I was in the West to represent some particular candidacy." "Nothing could be farther from the truth," Farley claimed, adding, "I really went to the Elk convention at Seattle, you know."¹⁵

As he traveled around, sizing up the political situation in each state, Farley was careful never to make his advocacy of Roosevelt explicit. Instead, having been introduced as chairman of the New York State Democratic Party, he would drop Roosevelt's name in among those of other contenders (Smith, Young, Baker), see how the audience reacted, and take it from there. He was warmly received almost everywhere he

went. Kansas City was the one partial exception. There, he ran into former senator James Reed, who was Missouri's favorite son and, as such, a Roosevelt rival. Louis Howe had suggested that Farley withdraw from the prearranged luncheon at which he was supposed to speak, but Farley insisted on honoring the invitation. According to Howe, it was in Kansas City that Farley "won his spurs," expertly diffusing a difficult situation by skirting around the subject of the Roosevelt candidacy in his speech. After hearing him speak, Reed went up to Farley's hotel bedroom to congratulate him on his performance. Reed stayed in the presidential race but ceased to be a hostile foe thereafter.¹⁶

More typical was Farley's experience in South Dakota, where William W. Howes told Farley he had been a great hit: "It was a great pleasure to meet you. Our boys all liked you very much. I stayed in Aberdeen Friday evening and talked with many of them after you left. If you make as good an impression everywhere as here there will be no question but that Roosevelt will be nominated." Similarly, Washington State national committeeman Scott Bullitt wrote, "You did a lot of good in crystallizing the Roosevelt sentiment, even when you were unconscious of it." Oregon's Oswald West was equally effusive in praise of Farley: "Your visit was enjoyed by all those who had the pleasure of meeting and hearing you. You made a good talk and it put more or less ginger into our local fossils."¹⁷

Montana's Thomas Walker, brother of the Democratic National Committee treasurer Frank Walker, was also impressed. "Big genial Jim has come and gone," he wrote on July 5. The previous day, Burton K. Wheeler and other Montana Democrats had met with Farley for more than ten hours to hammer out their strategy, finishing at 11:30 in the evening. Farley was up again at seven the next morning. He barely had a "chance to wash his hands and face," said Walker, who reported feeling "as tired as a fat woman who sat up all day tightly laced waiting to have her picture taken." Walker added, approvingly, "Jim will have a real message to convey, and I am sure enjoyed his visit with us because we were nothing, if not enthusiastic, and as usual always positive, if possibly wrong. We, too, enjoyed him. He's a big, fine wholesome healthy heman, and so loyal."¹⁸

In addition to maintaining a hectic schedule of handshaking, lun-

cheons, dinners, and late-night convocations, the tireless Farley also found time to write eighteen reports, one for each state he visited. These were sent back to Louis Howe at Roosevelt's headquarters. The reports show that Farley targeted three groups everywhere he went: leading Democratic politicians (usually state chairmen and national committeemen), potentially supportive businessmen, and the local press. For instance, during the few hours he was in Wyoming, he met Joseph C. O'Mahoney, who was the Democratic national committeeman; had lunch with Lester A. Miller, a former candidate for governor; went to the home of John Olar, formerly of Standard Oil; and visited Tracy McCracken, editor of the *Wyoming Eagle*.¹⁹

Some historians have criticized Farley's handling of the western trip, alleging that he was too optimistic in his assessments of the balance of political forces in the states he visited. James MacGregor Burns suggested that Farley "did not realize the extent of factionalism in some states" and that "his one- or two-day trips did not give him the time to explore the many centers of power." But Farley's state reports show this judgment to be harsh.²⁰

The overall tone of the reports from the western trip is indeed optimistic. In a letter written from Seattle after the first stage of his tour was complete, Farley told Roosevelt, "If I continue to find the same sentiment in the other states that I have found already I will probably reach New York so enthusiastic that I will make a statement and those who read it will believe I am a fit candidate for an insane asylum." Of Wyoming, he wrote, "This state is thoroughly Roosevelt in sentiment, and there is no doubt but what [*sic*] the situation is in good hands." But Farley's confidence was invariably tempered by an appropriate degree of caution, demonstrating that he was well aware of the fact that his trip was part of his incomplete political education.²¹

