1991


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Original Publication Citation
“VIRGINIA—There She Stands!” exulted the editorial writer of the Roanoke Times two days after the Old Dominion gave its popular vote to losing presidential candidate Richard M. Nixon on 8 November 1960. Indeed, for the third consecutive national election Virginia had voted for the Republican nominee. The Norfolk Virginian-Pilot interpreted Nixon's ultimately futile triumph in Virginia as a victory for Senator Harry F. Byrd, Sr., as well as for the vice-president. During the fall campaign the leader of Virginia's conservative Democratic Organization had maintained what he described as "golden silence" on the presidential election. He was anything but inactive in the contest; the extent of his intervention in behalf of Vice-President Nixon, however, was not known at the time. Although it was reasonable to view the outcome that November as a vindication of Byrd's role, the perspective of thirty years reveals in the 1960 election portents of the demise later in the decade of the Byrd Organization as the dominant influence in state politics.1

The 1960 election was another chapter in Harry Byrd's long estrangement from the national Democratic party. In 1948 and 1956 Byrd was inactive in the presidential campaign, while in 1952 he went on a statewide radio network to repudiate his party's nominee, Governor Adlai E. Stevenson of Illinois. General Dwight D. Eisenhower's impres-
sive victory in Virginia was attributed in part to the senator’s speech.\textsuperscript{2} Byrd’s tradition of nonsupport of his party’s presidential nominees might well have discouraged Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts as he planned for the presidential campaign of 1960.

Kennedy, however, was not at all deterred by Byrd’s record, and the Massachusetts senator seemed to have reasonable grounds for his optimism. In 1940 Byrd and the senator’s father, Joseph P. Kennedy, had been associated in their opposition to a third term for Franklin D. Roosevelt. More recently, cordial relations had been established between Senator Kennedy and the leaders of the Byrd Organization at the Democratic National Convention in 1956. When Adlai Stevenson allowed the delegates to choose his running mate, the conservative Virginians gave unanimous support to the youthful, moderately liberal Catholic senator from New England. Like most southern delegates, the Virginians detested Kennedy’s successful rival, Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee, a racial moderate who had refused to sign the segregationist Southern Manifesto. Although Kennedy supported the Supreme Court’s Brown decision, he did not seem, in the words of the Richmond Times-Dispatch, to be “a violent advocate of integration.” After the convention G. Fred Switzer, Virginia’s Democratic national committeeman, wrote to Kennedy that “[w]e of Virginia fell very much in love with you and your brother, Bob,” and that he looked forward to the day when he would “have the pleasure” of supporting Kennedy for the presidential nomination. Byrd himself informed Kennedy that he was “greatly disappointed” that the Massachusetts senator had not been nominated for vice-president. He believed that Kennedy would have strengthened the ticket, while Kefauver’s selection would have “the opposite result.”\textsuperscript{3}

Southern support had been indispensable to Kennedy’s efforts to win the vice-presidential nomination in 1956. After the convention he told journalist Arthur Krock, “I’ll be singing Dixie the rest of my life.”\textsuperscript{4} As he looked forward to 1960, Kennedy continued to cultivate the favor of


\textsuperscript{4} Parmet, Jack, pp. 378, 382.
southern Democratic leaders. It remained to be seen, however, how he would fare in competition with several other candidates, one or more of whom might be a southerner.

During the years from 1956 to 1959 Virginia experienced its most serious crisis since the Civil War. In February 1956 Byrd called on the South to organize a program of massive resistance to school desegregation ordered by the federal courts. He worked with Governor Thomas B. Stanley and other leaders to frame Virginia's specific response. In September 1958 massive resistance became a reality in the commonwealth when Governor J. Lindsay Almond, Jr., ordered the closure of public schools in three localities. The affected schools remained padlocked for five months. In January 1959 both the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals and a three-judge federal district court in Norfolk declared the massive resistance laws unconstitutional. Harry Byrd wanted Almond to defy the courts and, if necessary, go to jail for contempt. Concluding that their strategy was doomed, Almond called a special session of the General Assembly and secured the repeal of the principal massive resistance laws.5

Almond's abandonment of massive resistance left the Byrd Organization divided. Senator Byrd, his chief allies in the congressional delegation, and the leaders of the General Assembly were angry with the governor for his capitulation. The bitterness carried over to the 1960 session of the legislature when Almond proposed a substantial increase in the budget and a 3 percent sales tax to finance it. Three leaders of the massive resistance forces, Speaker of the House E. Blackburn Moore, Senator Harry F. Byrd, Jr., and Senator Mills E. Godwin, Jr., spearheaded the successful effort to abort the proposed sales tax. Almond later described the defeat of his program as "the politics of revenge."6

During these years John Kennedy kept up his contacts in the Old Dominion. He spoke in Lynchburg and Portsmouth in 1957 and in Bristol in 1958, and he made the principal address at the annual meeting of the League of Virginia Municipalities at Old Point Comfort on 20 September 1959. Confining his prepared remarks before the municipal officials to urban problems, Kennedy discussed school desegregation in the question-and-answer period. While expressing support for the Brown decision,

6 Wilkinson, Harry Byrd, p. 149; Ely, Crisis, pp. 144–45.
Kennedy said he was confident that federal district judges charged with implementing it would "use their good judgment" and recognize the difficult problems desegregation presented for the South. Kennedy's carefully chosen words were well calculated to appeal to an audience of white, middle-class Virginians.

During 1959 two attorneys, William C. Battle of Charlottesville and Stuart E. Brown, Jr., of Berryville, began independently to advocate Kennedy for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1960. The son of former governor John S. Battle, William Battle was a close personal friend of Kennedy. During World War II both men were PT boat skippers in the South Pacific. After Kennedy's PT-109 was rammed by the Japanese destroyer Amigari in the Solomon Islands, Battle commanded one of the vessels that took part in the rescue of Kennedy and his crew. The two men kept in contact after the war. Although Stuart Brown was also a veteran of naval service in the Pacific during World War II, he did not know either Battle or Kennedy personally. For Brown, politics was an avocation. He had developed a warm regard for the Massachusetts senator, and during the summer of 1959 he volunteered his support to the as-yet-undeclared Kennedy candidacy. Brown's offer resulted in a voluminous correspondence with Battle and Stephen Smith, the senator's brother-in-law, who was in charge of the unofficial Kennedy campaign headquarters in Washington. Beginning in late February 1960, Brown sent weekly memoranda on the political situation in Virginia to Smith, who stated that Brown's "untiring efforts" kept headquarters better informed than the political intelligence received from any other state.

Battle, Brown, and the Kennedy campaign strategists agreed that the senator should seek the support of both Governor Almond and Senator Byrd. In November 1959 William Battle and Robert F. Kennedy called on Almond in Richmond to gauge his feelings about Kennedy's possible candidacy. Robert Kennedy found the governor to be "friendly to Jack" but "relatively noncommittal." Battle also advised the younger Kennedy to maintain contact with Senator Byrd and his son Harry, Jr.

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spring of 1960 Battle arranged for a luncheon meeting of Kennedy and the younger Byrd, who revealed that his preference for the 1960 nomination was Senator Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas. Subsequently, John F. Kennedy remarked to Battle that he realized the Byrds would be for Johnson, but he hoped they would support him after the convention.  

Harry Byrd, Sr., chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, and Lyndon Johnson, the majority leader in the Senate, enjoyed a cordial relationship as colleagues in the upper house. A fellow southerner and the most conservative of the potential candidates for the Democratic nomination, Johnson was the logical recipient of Byrd's support. In the fall of 1959 Byrd assured Governor Price Daniel of Texas that he would do everything he could to help Johnson obtain the nomination. Expressing his "great personal affection" for Johnson as well as "admiration for his great ability," Byrd wrote that he was "confident" that Johnson could be elected.  

The enthusiasm that Byrd had displayed for Kennedy in 1956 had been superseded by personal friendship and political reality. There is no evidence that Kennedy's Catholic faith figured in Byrd's changing attitude. In fact, Byrd had campaigned actively for his fellow governor Alfred E. Smith of New York in 1928 when virulent anti-Catholic propaganda marred that election in Virginia.  

What bothered Byrd Organization leaders more about Kennedy was his record of support for organized labor. In 1958, for example, Kennedy told the biennial convention of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America that right-to-work laws and other legislation detrimental to the cause of unions should be outlawed. Such remarks caused G. Fred Switzer to recover from his infatuation with Kennedy. After Kennedy formally announced his candidacy in January 1960, Switzer informed a reporter that Virginia's Democrats would prefer Johnson and that Nixon would carry the commonwealth if the Democrats nominated Kennedy. Conceding that Virginia had supported Kennedy for vice-president at the 1956 convention, Switzer said that Kennedy was simply "too liberal, too pro-labor" to carry Virginia in the presidential election. Switzer's unauthorized statement embarrassed Byrd, who assured a correspondent that he "knew nothing about it until I saw it in the papers." Nevertheless,
Senator Harry F. Byrd, Sr., threw his support to Lyndon Johnson for the 1960 Democratic presidential nomination. Byrd, on the far right, stands with Lyndon Johnson, Lady Bird Johnson, Dwight Eisenhower, and two supporters.

