ROAD TO DEFEAT:
CLAUDE PEPPER AND DEFEAT IN
THE 1950 FLORIDA PRIMARY

By

JAMES C. CLARK

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

1998
Copyright 1998

by

James C. Clark
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................... iii

CHAPTERS

1. INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................... 1
   Notes ........................................................................................................... 9

2 MAKING OF A LIBERAL .............................................................................. 11
   The College Student ............................................................................... 12
   The Move to Florida ............................................................................. 16
   The First Campaign ............................................................................. 17
   Campaign for the Senate .................................................................... 19
   Notes ...................................................................................................... 23

3 THE JUNIOR SENATOR ........................................................................... 25
   The 1938 Campaign ............................................................................ 29
   The Coming War ................................................................................... 32
   The South and the New Deal ................................................................. 35
   Notes ...................................................................................................... 40

4 MAKING ENEMIES ................................................................................... 42
   The 1944 Election ................................................................................. 51
   Notes ...................................................................................................... 60

5 THE SEARCH FOR PEACE ........................................................................ 63
   The Truman Presidency ......................................................................... 65
   Truman and the Liberals ..................................................................... 66
   Pepper in Russia .................................................................................... 70
   The Growing Soviet Threat ................................................................. 75
   Notes ...................................................................................................... 76
Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

ROAD TO DEFEAT:
CLAUDE PEPPER AND THE DEFEAT IN
THE 1950 FLORIDA PRIMARY

By
James C. Clark

December 1998

Chairman: David R. Colburn
Major Department: History

In 1950, Florida was the site of one of the most mean-spirited campaigns in the history of American politics. The campaign resulted in the defeat of Senator Claude Pepper in the 1950 Democratic primary. He was branded "Red Pepper," and subjected to some of the strongest criticism a political candidate has ever encountered. But while his opponent, George Smathers, ran an aggressive, negative campaign, the seeds of Pepper's defeat had been planted six years earlier, when he began to move to the far left. He embraced closer relations with Russia in the hope that it would advance peace and help him become president. This paper examines the reasons for Pepper's defeat.
General Audience Abstract

The 1950 Florida Democratic primary was the nastiest campaign in Florida political history. The two candidates were Senator Claude Pepper, who had served in the United States Senate for 14 years, and become one of the most liberal senators ever elected from the South, and Representative George Smathers, a bright attractive candidate who won by conducting an aggressive, negative campaign. This paper examines the reasons Pepper lost. It traces his development as a politician, and his loss of popularity in Florida.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

In May 1989, while Claude Pepper lay dying in a Washington hospital, Bruce Smathers was busy trying to set history straight in Jacksonville, Florida. He called journalists in an effort to give them his version of an event that had occurred nearly 40 years earlier. He knew that with Pepper's death there would be obituaries dredging up the events of the 1950 election between his father, George Smathers, and Pepper. He told reporters that, despite nearly universal belief to the contrary, his father had not branded Pepper as "Red Pepper," nor had he made the mocking speech that reporters had attributed to him. But Bruce Smathers' effort at rewriting history was hopeless. Scores of books had already made the election legendary as historians documented that it was Smathers who had branded Pepper "Red Pepper," Historian Roger Morris was one of many who pointed to the Smathers' speech, and noted that Smathers "regaled rural Florida with Pepper's subversive sympathies for blacks and expressed shock that the senator's sister had gone off to the big city to become a known 'thespian,' or that Claude Pepper actually practiced 'celibacy' before his marriage." It did not matter that it was not Smathers who started calling Pepper "Red Pepper" in 1950, or that Smathers never gave what has become "his" most famous speech.
Smathers won the election, but lost the battle of history. Twelve years after his defeat, Pepper returned to Congress and became an American icon, beloved for his efforts to help the elderly. Smathers went on to serve three terms in the Senate without leaving a significant mark.

While the 1950 senatorial election between Smathers and Pepper has been remembered for things that did not happen, the true impact of the contest has been obscured. The election marked both an end and a new beginning in Southern politics. Southern liberalism went down to defeat with Pepper in 1950 and emerging from its ashes was a conservative politics that would combine with race and dominate the region for much of the second half of the 20th century.

Pepper’s liberalism took form in his youth. Reared in Alabama, where the land and the economy were similar to that of North Florida, Pepper knew poverty from his earliest years. His was a life without material comforts, and his family and their neighbors were faced with ever-present debt and the threat of financial ruin. Pepper had worked his way through the University of Alabama, then attended the Harvard University Law School with financial support from a government program. The government even furnished him money to purchase the glasses he needed to read. He had seen how a government program could improve the quality of his life, and he was convinced it could do the same for millions like him in the South.

After serving just one term in the Florida Legislature, then losing his bid for re-election, Pepper was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1936. His election
came at a unique point in American history. The impact of the Depression led voters to make wholesale changes in Congress. A decade earlier it would have been impossible to imagine someone such as Pepper being elected to the Senate from Florida. But the state, like many others, was undergoing a huge political transformation as voters sought to elect those who offered programs to end the Depression. Elected with Pepper was Charles O. Andrews of Orlando, and David Sholtz, both who embraced the New Deal, even though they were almost unknown to the voters.

Florida was changing dramatically during this period as the voting patterns indicated. For much of the Depression, Floridians threw their lot with the New Deal. That began to change after 1935 when Florida saw a sudden spurt in its population which increased to nearly two million people by the end of the decade. Many of the new arrivals came from the Midwest and were conservative Republicans. Once in Florida, they found that being a Republican all but excluded them from the electoral process. The real decisions were made in the Democratic primaries. So, they registered as Democrats and began voting for the most conservative of the Democratic candidates. Political Scientist V. O. Key, Jr., noted about this period in Florida politics that "anything can happen in and usually does."²

Pepper saw Roosevelt’s election in 1932, and his New Deal program, as the savior of his region. Roosevelt became a political icon for Pepper, and he fully supported the New Deal’s use of the power of the state to help average
Americans. Historian David Plotke noted that the "progressive liberalism" of the New Deal drew its strength from three main themes: The increasing role of groups in political life, a new view of the role of the state in regulating social and economic life, and increasing calls for government aid for the less advantaged.³

Pepper came to the Senate as a champion of the New Deal, calling for more liberal legislation even as the New Deal began to decline. Pepper thought that government should have the responsibility of improving the quality of life for its citizens and he supported every New Deal measure Roosevelt requested. His only disagreements with Roosevelt came when he did not think that a particular New Deal measure went far enough. Roosevelt's Social Security Act had already passed when Pepper came to the Senate, but Pepper continued to support the far more radical, and generous Townsend Plan.

Pepper's friends advised him to concentrate on domestic policies as the path toward national office, but Pepper believed that international affairs would become the major issue after the war. Pepper pushed for military preparedness well ahead of Roosevelt and at a time when most of the nation wanted to ignore the growing Nazi threat. His calls for military preparedness were answered, but only after France fell and Britain was imperiled. After the United States entered World War II, Pepper became a champion for the formation of a world organization to work for world peace.

In Pepper's effort to further his national aspirations, he lost sight of his state constituents and that would doom him in 1950. Pepper's defeat for re-
election in 1950 marked the end of the liberal movement that seemed so promising a decade earlier. After Roosevelt's death in 1945, liberalism stumbled. As historian Patricia Sullivan observed, "The vitality of New Deal liberalism in the postwar era would be determined in large part by the ability of its core constituencies to define a postwar program and organize themselves into an effective political force." But Sullivan found that "By early 1946, however, the incipient cold war began to eclipse domestic issues as the defining element of postwar politics."4

The liberals tried to keep their cause alive, pushing Truman to continue with New Deal policies. When he seemed reluctant, they then pressed a wide range of initiatives, including a new, liberal political party. In the fall of 1946, liberals representing a wide range of views gathered to discuss the future of liberalism. Jack Kroll, the political director of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, was in high spirits as he said there "was striking evidence... that the reactionaries that have traded so long on the one-party system in that region can be defeated in their own strongholds."5

Like the half-filled glass, it was possible to look at the Southern election returns in 1946 as either good news for liberals, or bad news. James E. Folsom was elected governor of Alabama after running what was clearly a populist-liberal campaign. John Sparkman, running as a progressive in Alabama, won election to the Senate against a much more conservative candidate. In Georgia, a CIO-backed candidate was elected governor and candidates
supported by the CIO-PAC won three congressional seats. The CIO enthusiasm with the Georgia returns was so great that CIO political organizer Dan Powell suggested realigning the state Democratic Party with blacks and union members forming the core.  

Many successful liberal candidates were helped by the rising tide of black voters. An estimated 600,000 blacks were registered to vote in the 1946 primary elections in the South. University of Florida Professor William Carleton, a close friend of Pepper's, saw the increased black voting as "a boon to liberals in their fight within the party to gain and keep party control." Carleton predicted "The cry 'nigger' employed to divide the liberal forces is losing its old magic."  

As a result of the developments, the CIO believed it had reason to be encouraged by what was happening in the South after World War II. Since the CIO's founding in 1935, its membership had exploded, reaching six million members by the end of the war. But membership in the CIO's affiliated unions in the South lagged. After the war, the CIO had organized a major organizing drive to build on the membership gains made in the South during the war. CIO membership in the South had reached 400,000 by 1945, while the larger American Federation of Labor had 1.8 million members in the South.  