Writing about Kansas, Farley noted that "sentiment is wholeheartedly for Governor Roosevelt" but that party leaders were "going along a little slowly before they commit themselves in any way." After stating that agricultural conditions in the state were such that "[n]o matter what happens we will be sure to carry [the state] in 1933," Farley expressed concern about "the one fly in the ointment," prohibition. He then gave a detailed assessment of the possible ramifications of mentioning prohi-

bition in the 1932 party platform. Democrats in Kansas and Nebraska wanted the subject omitted entirely. Of South Dakota, Farley wrote that while the “situation is satisfactory” in that the state leaders were behind Roosevelt, there was also “a minority opposed to them.” Admitting that he had no idea how strong the minority was, he concluded, “We will have to be very careful . . . and not tie up too closely with anyone but keep close enough to the situation so that no matter what happens our interests are protected.” In San Francisco, he secured the backing of Isidore Dockweiler, California’s national committeeman, and Justus Wardell, chairman of the state executive committee. They predicted Roosevelt would win the California primary with ease, but Farley was not so sure. “I think this is almost too much to hope for,” he wrote, explaining, “There is, among a lot of the voters, strong sentiment for Governor Smith, and more so than in any other state in which I have traveled.” These were not the words of an overzealous neophyte; Farley was a confident, yet prudent, politician who was well aware that there were gaps in his knowledge.²²

Writing about Roosevelt’s bid for the presidential nomination in his second autobiography, Jim Farley observed that “[v]arious men have staked out an assortment of claims . . . that they brought about the nomination by one effort or another” but that “the majority of the claimants did little or nothing to bring about the convention selection of Roosevelt.” Farley was understandably eager to ensure that his version of events became the standard account. He was not the only person to note the proliferation of self-serving stories claiming credit for the Roosevelt nomination. “Of the 56,000 Democrats alleged to have been in Chicago,” Roosevelt’s former law partner Basil O’Connor ironically observed, “undoubtedly 62,000 of them arranged the McAdoo shift.”²³

Farley had a better case than most for being regarded as the man responsible for breaking the deadlock at the convention. Farley’s links to the Texas delegation held the key. When the first ballot was called at 4:28 a.m., Roosevelt won a majority of delegate votes (666¼), but not the required two-thirds majority. Another 1½ votes were squeezed out in the second ballot, largely due to Kansas City boss Tom Pendergast. He, along with Missouri leaders whom Farley had met on his western trip,

was still loyal to James Reed, but Reed's chances were fading, and the Missouri delegation, who remembered Farley from his western trip a year earlier, was gradually creeping into the Roosevelt camp. A third ballot, however, failed yet again to provide a conclusive result. This time, Roosevelt captured 682 votes, but it was not enough. At 9:15 a.m., hundreds of weary Democratic delegates staggered out of the convention hall into the bright Chicago sunshine having failed to make a nomination.²⁴

Farley insisted, in *Behind the Ballots*, that he had Texas sown up even before the first ballot. He said that when he received a telegram from Senators Key Pittman and Harry Hawes proposing a Roosevelt-Garner ticket, he took it straight to the Texas delegation, where he informed his key Texas contact, Silliman Evans, that Garner was an acceptable vice presidential candidate. Evans fetched Sam Rayburn, and the two Texans turned up at Farley's hotel room at 11 p.m., where Farley and his wife, Bess, were preparing for bed. Evans and Rayburn indicated, without making a firm promise, that Texas might well switch to Roosevelt after a few rounds of voting.²⁵

After the third ballot, Farley was still convinced that this fragile promise, about which Howe had been skeptical, would hold good. He took a cab to the Congress Hotel, where he found Louis Howe. It was a strange scene. Howe, a chronic asthmatic, was lying prone on the floor. It was from this position that he had been intermittently coughing, wheezing, and barking orders through much of the convention. Marion Dickerman remembered that he "looked like death." Farley crouched down beside Howe and explained that Texas was now "the best bet." Howe agreed. This, in Farley's view, precipitated the tactical switch that secured the Roosevelt victory on the fourth ballot, when, after further dealings with William Randolph Hearst and McAdoo, both the Texas and California delegations fell into the Roosevelt column.²⁶

In *Behind the Ballots*, Farley presented his last-minute appeal to the Texas delegation as "an ace in the hole to be played at the proper time." This gives the misleading impression that a Roosevelt-Garner ticket was planned from the start. In fact, the Roosevelt-Garner combination was only one among dozens that were mentioned and pursued before and during the Chicago convention. The Roosevelt team's manage-

ment of the entire pre-convention campaign was a precarious affair carried out by men who, like Farley, were relative amateurs in national politics.²⁷

The Roosevelt campaign for the Democratic nomination had begun in earnest as far back as the day after Roosevelt's crushing victory in the 1930 gubernatorial election, when Farley released a boastful statement announcing Roosevelt's interest in the presidency.