Switzer's candid comment was prophetic of Senator Byrd's ultimate attitude toward the Kennedy candidacy.12

Fred Switzer's comment also gave additional impetus to the efforts of Colonel Francis Pickens Miller to organize a committee of Democrats loyal to the national party to ensure that the nominee of the Democratic National Convention would have organized support in Virginia. Miller, who unsuccessfully sought the governorship in 1949 and Harry Byrd's Senate seat in 1952, had emerged as the leader of the anti–Byrd Organization Democrats in Virginia after his return from service in

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12 Parmet, Jack, p. 428; Richmond Times-Dispatch, 5 Jan. 1960; Harry F. Byrd, Sr., to Mrs. John Garland Pollard, 11 Jan. 1960, Byrd Papers. Right-to-work laws were state laws, permitted under the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, that made it illegal to require a worker to belong to a union in order to obtain or keep employment.
World War II. When the Organization's leaders declined to support President Harry S Truman in 1948, Miller and others had organized the Truman-Barkley Straight Democratic Ticket Committee. The committee's efforts provided a much-needed boost to the Truman campaign in Virginia. In 1952 and 1956 the managers of Adlai Stevenson's campaign requested that Virginia's "national" Democrats not launch an independent committee so as not to offend Byrd. Nevertheless, the senior Virginia senator did not support Stevenson's candidacies. Consequently, Miller decided in the spring of 1959 that a Straight Democratic Ticket Committee should be organized for the 1960 election.

As a first step Miller sponsored a campaign during the winter of 1959–60 to secure sustaining members for the national Democratic party through a new group known as the Democratic Club of Virginia. This fund-raising effort was sanctioned by national chairman Paul Butler. Ultimately over 350 sustaining members were enrolled. After Switzer's statement in January, Miller wrote that "the leopard had not changed its spots. Only a fool would imagine that we could rely on men like Switzer to carry the State for the ticket." Miller called an organizational meeting for the Straight Democratic Ticket Committee on 26 March at the Farmington Country Club in Charlottesville. Two hundred Democrats representing all of the state's congressional districts attended the meeting. In his address to the group Miller stated that the committee was "not supporting any particular candidate. But if Kennedy is nominated, we intend to prove that Fred Switzer was wrong."13

During the spring of 1960 the Straight Democratic Ticket Committee continued its preparations for the fall presidential race. On 16 April the committee met in Richmond, offered to cooperate with party leaders, and passed a resolution urging "a complete mobilization of Democratic manpower and resources and the waging of a vigorous campaign." Meeting in Richmond on 18 June, SDTC officials chose Virgil H. Goode of Rocky Mount, commonwealth's attorney of Franklin County, as

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campaign director. They also adopted a budget of $27,000 and nominated a finance committee to raise the funds.\textsuperscript{14}

While the Straight Democratic Ticket Committee was completing its preparations during the spring of 1960, events in Congress confirmed Byrd's belief that Lyndon Johnson would be the best choice for the South as the Democratic nominee. The question was not whether Congress would pass a civil rights bill in 1960, but how comprehensive the legislation would be. The bill that Johnson guided to passage in the Senate was concerned principally with voting rights. Efforts by northern liberals to amend the bill by establishing an equal employment commission and by providing federal funds to assist communities to desegregate their schools were defeated. "In the final analysis," Byrd wrote, "it was the influence of Lyndon Johnson that defeated the most iniquitous parts of the proposed bill." He noted that "[t]he other two Senatorial candidates for the Presidency [John Kennedy and Stuart Symington of Missouri] signed the cl\textsuperscript{o}ture petition, voted for cl\textsuperscript{o}ture, and on the same day, voted to take away the right of trial by jury in Civil Rights Cases." In fact, Byrd believed that without Johnson's opposition cl\textsuperscript{o}ture would have been voted. Referring to the Democratic State Convention that had just concluded, Byrd added, "It is for this reason that I led the fight to instruct for Lyndon Johnson, and Virginia did so by a vote of 2–1."\textsuperscript{15}

The Virginia Democratic State Convention at Virginia Beach in May 1960, an apparent tour de force for Harry Byrd, was summed up by a Norfolk newspaper in the headline "Byrd Still Controls Democrats." After the split over massive resistance and the confrontation over the budget in the 1960 General Assembly, the Organization was deeply divided. Byrd was determined to reassert his command at Virginia Beach. A close analysis of the state convention, however, reveals that Byrd's dominance was not as secure as it seemed.\textsuperscript{16}

Not since 1932 when Harry Byrd had been a favorite-son candidate for the presidency had a Democratic State Convention sent an instructed delegation to the national convention. The unit rule would have assured all of Virginia's votes for Johnson. Why, then, was it necessary for the Byrd Organization to break precedent? The Organization's convention managers told delegates that Johnson's still-unannounced candidacy was

\textsuperscript{14} Richmond Times-Dispatch, 17 Apr. 1960; "Background of Straight Democratic Ticket Committee," Miller Papers; Richmond Times-Dispatch, 19 June 1960.


\textsuperscript{16} Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 24 May 1960.
Fred O. Seibel provided newspaper readers with a satiric look at the 1960 presidential election through cartoons such as "When the Roll Is Called Out Yonder."

in jeopardy and that Virginia's resolution of instruction was needed to retain the support of other southern states for the senator from Texas. Indeed, Johnson's prospects were not bright. No citizen of a southern state had been nominated for the presidency since before the Civil War. Kennedy, having eliminated Senator Hubert H. Humphrey of Minnesota on 10 May with a landslide victory in predominantly Protestant West Virginia, seemed the probable nominee. Undoubtedly Byrd desired to provide whatever aid he could to Johnson's candidacy; it is likely, however, that Byrd had another motive for sending an instructed delegation. Traditionally the governor headed the Virginia delegation to the Democratic National Convention. In 1960 this precedent meant that J. Lindsay Almond, Jr., would hold this potentially influential position. Despite Almond's statement to the press that he was "inclined to support Johnson," Byrd did not trust his former ally. He wanted to be sure that the governor had no room to maneuver the delegation at Los Angeles, especially since Byrd had decided not to attend the convention.17

It is difficult to ascertain what Almond's true feelings were about the presidential nomination. In 1969 he told an interviewer from the Lyndon B. Johnson Library that while serving in Congress in the 1940s he

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17 Ibid., 26 May 1960; White, Making of the President, p. 133; Richmond Times-Dispatch, 20 Apr. 1960.
had been "very close to and very fond of Speaker Sam Rayburn . . . and I had held that [Texas] delegation in very, very high respect. Somehow I felt closer to Senator Johnson than I did to Senator Kennedy." A year earlier, however, he had told an interviewer from the John F. Kennedy Library that before the balloting in Los Angeles he informed Kennedy that "at heart I was for him" but that he was bound to abide by the instructions of the state convention to support Johnson. Byrd's suspicions about the governor's intentions seem understandable.

The motion to instruct the Virginia delegation for Johnson caused the most controversy at the state convention. The resolution stated that the commonwealth would cast its votes "to secure the nomination of Lyndon B. Johnson as the nominee for president." Byrd assured Charles McDowell, political columnist for the Richmond Times-Dispatch, that the resolution meant that Virginia must vote for Johnson "as long as his name is before the [national] convention." Almond, chairman of the platform committee, had opposed the motion in committee. The motion nonetheless passed by a vote of twenty-two to eight. On the floor of the convention a substitute motion to send the delegation uninstructed was defeated, 521 to 1,042. Many years later political reporter Guy Friddell recalled that after the vote Byrd was so pleased that "he sat on the press table under the speakers' stand and kicked his heels and laughed like a boy sitting on a plank bridge over a river on a Saturday morning."19

Byrd's triumph was less impressive than it seemed. The margin of victory had been achieved by imposing the unit rule on each city and county delegation in its congressional district caucus. Robert Whitehead, an opponent of the Organization who was known as the conscience of the House of Delegates, criticized this procedure in a letter to a Norfolk newspaper. He pointed out that no district caucus had the power to adopt the unit rule or a resolution to instruct the delegates to the national convention. Only the body that elected the delegates possessed such a power. According to the party plan, district caucuses had only the limited power of nominating certain party officials for election. Whitehead conceded that the violation of the party's rules did not affect the outcome of the vote, but it did inflate the resolution's margin of victory. Miller


estimated that the vote would have been approximately 800 to 700 in favor of the motion without the unit rule.²⁰