By 1950, however, dreams of a more liberal, tolerant, pro-labor South had vanished. Morton Sosna noted the South was an "uncomfortable place" for the white liberals who remained in the South. Plotke found that "The Cold War provided a large supply of ammunition for conservatives to attack domestic
reform efforts as Communist-inspired and therefore illegitimate." The Cold War gave many southerners the opportunity to attack "racial reform projects on the grounds that Communists favored and were sometimes involved in them."¹⁰

As a consequence of these changes, Florida and southern politicians were forced to make choices between playing a national role, or a more limited, but politically safer regional role. Jimmy Byrnes, who was once one of the strongest New Dealers until he was passed over for national office in 1944, returned to his native South Carolina to run for governor as a strong segregationist. Senator Lister Hill, an Alabama progressive, resigned his post as Democratic majority whip and "began to retreat from the Democratic party's national leadership ranks." Others, such as Lyndon Johnson, tempered their New Deal attitudes to win re-election.¹¹

Pepper faced the same choice, but could not abandon his national political ambitions. He had hoped to be either a vice presidential or presidential candidate in 1948, and even after failing to win either a presidential or vice presidential nomination, he kept his national ambitions alive. He spoke throughout the country, but his listeners were largely members of left-wing groups, who shared Pepper's concerns about Truman's leadership and his commitment to New Deal liberalism.

Because of his increasing identification with the left, Pepper allowed himself to be politically marginalized by his opponents. As historian Thomas Patterson has observed, "In depicting him as a mindless obstructionist, they
besmeared his significant, articulate, and viable critique of American foreign policy, as well as his suggested policy alternatives.\textsuperscript{12}

There were others who championed the New Deal, called for military preparedness before World War II, and wanted greater cooperation with Russia, but Pepper made himself the lightening rod in these battles. He spoke the longest, argued the most, and garnered the most public attention. Opponents used Pepper's insistence on improving Soviet relations to drive him from office, although for them the issue was only a smokescreen. Physicians wanted him out because he had called for national health insurance. Many businessmen wanted him out because of his support for the New Deal. The state's most powerful man, Ed Ball, wanted him out because Pepper had opposed him on several issues. All were happy to use communism to defeat him in 1950.

By 1950, the very groups that Pepper had depended upon had encountered their own problems. Historian Michael Kazin found that the backers of the New Deal had lost much of its insurgent support after the war. "Communists and their allies became preoccupied with self-defense, and liberal politicians and intellectuals took for granted the reforms on the new Deal—and the expanded, bureaucratic state that administered them—and fretted about Cold War hysteria."\textsuperscript{13}

Pepper's defeat, followed the next month by the loss of Senator Frank Graham in North Carolina, marked the end of hopes for a liberal foothold in the South. Samuel Lubell called the two losses the "most crushing setbacks
Southern liberalism has suffered since the coming of Franklin Roosevelt.14 Numan Bartley found that "the word "liberal" gradually disappeared from the southern political lexicon."15 Along with the disappearance of the word "liberal" came the disappearance of liberal Southern politicians themselves.

This dissertation examines Pepper's political roots and the evolution of his political career leading up to his defeat by Smathers in 1950. It also assesses Florida politics during this period and the emergence of George Smathers as Pepper's rival and challenger to Pepper's liberal politics.

The Pepper defeat marked an end to liberalism in Florida. In the 49 years since Pepper's defeat, no statewide candidate as liberal as Pepper has been elected. By the time Pepper was defeated, his fellow Senator, Charles O. Andrews, had died and been replaced by the more conservative Spessard Holland. It took nearly a quarter of a century for the voters to elect a candidate who even approached Pepper in liberalism.

Notes


2. V. O. Key, Jr., Southern Politics in State and Nation (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 82.


5. Ibid., 229.


7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., 188.


CHAPTER 2
MAKING OF A LIBERAL

If there was a couple the New Deal was made for, it was Joseph Wheeler Pepper and his wife Lena, who lived on a small East Alabama farm near the tiny community of Dudleyville. Joseph Pepper's family came from Ireland or England, probably around the time of the American Revolution, although he was never sure. Lena Pepper's family came from England in the late 1700s. For generations their families farmed in the South. Both of their fathers left the family farm just once, to fight for the Confederacy.¹

The couple tried to make a success of the farm during a hardscrabble time of unpredictable food prices and 12-hour days. On September 8, 1900, Lena gave birth to a son, Claude Pepper. He was their fourth child, but the first one to live beyond infancy. In 1910, the family gave up farming to move to nearby Camp Hill, Alabama, a town of 1,500. The advantage for Claude was a better school, but the family's economic situation remained precarious. Joseph Pepper tried his hand at business, first in a general merchandise store, then in a furniture store. Both failed and led to bankruptcy court. A series of jobs followed, and finally Joseph Pepper became a deputy sheriff.²
Pepper worked to help support the family, but he was also encouraged to finish high school. He was a bright boy, who loved to read, and used a lawyer's office and typewriter at night to do his homework. Pepper graduated from high school in 1917, wearing a suit that was clearly too small, an indication of the family's limited financial means. He worked briefly as a traveling hat cleaner, moving from farm to farm to block and clean hats until he accidentally ruined a customer's hat and had to pay for it, putting him out of the hat business.

Although barely out of high school, he took a job teaching in Dothan, Alabama. The first semester he taught in the grammar school and the second semester in the high school, working with students who were about his age. He taught for just a year, then took a job in a Birmingham steel mill. There, he worked 12 hours a day, sometimes seven days a week, carrying heavy pig iron ingots onto a conveyor belt. The work convinced Pepper that he would need more education to get ahead.

The College Student

He entered college in September 1918, first at Howard College, a small Baptist school in Birmingham. He stayed only one night before deciding the school was not for him. He gave up a scholarship to the school and transferred to the University of Alabama without a scholarship. To pay his tuition, his family
borrowed money from a banker, who saw Pepper's potential and overlooked the family's poor financial situation.6

When Pepper arrived at the University of Alabama in the fall of 1918, he enlisted in the Student Army Training Corps, and without leaving the campus became a veteran of World War I. During his 57 days of military service, he injured himself lifting ammunition boxes which qualified him for veteran's benefits.7 He used the government benefits to help pay for his college education.

He spent his time on campus studying, working, or talking about politics. He admired Woodrow Wilson and saw in Wilson's Fourteen Points the hope for a better world. In 1921 he received his degree after just three years. He was a good student, graduating Phi Beta Kappa, but he could not afford a new key and bought a used one.8 The University of Alabama yearbook held a prediction for Pepper: "Watch this boy. He's bound for a seat in a J.P. [Justice of the Peace] court or the gubernatorial chair."9

In 1921 he was accepted at Harvard Law School and was able to attend with another loan from the Camp Hill bank and the $50 a month he received from the government. Pepper felt that being a recipient of government money separated him from his more wealthy classmates. When a classmate asked about his glasses, which were provided free by the government, Pepper was evasive. "I didn't tell him I was a vocational student," adding that, "one has a sort of pride in family having means. And it takes courage to stand up & admit your poverty."10 But the students eventually learned of his status and Pepper heard
that some of his classmates had laughed about it. "Damn them, they would have got it if possible," he wrote in his diary. "Mine was legitimate. I'll be somebody when they are still laughing, but they won't laugh then."11

Pepper also used the money to seek a cure for a long-term skin condition. Pepper's face carried acne scars, made more noticeable by his large, red nose. He was able to see Dr. Townsend Thorndike, one of the nation's leading dermatologists, but Thorndike said nothing could be done about the scars. Pepper wrote to his parents, 'How I would be if my face had been smooth & all, how different would I have been.'12

From his childhood in Camp Hill, Pepper had dreamed of being a United States Senator. One night, when he was 14, he was studying in the office of a local justice of the peace, J. H. Rogers. He wrote on a wall "Someday Claude Pepper will be United States Senator."13 At the University of Alabama and at Harvard, his classmates nicknamed him "Senator."14 In the Harvard dining hall, his friends called him "the future Senator from Alabama."15 He said of his friends and professors, "They seemed to take it as an inevitable fact that I . . . was destined for Senate."16 Pepper encouraged such speculation. His conversations in the dining halls centered on politics and his hope for a political career.

In 1922 he became involved in politics for the first time, campaigning for the defeat of Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, who had led the effort against American entry into the League of Nations. Pepper wrote in his diary that he felt "bitterly towards Republicans for [their] treatment of Wilson."17 It was easy
to see why Wilson would appeal to Pepper. Both were native Southerners, who had gone North, but retained their love of their native region. Wilson supported the progressive reforms Pepper admired, including the eight-hour work day, the Rural Credits Act for rural development, the Kern-McGillicuddy Act establishing workmen’s compensation, the Keating-Owen Act regulating child labor, and tariff revision. Wilson also led the United States into World War I, and proposed that the United States play a role in international affairs for the first time through the League of Nations.

In 1924, Pepper graduated from Harvard in the top third of his class and returned to Alabama. While his classmates flocked with their prestigious degrees to the big cities, Pepper was anxious to return home. Most of his classmates saw the South as backward, but Pepper was committed to helping his family and the region. He wrote in his diary of his desire to “go back home and help” the poor in the South. “It makes me sad to see the plight of people, hair drawn, sallow, emaciated, unhappy, wearied they all seem. The dirt, the sorrow, the tragedy of it all.” He wrote that he wanted to “see it better.”