I fully expect that the call will come to Governor Roosevelt when the first presidential primary is held, which will be late next year. The Democrats in the Nation naturally want as their candidate for President the man who has shown himself capable of carrying the most important state in the country by a record-breaking majority. I do not see how Mr. Roosevelt can escape becoming the next presidential nominee of his party, even if no one should raise a finger to bring it about.²⁸

This calculated piece of braggadocio was consistent with Farley's approach to the entire campaign, which was characterized by a confidence that at times tended toward complacency. In part, this was a symptom of Farley's characteristic optimism, but it also reflected the aggressive strategy Roosevelt and his team adopted.

In keeping with this combative approach, Farley's response to Roosevelt's 1930 gubernatorial victory was to send out a small booklet to Democratic leaders throughout the country with details of the party organization in New York State. It was no more than a compendium of facts about the New York Democratic State Committee. This opening salvo was designed as a means of extending the scope of Farley's nationwide correspondence. He followed it up with a letter containing a chart of Roosevelt's electoral performances in the rural regions of upstate New York, comparing them with those of candidates stretching back to 1916. This was another signal to Democratic congressmen and party leaders that Roosevelt meant business, a reminder that he had proven vote-getting ability in farming districts as well as in the cities.²⁹

Roosevelt could have opted for a passive, front-porch campaign.

That, as Farley acknowledged in *Behind the Ballots*, would have prevented him from upsetting favorite sons and would have given his candidacy the chance to gather strength until the time was right. Instead, Roosevelt's campaign team chose to run their candidate ahead of the field, in an attempt to capture as many delegates as possible early on in the game.³⁰

A front-running campaign was not without risk. It gave Roosevelt's opponents plenty of time to organize a coalition to block his nomination—and in the Democratic Party, blocking a nomination was not especially difficult. Since the presidency of Andrew Jackson, in order for candidates to prevail, they had to earn not just a majority but two-thirds of Democratic delegates' votes at the national convention. In the event, the forces behind the "Stop Roosevelt" campaign very nearly succeeded in this strategy at Chicago, and their failure owed as much to fortune as it did to the tactical acumen of Farley and Howe.³¹

The main locus of opposition to Roosevelt's bid for the Democratic nomination was the Democratic National Committee. The party chairman, John J. Raskob, and his assistant, Jouett Shouse, spearheaded the anti-Roosevelt movement, selecting Newton D. Baker of Ohio as their candidate, but also cooperating with Al Smith, who had strength among delegates in the urban Northeast, especially those representing largely Catholic areas. Baker, a lawyer who became mayor of Cleveland before being made Woodrow Wilson's secretary of war, had a reputation as a progressive because of his advocacy of municipal ownership and his association with Cleveland's reformist mayor, Tom L. Johnson. But his progressivism was limited to municipal, penal, and judicial reform and to administrative reorganization. Unlike Roosevelt, he never embraced the notion that the state could be an instrument of government. Baker's politics—conservative at home, internationalist abroad—were entirely amenable to the business and finance constituencies in the East that Raskob represented. Owen Young of General Electric, Robert Woodruff of Coca-Cola, and Thomas Lamont of J. P. Morgan were all Baker supporters.³²

Farley was lucky to survive Chicago with his reputation not just unscathed but enhanced. Inexperience betrayed him on a number of occasions leading up to and during the convention. One example con-

cerns the battle to secure key positions on convention committees. By the first week of April 1932, when Farley arrived in Chicago to prepare for the party convention, Roosevelt was guaranteed support from seven states: Washington, New Hampshire, Minnesota, North Dakota, Georgia, Iowa, and Maine. In addition, some favorite sons had moved over to Roosevelt's side, including Alben Barkley of Kentucky and Joseph T. Robinson of Arkansas; others, such as Maryland's Albert C. Ritchie and Oklahoma's "Alfalfa Bill" Murray, seemed to be fading. With his position improving all the time, Roosevelt decided to test the opposition by contesting Jouett Shouse's selection as temporary chairman. It was a blunder that almost cost him the nomination.