Whitehead and Miller understood the real significance of the Democratic State Convention. Whitehead wrote that the reason for the vigorous opposition to the motion for instruction was that Johnson could not win the nomination and that many representatives wanted the delegation to the national convention to “assert positive leadership, with full freedom to participate in picking a winner.” He noted the “optimistic spirit of the rank and file Democratic delegates” who “indicated their willingness to carry Virginia for the Democratic nominee for president.” Miller was cheered by “the amount of independent spirit shown.” The convention had displayed “more opposition to Byrd dictation than in any previous convention in my lifetime.” He correctly predicted that “this is the last State Convention that Byrd will dominate.”²¹

The Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles elicited mixed reactions from Virginia’s delegation. Byrd and his neighbor and fellow apple grower E. Blackburn Moore, Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates, departed for a three-week vacation in the Swiss Alps before the conclave. Byrd admitted to a correspondent that he went to Switzerland “to avoid the Democratic Convention.”²²

The question of party loyalty that had proved so troublesome at the 1952 convention briefly threatened to disrupt proceedings at Los Angeles. Virgil Goode of the Straight Democratic Ticket Committee challenged the seating of Frank C. Vaughan, vice-chairman of the Richmond City Democratic Committee. After serving as a delegate to the 1956 Democratic National Convention, Vaughan had openly supported President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Vaughan had also indicated that he might not support the Democratic nominee in 1960. Leaders of both the Kennedy and Johnson campaigns realized the danger inherent in Goode’s challenge of Vaughan’s credentials. The Kennedy managers, including William C. Battle, supported a face-saving compromise whereby Vaughan signed the “customary party oath” of loyalty prescribed by the Democratic party plan. Those who chose to interpret this action as a pledge to support the convention’s nominee could do so, but historically the oath had not

²⁰ Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 May 1960. Whitehead, who was also involved in creating the Straight Democratic Ticket Committee, died unexpectedly on 8 June 1960.
²¹ Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 May 1960; Francis Pickens Miller to John F. Kennedy, 25 May 1960, PPP.
implied such a commitment. It did not keep Vaughan from supporting Nixon in 1960.

Everyone seemed pleased to put the dispute behind them. Kennedy had a pleasant visit with the Virginia delegation at a luncheon party given by Richard S. Reynolds, Jr., of Richmond at the Sheraton West Hotel. Several members of the delegation would have voted for Kennedy if they had had the opportunity; the Virginians, however, left the party hurriedly to carry out the instruction to cast their thirty-three votes for Johnson in the presidential balloting.23

The nadir of the Democratic National Convention for the Virginia delegation was the adoption of a progressive platform with a strong civil rights plank. Unlike the platitudes of the 1956 platform, the 1960 document made specific commitments that were certain to anger conservative white southerners. Proclaiming the right to vote as "the first principle of self-government," the platform called for the abolition of literacy tests and the poll tax. Segregation must be ended and equal access provided to schools, jobs, housing, and public facilities. Racial discrimination must end in federal housing programs. The document set a target date of 1963 for every school district affected by the Brown decision to submit to the federal courts a plan of minimum compliance. The attorney general should be given the power to initiate suits against violations of civil rights. To bring about equal employment opportunity, a Fair Employment Practices Commission should be established. Finally, the platform supported the sit-in movement against racial segregation that began in February 1960 in Greensboro, North Carolina. In caucus the Virginia delegates rejected the civil rights plank and stated that they would not be bound by it. White hair flying and waving a clenched fist, Almond told the convention that the pledge of support for the sit-ins would "invite a storm of lawlessness which would accomplish nothing but would worsen race relations."24

Another sensitive subject for Virginians was labor relations. The platform pledged the party to work for the repeal of Section 14(b) of the Taft-Hartley Act, which authorized state right-to-work laws. To Virgin-

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ia's businessmen and to the leaders of the Byrd Organization the right-to-work law was a guarantee of basic freedoms that must be preserved. For Kennedy, however, the platform was a strong document, "a platform on which I can run with enthusiasm and with conviction," as he put it in his acceptance speech.²⁵

The only consolation that many Virginia delegates obtained in Los Angeles was Kennedy's choice of Lyndon Johnson as his running mate. On the morning after Kennedy was nominated he invited Almond to join other governors in a meeting with him at the Biltmore Hotel. He asked for their candid, off-the-record advice on the selection of a vice-presidential candidate. Almond kept silent while the others gave their views. Finally Kennedy turned to Almond and said, "Governor, you haven't said anything. Would you express an opinion?" Almond replied that he would be glad to and gave a ringing endorsement of Lyndon Johnson. He stated that "the main object" was to win the election and that Johnson would "bring great strength to the ticket, especially in the South." In fact the election might be so close that "it could well swing on Texas, and with Lyndon Johnson on the ticket, I'm sure you can carry Texas."²⁶

Someone asked the question, "What about Virginia?" Almond replied, "Well, I think he [Kennedy] can carry Virginia. I know he can if Senator Byrd will come out for him." After the meeting Almond was asked to step into another room of the suite for a private word with Kennedy, who thanked him for the frankness of his comments. The senator, however, was disturbed by Almond's comment about Harry Byrd. "From what you said you didn't feel that you were too certain that Senator Byrd's going to support me," Kennedy remarked. "Senator, I'm afraid he's not going to support you," Almond replied. Kennedy said he could not understand why Almond doubted Byrd's support because Byrd had backed him for the vice-presidential nomination in 1956 and, "as you said, he was so adamant . . . to get the Virginia delegation instructed for Johnson." When he left the meeting, Almond felt confident that Kennedy would select Johnson.²⁷

Of course, it is impossible to determine what effect Almond's advice had on Kennedy, but Almond himself had made a favorable impression. He was soon informed that he had been selected to make a seconding speech when Johnson's name was put in nomination. The Virginia delegation

²⁶ J. Lindsay Almond, Jr., Baker interview; J. Lindsay Almond, Jr., Hackman interview.
²⁷ J. Lindsay Almond, Jr., Hackman interview; J. Lindsay Almond, Jr., Baker interview.
gave its unanimous vote to the Texan. As the convention ended, Almond called for united support by Virginia Democrats for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket, but in his heart he knew, as he had told Kennedy, that such unity “remains to be seen.”  

Virginia’s straight-ticket Democrats had no intention of waiting to see whether Byrd or the state party would endorse Kennedy. At Los Angeles Miller conferred with Kenneth O’Donnell of Kennedy’s staff and arranged for a delegation of Virginia’s “national” Democrats to meet with him in Washington after the convention. Their mission was to explain to Kennedy campaign officials why it was necessary to have two separate campaigns in Virginia. William Battle had been named executive director of the Kennedy-Johnson campaign in Virginia on 18 July. Two days later Miller wrote O’Donnell a letter confirming their conversation at the convention. Miller praised the selection of the “able and attractive” Battle, whose “primary responsibility,” in Miller’s view, would be “to activate the regular Party organizations in the cities and counties.” Victory in November, however, could only be accomplished “if two separate but coordinated efforts are made.” Battle’s ties to the Byrd

Organization would make it impossible for him “to rally the anti-Byrd forces, or to lead them on to the field of battle.” Miller believed “the negro leaders in particular, would not only not respond but be inclined to go the other way.” He assured O’Donnell that the Straight Democratic Ticket Committee contained people who had “won the complete confidence” of both black leaders and labor leaders. If the Kennedy campaign were to decide that “it is going to operate in Virginia exclusively through the Byrd organization,” Miller warned, “you can write off Virginia now.” O’Donnell met his visitors on 1 August and approved the coordinated campaign but asked them to try to work through Battle. If at any time they did not receive the cooperation they wanted from Battle or the State Central Committee, O’Donnell urged them to contact him, and he would see that their needs were met.29

Although he cooperated with the straight-ticket Democrats in public, Battle was not pleased with the divided effort. Many years later he reflected that the Straight Democratic Ticket Committee was “an ill-conceived move.” Battle regarded it as “a little bit vindictive because Miller had been a bitter opponent” of his father, former governor John S. Battle, in the 1949 Democratic gubernatorial primary.30 William Battle also objected because “it gave everybody the impression that there was no cohesive effort in Virginia.” His chief objective as campaign chairman was to see John F. Kennedy carry the state, “nothing further,” whereas he believed the SDTC was “trying to build a political power base” of its own. He conceded that the committee had influence with blacks and labor, but “I’ve got to believe that Jack [Kennedy] would have got those votes anyhow.”31

Battle’s assessment of the role of the Straight Democratic Ticket Committee seems questionable. The committee made a substantial

29 “Report, Presidential Campaign 1960, Virginia Straight Democratic Ticket Committee,” Miller Papers; Richmond Times-Dispatch, 19 July 1960; Francis Pickens Miller to Kenneth O’Donnell, 20 July 1960, Miller Papers. Miller was unable to be present at the meeting with O’Donnell because he was in Europe attending a meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. The report of the SDTC contains a lengthy quotation from a letter to Miller written by John B. Vance, president of the Virginia Farmers Union, describing the meeting with O’Donnell.