A leading Birmingham law firm offered Pepper a job, but he already had accepted a one-year position teaching at the University of Arkansas. The law school was brand new and there were only two faculty members, Pepper and the dean, Julian Seesel Waterman. Pepper enjoyed his year in Arkansas, and was invited to remain at the college, but he turned down the offer for an opportunity to try to make his fortune in the Florida land boom.
The Move to Florida

In 1925, Arthur Trumbo, an Oklahoma banker, and father of one of Pepper's students at Arkansas, invited Pepper to go to Perry, Florida, as a consultant in a Florida land deal. The Perry attorney for the syndicate was Judge William Barnett Davis who formed a "temporary association" with Pepper. The Florida boom drew thousands who saw a chance to make a fortune. The plan called for Pepper to start working in Perry, then move to Homosassa to direct the syndicate's business dealings there. Pepper could make enough money to pay off his college loans, help his still-struggling parents, and for the first time in his life, be able to enjoy life's pleasures. He wrote to his parents that he would be able to "send you all enough money every month to pay your bills and living expenses."22

In the 1920s, the state experienced a land rush that drew more people than all of the American migrations that had come before. From 1920 to 1930, the state's population increased nearly 50 percent. Land, that in 1915 was being given away, went for hundreds of thousands of dollars a decade later. The increasing values were based on speculation, and often property changed hands half-a-dozen times a day, with ever-escalating prices.23

Pepper arrived in Florida on June 30, 1925, just in time for the collapse of the state's land boom. Four months before Pepper arrived, The New York Times had reported a slowdown in the boom, and just days after Pepper moved to
Perry, The Nation said the boom had turned to a bust. Those stories were followed by a disastrous hurricane in South Florida in 1926 and a citrus-crop infestation by the Mediterranean fruit fly. In 1926, banks began to fail in Florida, land sales collapsed, and hundreds of developments turned into overgrown fields. There was now no need for Pepper to move to Homosassa and he remained in Perry to practice with Davis. The prospect of making big money in the had evaporated, but Pepper found his law practice interesting and he was making enough money to gradually pay off his debts in Alabama.

The First Campaign

In 1928 Pepper launched his political career as a candidate for the Florida House from Taylor County. He won by pointing out that the incumbent, W. T. Hendry, had failed to vote on a bill requiring farmers to dip their cattle to remove ticks. It was a controversial issue in the district and farmers were split over whether to support it. Pepper never took a stand on the bill but was able to appeal to both supporters and opponents of the legislation merely by saying that the voters needed someone who would vote on important issues. He upset Hendry and, as a result of his election, was appointed to the State Democratic Executive Committee. As a member of this body, Pepper received a form letter from Franklin Roosevelt seeking advice on reforms in the Democratic Party. He wrote to Roosevelt that "I want the Democratic Party genuinely to become the
Liberal Party of this Nation." In 1928, Pepper campaigned for New York Governor Al Smith, the Democratic presidential candidate in a state that had voted for the Democratic candidate in every election since the end of Reconstruction. But Smith, a Catholic who favored the repeal of prohibition. Despite Pepper's efforts, Herbert Hoover, the Republican candidate, carried the state handily.

In 1930, Pepper was defeated in his bid for a second term. He had refused to rule out support for a retail sales tax, while his opponent stressed opposition to any such measure. Pepper later blamed his defeat on his failure to support a resolution censuring the wife of President Herbert Hoover for inviting the wife of a black congressman to the White House. But Pepper's opponent did not mention the race issue, campaigning only on the sales tax. Pepper carried just one precinct.

Not only did he lose his House seat in 1930, but the Great Depression was beginning to effect him. The bank in Perry failed, and Pepper lost his small savings account. He also lost most of his law business. Like millions of Americans, he faced the prospect of remaining where he was, without much hope for a better future, or moving. In 1930 Pepper moved to Tallahassee to start over, forming a partnership with Curtis Waller, a former aide to Mississippi Senator Pat Harrison.

In 1932 Pepper campaigned for the Democratic National Committee, traveling throughout Florida for Franklin Roosevelt, who easily won Florida and
the presidency. Hoover was not the only political victim of the election. The Republicans lost control of the House of Representatives in 1930 and the Senate in 1932. Americans wanted something done, and the old politics and the old answers were not sufficient.

Campaign for the Senate

Florida’s two United States Senators had held elective office since the 19th century, and were not popular with the voters. The senior senator, Duncan Upshaw Fletcher, had been in the Senate for 34 years rising to chair the Senate Committee on Banking and Currency. The junior senator, Park Trammell, was first elected mayor of Lakeland in 1899. He had moved through the Legislature, served as Florida attorney general, and was elected governor in 1912. In 1916, he was elected to the U.S. Senate and re-elected in 1922 and 1928. While Fletcher was generally respected, a Washington newspaper named Trammell as “the Senator least inclined to work.”

In 1934, Pepper decided to run against Trammel. A decade earlier, it would have been difficult to envision a successful Pepper challenge to Trammell, but the Great Depression had changed the rules of American politics. Candidates who had served faithfully for decades were thrown out of office by the voters. Pepper had served only one term in the legislature, had lived in the state for less than a decade, and had no money. But candidates such as Pepper
were winning office throughout the country. “The sentiment of our people demands that a candidate be free of reactionary tendencies and have a point of view boldly in sympathy with the New Deal,” Pepper said in making his announcement. There were three other candidates in the race, but Pepper quickly established himself as an avid New Dealer. “I am with Franklin D. Roosevelt and shall give him aggressive and helpful cooperation. The cornerstone of the New Deal is the welfare of the common man. Upon that cornerstone I shall make my campaign.”

The New Deal was very popular in Florida, a state that had been in a depression since the collapse of the land boom in 1926.

By embracing Roosevelt and the New Deal, Pepper set himself apart from the other challengers. It was a strategy other candidates used to win office, most noticeably Lyndon Johnson in a congressional campaign in Texas. In a multi-candidate race, the one who established the closest rapport with Roosevelt and the New Deal could usually do well. The largely rural population stood to benefit from the dozens of New Deal programs, and even businessmen, who thought it could save their struggling firms. Pepper also received support from John H. Perry, the owner of the Jacksonville Journal, who endorsed Pepper and complained of Trammell’s “absolute inaction in Congress.” Pepper made Trammell the issue by pointing out that Trammell had introduced eighty-one bills during his third term, but just four minor bills had become law.
In the first primary, Trammell received 81,321 votes, but to the surprise of many, Pepper was close behind with 79,396 votes. The other three candidates received a total of 53,000 votes and forced a runoff election. In the second primary, Trammell made race an issue, pointing out that Pepper had voted against the resolution condemning Mrs. Herbert Hoover for inviting a black woman to the White House. "HOOVER DINES [with] NEGRO, PEPPER SAYS O.K." read the headline on the handbill the Trammell supporters circulated. Trammell also claimed that because Pepper had attended Harvard University, he must somehow be in favor of racial equality. Trammel ignored Pepper's calls for debates. Pepper continued to push for a pension for anyone over 70 years of age and emphasized his support of labor unions. But primarily he hammered at his support for Roosevelt and the New Deal.

Pepper lost the runoff election by 4,050 votes, 103,028 to 98,978. He was gracious in defeat. "I extend to you my best wishes," Pepper telegraphed. "If I can in any way aid you to serve the people of Florida be ever free to command me." But others were not so willing to accept the results. It was clear after the first primary that there had been irregularities in the voting in Tampa. In a state with little in the way of strong political organizations, the Tampa political machine could produce a significant number of votes. After the runoff, Edwin Dart Lambright of the Tampa Morning Tribune wrote that he believed that 6,000 of Trammell's votes were fraudulent. In one Tampa precinct, Trammell had received 446 votes to 1 for Pepper. In another, Pepper received 75 votes while
Trammell got 715. In all, Trammell received 6,511 votes to 360 for Pepper in the questionable Tampa precincts. Lambright wanted Pepper to call for an investigation, but Pepper accepted the results and returned to his law practice.38

A challenge would have done little good. Trammell had influential friends in Washington and Tallahassee, who could be counted on to come to his aid. Around the state, Pepper’s popularity increased as the result of his gracious acceptance of defeat. Thus, The Orlando Sentinel editorialized that "Someday, in some election, the people of Florida are going to give Pepper another break – or rather a new deal. That is the general feeling. It is now Saint Pepper."39

On May 8, 1936, Trammell died in Washington, creating an opportunity for Pepper. Newspapers also speculated that Judge Charles O. Andrews of Orlando and former-governor Doyle Carlton of Tampa might be candidates. The State Democratic Executive Committee had the responsibility to decide whether to hold an open primary or have the committee select the nominee. The state’s other Senator, Fletcher, died on June 17 before a decision was reached on first open seat. Pepper announced that he would be a candidate for Fletcher’s seat. Meanwhile, Carlton and Andrews competed for Trammell’s seat, and Pepper was unopposed for Fletcher’s seat. Andrews upset former Governor Carlton 67,387 to 62,530. The Leesburg Commercial said, “As soon as Claude Pepper has time to ‘learn the ropes’ he will be recognized as one of the really great men of the Senate.”40
Notes


4. Pepper to Dorothy Sara, 16 August 1948, Pepper Papers.

5. Miami Herald, 18 October 1936.


7. Pepper to former Congressman William Joseph Sears, Jr., 11 May 1940, Pepper Papers. Miami Herald, 18 October 1936.


10. Pepper Diary, 1 November 1921.

11. Ibid., 21 June 1922.


13. Pepper to Mrs. Frances Collinson, 4 December 1941, Pepper Papers.

14. Pepper Diary, 19 November 1921.

15. Ibid., 7 May 1922.

16. Ibid., 25 December 1922.

17. Ibid., 6 December 1922.

18. Ibid., 6 May 1922.

19. Pepper to Julian Pennington, 11 April 1929, Pepper Papers.
20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.


24. Ibid., 82-83.

25. Pepper to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 22 December 1928, Pepper Papers.


28. Stewart, 8.


37. Pepper to Park Trammell, 28 June 1934, Pepper Papers.

38. Edwin D. Lambright to Pepper, 9 July 1934, Pepper Papers.


CHAPTER 3
THE JUNIOR SENATOR

By the time Pepper arrived in Washington as a champion of the New Deal, it was all but over. Most of the significant New Deal legislation had been enacted between 1933 and 1936. Nevertheless, 1937 began with Roosevelt’s second inauguration and with high hopes. Roosevelt intended to use his overwhelming re-election as a mandate to continue his New Deal programs. “I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished,” Roosevelt said in taking the oath for his second term. He could point to a series of dramatic accomplishments in his first term. Industrial output had doubled since 1932 and farm income had increased almost fourfold.¹

But at the onset of his second term, Roosevelt made a major political miscalculation. He proposed a complicated program to allow him to name more judges—presumably sympathetic to his programs—to the Supreme Court. During his first term, Roosevelt had not named any justices, and the court was loaded with conservatives who struck down many of his New Deal proposals. His plan touched a raw nerve in the nation, gave the undermanned Republicans a rallying cry, and divided the Democratic Party. As historian William Leuchtenburg noted, “In attempting to alter the Court, Roosevelt had attacked one of the symbols
which many believed the nation needed for its sense of unity as a body politic." There are many who contend that although Roosevelt lost the battle—adding justices to the court—he won the war. Shortly after making his proposal, the court switched directions. In a 5-4 decision, the court upheld a minimum wage case, almost identical to one it had overturned earlier, then upheld the Wagner Act by the same 5-4 margin. Despite these favorable court rulings, Roosevelt lost considerable public and political support for his attack on the Court.