On April 4, more than three months before the convention, Farley and Robert Jackson were sent to a crucial subcommittee meeting of the Arrangements Committee. Jackson was a businessman with powerful Democratic connections who understood the intricacies of New England politics better than most. He had recently been appointed secretary of the Democratic National Committee. Farley, who was not a member of the national committee, was not permitted to participate in the meeting. As soon as proceedings were underway, it became clear to a horrified Jackson that Jouett Shouse had comprehensively outwitted Roosevelt, Howe, and Farley. Shouse, it turned out, had the necessary votes tied up well in advance. In a 1965 interview, Robert Jackson implied that Farley had been complacent.

In spite of Jim Farley's repeated public claims some of us were only too well aware we were far short of the necessary two-thirds. Whether Jim knew it I cannot say. By temperament a supreme optimist, he radiated confidence at all times. But Roosevelt, Cordell Hull, Louis Howe and I knew we must struggle for additional votes.³³

Perhaps Farley had begun to believe his own propaganda. Throughout the pre-convention campaign, he had insisted that Roosevelt would win on the first ballot. Al Smith, referring to this prediction, pointed derisively to "Farley's Fairy Stories."³⁴

Following an adjournment, a chastened Farley met with Jackson, Virginia governor Harry F. Byrd, and a group of sympathetic western lead-

ers in a bid to fashion a compromise. Byrd suggested that Alben W. Barkley be named temporary chairman and that Shouse be recommended for permanent chairman. After checking with Roosevelt, “recommend” was changed to “commend,” a subtle switch (justified on the basis that a subcommittee could only choose temporary officers) that allowed Roosevelt a potential escape route. This new proposal was passed through the Arrangements Committee under Jouett Shouse’s unsuspecting nose. Two months later, on June 5, having recovered their composure a little, the Roosevelt team moved in for the kill. They announced they wanted Thomas J. Walsh of Montana, not Shouse, as permanent chairman.³⁵

Even now, though, the Roosevelt forces were not in control of their destiny. Farley insisted, in *Behind the Ballots*, that he and Howe had always wanted Walsh for permanent chairman, but the balance of evidence suggests that this was not so. As Elliot Rosen has pointed out, Louis Howe’s agenda for the June 5 meeting gives no hint that Walsh was being considered. A letter to Shouse from his close friend Dudley Doolittle stated that Farley and Roosevelt argued against any such change. Doolittle thought they had been “over persuaded by the Senatorial group.” The *New York Times* carried a report that Roosevelt’s opposition to Shouse was a result of the efforts of Senators Dill, Hull, and Wheeler, a version of events to which Wheeler also subscribed. On this occasion, it is quite possible that Roosevelt benefited not from Farley’s political expertise but from the wise counsel of his western allies.³⁶

It is perhaps unfair to blame Farley for the way he handled decisions made primarily by Roosevelt and Howe. Farley can be held responsible, however, for the inept way he chaired an important Roosevelt rally at the end of June, on the eve of the convention. The Roosevelt camp had been toying for some time with the idea of securing abrogation of the two-thirds rule—which dictated that a candidate must secure the votes of two-thirds of the delegates at the party convention to be nominated—but had deferred a decision until June 24. This was their chance to test the water on this most delicate of issues.

Most of Roosevelt’s advisers, fearing that Al Smith or Newton Baker might deadlock the convention, were in favor of abrogation, but they were also aware of the potential dangers of such a move, especially as it

might stir up hostility to Roosevelt among the southern delegates who were most likely to be able to employ what was in effect a southern veto. When Farley, holding the gavel, raised the two-thirds rule issue, Huey Long, the maverick senator from Louisiana, stood up, took off his coat, and, to Farley's utter astonishment, made a barnstorming speech in favor of abrogation. Not content with merely making a speech, Long then proposed a motion calling for abrogation, seconded it himself, and carried the entire meeting.³⁷