30 Francis Pickens Miller had mounted a spirited campaign in 1949 in which he excoriated the Byrd Organization’s role in Virginia politics. After Henry Wise called upon his fellow Republicans to enter the Democratic primary and vote for John Battle, the Organization’s candidate, Battle defeated Miller by approximately 24,000 votes. Miller believed that Byrd and Wise had made a deal whereby Wise would supply 50,000 Republican votes in the primary and Byrd would use his influence to gain the support of Virginia Republicans for Senator Robert Taft of Ohio for the presidency at the next Republican National Convention. See Peter R. Henriques, “The Organization Challenged: John S. Battle, Francis P. Miller, and Horace Edwards Run for Governor in 1949,” VMHB 82 (1974): 372–406; Miller, Man from the Valley, pp. 186–88.

31 Battle interview.
contribution to the Kennedy-Johnson effort, and specific evidence of disharmony is lacking. At Battle's request the committee delayed opening its state headquarters until 2 September. Miller recruited Ray Niblack, news director of radio station WINA in Charlottesville, to serve as executive secretary of the committee in charge of operations at its main headquarters in the Hotel Richmond. After the election Niblack wrote that "in most of the state our group simply went to work for the regular Organization committees when they were formed," but in some areas, such as Danville, Waynesboro, and Staunton, the Straight Democratic Ticket Committee provided "the only semblance of a campaign."32

In Richmond the SDTC faced the outright hostility of the party apparatus dominated by Organization stalwarts. Late in the campaign, however, two leaders of the Young Democrats, J. Sargeant Reynolds and Walter W. Regirer, became active and helped expand the precinct organizations in the capital. The Second District, consisting of Norfolk, Norfolk County, South Norfolk, and Portsmouth, witnessed the most effective cooperation between the SDTC and the regular Democrats. Delegate Henry E. Howell, Jr., leader of the anti-Byrd forces in the area, was on good terms with Frederick T. ("Bingo") Stant, a young attorney and chairman of the Democratic campaign in the region. There was no necessity for separate headquarters in the district as the two groups worked together to produce a Kennedy victory margin of 10,011 votes.

The SDTC, which received its principal financial support from Miller and the Reynolds family of Richmond, was able to launch a significant effort on radio and television for Kennedy. The SDTC sponsored six five-minute and two fifteen-minute statewide radio broadcasts, extensive advertisements in rural newspapers, and one major television broadcast. In an effort to counteract religious prejudice, the SDTC telecast statewide a thirty-minute film of Kennedy's speech on the relationship of church and state to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association. The SDTC also worked in the black community, with organized labor, and with farmers to attract those voters to the Kennedy-Johnson ticket.33

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Whispers in the Golden Silence

Byrd’s reaction to the Democratic National Convention was eagerly awaited by the other leaders of the Organization. Although he was vacationing in the Swiss Alps, Byrd could not get away from politics. He complained to his administrative assistant Marvin J. (“Peachy”) Menefee that the Associated Press had been trying to contact him, but he had been “evading” them. Menefee replied that the reaction to both the platform and the nominees had been “very bad” in Virginia. Congressman Howard W. Smith, chairman of the House Rules Committee and a Byrd ally, had told Menefee that the leaders of the Organization were awaiting Byrd’s return before deciding what to do.34

As the sultry days of late July passed, some Organization leaders became increasingly uneasy about the political situation. William L. (“Billy”) Prieur, Jr., clerk of the circuit court in Norfolk, regarded the party platform as “a stench in the nostrils of all self-respecting southerners,” but he wrote that he could “see no course for me other than to vote for the Democratic nominees.” Congressman Watkins W. Abbitt of the Southside Fourth District could not contain his anxiety and addressed a note to Byrd in Switzerland. “We are in a terrible situation,” he fretted. The working people and the small farmers as well as many of the county officials in his district were in favor of supporting the ticket. So far, Abbitt concluded, he had “escaped” the newspaper reporters, but he realized that “sooner or later something is going to have to be said.”35

In his Alpine retreat Byrd recognized the gravity of the situation. After reading news accounts of the Democratic platform, he decided that it was “certainly terrible.” Although still barraged with calls from the press, he advised Menefee that he would make no statement until he met with his “close friends.” After the Republicans nominated Vice-President Nixon on a platform tailored to meet the concerns of New York’s liberal governor Nelson Rockefeller, Byrd wrote that both parties had abandoned all principles. He believed that his “best course” was not to make any statement until after the postconvention session of Congress in August and “maybe not then.” Menefee, however, had reached a different conclusion. “Despite any strong convictions one would have,” he counseled Byrd, “it would be extremely difficult not to go along with the ticket and condemn the platform.” Byrd’s colleague in the Senate, A. Willis

34 Harry F. Byrd, Sr., to Marvin J. Menefee, n.d. (internal evidence suggests that this letter was written on 18 July 1960), Marvin J. Menefee Papers, ViU; Marvin J. Menefee to Harry F. Byrd, Sr., 21 July 1960, ibid.

Shortly after the floor demonstration in his favor, Senator Barry Goldwater mounted the podium at the 1960 Republican National Convention to withdraw his name from nomination and to urge his delegates to support Richard Nixon. Goldwater warned, "The Democratic party is no longer the party of Jefferson, Jackson, and Wilson. It is the party of Bowles, Galbraith, and Walter Reuther."

Robertson, had chosen this course of action in a speech to the Virginia Press Association after the Democratic National Convention. Byrd, however, was not swayed by Menefee. On his return to Washington he conferred with Smith and William M. Tuck and subsequently issued a statement that he had "no comment to make at this time on the coming election." 36

In an indirect manner, however, Byrd began to make known his political sentiments. On 18 August he delivered a significant speech in

Whispers in the Golden Silence

the Senate denouncing the Democratic platform’s plank on state right-to-work laws. He regarded this plank as a response to labor leaders, “insatiable in their demands for special privilege.” He believed that the time was “appropriate” for him to promise that he would oppose repeal of Section 14(b) of the Taft-Hartley Act “with all my strength and ability.” The Richmond News Leader asked editorially why it was an appropriate time to raise an issue that was neither in the news nor before Congress in the form of pending legislation. Answering his own question, the editorial writer noted that Kennedy had embraced the entire Democratic platform “with enthusiasm and conviction” in his acceptance speech. Therefore, “we may well surmise that Mr. Byrd was talking not only of his views on Taft-Hartley in August, but of his views on Kennedy-Johnson in November.”

Senators Kennedy and Johnson were so upset by Byrd’s speech that they requested a meeting with him. In Byrd’s office they spent an hour trying to convince the skeptical Virginian that leaders of organized labor would not dictate their agenda. Kennedy even assured Byrd that as president he would not seek repeal of Section 14(b) as the platform advocated. Still Byrd withheld his support. His staff had checked the Congressional Record and discovered that on 2 May 1955 Kennedy had cosponsored a bill to repeal that section of the Taft-Hartley Act.

In mid-August Byrd faced a potentially embarrassing political development in connection with the presidential campaign. Two independent archconservatives, C. Benton Coiner of Waynesboro and J. Addison Hagan of Norfolk, proposed a “Conservative party” ticket of Senator Harry F. Byrd for president and Republican senator Barry M. Goldwater of Arizona for vice-president. Both senators quickly announced their opposition to such a move. Coiner and Hagan, however, speaking for the Virginia Committee for Constitutional Government (also called the Bill of Rights Crusade), seemed determined to forge ahead with their efforts because both major party platforms were “based on political expediency” and at odds with the principles of constitutional government. Editor James Jackson Kilpatrick of the Richmond News Leader confided to a correspondent that “if I thought the Byrd-Goldwater nonprofessionals had a prayer of getting 280,000 or 300,000 votes in Virginia—enough to

The Crusade of Conservative Citizens placed C. Benton Coiner and Edward J. Silverman on the presidential ballot in Virginia. All of the Coiner-Silverman electors were pledged to vote for Harry Byrd for president and Thomas J. Anderson of Tennessee for vice-president. Coiner received 4,204 votes statewide on 8 November.
win—I’d be with them instantly.” In an editorial, however, the News Leader acknowledged that the effect of such a third-party ticket would be to split the conservative vote and give the state’s electoral vote to the Kennedy-Johnson ticket. The Richmond Times-Dispatch described the Coiner-Hagan effort as an “Idealistic, But Futile, Gesture.” Noting that they had been “warm and devoted friends for many years,” Byrd sent Hagan a letter and a telegram making his “personal request” that petitions not be filed placing Goldwater and Byrd on the ballot. Apparently Byrd’s plea had the desired effect. Coiner issued a statement on 29 August announcing that, although the committee would have two candidates, they would not be Byrd and Goldwater because “Virginians must always be courteous.”