In 1937, Roosevelt also ordered cuts in federal spending in an attempt to balance the budget. He cut the relief roles and nearly eliminated public works spending. Roosevelt and his advisors, primarily Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, thought that the economy could stand some fiscal restraint, and they were nervous about the size of the federal debt. They made the wrong decision. The economy fell as industrial activity dropped sharply and unemployment soared.

For Pepper, the New Deal was why he had come to Washington, and he would continue to be its champion even as others deserted the cause. His own life had convinced him that many Americans needed help and that the government should provide that help. He was certain that he would not have attended Harvard without the federal aid he received, and he knew firsthand what life was like for poor farmers in the South. He believed Roosevelt’s New Deal held the answers to the problems he had personally experienced.
Pepper arrived in Washington in time for a debate on an issue that would present problems for him throughout his Senate career, a bill to make lynching a federal crime. Pepper fell in line with his fellow Southerners, denouncing the debate as a waste of time and saying that there were more important issues to be considered. For the rest of his career, Pepper wrestled with his desire to be a national political figure and the need to keep his constituents in Florida placated by opposing civil rights legislation.

During debate on a farm bill, Pepper found a way to link farming and civil rights. He said that blacks were being lynched in the South for economic reasons and improving the lot of all Southerners would cut down on lynchings. "There is an actual correlation between the number of lynchings and the price of cotton," he told the Senate. Pepper took part in a filibuster against the anti-lynching bill, talking for six hours one day and five the next. Pepper questioned the place of blacks in society, saying that giving the vote to blacks in the South would "endanger the supremacy of a race to which God has committed the destiny of a continent, perhaps of a world." The filibuster worked, and the anti-lynching bill died.

It was routine for southern senators to take their place in the filibuster rotation when civil rights legislation was being considered. During the course of the filibuster, Pepper drew surprising criticism from two liberals. Pennsylvania Senator Joseph Guffey warned Pepper that criticizing blacks would cost him a role in national politics, and Tommy Corcoran, a Roosevelt aide, urged him to
take a temperate tone, or risk losing his liberal credentials. Fortunately for Pepper, Roosevelt did not make civil rights an integral part of the New Deal. He did not want to challenge the powerful southern Democrats by pushing the civil rights issues. In general, blacks benefitted from New Deal programs only when they were not excluded from broad-based programs designed to aid the poor. That meant the Pepper could support the entire New Deal program without offending Florida's white voters.

In addition to the farm program, a major part of Roosevelt's plan for his second term was the fair labor standards bill. The bill called for a minimum wage of forty cents an hour, and a maximum working week of forty hours. It was opposed by much of industry including Florida's large timber interests. Pepper said he was opposed to the original bill and worked for change in the Senate Education and Labor Committee. He reshaped the bill to exempt many of Florida's workers, including those in agriculture and in the turpentine industry. But he failed to get an exemption for the lumber industry, and the timber owners worried that the weak law could become a strong law over time. The fair labor standards legislation was one of those bills in which few wanted compromise. Business wanted no restrictions on its ability to set hours and wages, while workers wanted both. Pepper's work at crafting a compromise gained him few friends, and the weakened form of the fair labor standards bill angered many in Florida. The legislation played a dominant role in Pepper's 1938 campaign.
The 1938 Campaign

Pepper's life was a constant political campaign. In 1936, he had run in two primaries, won the election in 1937, and now in 1938, just months after being sworn in, he had to face the voters again. Thus, in three years he faced the voters five times.

On January 2, 1938, Pepper and Congressman James Mark Wilcox announced their candidacies for the Senate seat. Wilcox, a three-term representative from South Florida, had never lost an election. He was an early New Deal supporter, but parted with Roosevelt over court-packing and the wage-hour measure, and labeled Pepper a "rubber stamp" for the president. A third candidate, former Governor David Sholtz, had burst onto the Florida political scene in 1932, but once in office, his popularity fell rapidly amid reports of corruption. Having failed to secure what he considered a decent job in the Roosevelt administration, he was trying for a political comeback. Like Pepper, Sholtz was running as a champion of the New Deal. Findley Moore, a Lake City businessman running on an anti-black and anti-immigrant platform, also announced his candidacy, as did Thomas Merchant, who wanted a national referendum held before the nation went to war.

The Florida primary election was important to Roosevelt, who was anxious to prove that the New Deal still had life and was popular with the voters. In Pepper, Roosevelt had a candidate who was a New Deal loyalist. On
February 6, 1938, the president's son, James Roosevelt, announced that while the administration did not want to tell the voters of Florida what to do, "it is our sincere hope that he [Pepper] will be returned to the Senate."¹²

Pepper became the poster boy for the New Deal. The importance of the Florida primary was magnified by the fact that it was the first in the nation. Pepper was seen as the New Deal candidate, even though Wilcox had been a faithful support of major New Deal legislation for six years. But he had voted against the wage-hour bill, and Roosevelt saw a chance for an election between an opponent of the wage-hour bill and a supporter. A Pepper victory might convince other members of Congress that the public wanted the legislation passed.¹³

During the campaign, a young Pepper volunteer at the University of Florida joined his campaign. George A. Smathers, a law student at Florida, was named to direct Pepper's campaign on campus, but quickly found himself directing the campaign for all of surrounding Alachua County. Pepper was impressed by young Smathers and wrote, "You and I are young men and there is a lot to be done. Nobody would appreciate more than I the privilege of working with you."¹⁴ Smathers responded by writing, "Anytime—any place . . . that I can aid your campaign please let me know."¹⁵

Just before the primary, Time magazine put Pepper on its cover with the caption, "A Florida fighting-cock will be a White House weather vane."¹⁶ Pepper won with 58.4 percent of the vote. He received 242,350 votes to 110,675 for
Wilcox and just 52,785 for Sholtz. Pepper did well in North Florida, winning the rural vote and in Central Florida. His strongest opposition came in what was known as Florida's Gold Coast, the counties around Palm Beach where the state's wealthier voters lived. Pepper sent a telegram to Roosevelt saying, "The true principles of democracy as exemplified by your great leadership have just received a striking vote of confidence and approval in Florida."18

Pepper returned enthusiastically to the Senate in 1939 with a full six-year term, but soon encountered more frustrations. The New Deal stalled during 1937, and by 1939 it seemed to be in full retreat. Pepper condemned what he saw as "the unrighteous partnership of those who have been willing to scuttle the American Government and the American people and to jeopardize the peace of the world because they hate Roosevelt and what Roosevelt stands for."

Pepper pointed to the United States Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers as the villains, and criticized those in Congress who had "prostituted their power to serve" them.19 Although Pepper was a loyal New Deal supporter, he was unable to sway votes in the Senate. He lacked seniority and was not popular with his colleagues. Pepper was seen by many of his colleagues as a publicity seeker who was quick to criticize others, in order to gain publicity. Time magazine reported that, "He was not well liked in the Senate, had no great influence there."20
The Coming War

The end of World War I seemed to hold out great hope for world peace, but the Treaty of Versailles quickly turned from a bold vision to just another political document. The Senate rejected appeals from President Wilson and chose not to join the League of Nations. Isolationism dominated American foreign policy during the Depression years and in 1937, Congress passed sweeping neutrality legislation to keep the United States from being pulled into another European war. A 1937 survey asked if America should take part if another war came to Europe. Ninety-five percent said "No," and the same percentage wanted the United States to do "everything possible to keep us out of foreign wars."21

Pepper was one of those few who correctly identified the threat Adolf Hitler posed to the world. In 1939, while most of his colleagues quietly watched from the sidelines, Pepper sounded the alarm. Pepper feared the United States would become "hemmed in between a dominant Japan on the West and a dominant Germany on the East." He began lobbying to allow Great Britain to purchase arms on a "cash and carry" basis. But other senators felt that the United States had been dragged into World War I because it had been too willing to serve as arms merchant and banker for Britain and France. They rejected Pepper's argument and retained the neutrality laws.
Although few paid attention to Pepper's proposals, he was not discouraged, introducing a resolution in 1939 to allow Roosevelt to send virtually every type of war material to the Allies. Pepper pledged to make a speech a day on the subject until something was done. Despite the worsening situation in Europe, and Pepper's speeches, he gained just one supporter in the Senate, Joseph Guffey of Pennsylvania. He fellow senators, Scott Lucas of Illinois, Josiah Bailey of North Carolina, and the venerable Burton K. Wheeler of Montana responded with attacks on Pepper. Most of those who spoke out against Pepper were isolationists, but even those who thought the United States should play a role in the world were quiet. It seemed that no one was listening to Pepper, although his constant calls for action were making him known throughout the country. An isolationist group calling itself Mothers of America, hung Pepper in effigy outside the Capitol. The cocoanut-headed dummy was given to Pepper as a souvenir. Still he pushed on, urging construction of 50,000 airplanes, an army of three million, a two-ocean Navy, and the transfer of American destroyers to Britain. Roosevelt knew that the isolationist sentiment in the country remained strong and aiding England could damage his attempt for an unprecedented third term as president.