Long's intervention was a disastrous development for the Roosevelt campaign. By allowing Long to dominate the meeting and pass his motion, Farley handed Roosevelt's opponents a golden opportunity to pick up some of the southern support that they so desperately needed. One of the New York governor's main opponents, Newton Baker, promptly issued a statement declaring that Roosevelt was "riding roughshod over the established traditions of the party." It would be "difficult," Baker said, "to defend a candidate who started out with a moral flaw in his title." When several southern senators threatened to defect, Roosevelt was forced into an embarrassing climbdown.³⁸

In *Behind the Ballots*, Farley admitted that he was at fault for losing control of the meeting, but he was less than convincing in arguing that there was nothing he could have done about it. "Farley had lost his grip," Molly Dewson later wrote. Dewson, who would work with Farley as head of the Democratic Party's Women's Division in the New Deal years, added, "He looked bewildered, confused and pathetic, like a terrier pup who is being reproached for knocking over a vase of flowers."³⁹

Farley's record in the preconvention period—and during the convention itself—was distinctly mixed. Roosevelt clearly benefited from the fruits of Farley's western trip, but such sparsely populated states as Arizona, Wyoming, and South Dakota could each yield only a handful of delegates. In one crucial state, California, Farley discovered that he had made alliances with unreliable former Smith supporters, a move that contributed to William Gibbs McAdoo's decision to indicate his support for the Texan John Nance Garner, who went on to defeat Roosevelt in the California primary on May 3, 1932. Farley was lucky in that the failure to spot that McAdoo was the preeminent political figure in Califor-

nia (with the possible exception of William Randolph Hearst) did not rebound on them more seriously at the Chicago convention. Arguably, only McAdoo's fear of a Baker victory saved Farley and Howe from bearing responsibility for Roosevelt's defeat.⁴⁰

Farley's links to the Texas delegation proved invaluable. His decision, after the third ballot, to use Silliman Evans to target Sam Rayburn proved a good one. Rayburn was the only man at the convention to whom John Nance Garner, at home in Uvalde, would listen. Garner and Farley would eventually develop a close political alliance. Both men actively opposed Roosevelt's third- and fourth-term bids, and they remained great friends until Garner's death, two weeks short of his ninety-ninth birthday, in 1967.

No one could fault Farley for any lack of preparation or effort. He tried every trick he knew to give himself an edge over the managers of other candidates' campaigns. He erected a huge map in the lobby of the Congress Hotel, with states he counted in the Roosevelt column colored in red. Farley thought this might sway undecided delegates. He distributed double-sided photographs of Roosevelt so that Roosevelt's image could be seen from every direction when his fans waved them in the air. He and Louis Howe put together a set of sixty-seven crib cards, each relating to a member of the Texas delegation. The cards noted delegates' personalities, political standpoints, and potential weaknesses. The card for Jim Ferguson of Austin, for instance, noted that he was "non-committal," "ruthless," and "intelligent"; that "Support of F.D.R. at early date would be *bad*"; and that "Support after commitments by Drys" would be "O.K." Jesse Jones's card noted that he was owner of the *Houston Chronicle*, that he was "Ambitious" and a "double-crosser" who "Promises everybody everything," and that he was "For himself first, last and all time."

This effort may well have helped to locate and persuade Texan delegates, many of whom, even after Garner had conceded his votes, were reluctant to support Roosevelt. The caucus of the Texas delegation held prior to the decisive fourth ballot went in Roosevelt's favor by only fifty-four to fifty-one votes. The margin of victory was small, but for Farley, its implications were profound. When Roosevelt finally secured the

required two-thirds majority, it was inevitable that Farley, who had been such a dynamic force throughout the arduous pre-convention campaign, would be regarded as one of the architects of the victory.⁴¹

Farley portrayed his role in the 1932 campaign as being a relatively straightforward story of how an individual with an unusual capacity for hard work, a degree of organizational and administrative competence, and a friendly, outgoing personality helped to elect a president. But Farley's role was not straightforward. His simplistic version of events masks the many ironies and ambiguities surrounding his contributions to the campaign effort.⁴²

One irony is that the nomination and presidential election were both substantially dependent on support from southern and western states, areas of the country with which Farley was unfamiliar. Farley made a good impression on his swing through the West in the summer of 1931. But this whistle-stop tour gave him little time to garner anything more than a modest understanding of either the region or its politics.⁴³