As the campaign began in late August, Kennedy’s prospects in Virginia were not bright. Melville Carico, political writer for the Roanoke Times, described the task facing the youthful Kennedy in the Old Dominion as an “uphill fight.” At its meeting on 19 August the Democratic State Central Committee called for an “active campaign” for all party nominees but did not mention Kennedy and Johnson by name. State campaign director William Battle, however, was determined that there would be no repetition of the apathetic campaigns of 1952 and 1956. He had the unstinting support of Almond, who made speeches both in Virginia and in other southern states during the fall. Battle was encouraged in late August when Kennedy addressed an enthusiastic audience of 15,000 at a high school football stadium in Alexandria. Almond welcomed the party’s nominees to Virginia, and Robertson also attended the rally. Conspicuously absent, however, were Byrd and five Democratic members of the state’s delegation in the House of Representatives. The Washington Evening Star considered Byrd’s absence “a bad omen for Mr. Kennedy.” Byrd himself provided another portent less than a week later. Speaking at his annual apple orchard picnic in Berryville, he criticized the Democratic platform again. Referring to the election, Byrd remarked, “When I want to speak out, I do, and when I don’t want to, I don’t. . . . I have found at times that silence is golden.”


Byrd's attitude was undoubtedly one factor that encouraged the leaders of the powerful Democrats-for-Eisenhower movements of 1952 and 1956 to launch a similar organization for Vice-President Richard M. Nixon, the Republican nominee. These business and professional men were among Byrd's most faithful adherents. As one political observer wrote, "Senator Byrd's coolness to Kennedy can invigorate them like a frosty morning invigorates a hunter." At the Hotel John Marshall in Richmond on 8 September over one hundred conservative Democrats launched Virginia Democrats for Nixon-Lodge and elected former state senator Eugene B. Sydnor, Jr., of Richmond chairman. Sydnor denounced the Democratic platform and quoted Byrd's remarks on the plank regarding

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Harry F. Byrd, Sr., 27 Aug. 1960, Byrd Papers; Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 28 Aug. 1960. Robertson, who was a candidate for reelection in 1960, did not make a speech at the Alexandria rally. He gave reporters a carefully worded statement indicating that he would vote the straight Democratic ticket. Thereafter he was almost completely inactive in the campaign (A. Willis Robertson to John J. Wicker, Jr., 9 Nov. 1960, Robertson Papers).
state right-to-work laws. He also declared that Kennedy’s voting record was in accord with the desires of the “labor bosses.” The Virginia Democrats for Nixon-Lodge recruited approximately 2,500 volunteer workers and dominated the pro-Nixon effort in the thirty Virginia communities in which it was active. After the election the Richmond Times-Dispatch commented editorially that “this group of business and professional men, together with many housewives, put together one of the most effective organizations of its kind Virginia has ever seen.”

In late August and early September Byrd’s coolness toward the Kennedy candidacy increased. Senator Richard Russell of Georgia informed Byrd that Kennedy was going to advocate civil rights measures beyond those included in the platform. Byrd also had concluded that, if elected, Kennedy would attempt to weaken two of the South’s main bulwarks against civil rights and social welfare legislation, namely Senate Rule 22, which permitted filibusters, and the power of Congressman Howard W. Smith of Virginia as chairman of the House Rules Committee. Byrd was especially incensed by the statements of Robert F. Kennedy, the nominee’s brother and campaign manager, on a New York City radio program. Appearing on the “Barry Gray Show” on 24 August, Kennedy was asked about the failure of the short postconvention session of Congress to pass legislation advocated in the party platform such as the Forand Bill, which provided for a system of health insurance for the elderly under Social Security. In response Kennedy singled out Howard Smith for criticism because he was able to use his position on the Rules Committee to block progressive legislation that displeased him. Byrd found the attack “astonishing” because the Senate Finance Committee and subsequently the full Senate had rejected the Forand Bill. Kennedy soon realized that he had blundered in criticizing Smith, and he sent the Virginian a letter of apology for any “personal annoyance” he might have caused. He added, however, that he had “no apologies” to make for his convictions. Kennedy’s apology did not mollify Byrd, who obtained a transcript of the radio program and sent copies to Abbitt and Tuck. To Byrd, the interview indicated “what a dangerous man Robert Kennedy could be if he had the power.”

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Virginia campaign buttons for the 1960 presidential election. The large Kennedy button on the far right was distributed by the AFL-CIO, one of the organizations opposed by Harry Byrd.

By mid-September Harry Byrd, although still publicly silent, was working for the defeat of his party's presidential candidate. His office provided information emphasizing the philosophical differences between Byrd and Kennedy to J. Clifford Miller, Jr., a Richmond businessman and supporter of Nixon. Ironically, Miller was also chairman of the Richmond City Democratic Committee. What Byrd sought from Miller was a list of businessmen throughout the state to whom he could send copies of his 18 August speech in the Senate defending right-to-work laws and condemning the Democratic platform's plank on that subject.43


Byrd must have been cheered by the attitude of Virginia’s leading daily newspapers in the presidential contest. Both Richmond newspapers, the Times-Dispatch and the News Leader, made clear their distaste for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket before making a formal endorsement. The News Leader emphasized Kennedy’s statement in his acceptance speech that he could run on the Democratic platform “with enthusiasm and conviction.” Kennedy, the paper declared, would “exert the massive powers of the presidency and the Federal government to the utmost. He would bring suits to ram integration down the South’s throat . . . he would encourage racial block busting and race-mixing across the country.” The News Leader formally endorsed Vice-President Nixon on 14 October. Five days earlier the Times-Dispatch, edited by Virginius Dabney, had rendered its verdict that Nixon was “The Man Best Qualified To Be President.” The Times-Dispatch declared that on the “vital matter of basic principles and underlying philosophies . . . Mr. Nixon’s principles and philosophy are much more in accord with the needs of the country and Virginia.” Simply stated, Nixon was “the more competent and capable of the two candidates.”

The Fredericksburg Free Lance-Star stressed that “Nixon’s knowledge and experience” had prepared him “to provide better cold war leadership for the nation and the world” than Kennedy. The Roanoke Times declared that Kennedy and Johnson had made commitments “impossible of fulfillment” to special interest groups, but Nixon had made it plain that, if he were elected, no pressure group could expect special favors. The Times believed that the Kennedy program and the Democratic platform “would take us down . . . the paternalistic avenue . . . to the authoritarian state . . . with a vengeance.”

Among major metropolitan dailies in Virginia only the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot supported the Kennedy-Johnson ticket. Although troubled by the Democratic platform and Kennedy’s relationship to organized labor, the Norfolk newspaper endorsed the Democratic candidate as one who reflected “the new spirit of a new age” and a deep concern about the United States’ “ineffectiveness” in the world. Nixon, on the other hand, had “streaks of political opportunism” and an addiction to “formula-fixed

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policies" while demonstrating neither "personal warmth" nor "the lifting spirit of great leadership."\footnote{Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 1 Nov. 1960.}

In mid-September, several weeks before the major editorial endorsements, the Kennedy campaign reached its nadir in Virginia. The cause was an internal Louis Harris poll conducted between 1 September and 12 September. The poll reported that Nixon held a commanding lead of 50.5 percent to 35.5 percent over Kennedy, with 11 percent undecided. Discounting the undecided, Nixon's lead was 59 percent to 41 percent. The poll found that prejudice against Kennedy's religion was the "key factor" in the Old Dominion. Over half of the voters surveyed expressed concern about having a Catholic president, and a majority of those favored Nixon's candidacy. The pollsters refused to pinpoint a trouble spot for Kennedy in the state because, "with the exception of the Tidewater," the situation was "universally bad."\footnote{"A Study of the Presidential Election in Virginia," Louis Harris and Associates, Inc., Poll #846, 22 Sept. 1960, PPP. That the religious issue figured prominently in 1960 in Virginia is evident in the news coverage, the editorials, and the letters to the editor of the Norfolk, Richmond, Roanoke, Danville, Petersburg, and Winchester newspapers. Virginia's Catholic population was estimated by John D. Morris of the New York Times as less than 5 percent, while the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations as well as independent fundamentalist Protestants were strong in the state. In an effort to counteract religious bias the national Kennedy campaign asked Francis Pickens Miller to serve as coordinator of the Committee on Religious Freedom in Virginia (New York Times, 25 Sept. 1960).}