The problem for Pepper was that he was seen as a Roosevelt functionary. Even those who agreed with his concerns about Germany saw him as little more than a Roosevelt mouthpiece, carrying out the president's wishes. The New York Herald-Tribune said that "when the White House has an important trial balloon
to send up, it invites Senator Pepper to supply the necessary oratorical helium for the ascension." Time magazine said that "Claude Pepper was the only one whom Franklin Roosevelt considered anywhere near fit to expound on the administration's foreign and defense policies." But Pepper often acted without White House approval, although he did routinely inform Roosevelt before taking a stand.

Speaking shortly before Germany invaded Poland, Pepper warned that the war would require the nation to turn all of its attention to "defense and security." Pepper always maintained that if Congress had listened to his plea, Hitler might have been dissuaded from attacking. After the German attack on Poland in September 1939, Roosevelt called Congress back into session to deal with the neutrality acts. From that moment on, the focus of Pepper's efforts was in world affairs.

While his speeches had made his name well-known throughout the country, his prophet-like stance seemed to do him little good in Florida where there were few misgivings about Pepper's position. The isolationism that was so strong in the Midwest was not a factor in Florida. But being right on military preparedness did not obscure the fact that he had alienated many of his fellow senators by his critical remarks during debates. None of the senators who had opposed him wanted to be reminded that they had been wrong about Adolf Hitler. But his biggest problem was in Florida, where opposition to the New Deal was growing, primarily among the state's leading businessmen.
The South and the New Deal

The South and the New Deal were an odd couple. When the New Deal began in 1933, Southern Democrats were among its most dedicated supporters. As historian H. C. Nixon found, “The seeking of Federal aid for southern highways, flood control, barge service, or cotton marketing, is only one aspect of the southern policy of looking northward for public and private bonds for economic, scientific and cultural development.”

Roosevelt’s election radically changed the status of Southern Democrats. Before 1933, Southern Democrats had been the largest single block in the party, faithfully providing their electoral votes for Democrats, as Republican presidential candidates rolled to victory. But with the Roosevelt election, and new-found Democratic strength in the North, the importance of the Southern Democrats within the party began to decline. As historian Dewey W. Gratham noted, the Southern Democrats went from “a majority faction in a minority party to a minority faction in a majority party.” In 1918 the South controlled 26 of the 27 Democratic Senate seats and 107 of the 131 Democratic House seats in Congress, but by 1936 the South had 26 of the 75 Democratic Senate seats and 116 Democratic House seats out of 333 the Democrats held. Roosevelt had eliminated the two-thirds rule for nominating Democratic presidential candidates, eliminating the South’s power to veto presidential nominees. Even in the general
election, the South lost influence. If Roosevelt had failed to carry a single
Southern state, he still would have won all four of his presidential elections.  

But a bigger concern for the Southern Democrats was the new members
of the Roosevelt coalition—the Northern labor unions, big city machines, blacks,
immigrants, and intellectuals. Gradually the Southerners in Congress began to
move away from Roosevelt's New Deal and toward the conservative
Republicans. Because of their seniority, the Southerners rose to committee
chairmanships and used those positions to block legislation they did not like,
including anti-lynching and anti-poll tax bills. Their influence went far beyond
defeating bills. Roosevelt proved reluctant to introduce civil rights legislation for
fear that it would alienate the Southerners.

As early as 1935, Roosevelt told Felix Frankfurter, "I will have trouble with
my own Democratic party from this time on in trying to carry out further programs
of reform and recovery." In 1937, opposition to Roosevelt began to manifest
itself. Many from the South thought the worst of the Great Depression was over
and saw no need for the New Deal's expanding welfare state and the federal
bureaucracy. But as William J. Cooper and Thomas E. Terrill have noted, "Race,
as usual, also figures in the controversy over federal relief. Southern Democrats
believed, again correctly, that federal relief efforts attracted black voters to the
national Democratic party."

In 1943 the coalition of Southern Democrats and Republicans joined
together to try to savage New Deal programs. They were aided by the 1942
election results, in which the Democrats lost 42 seats in the House of Representatives and 12 seats in the Senate. The losses came outside the South, which gave the Southerners a greater voice in the Democratic party. The new coalition of southerners and conservative Republicans attacked the Civilian Conservation Corps, Works Progress Administration, and the National Youth Administration. The movement away from the party was clear by 1946, when 43 of the 102 Congressional Democrats from the South deserted the party on votes more than half the time.

Roosevelt still had loyal followers from the South in Congress, but often they were out of step with the political situation in their home states. George B. Tindall called the New Deal liberals from the South, "generals without an army." At first glance, the list of New Deal supporters in the South seems impressive. There was Pepper, Congressman Lyndon Johnson in Texas, Governor Olin Johnston in South Carolina, Governor E. D. Rivers in Georgia, Lester Hill in Alabama, Governor Dave Sholtz in Florida, Congressman Maury Maverick in Texas, and Governor Burnet Maybank in South Carolina. But a closer look shows that there little to support the notion that the South was becoming more liberal. Rivers was replaced after four years by Eugene Talmadge, an anti-Roosevelt racist; Olin Johnston lost his first bid to the Senate to an anti-New Dealer, Maverick lost his seat after two terms, Johnson moved to the right to keep his seat, Sholtz was discredited, and Pepper eventually lost his seat. Only Maybank and Hill managed to hold on without a defeat. Although Pepper and
the other Southern New Deal supporters were often considered too liberal for their constituents, they were hardly true liberals, especially in civil rights. Historian Alan Brinkley found that the New Deal southerners had little power in Congress and were what he called "unliberal" in comparison to those from other regions.37

Still the voters in the South remained loyal to Roosevelt. In 1944 southern voters gave Roosevelt 69 percent of their votes, compared to about 50 percent in the Northeast and Midwest. It was a strange contradiction: Among voters, Roosevelt found his greatest support in the South. Among Democratic Senators and Congressmen, he found his greatest opposition in the South. While the people in the South still supported Roosevelt, business support was slipping away. Businessmen who had begged for help in 1933, began to see the New Deal as a threat to their economic well being by 1937. As the businessmen turned against the New Deal, they also turned against its supporters, including Pepper.

As Brinkley has noted, New Deal critics have maintained that Roosevelt's failure to back liberals and challenge the conservative power structure of the South was caused by a lack of will. James MacGregor Burns argued that had Roosevelt joined hands with them, he "could have challenged anti-New Deal factions and tried to convert neutralists into backers of the New Deal."38 But when Roosevelt tried to purge two anti-New Deal Senators, Walter George in
Georgia, and Ed Smith in South Carolina in 1938, it turned into a political disaster for the president.

Notes


3. Ibid., 236.


6. Kabat, 70.


6. Pepper radio address, manuscript, 12 November 1937, Pepper Papers.

9. Ibid.

10. Mark Wilcox, 1938 campaign flyer, Pepper Papers.


14. Pepper to George A. Smathers, 4 January 1938, Pepper Papers.


18. Pepper to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 4 May 1968, Pepper Papers.


25. Tampa Morning Tribune, 7 October 1940.

26. Time, 2 September 1940.

27. Pepper, speech of July 17, 1939, manuscript in Pepper Papers.


34. Gratham, 115.

35. Gratham, 119.


38. Ibid., 67.
CHAPTER 4
MAKING ENEMIES

All politicians make enemies, and the more controversial a politician becomes, the more likely the number of his enemies will increase. Throughout his career, Pepper somehow managed to alienate people with long memories and large bank accounts. One of those was one-time supporter Ed Ball, who was the most powerful man in Florida, directing everything from a large banking empire to the largest tract of land in the state to some said the state legislature.

Ball was the brother-in-law of Alfred I. duPont, who had increased his family fortune after moving to Florida and begun buying banks, paper mills, and huge portions of North Florida real estate. He married Jessie Ball, and hired her brother, Ed. Gradually, Ball assumed more responsibility. In 1935, when duPont died, leaving the bulk of his estate to a trust headed by his widow, Ball took over management of the duPont interests in Florida. Many of the representatives and senators from rural north Florida counties, who dominated the Florida legislature, were friends, or business associates. Ball supported Pepper in 1936 and 1938 and later said he had “helped the buzzard get elected.”

In 1944, three events occurred that dramatically changed Pepper’s once-friendly relationship with Ball into one of hatred. In one year, Pepper attacked
Ball's business interests twice, and launched a personal attack based on incorrect information. The first incident involved a tax bill to raise money to fight World War II. In 1943 Roosevelt asked Congress for eleven billion dollars in new taxes. It seemed a simple matter, certainly no one was going to say no to money to help win World War II. But the Congress was in a rebellious mood. The Republicans posted significant gains in the 1942 elections, and many Democrats were ready to rebel against Roosevelt's orders.

What should have been a routine piece of legislation led to a political rebellion. Both Democrats and Republicans began hacking away at the Roosevelt tax plan, butchering his request to just two billion, of which only one billion represented new revenue. Then, they began tacking on amendments to give tax advantages to selected businesses, including major benefits for Ed Ball.