An ambiguity concerns how Farley was perceived—or misperceived—by political friends and enemies alike. When Farley toured the West, he thought he was traveling disguised as an Elk. He fooled no one on this score, but he fooled many—at the time and since—with an unwitting disguise: as soon as this New York Roman Catholic party politician with Irish roots stepped up from the state to the national stage, he became, indubitably, in the eyes of all but the most perceptive observers, a Tammany man. Though Farley had worked with Al Smith and was on good terms with leading Tammany figures, it was Rockland County and the small-town politics of upstate New York that shaped and defined him. When Farley visited Tammany Hall after the 1932 national party convention, having engineered the defeat of Al Smith, Tammany's darling, he was hissed at from the galleries and ignored by the sachems on the platform. He was never quite one of them. Many of Farley's colleagues, particularly female reformers from privileged backgrounds, such as Eleanor Roosevelt and Molly Dewson, found it hard to understand that his range was not limited to machine politics and politicians.⁴⁴

Of the links Farley forged in the 1932 campaign, those with politicians from the West and the South were to prove the most powerful and

enduring. John Nance Garner and Cordell Hull, for example, became not only Farley's close friends but his big-hitting allies, both in his bid for the presidential nomination in 1940 and in his opposition to the fourth term in 1944. Dewson's conviction that Farley was a mere "contact man with the city bosses" was wide of the mark.⁴⁵

Although Farley was frequently perceived by his contemporaries and by subsequent historians of the New Deal as a man with an affinity for city politics and politicians, his preconvention attempts to win city bosses over to Roosevelt's side in the 1932 campaign yielded an unimpressive harvest. Even after Roosevelt's nomination, significant support from city machines came only from Ed Flynn in the Bronx (one of Roosevelt's closest advisers) and Ed Crump in Memphis—though the independent Irish mayors James Curley and Frank Murphy (in Boston and Detroit, respectively) were also supportive. The loyalty of many of the northeastern cities to Al Smith was a considerable obstacle to overcome, but Farley and Roosevelt's other advisers (except perhaps Robert Jackson, who aided Roosevelt's cause with a cleverly crafted campaign in New Hampshire) were often at fault for failing to secure backing from the urban Northeast and Midwest. In the Massachusetts primary in late April 1932, the Roosevelt team's alliance with Mayor Curley—an alliance that Jackson, who knew that the real leaders in the state were Governor Ely and Senator Walsh, had warned Roosevelt against—led to a humiliating defeat by Al Smith. In the weeks that followed, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Jersey all opted for Smith.⁴⁶

The Roosevelt campaigners had as much difficulty securing machine support in the Midwest as they had in the Northeast. Before the convention, they failed to secure pledged delegations from Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, the states that Farley had described—incorrectly, as it turned out—as the "key to the nomination." Ohio's favorite son George White had an arrangement with Newton Baker and refused to budge. Indiana's delegation went uninstructed despite Farley's offer (during a flying visit in June 1932) of an important committee post related to the convention in return for a delegation pledged to Roosevelt. The new governor of Indiana, Paul V. McNutt, earned a lifetime's animosity from Farley for his refusal to cooperate. Illinois was pledged first to Senator James Hamilton Lewis and then to Melvin Traylor, a Chicago banker.⁴⁷

As early as November 1931, Farley had visited Chicago on a mission to

“investigate business and political conditions.” He attended a meeting of midwestern insurance agents and afterward wrote to his boss detailing the agents’ “universal condemnation of the Hoover administration” and their reluctance to back Al Smith, because “the forces of bigotry” that opposed Smith in 1928 might do the same in 1932. But Farley was far less enthusiastic about his meetings with Illinois Democrats, especially Chicago mayor Anton Cermak. In *Behind the Ballots*, Farley twice states that Cermak was friendly to the Roosevelt cause, but Cermak consistently refused to support Roosevelt. Cermak preferred Smith to Roosevelt because of Smith’s “dripping wet” stance on prohibition. Farley’s hostile portrayal of Cermak’s involvement in Chicago politics in his confidential report to Roosevelt suggests that Farley’s views had been unduly influenced by his Irish American contacts in Chicago, notably Democratic National Committee member Michael Igoe, who resented the ascendancy of non-Irish ethnic groups in Chicago politics.⁴⁸