Aware that the Democratic presidential ticket seemed to be heading toward a third consecutive defeat in Virginia, many party officials began to express their resentment at the lack of leadership provided by Harry Byrd and his allies. During a 1,500-mile trip across the Old Dominion, George M. Kelley, the political correspondent of the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, found a level of discontent unprecedented in the ten years he had covered Virginia politics. State legislators were "restless," and so too were the courthouse officials, whom Kelley aptly described as the "life in the Organization engine." Republican victories in presidential elections had dual significance for these politicians. Federal patronage jobs were "slipping away," and voters might become so accustomed to casting ballots for Republicans that the Democrats' hold on state and local offices would be jeopardized. Some Organization loyalists were asking whether a politician who depended on a party to keep him in office had the right to hurt that party in an election. Did a leader who could not live within his party have the right to lead it? Such questions denoted a markedly different attitude in the Byrd Organization.\footnote{George M. Kelley, "State's Old Political Habits Die Out" and "Byrd's Quiet Stirs Disquiet," Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 2 Oct. 1960; George M. Kelley, "Democrats Tire of Silence," ibid., 25 Sept. 1960. Both}
Loyal Democratic voters were also demanding action. William M. Tuck wrote to Byrd that he was receiving letters "every few days" from his constituents "more or less demanding" that he endorse Kennedy's candidacy. Howard Smith came under intense pressure from Democrats in the Eighth District urging him to declare his support for the ticket. The Spotsylvania County Democratic Committee, for example, passed a resolution requesting that Smith endorse Kennedy. In southeastern Virginia, courthouse politicians, such as those in Princess Anne County, embraced the ticket enthusiastically.\(^{49}\)

The most visible sign of the Organization's division was the endorsement of the Kennedy-Johnson ticket by fifty-two Democratic members of the Virginia General Assembly. The legislators also sent a telegram inviting Kennedy to come to Virginia for a major speech before the election. Thirty of the legislators met William Battle in Roanoke on 23 September for the announcement of the endorsement, while twenty-two others were contacted by telephone during the meeting so that they could add their names to the resolution. Some of the signers were closely associated with Byrd, especially Senator Thomas H. Blanton of Bowling Green, who was also state party chairman. Two of Battle's former law school classmates at the University of Virginia, Senator William B. Spong, Jr., of Portsmouth and Delegate Kossen Gregory of Roanoke, had organized the legislative endorsements to assist Battle in what looked like a lost cause. The enthusiastic Battle stressed that the effort "really snowballed." The names of twenty-three additional legislators were added on 2 October. Ultimately ninety of the 134 Democratic members of the General Assembly endorsed the Kennedy-Johnson ticket. Nothing like this movement had occurred in 1952 or 1956.\(^{50}\)

William C. Battle, Kennedy's state campaign director, and Frederick T. Stant, Jr., campaign coordinator in the Second District, have confirmed Kelley's findings in separate interviews with the author.

\(^{49}\) William M. Tuck to Harry F. Byrd, Sr., 30 Sept. 1960, Byrd Papers; L. C. Mitchell to Howard W. Smith, 10 Oct. 1960, Smith Papers; Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 Sept. 1960. The Smith Papers contain letters from Charlottesville, Fredericksburg, and twelve counties urging Smith to support the party's nominees. The endorsement by the constitutional officers of Princess Anne County was especially noteworthy because the local leader of the Byrd Organization, Sidney S. Kellam, was considered close to Byrd (Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 30 Sept. 1960).

\(^{50}\) Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 24 Sept., 3 Oct. 1960; Richmond Times-Dispatch, 24 Sept. 1960; Richmond News Leader, 9 Nov. 1960. Battle and Spong also accompanied a delegation of state legislators to Washington three days later to meet with Kennedy and extend the invitation to visit Virginia personally. Of the original fifty-two signers of the resolution, thirty-nine were members of the House of Delegates and thirteen were senators. Another hopeful sign for the Kennedy campaign was the announcement by Representative Watkins Abbitt of the Fourth District, a Byrd intimate, that he supported the Kennedy-Johnson ticket. This endorsement left Senator Byrd and Representatives Smith and Tuck as the only members of the Virginia congressional delegation withholding their support from the ticket (Winchester Evening Star, 17 Oct. 1960).
The legislative endorsements were a good omen for the Kennedy campaign in Virginia. Although Nixon visited the state twice, the second Louis Harris poll, conducted in mid-October, indicated that the presidential race in Virginia had narrowed considerably. Nixon’s level of support had declined from 50.5 percent to 46 percent, while Kennedy’s had increased from 35.5 percent to 44 percent. The percentage of undecided voters had decreased only one point from 11 percent to 10 percent. Excluding the undecided vote, Nixon led Kennedy by two points, 51 percent to 49 percent. The poll attributed Kennedy’s gain to Lyndon Johnson’s successful campaign swing through central Virginia in early October and, more important, to “the current decrease in religious bigotry in Virginia.” The number of voters who dismissed religion as a factor in their choice of a candidate had increased by 8 percent since the September survey. Significantly the increase in voters preferring Kennedy in the October survey was 8.5 percent.

There are some possible reasons for the decline of Kennedy’s religion as a campaign issue. The Straight Democratic Ticket Committee rebroadcast Kennedy’s speech of 12 September to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association in every community in the state that had a television station. In addition, supporters of the Democratic candidate, such as Governor J. Lindsay Almond, Jr., were not above making skillful use of the religious issue to attract voters desirous of casting ballots against bigotry. The Harris poll also concluded that “without question, one of the real factors” in Kennedy’s improvement in Virginia was his performance in the televised debates. Two other issues that helped Kennedy were the declining economy and the Democrats’ stand on the problems of older Americans. What had appeared to be a Nixon landslide in the Old Dominion in early September had been transformed in one month to “a neck-and-neck race down to the finish.”

The Kennedy-Johnson surge in Virginia caused a general revision of campaign strategy. On 14 October Democratic campaign headquarters announced that Kennedy would spend one day in the state during the

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51 Untitled, Louis Harris and Associates, Inc., Poll #847, Pre-Administration Political Files, Robert F. Kennedy Papers, MBK. The second Harris poll does not have a specific date but states that “all interviewing was completed during the middle of October, some five weeks from the time of our previous study and about three weeks before Election Day.” An Associated Press poll published on 17 October produced results similar to the Harris one (Richmond News Leader, 17 Oct. 1960). Nixon spoke in Roanoke on 15 September and in Richmond on 3 October.

final week of the campaign. William Battle has recalled that "they would never have given us that time" in the last week of the race "if we hadn't made such a tremendous surge." Kennedy's increasing popularity in the Old Dominion was also causing Byrd much concern.  

Without technically abandoning his "golden silence," Byrd orchestrated a masterful campaign to ensure that Virginia remained safe for Richard Nixon. During the third week of October he mailed at his own expense thousands of copies of his Senate speech denouncing the Democratic platform's call for legislation to repeal the Taft-Hartley Act's authorization of state right-to-work laws. On 27 October Byrd introduced President Dwight D. Eisenhower at Mary Baldwin College in Staunton, where the president delivered a "nonpolitical" address to a crowd estimated at 7,000 to 10,000 on the occasion of the annual meeting of the Woodrow Wilson Birthplace Foundation. Byrd, first vice-president of the foundation, praised Eisenhower as one who "kept the faith" and "preserved the peace without surrender of principle." The political implications of Byrd's actions less than two weeks before the election were obvious to the Richmond Times-Dispatch. Referring to Byrd and Eisenhower as "virtual ideological soul-mates," the paper commented editorially that "if there was ever any doubt that Sen. Harry F. Byrd is opposed to the presidential candidacy of Sen. John F. Kennedy . . . events of this week have removed it." Significantly, the White House had not scheduled the president's visit until 14 October, after the presidential race had narrowed in Virginia.

The third and probably most effective aspect of Byrd's clandestine warfare against the Kennedy candidacy involved the race issue. In late October Byrd's friend Speaker E. Blackburn Moore released to the press a letter he had written to William Battle asking that John Kennedy pledge not to appoint any Negro as a federal judge in the South. The letter noted that Kennedy had made remarks during the campaign indicating his

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53 Richmond Times-Dispatch, 15 Oct. 1960; Battle interview.
54 Richmond Times-Dispatch, 25, 28 Oct. 1960; text of remarks by Harry F. Byrd, Sr., introducing President Eisenhower before the annual meeting of the Woodrow Wilson Birthplace Foundation, 27 Oct. 1960, Byrd Papers; Richmond Times-Dispatch, 15, 28 Oct. 1960. Accompanying Eisenhower to Staunton was General Wilton B. ("Jerry") Persons, who had succeeded Sherman Adams as assistant to the president. Persons, a former superintendent of Staunton Military Academy, was a longtime friend of Eisenhower. Persons had served him as chief of congressional liaison when Eisenhower was army chief of staff, supreme commander of the Allied powers in Europe, and president before succeeding Adams (Fred I. Greenstein, The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader [New York, 1982], p. 147). Correspondence in the Byrd Papers indicates that the senator and Persons enjoyed a cordial relationship. As White House chief of staff, Persons was in a position to exert considerable influence on the decision to accept the invitation from the Wilson Birthplace Foundation.
intention to elevate Negroes to the federal bench. Moore wrote that such appointments combined with the Democratic platform’s commitment to rapid progress toward school desegregation could produce “chaos” in Virginia and throughout the South.