The first benefit for Ball involved what became known as "renegotiation," a complex bureaucratic system allowing the government to reduce the amount paid to a company after the work had been done. The idea was to prevent war contractors from war profiteering. If a company's profit on a war-related contract was found to be excessive by government auditors, the government could renegotiate the contract. One of the amendments to the Roosevelt tax bill exempted many businesses from the process and made it more difficult for the government to renegotiate contracts with the ones that still fell under the review process. Ed Ball's St. Joe Paper Company made boxes and containers for companies shipping war material. Under the old rules, his company could face
the renegotiation process, but under the legislation passed by Congress, the company would be exempt. That meant that no matter how much money St. Joe Paper made, it was not subject to government review.  

The second amendment that benefitted Ball involved taxing provisions for bond holders. It was an obscure provision amendment, designed to benefit only a handful of people. It would save Ball money as a result of his purchase of Florida East Coast Railway Company bonds. The railroad was in bankruptcy and its bonds were all but worthless. Ball began buying them for pennies on the dollar. Because of the financial situation of the railroad, no interest was being paid on the bonds. The railroad claimed a deduction of the unpaid interest, but the Internal Revenue Service questioned the deduction and left open the possibility that the railroad might owe substantial back taxes. That would have cost Ball a considerable sum.  

Finally, the bill contained an amendment to aid Ball’s vast timber interests. The provision allowed Ball to treat profits from lumber as capital gains instead of ordinary income, giving him a lower tax rate.  

Ball stood potentially as one of the biggest winners in the country from the legislation. He would not have to pay the new taxes Roosevelt had requested. He was assured that no government bureaucrats would question his war-related profits, he would be guaranteed tax breaks on his bonds in the Florida East Coast Railway, and his lumber profits would be taxed at a lower rate.  

Helping Ed Ball was certainly not what Roosevelt had in mind when he asked Congress for new taxes. When the results of this legislation became
known, Roosevelt told congressional leaders that he would veto it. They urged him not to veto the bill, but he did, declaring that the legislation "is not a tax bill but tax relief bill providing relief not for the needy but for the greedy." Roosevelt singled out two of the exemptions that would have benefitted Ball, the reclassification of timber profits and the tax breaks for bond holders.

The President's decision provided opponents in Congress an opportunity to assert their leadership. There were just too many items for too many political supporters in the legislation for Roosevelt's veto to hold. The lobbying was intense as supporters of the legislation fought for the dozens of tax breaks. Ball hired Charles Murchison to lobby Pepper. Murchison had been a Harvard classmate of Peppers' and best man at his wedding.

With the veto, Pepper had to choose between backing Ball and hundreds of other Florida businessmen or supporting Roosevelt. The House overrode the veto 299 to 95, far more than the number needed, and sent the bill to the Senate. Pepper was in Florida campaigning for re-election when the matter came up. He had three choices: stay in Florida, and simply not return for the vote, vote to override the president's vote, or vote to uphold the veto.

Pepper's staff sensed that he wanted to support the President and knew that doing so would be politically damaging. They urged him to stay in Florida. Before returning to Washington, Pepper went to St. Augustine to have dinner with Herbert E. Wolfe, who was a close associate of Ed Ball, a major player in
Democratic politics, and a road builder who also stood to benefit from the bill. Wolfe pressed Pepper to vote to override the President’s veto.6

Pepper returned to Washington with his mind made up. Although Pepper knew that the tax was unpopular, he saw Roosevelt’s stand as “making a magnificent liberal fight.”7 Not only would he vote to uphold the President, he would try to rally others. He was the only one in the Senate to speak in favor of Roosevelt’s veto. While his fellow Senators yelled out, “Vote, Vote,” Pepper urged his colleagues to support the president. It was a losing cause, only 12 other Democrats and a single Republican voted to sustain the veto.8

The second conflict with Ball was more personal and involved an attack on Ball based upon incorrect information. In early 1944, as the tax bill moved through Congress, Pepper went to West Palm Beach, and stayed with a friend. He visited the exclusive Breakers Hotel, which was being used as both a hotel and an Army hospital. The ownership situation was murky and unpredictable. It was owned by the Florida East Coast Hotel Corporation, a subsidiary of the bankrupt Florida East Coast Railway Company. The company also owned the railway, but the hotel and railway were operated as separate companies. At the time, Ed Ball was acquiring bonds in the railroad and would eventually come to own it, but he did not own the company in 1944.

During his visit, some soldiers told Pepper that they were not allowed to walk on the well-tended golf course, presumably because it would bother the paying guests. In April, the Army announced that it would close the military
hospital at the Breakers because of the high operating cost. The patients were to be moved to other hospitals. With just a month to go before the 1944 primary election, Pepper turned the closing of the hospital into a campaign issue with a scathing attack on Ball. He reasoned that Ball wanted to make more money by renting the rooms to the wealthy.

What had begun as a political dispute between Pepper and Ball turned into a personal feud that continued for six years. Ball was working behind the scenes on behalf of a Pepper opponent in the 1944 election, and with America at war, an attack on Ball's patriotism would certainly discredit him. In a telegram to Roosevelt, Pepper said the closing "has been influenced either by the present management of the corporation which owns the hotel, or by a mistaken policy of economy by the War Department." He wrote incorrectly that "The corporation is headed by Edward G. Ball of Jacksonville, brother of Mrs. Alfred I. DuPont [sic], and in charge of the DuPont interests in Florida." There is no indication that Pepper or his staff had done any research into the case. It sounded compelling, the case of a wealthy businessman making wounded veterans suffer to please wealthy people. Certainly nothing could be worse than the charge of turning one's back on wounded soldiers in a time of war. But Ball did not have anything to do with the operation of the hotel, or the rules limiting the movement of the soldiers.

Ball sent Jacksonville attorney A. Y. Milam, who had once worked with Pepper, to Washington to explain the situation and demand an apology. Pepper
refused to see Milam, who was left to explain the facts to a Pepper aide. Pepper was informed of his mistake and issued a retraction that fell short of the apology Ball wanted, further enraging him.¹¹

Finally, Ball and Pepper clashed over the Florida East Coast Railway, which eventually cost Pepper not only Ball’s support, but that of many union members. The state’s other senator, Spessard Holland later wrote, “I could never understand why [Pepper] would get into that fight . . . . I think it will haunt him for the rest of his life.”¹²

For most people, the Florida East Coast Railway was a case so confusing that it defied understanding. The original railroad had been built between 1885 and 1896 by Henry Flagler, who also developed hotels along the Florida’s East Coast. In the 1920s, the railroad floated $150 million worth of second general mortgage refunding bonds to expand. Florida was in the midst of a boom and the railroad was overwhelmed by the demands for freight hauling, and needed to build a second track from Jacksonville to Miami. The railroad was hugely profitable and it appeared to be a sound business decision. But the boom collapsed in 1925. The railroad might have survived that, but the Great Depression eliminated any chance that it could repay the bonds. In 1930, the railroad defaulted on the bonds and, in 1931, collapsed amid a worsening Depression. It was placed in receivership, and the value of its bonds declined dramatically.
In 1940, Ed Ball began acquiring the bonds for pennies on the dollar and eventually acquired effective control of the line. In an unbelievable statement, the Ball forces denied that they had any thought of making money, but rather wanted to guarantee “the preservation of an efficient and serviceable railroad devoted to the welfare of the east coast of Florida.” If Ball could purchase the railroad at bargain-basement prices, reorganize it, and make it profitable, he could make a fortune.

In 1941 the Interstate Commerce Commission began looking at possible reorganization plans for the bankrupt railroad. The ICC came up with a solution, but the United States District Court rejected it. Ball kept buying the bonds and by 1944 he had acquired 51 percent. Ball wanted the railroad for himself, but other bondholders thought they would do better to merge with the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad. It looked as thought Ball was about to win when Pepper stepped in and took the side of the Atlantic Coast Line. Pepper said it “would be against the public interest” to put the railroad in Ball’s hands. Pepper launched a campaign to deny Ball ownership of the railroad after the 1944 election. Perhaps Pepper thought that with a six-year term to look forward to, and a friendly president in the White House, he could afford to take on the man who had tried to defeat him.

During the campaign, the Atlantic Coast Line Railway helped Pepper and his friends obtain train reservations. It was no small task to find a seat during the war, and took considerable influence to get a sleeping berth on short notice.
After the election, Pepper thanked the president of the Atlantic Coast Line for his help. By this time, the two were on a first-name basis.16

Ball launched a campaign to convince railroad employees that a merger with the Atlantic Coast Line would cost many of them their jobs. The St. Augustine Chamber of Commerce, where the railroad had its headquarters, published a booklet supporting Ball.17

Pepper had managed to draw fire from both Ball and the railway workers, and he then made the situation worse. The ICC agreed to hold a hearing on the matter in November 1945 in West Palm Beach, while Pepper was making an ill-fated trip to Russia. The president of the Atlantic Coast Line, Champion Davis, sent a cable to Pepper in Rumania urging him to return to appear before the hearing. Davis said Pepper would be ridiculed if he did not appear.18 Pepper replied that he did not "deem it necessary" to appear at the hearing.19 It was Pepper who had requested the November hearing in the first place, getting it delayed from August.20 A lawyer for Ball later commented that Pepper had failed to show up because he "was in Moscow learning about the party line."21 The failure to appear brought Pepper widespread criticism, alienating everyone involved in the case. He offended people who had been major supporters—the union railroad employees and Ed Ball. Still, he wrote to a friend that "In the long run, it will not have hurt me politically to have opposed Ed Ball and the Dupont [sic] interests."22 The case dragged through the Interstate Commerce Commission and the courts. It remained a major news story and made front-page
news again when the United States Supreme Court upheld a ruling that the
Interstate Commerce Commission could not force a merger. In 1961 Ball finally
obtained control of the 572-mile railroad.