Cermac [*sic*] is almost illiterate and the [mayoral] election swelled him up so that he lost all sense of proportion and decency. He surrounded himself with a crowd of thugs and bandits that are a disgrace to the community . . . The Irish vote is about 60% in Cook County and 50% throughout the state. Cermac [*sic*] has given all the jobs to the Poles, Slovaks, Bohemians, Germans and Jews, and naturally all the Irish are sore.⁴⁹

Farley’s attitude toward Cermak after the convention was much more levelheaded. Cermak—who, in March 1933, would be killed by an assassin’s bullet intended for president-elect Roosevelt—was placed in charge of the national campaign in Illinois, getting the nod in preference to members of the Illinois delegation who had supported Roosevelt at the national convention. Farley made a point of publicly congratulating Cermak on the excellence of his campaign organization. In November 1932, Illinois went Democratic for only the third time since the Civil War, giving Roosevelt a majority of 550,000 votes.⁵⁰

A similar postconvention rapprochement was made with New Jersey mayor Frank Hague, who had spearheaded Al Smith’s bid for the presidential nomination. In the week following the national convention,

Hague, who was eager to maintain his place on the Democratic National Committee, invited Farley to speak before a group of two hundred prominent New Jersey Democrats. Farley accepted and took the opportunity to offer an olive branch to other disaffected Democrats. In a comment aimed pointedly at Al Smith, who had as yet refused fully to endorse Roosevelt's candidacy, Farley declared, "Had the balloting given the nomination to Al Smith, Ritchie, Baker or any other candidate, Governor Roosevelt and every other member of the organization behind him would have been found in the ranks devoting himself wholeheartedly to electing that nominee."⁵¹

Once he had helped to secure Franklin Roosevelt's presidential nomination, Farley's power and prestige skyrocketed. He became Roosevelt's campaign manager and, shortly after the convention closed, was elected chairman of the Democratic National Committee, a post that he held for the next eight years. This second appointment put him in charge of a cumbersome and top-heavy party apparatus. It also placed Farley at the center of the clamor for patronage that was already gathering speed in anticipation of what was to be the first Democratic victory in a presidential election since 1916.

Farley's predicament in 1932, when he took over the reins of the national party, mirrored that he had faced in 1930, when he was made chairman of the Democratic Party in New York State. In 1932, Farley began a massive nationwide correspondence campaign in an attempt to forge new contacts and reinforce old ones. He paid special attention to party workers. He immediately renewed contact with the 140,000 party workers whose names he had collected during the preconvention campaign. He also sent twenty-five hundred letters to Roosevelt clubs, asking that the names and addresses of members be supplied so that material could be sent directly to each individual.⁵²

Farley also participated in the party's fund-raising efforts. He held a series of conferences with campaign managers in the various states, urging them to secure funding from local sources. Between September 9 and November 2, 1932, Farley made 70,600 written requests for campaign contributions. Some campaign methods demonstrated considerable ingenuity. On October 6, 1932, Farley gave his approval to the man-

ufacture and sale of an automobile tire cover—though the success of this venture may have been hampered by its far from inspiring slogan, “Let’s Get Around That Bad Times Corner with Roosevelt and Garner.” Farley also worked with Richard Roper, who headed the clubs division of the campaign. Roper’s “Shareholders in America” scheme awarded medallions bearing the profile of Roosevelt and Garner to generous contributors. Clubs competed to earn the most medallions, the winners receiving “a beautiful silver cup . . . to be known as the Jim Farley Cup.”⁵³

It has been estimated that Farley sent 1.7 million letters to Democratic Party workers at every level in the course of the campaign. These men and women were bombarded with letters, leaflets, and other campaign materials as part of a calculated strategy aimed at bypassing state and county committees. This, it was thought, would prevent the Roosevelt drive from being slowed by bureaucratic inertia or by the reluctance of local organizations—some of which were in decrepit condition—to cooperate with the necessary enthusiasm. Roosevelt and Farley did, however, collaborate with many state committees that had supported other candidates in the preconvention campaign. They worked, for instance, with Edward Pettus in Alabama, who had fought tooth and nail to persuade the Alabama delegation to desert Roosevelt.⁵⁴