Battle first learned of Moore’s letter from a newspaper reporter. In a formal response the next day he decried it as “a political maneuver . . . to fan the racial question, rather than a sincere attempt to secure information.” He pointed out that all federal judges must be confirmed by the Senate and that historically the Senate had rejected nominees who were objectionable to senators of the state in which the judge was appointed. The Danville Register on Virginia’s Southside called Battle’s reply “Hardly a Suitable Response.” Moore himself declared that he was not satisfied with Battle’s answer and renewed his request in a second letter on 28 October. Robert Kennedy, speaking in Richmond on 1 November, responded that Virginia’s Democratic leaders would be consulted on judicial appointments and their recommendations carefully

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55 Specifically Moore quoted remarks by Kennedy to the National Bar Association, an organization of black lawyers, in early September and comments by the candidate on the 16 October broadcast of “Meet the Press.” The full text of the first Moore letter is in the Winchester Evening Star, 27 Oct. 1960.
Time Will Tell

VIRGINIA'S
12 ELECTORAL VOTES

HOW'S THE
APPLE CROP
THIS YEAR,
SENATOR?

STAUNTON,
VA.

"NON-POLITICAL
TRIP"

10-27-40

To Senator Harry F. Byrd,
with my best wishes,
Fred O. Seibel

Fred O. Seibel Papers (#2531), University of Virginia Library
considered. He affirmed, however, that such appointments would be made on the basis of ability and qualifications, not race, creed, or color.\textsuperscript{56}

Although it is not possible to measure scientifically the effect of Moore’s letters on the Virginia electorate, the introduction of the race issue into the campaign placed the Kennedy forces on the defensive and helped to arrest their momentum.\textsuperscript{57} William Battle has recalled that “it hurt because that not only threw a scare into the racists but it also, well, it was no longer golden silence because everybody damn well knew that Blackie Moore was Byrd’s henchman.” That Byrd was behind the Moore letters can hardly be doubted. Research material used in preparing the first letter can be found in the Byrd Papers at the University of Virginia Library. The documents are marked in Byrd’s handwriting.\textsuperscript{58} Thousands of copies of Moore’s first letter were circulated during the final ten days of the campaign in Southside Virginia and other areas where racial feelings were strong. Byrd himself wrote to General Wilton B. Persons, Eisenhower’s chief of staff at the White House, enclosing copies of Moore’s letters and Battle’s first reply. “This has gone all through the South,” Byrd wrote, “and I think is enormously effective.”\textsuperscript{59}

Kennedy’s rising popularity in the Old Dominion was not the only reason for Byrd’s raising the race issue. On 12 October the Republican


\textsuperscript{57} The only polling data available for the period after the Moore-Battle exchange were the result of telephone interviews of 200 men and 200 women conducted by the research department of Richmond Newspapers, Inc. All those contacted were qualified voters in Richmond and its conservative suburbs, Chesterfield and Henrico counties. The poll showed that Kennedy’s support had declined from 32 percent to 27 percent since early October, while Nixon’s rating had jumped from 43 percent to 54 percent in the same period. Unfortunately the polltakers asked no follow-up questions to ascertain the reason for the Nixon surge at a time when Kennedy held a six-point lead in the Gallup poll nationwide (Richmond Times-Dispatch, 5 Nov. 1960).

\textsuperscript{58} Box 245 of the Byrd Papers contains a folder labeled “Kennedy John and Robert, Re Civil Rights and Right to Work Laws.” Included in this folder are a clipping and a typescript copy of an article from the Columbia [S.C.] State containing Kennedy’s remarks to the National Bar Association and a transcript of Kennedy’s “Meet the Press” interview. Before the passage in the transcript quoted by Moore, Byrd inserted the words “Kennedy said” in his own hand. Byrd sent a copy of the “Meet the Press” transcript to former governor James F. Byrnes of South Carolina and informed Byrnes that he was eager to obtain Kennedy’s statement about judicial appointments (Harry F. Byrd, Sr., to James F. Byrnes, 19, 21 Oct. 1960, Byrd Papers). It is likely that Byrnes sent Byrd the clipping from the Columbia State.

\textsuperscript{59} Battle interview; Richmond Times-Dispatch, 9 Nov. 1960; Harry F. Byrd, Sr., to Wilton B. Persons, 28 Oct. 1960, Byrd Papers. In his response to Moore’s second letter Battle enclosed a statement authorized by John F. Kennedy that reiterated the assurances given by Robert Kennedy on 1 November in Richmond (Richmond Times-Dispatch, 6 Nov. 1960). On the same day that Moore’s first letter was published, newspapers reported that Senator Kennedy had telephoned Coretta Scott King to express his concern and pledge his help after the jailing of her husband, civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., in rural Georgia (New York Post, 27 Oct. 1960).
Richard M. Nixon and Henry Cabot Lodge congratulate one another on the night they accepted their party's nomination. Lodge later alarmed the Virginia Democrats for Nixon-Lodge by pledging at a campaign rally in Harlem that Nixon would appoint a black to his cabinet.

vice-presidential candidate, Henry Cabot Lodge, had pledged to a campaign rally in the East Harlem section of New York City that Nixon, if elected, would appoint a Negro to his cabinet. Although the statement angered Nixon's staff, Lodge repeated it as a prediction rather than a promise six days later. The Kennedy campaign in Virginia took advantage of Lodge's controversial remarks. Battle called it an attempt to buy Negro votes with "a blatant political promise." By raising the question of appointing Negro judges, Byrd was attempting to divert the electorate's attention from Lodge's statements. Byrd therefore cautioned Persons: "It is imperative that neither of your candidates make any statements in favor of Negro Federal Judges. . . . I hope you will contact the proper persons to avoid such statements."60

Whispers in the Golden Silence

Taking their cue from Byrd, the Democrats for Nixon-Lodge exploited the race issue in the remaining days of the campaign. One advertisement was captioned “Kennedy’s Plan To Humiliate the South” and featured an attack on Kennedy’s “radical” civil rights promises beneath a drawing of a pair of wrists bound with rope. Collins Denny, an attorney in Richmond and a staunch segregationist, made daily radio broadcasts in Southside Virginia warning that, if elected, Kennedy would appoint a Negro judge in the state. The Nixon Democrats, who had emerged as the principal Republican campaign organization in eastern Virginia, obtained a copy of a letter from black representative Adam Clayton Powell to his constituency in Harlem urging Kennedy’s election. Powell stressed the Massachusetts senator’s support for such programs as “massive scholarship assistance for African students” and a Fair Employment Practices Commission. J. Clifford Miller, Jr., mailed over 14,000 copies of the letter to voters in central Virginia and on the Southside. He also enclosed copies of clippings from New York newspapers relating Kennedy’s efforts to obtain the release of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., from jail in rural Georgia. So that no one could miss the point, the Nixon Democrats reproduced the Powell letter in large newspaper advertisements under the headline “Adam Clayton Powell Speaks For Kennedy.”

The negative campaign of the Nixon Democrats did not dampen the enthusiastic reception for John F. Kennedy when he visited Norfolk and Roanoke on 4 November. The morning rally in Norfolk attracted between 12,000 and 20,000, an unprecedented number for a political rally in the port city. Having misplaced his text, Kennedy improvised a humorous talk contrasting Richard Nixon and Thomas Jefferson, much to the vice-president’s disadvantage and to the delight of the crowd. At the airport in Roanoke an excited throng estimated at between 15,000 and 25,000 heard Kennedy pledge that his administration would be dedicated to fiscal responsibility. In Norfolk the Virginian-Pilot described Kennedy’s


61 In October 1960 there was a vacant federal judgeship in Virginia. Moore referred to this vacancy in both of his letters to Battle (Winchester Evening Star, 27 Oct. 1960; Danville Register, 29 Oct. 1960). The first black federal judge in Virginia, James R. Spencer, was appointed by Ronald Reagan in 1986 (Richmond Times-Dispatch, 1 Nov. 1986).

visit as a “historic mission” that emphasized the closeness of the race in Virginia. Eugene Sydnor, Jr., chairman of the Nixon Democrats, was not impressed. Believing that there had been a substantial shift to Nixon in the last week, Sydnor predicted that Nixon would carry Virginia by 70,000 votes. Nevertheless, Kennedy’s tumultuous reception seemed to bode well for election day.63

On a clear and crisp autumn day, 8 November 1960, Virginians went to the polls in record numbers and chose Vice-President Nixon over Senator Kennedy by 42,194 votes. Harry Byrd was pleased with results in the state, even though Nixon’s popular vote nationwide garnered him only 219 electoral votes to Kennedy’s 303. Writing to his former colleague in the Senate, Edward Martin, a Pennsylvania Republican, Byrd remarked that Virginia “stood staunch.” Nixon had carried seven of Virginia’s ten congressional districts. Significantly the Third District in the Richmond area gave Nixon a margin of 23,464 votes—more than half of his statewide margin. Undoubtedly influenced by the articulately pro-Nixon editorials in the Times-Dispatch and the News Leader, Third District voters may also have been swayed by the most active Democrats for Nixon-Lodge chapter in the state. The Times-Dispatch estimated that statewide 100,000 nominal Democrats cast votes for the Republican ticket. President Harold B. Boyd of the Virginia State AFL-CIO summed up the election well when he described it as “a Byrd Democrats for Nixon victory.”64