The 1944 Election

In 1944 Pepper initially drew the opposition of three minor opponents in
the Democratic primary. Findley Moore, who had garnered one percent of the
vote in 1938, was back with his racist platform. Another candidate running on an
anti-black platform was Millard Conklin of Daytona Beach. Alston Cockrell of
Daytona Beach sought votes by leaving the impression that he was a member of
a well-known Florida family, even though he was not related to the well-known
Cockrell’s.

With two months to go before the election, Pepper had not drawn a
significant opponent. Wilcox, the loser in 1938 and former Governor Doyle
Carlton, a loser in a 1936 Senate race, declined to run. Just fifty-seven days
before the May primary, Judge J. Ollie Edmunds of Jacksonville, a most unlikely
challenger, announced his candidacy.

Edmunds was a native of Georgia and the son of an itinerant lumber
worker. He put himself through Stetson University, working as a janitor, waiter,
and newspaper reporter, while earning his undergraduate and law degrees. In
1931 he was appointed to the county court in Jacksonville. He invested in timber
land and became wealthy. He had supported Pepper in 1934 and wrote to a friend that he had a “high regard for Claude’s ability,” adding, “I should like to see him in Washington.” Edmunds was re-elected judge twice, but he was not a natural politician. He was chosen by his fellow county judges as their lobbyist in Tallahassee in 1941, but otherwise was unknown outside of Jacksonville.

Edmunds had almost no organization or campaign staff. He asked Ronald Slye to be his campaign manager, an unusual choice since Slye had no political experience. He was a salesman for a furniture manufacturer who had traveled extensively throughout the state. His title was misleading for his role was largely handling the luggage and making sure the candidate showed up for events on time. Slye was not the only political novice in the campaign, most of those involved were friends and neighbors who had never been involved in a political campaign.

Edmunds was a game candidate, working his way through every county in the state, usually making three to five appearances a day. Political scientist V. O. Key found that “Edmunds lacked Pepper’s histrionic skills and his managers handled his campaign ineptly.” Edmunds called for less government but made no campaign promises, while Pepper traveled the state making what the Miami Herald said were too many promises. Edmunds had trouble remembering people’s names, a serious failing for a politician, and was chronically late for appearances. Ronald Slye’s wife remembered that her husband “was just prodding him all the time [saying] ‘come one, it’s time to go, it’s time to go.’"
Opposition to Pepper was led by Associated Industries, the Florida branch of the National Association of Manufacturers, which was controlled by Ball. He hired Dan Crisp, a Jacksonville public relations man, to lead the fight against Pepper. "We just wanted to defeat Pepper. Those were my orders," Crisp said. Ball gave some money, but his real contribution was in getting others to give, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, the American Medical Association, and dozens of others. But the opposition was far from united. Many businesses were receiving lucrative government contracts, and scores of military installations were springing up around the state, creating thousands of jobs.

As in 1938, the Pepper campaign was seen as a referendum on the New Deal and Franklin Roosevelt. A strong showing by Pepper would boost the fourth-term aspirations of Roosevelt. A United Press story predicted, "The showing Pepper makes in this election will serve in many quarters as a gauge for estimating Pres. Roosevelt’s fourth-term support in the ‘solid South’ . . . .If Pepper gets a majority vote and is returned to the Senate without being forced into a second primary, it will be considered an overwhelming victory for the New Deal." To help him, Roosevelt asked Bernard Baruch—one of the wealthiest businessmen in the United States—to send money to Pepper, saying it was important.

Florida was a difficult state for a politician who was not already well-known to the voters. The size alone favored the incumbent. Its population
centers were far apart, and the areas in between were sparsely settled. Air travel was not yet practical, and it took many hours to drive from one place to another. The Democratic party in Florida was not tightly organized, and candidates generally had to depend upon their own resources, ingenuity, and personality to woo the voters. In the 1949, Key wrote, "The search for coherent, organized political leadership in Florida seems futile in whatever direction one looks." There were few if any political groups that could deliver sizeable blocs of votes. Incumbents with high name recognition benefitted from this situation, but it hurt a candidate such as Edmunds, who needed to attract more than 100,000 voters in less than two months.

Even a candidate with a clear and convincing message and plenty of money would have had a difficult time, and Edmunds’ campaign lacked both of those. He ran as an opponent of the New Deal, but his message was usually muddled, charging Pepper with indiscretions, but providing no specifics, and calling Pepper, "the most notoriously absentee senator in Congress," although the charge was not true.

It was Conklin and Moore, the two white supremacists, who raised race as an issue and allowed Edmunds to exploit it. Conklin was confident that "The issue that will defeat Pepper is the issue of white supremacy in the South," he said. At issue was a 1942 appearance by Pepper at a black church in Los Angeles. During the campaign, pictures of Pepper at the church began appearing in fliers and in newspapers throughout Florida. Pepper tried to explain
the appearance through newspaper advertisement and in public statements. Under a large headline which read: "Senator Pepper's Reply to His Opposition's Cheap and Vicious Political Trick in Connection With His Appearance Before A Negro Church Congregation," Pepper maintained, "The only speech I have ever given to any Negro audience in California is a patriotic one I made . . . in the pulpit of a Baptist Negro Church on a Sunday afternoon at the expressed request of the members of the church. I said nothing indicating that I believe in social equality because, of course, I do not."35

In the midst of the campaign, the Supreme Court ruled in Smith v. Allwright (1944) that it was unconstitutional for the Texas Democratic party to bar blacks from participating in primary. In Florida, like other states throughout the South, the white primary system had effectively disfranchised blacks since the turn of the century. Some blacks did vote, mainly for Republican candidates in the general election and nearly always in larger cities such as Miami, Tampa, Daytona Beach, and Jacksonville. But they were few in numbers and had little effect on the election results. In some Florida counties in the 1940s, there were no blacks registered to vote. Pepper had to react to the Smith v. Allwright ruling to establish his credentials as an opponent of racial equality. "The South will allow nothing to impair white supremacy," he said. Pepper advocated an end-run around the Supreme Court ruling by trying to rewrite the requirements for voting in the Democratic primary so that it would pass a constitutional test while denying blacks the right to vote.36
Edmunds tried to exploit the race issue, running newspaper advertisements calling Pepper "a man who stirs up racial strife and discord in violation of Southern tradition." The advertisements said Edmunds believed that "the party principle of white supremacy must be maintained." But Pepper’s strong defense of the white primary system, and statements on white supremacy, kept Edmunds from successfully exploiting the issue.

Edmunds’ other major primary issue was Pepper’s support of the New Deal. By 1944 the New Deal had become controversial with many believing it was costing too much, robbing the individual of rights, and creating a huge bureaucracy which was involved in every facet of American life. Speaking in Miami, Edmunds said, "The daily life of every one of us has been so affected by petty tyrants and bureaucratic dictators who was wasting billions of precious dollars." The strangest disagreement in the campaign came over money. Although both were running inexpensive campaigns, each accused the other of having huge slush funds. Edmunds said, "A slush fund to stagger the imagination has been raised by those who have grown rich from profiteering on war contracts. This fund, reported to exceed $250,000, is being lavishly spent by the largest political organization in Florida history. The war profiteers are opposed to Ollie Edmunds. I am proud of it."

Pepper saw it the other way. It was Edmunds who had unlimited money provided by wealthy businessmen determined to drive Pepper from the Senate.
"They have offered every financial inducement, including financial security after the campaign." Columnist Drew Pearson, a friend of Pepper's, wrote, "the GOP is pouring piles of money into the race" to defeat Pepper. Another columnist, Marquis Childs wrote that "Pepper had the formidable enmity of wealthy Northerners who have established residence in the resort state."

Actually neither candidate had abundant funds. The financial status of the Edmunds campaign is perhaps best illustrated by Cosby Haddock, Sr., a dairy company employee, who was loaned to the Edmunds campaign as a driver and advance man by his employer. Haddock said that on more than one occasion, he had to share a hotel room with Edmunds, hardly a sign of a healthy financial situation.

Both candidates followed a traditional pattern which included an automobile tour of the state, and speeches at county courthouses. Both also used radio to carry their speeches, although Pepper was more effective both in arranging for broadcast time and in his presentation. The one-minute or thirty-second commercial had not yet come to Florida and newspapers were the primary vehicle for advertising. The real value of newspapers was not in the advertisements but in the news columns and editorial pages. Newspapers routinely used their news columns to voice support of a candidate, and this coverage could be vital to a candidate. There were front page editorials and cartoons either supporting a candidate or lampooning the opposition. Pepper received the support of all but two of the state's newspapers, failing to get the
endorsements of those owned by Perry. With financing from Ball, Perry bought daily and weekly Florida newspapers and soon owned a statewide media empire. Perry had turned from a supporter into a vigorous opponent.

One editor, Martin Anderson, the owner of the Orlando Morning Sentinel was typical of the publishers backing Pepper. He wrote, "Can a citizen of Florida figure out any percentage in putting an anti-Roosevelt freshmen into the Senate against a pro-Roosevelt young veteran who by 1949 easily may become one of the outstanding figures of the world."44

The power of Pepper's relationship with Roosevelt was shown five days before the election. The Gandy Bridge, connecting Tampa and St. Petersburg, opened in 1924, and charged a thirty-five cent toll. For two decades, residents complained about the toll, and asked the federal government to take over the bridge and eliminate the toll. With the election days away, Roosevelt lifted the toll as a wartime measure. The honor of making the announcement went to Pepper. In Tampa and St. Petersburg there were celebrations and the schools of St. Petersburg were closed the day after the announcement.45 Edmunds maintained that the announcement killed his campaign. Although he did do worse in Pinellas County than his statewide average, the difference was not enough to give him a victory.46

In the May 2 election, Pepper received 194,445 votes, Edmunds 127,157, Conklin 33,317, and the two other candidates received a total of 26,000 votes. Pepper was held to 51.8 percent of the vote, just enough to win the election
without a runoff. A shift of just 5,000 votes from Pepper to the other candidates would have forced Pepper into a runoff. It was not just that Pepper had come close to being thrown into a runoff, it was that he lost support in every area of the state. Even though the state's population had increased, along with voter registration, Pepper received fewer votes in 53 of the state's 67 counties than he had in 1938. In some counties his total declined by half. Pepper did well in Dade County—which was already becoming a haven for retirees—but in the Gold Coast counties, such as Palm Beach, where wealthy Northerners were flocking, Pepper did poorly.\(^47\)

Pepper seemed unfazed by his close call. In 1936 he won without opposition, in 1938 he was re-nominated with 58 percent of the vote, and in 1944 won with just 52 percent. This came in an era when most Democrats in the South were routinely returned to office with no opposition or only token opposition. Pepper had another six years to mend his political fences.