At this early stage, Roosevelt judged that the risk of antagonizing party regulars by forcing them to stand aside in favor of handpicked Roosevelt men was too great. Farley was the last person to grumble at such an arrangement; Roosevelt’s decision was perfectly compatible with his approach to politics. He was happy to concentrate on the necessary, but mundane, business of accumulating information and forging links with as many loyal Democrats as possible, just as he had at the state level in New York. In this way, Farley began to make himself the center of a national political organization based, as he understood it, less on common ideological goals or programmatic aspirations than on loyal service to the party—service that would in due course be rewarded in the form of patronage. Working in this way with the party regulars, Farley began to attract the loyalty and admiration, as well as the cooperation, of his fellow Democrats. The party workers in the states became Farley’s power base.

Farley’s role in the postconvention campaign was confined to the administrative and organizational duties that arose from his new job as

national chairman and to consulting and reporting back to Roosevelt the views of prominent Democrats seeking to influence the conduct of the campaign. As Raymond Moley explained in his memoir, *After Seven Years*, Farley's party work at the Biltmore Hotel headquarters in New York City was kept separate from the policymaking and speech-writing tasks of the Brains Trust, whose base was around the corner, at the Roosevelt Hotel. When the Brains Trust was being set up, Farley made the call inviting the Columbia professor to join the Roosevelt team. He told Moley: "Issues aren't my business. They're yours and his. You keep out of mine, and I'll keep out of yours." Moley, the intellectual, took Farley at his word. In *After Seven Years*, Moley wrote that Farley would campaign for Roosevelt on anything from the Lord's Prayer to the *Communist Manifesto*. In a later essay on Farley entitled "Prometheus Unbound," Moley switched religious texts, straining for the most exotic analogy with which to compare Farley's nonideological political style. "If Roosevelt had decided upon the Koran as the subject of a discourse," Moley opined, "Farley would have enthusiastically sold the product."⁵⁵

This attempt to demarcate the boundaries between the Brains Trusters and the politicians, between policymakers and the policy sellers, was in one sense merely a sensible division of labor between two of Roosevelt's advisors, consistent with their relative abilities and experience. In another sense, however, it was deceptive, because the issues and the salesmanship, the ideas and practical politics, were two sides of the same coin. The twin-track strategy disguised the fact that the politics of the New Deal were forged out of the interaction between the politics of reform and their institutional setting. Moley, for a time, was associated with the former; Farley, through his chairmanship of the Democratic Party, with the latter. The separation of tasks that Farley and Moley were eager to emphasize in their memoirs is therefore misleading, for it masks the more significant fact that these two men were participating in the same broader political enterprise, the emergence of the new politics—a politics that, as it happens, would develop in ways that neither man would be fully satisfied with and that would leave both men disillusioned and embittered. Moley grew suspicious of Roosevelt's populist antibusiness rhetoric, believing that the New Deal had fallen prey to modishness and radical posturing. By 1936, he had completed his jour-

ney from influential insider to sour critic. It took Farley more time, but he would follow in Moley's footsteps.

On election night, November 2, 1932, no one could have guessed that this ultimately would be Farley's fate. At the Roosevelt campaign headquarters at the Biltmore Hotel, it was a thrilling night, filled with hope, expectation, and a great sense of possibility. Louis Howe could not quite believe what was happening. Roosevelt would win 22,815,539 votes to Herbert Hoover's 15,759,930, losing only six states (Pennsylvania, Delaware, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Maine, and Vermont) and accumulating 472 electoral votes to Hoover's 59. There would be 310 Democrats to 117 Republicans in the House of Representatives, and almost two-thirds of the Senate was Democratic. It was a crushing victory. Shortly after 11:00 p.m., with Farley and Howe at his side, Franklin Roosevelt spoke to his supporters. "There are two people in the United States more than anybody else who are responsible for this great victory," he said, continuing, "One is my old friend and associate, Colonel Louis McHenry Howe, and the other is that splendid American, Jim Farley."⁵⁶

Once Hoover had conceded defeat, the hundreds of Roosevelt supporters who had been massing outside the Biltmore were permitted to enter the president-elect's suite to extend their congratulations. When Bess Farley's turn came, Roosevelt leaned over and whispered, "Get ready to move to Washington." When she told him that she did not want to go to Washington, he replied, "Well, get ready anyway because Jim is coming down there after the Fourth of March."⁵⁷