Kennedy won the Second District in the Norfolk-Portsmouth area, the Fourth District on the Southside, and the Ninth District in southwest Virginia. His largest margins of victory were in the Second and Fourth districts, 10,011 and 10,136 votes, respectively. Kennedy’s performance in the rural areas, especially on the Southside, pleased Democrats. John B. Vance, president of the Virginia Farmers Union and director of


64 Richmond Times-Dispatch, 9 Nov. 1960; Eisenberg, Virginia Votes, pp. 221–24; Harry F. Byrd, Sr., to Edward Martin, 26 Nov. 1960, Byrd Papers; Richmond Times-Dispatch, 30 Nov. 1960; Harold B. Boyd to Blake T. Newton, 14 Nov. 1960, Miller Papers. The total vote cast for president was 771,449. In 1956 697,978 Virginians had voted for president. Nixon received 404,521 votes (52.4 percent) to 362,327 (47.0 percent) for Kennedy in Virginia. Conservative party candidate Benjamin Coiner received 4,204 votes (0.5 percent). Although the 1960 election turnout set a record, only 33.4 percent of the citizens of voting age participated, as the poll tax and literacy tests remained in effect in Virginia (Numan V. Bartley and Hugh D. Graham, Southern Elections: County and Precinct Data, 1950–1972 [Baton Rouge, 1978], p. 327). Undoubtedly demographics also played a part in Nixon’s showing in the Third District, where predominantly white, middle-class suburban counties surround Richmond.
On 4 November John F. Kennedy made a campaign swing through Norfolk and Roanoke. In Norfolk he was greeted by a crowd of nearly 20,000.
Southeastern Farmers for Kennedy-Johnson, had a ready explanation for Kennedy's success. He attributed it to the greater appeal of Kennedy's farm program and the activities of the Straight Democratic Ticket Committee in publicizing it in rural areas. In fact, Vance estimated that the SDTC contributed "at least 75,000 votes to Senator Kennedy's total in the state."65

The SDTC had also assigned Dr. Harry T. Penn of Roanoke, Dr. Tinsley Spraggins of Virginia Union University in Richmond, and John T. Drew, a member of the Democratic committee in Richmond, to organize the black precincts in urban areas. The results were gratifying. Predominantly black precincts in Norfolk, Richmond, and Roanoke had given Eisenhower 78 percent, 75 percent, and 79 percent, respectively, in 1956. Four years later Kennedy carried the same precincts with 78 percent, 62 percent, and 68 percent of the vote, respectively. While it is impossible to determine how many votes the SDTC's activities won for the Kennedy ticket, its efforts among blacks and organized labor energized groups that had little sympathy for the Democratic Organization.66

Although Nixon's margin of victory in Virginia was only a little better than one-third of Dwight Eisenhower's in 1956, Kennedy's supporters were nonetheless deeply disappointed. A Kennedy victory had seemed within reach in mid-October, but the trend toward Kennedy had stopped. William Battle has stated that the Moore letters were "extremely damaging," but he acknowledged that it was "a brilliant political ploy if you countenance things like that." Two weeks after the election Francis Pickens Miller wrote to Senator Henry Jackson, the Democratic national chairman, in an effort to explain the outcome in Virginia. Miller acknowledged that the religious issue caused many Democrats in the First, Third, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth districts to vote for Nixon. Still, the "decisive factor," in Miller's opinion, was Senator Harry F. Byrd's intervention by mailing a letter to his constituents opposing repeal of the right-to-work law and by "exploiting the race issue during the last ten days of the campaign."67

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66 "Report, Presidential Campaign 1960, Virginia Straight Democratic Ticket Committee," Miller Papers; Bartley and Graham, Southern Elections, pp. 405–7. Kennedy and Nixon divided equally Virginia's ninety-eight counties as Kennedy received 47.6 percent to Nixon's 51.8 percent. Nixon carried twenty-three of thirty-two cities with 53.6 percent of the vote to Kennedy's 45.8 percent (Eisenberg, Virginia Votes, pp. 221–24).
67 Eisenberg, Virginia Votes, p. 208; Battle interview; Francis Pickens Miller to Henry M. Jackson, 18 Nov. 1960, Miller Papers.
Some of Virginia's leading newspapers interpreted Nixon's victory in the Old Dominion as a triumph for Harry Byrd. The *Richmond News Leader* saw the outcome as proof that Byrd knew "the political temper" of his state "better than any man in Virginia's public life." For Governor Almond, however, the result was a "convincing rebuff." The *Richmond Times-Dispatch* believed that Byrd's "golden silence" was a "major factor in the failure of the Democrats to carry Virginia." The *Roanoke Times*, on the other hand, emphasized Virginia's traditional conservatism and asserted that it "would be merely guessing" to ascribe the result in the state to Byrd's stance. Norfolk's *Virginian-Pilot* agreed that Nixon's victory was "explicable largely on the ground of Virginia's innate conservatism" and the national Democratic party's rejection of "the Virginia operating principle of pay-as-you-go." Nonetheless, the Norfolk newspaper regarded the outcome as "a triumph for Senator Harry F. Byrd as well as for Mr. Nixon in this state." The editor also detected a deeper significance in the outcome in Virginia. Byrd's victory had been won "over the larger number of Democrats" who had become interested in their party nominee's success. "More public criticism" had been directed at Byrd than in any previous presidential election. "More restlessness" could be seen in the Democratic party. "More doubt" was experienced by the professional politicians. In sum, there was "more . . . at issue in Virginia than the Kennedy-Nixon struggle." In Virginia politics "the present shape of things cannot continue much longer. Change is coming. A scramble for power is likely. A new era is inevitable."  

On the national level Pennsylvania's first-term Democratic senator Joseph Clark sent letters to his Democratic colleagues after the election proposing that Democratic senators who did not support Kennedy and the party's platform should be barred from the Democratic caucus. Clark also stated that any Democratic senator holding a committee chairmanship should be removed if he did not endorse proposals in the Democratic platform that might come before his committee as proposed legislation. Byrd's response was quick and defiant. In a four-page letter to Clark, Byrd again listed his objections to the Democratic platform, stated that he would continue to owe his primary allegiance to those who elected him, and rejected any "coercion such as you propose in performing my duties as a Senator from Virginia." Neither President-elect Kennedy nor the

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new Democratic majority leader, Senator Mike Mansfield of Montana, had any desire to antagonize the powerful bloc of southerners in the Senate, and Clark's proposal to enforce party regularity was stillborn.69

In state politics, however, the presidential election of 1960 was a harbinger of change. Harry Byrd's "golden silence" was unacceptable to many members of the Organization who were worried by the Old Dominion's Republican voting trend. A group of Democratic politicians from Hampton Roads who visited Byrd in his Washington office after the election came away puzzled at the senator's apparent absence of distress about the division in the party. The 1961 gubernatorial election was on their minds. Byrd's lack of concern, however, seemed justified in 1961 when the Organization's choice, Attorney General Albertis S. Harrison, Jr., won the gubernatorial primary over Lieutenant Governor A. E. S. Stephens, a former member of the Organization who had criticized Byrd harshly during the campaign. Harrison had given a tepid endorsement to the national ticket in 1960, while Stephens had campaigned actively for Kennedy and Johnson.70

By 1964, however, there were signs that the Byrd era in Virginia politics might indeed be coming to an end. Party loyalists rejoiced when the Democratic State Convention passed a resolution endorsing the candidacy of President Lyndon B. Johnson over the objections of Byrd.71 There were two reasons why Virginia Democrats were moving into closer alignment with their national counterparts in 1964. A few days before the Democratic State Convention the Republican party had nominated Senator Barry M. Goldwater of Arizona for president. Goldwater, perceived by many as an archconservative, had strong support in Virginia, even among some of the most conservative elements in the Virginia Democratic party. Many Virginia Democrats of all factions believed that a united effort would be required if Goldwater were to be defeated in the Old Dominion. The second factor moving Virginia Democrats closer to the national party predated the nomination of the senator from Arizona. According to Mills Godwin, party regulars were disillusioned and


disenchanted with "golden silence." Fearing the increasing strength of the liberal faction in the Democratic party and the possible loss of local offices, many Organization loyalists at the state convention in 1964 believed that the Virginia Democratic party must support the national ticket if the Organization were to continue to prevail in Virginia. Delegate Edgar Bacon, who offered the resolution supporting Johnson, has recalled that many Democrats, including Organization people, were "tired unto death" of the party leadership's nonsupport of the Democratic presidential ticket. This growing disenchantment began with the resentment felt by many Virginia Democrats at Harry Byrd's "golden silence" in 1960.72