Ball was angry at Edmunds for not attacking Pepper more. He said that he had told Edmunds "he couldn't follow the Marquis of Queensberry rules in a barroom brawl, but he wouldn't listen."\(^48\) But while Pepper won another six-year term, Ball's campaign to unseat him continued. Crisp kept working to defeat Pepper, creating The Florida Democratic Club as an umbrella group for all those who wanted to see Pepper defeated in 1950.

During his first full term in the Senate, Pepper had emerged as a national figure, known for his early condemnation of Hitler, his support of American aid to
Great Britain, and as a devoted New Dealer. Nevertheless, he had managed to alienate some powerful interests in his home state, who could undermine in senatorial career and his national ambitions. He seemed unmindful of the political problems he was creating for himself as he resumed his seat in 1945.

Notes


2. Tracy Emanuel Danese, "Claude Pepper and Ed Ball: A Study in Contrasting Political Purposes" (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University), 1997, 199-201.


4. Danese, 204.


7. Pepper, Diary, 23 February 1944.

8. Danese, 208.


10. Ibid.

11. Danese, 210-211.

12. Spessard L. Holland to Ed Ball, 3 July 1958, box 812, file 77, Spessard Holland papers, Florida State University Special Collections, Tallahassee, Florida.

Papers.


18. Champion Davis to Pepper, 1 November 1945. Pepper Papers.


22. Pepper to Moorman M. Parrish, 29 December 1945, Pepper Papers.


27. Miami Herald, 25 April 1944.

28. Slye, interview.


30. Orlando Morning Sentinel, 2 May 1944.

32. Key, 99.

33. Pensacola Journal, 25 March 1944

34. Jacksonville Journal, 21 March 1944.


37. Orlando Morning Sentinel, 29 March 1944


39. Winter Haven Chief, 13 April 1944.

40. Lakeland Ledger, 7 April 1944

41. Miami Herald, 1 April 1944.

42. St. Petersburg Times, 10 May 1944.

43. Haddock, interview.

44. Orlando Morning Sentinel, 26 April 1944.


47. Ibid.

48. Lincoln, 158.
CHAPTER 5
THE SEARCH FOR PEACE

Once World War II started, Pepper began to think about the future—both for himself and the world. He came to believe that world peace would be the issue that would dominate politics in the post-war period. Seven weeks after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Pepper wrote to his friend, Raymond Robins, a Florida resident who was close to the Soviet leadership, "Of course, I am concerned about winning the war. Very much concerned. But I am primarily beginning to think about the Post War period, economically, politically, spiritually. . . . I am doing what I can to foster an appreciation of the necessity of some kind of a world governmental structure to be built upon the Post War wreckage."1

In April 1942—five months after Pearl Harbor—he submitted a resolution calling for the United States to join a world organization after the war.2 For the remainder of the war, Pepper continued his efforts to form a world organization. He believed the issue would also increase his standing in the Senate. He told his friend Sherman Minton he had "a feeling that I have gained somewhat in influence in the Senate. . . . I have usually had to be so far ahead of the Senate that I was constantly in an exposed position. . . . There is no need concealing the fact that all of them have never thought that I was the greatest person in the
world." To Robins, he wrote that he had developed liberal groups in Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, and Wisconsin to "work in the next Democratic Convention for a liberal platform and a liberal candidate." A friend from Harvard Law School began to work on a "plan for forming an organization on my behalf throughout the country."4

As part of his effort to become a national political leader, he took a major role in getting Henry Wallace confirmed as secretary of commerce in 1945. The two men were devoted to the ideals of the New Deal and, from 1945 through 1948, they emerged as Washington's leading New Deal supporters and both became estranged from the Democratic Party after Roosevelt's death. Wallace, who was considered to be an extreme left-winger, and too friendly toward Russia, was nominated for the cabinet post as a conciliation prize after losing the vice presidency to Harry S Truman, but there was strong opposition in the Senate. The Commerce Department had the responsibility for loaning money to foreign nations, and there was a fear that he would use that power to loan money to Russia. Pepper helped engineer a compromise in which Wallace was confirmed, but lost the power to lend money. Although Pepper believed it had enhanced his standing in the Senate and in the White House, the battle also served to tie he and Wallace closer together in the mind of the public.5
The Truman Presidency

Roosevelt’s sudden death in April 1945 was a severe blow to Pepper. Roosevelt was his political hero, and Pepper was always the first to rally to a Roosevelt idea and willing to lend his considerable oratorical skills to defend the President on the Senate floor. It was a double blow because it placed Harry Truman in the White House. Pepper believed that he or Wallace—not Truman—was the logical heir to the Roosevelt political legacy. Years later, he told an interviewer, "I liked Harry Truman, but he was not someone to take seriously."6 It was an error on Pepper’s part to underestimate Truman and would eventually contribute to his 1950 defeat.

Pepper was not the only one to underestimate Truman. Time magazine concluded that “Harry Truman is a man of distinct limitations, especially in high level politics. He knows his limitations. . . . In his administration there are likely to be few innovations and little experimentation."7

Although the New Deal stumbled badly after 1936, its champions still saw it as the best hope for the future of America. They were confident that Roosevelt would engineer a comeback for the New Deal once the war was over. Liberals questioned whether Truman would continue Roosevelt’s policies. Five months after Roosevelt’s death, Truman urged a continuation of Roosevelt’s domestic programs, an ambitious reorganization of the executive branch, increases in the minimum wage, greater rights for collective bargaining, more public works and a
permanent Fair Employment Practices Committee permanent. He also talked about better housing and health care. Truman said, “Let us make the attainment of those rights the essence of postwar American life,” he said. As Donald R. McCoy has observed, Truman’s domestic program was more than a warmed over New Deal. Former New York Mayor Fiorello La Guardia said, “Franklin Roosevelt is not dead.”

Although Pepper had reservations about Truman, the new president had disliked Pepper since their days in the Senate. After becoming president, Truman discussed Pepper with Henry Wallace and other members of his cabinet. Wallace recorded that Truman, “. . . has a very deep animus against Pepper. He says Pepper’s only motive is to get publicity.” Truman said that while the two were at the Bath Shipyards in Maine during the war, and he was speaking, Pepper tried to take the microphone away from him. Truman told the cabinet that “all that was necessary to get 90 percent of the senators against anything was to have Claude Pepper come out on the floor for it.”

**Truman and the Liberals**

Pepper was not alone in his feelings about Truman. Many liberals saw disturbing signs in Truman’s actions. The Roosevelt cabinet, with its strong liberal element, began to change under Truman. Within four months after taking office, only Wallace and Interior Secretary Harold Ickes were left from the
Roosevelt cabinet, and they were eventually cast aside. One study found that 80 percent of Truman’s most significant appointments in 1945 and 1946 went to businessmen, corporate lawyers, bankers and military men.”12

As historian Robert Griffith wrote, “While he pledged himself to Roosevelt’s reform agenda in his September 1945, address to Congress, there was a wide discrepancy between the new Chief Executive’s words and actions.”13 One critic, historian Susan Hartmann suggested that Truman words were part of a strategy designed to create liberal issues, not to secure enactment of liberal programs.14 Still he faced a Republican Congress beginning in 1947, and had little leverage in getting legislation passed.

Roosevelt intimate Tommy Corcoran told Alabama Senator Lister Hill that such New Dealers as Wallace, Pepper, William O. Douglas and Hugo Black, “had the world in their hands last year, and now they’re just a bunch of political refugees. . . . a helpless bunch of sheep.”15 Pepper and the other New Dealers found themselves on the outside, their advice no longer sought, their participation in the highest political councils no longer wanted. Under Roosevelt, Pepper was a frequent visitor at the White House, and could count on the president for assistance.

Pepper must have wondered how Truman, a virtual stranger to Roosevelt, could have ended up as president. During the 1944 campaign, Roosevelt and Truman had never campaigned together, and as vice president, Truman had held just three brief meetings with Roosevelt. During those three meetings,
Roosevelt failed to give him any assignments, tell him what the administration was doing—especially the development of the atomic bomb—and made no effort to keep him informed of domestic or foreign policy issues.\textsuperscript{16}

Truman faced huge problems. Millions of soldiers were clamoring to get out of the service, at home people were tired of doing without a long list of rationed items, businesses wanted to get back to producing consumer merchandise, and the labor unions were displaying increasing militancy. Beginning in late 1945, unions staged a record numbers of strikes as workers sought to gain the pay raises they felt had been lost during the war. There were strikes in nearly every industry, steel, coal lumber, shipping, railroads. In all, four-and-a-half million workers walked off the job in more than five thousand strikes in 1945 and 1946.\textsuperscript{17} In some cases, the strikes forced Truman to take anti-union positions, alienating the Democrats' most faithful supporters.

Truman's problems hurt his popularity ratings and by July, Pepper was expressing more misgivings about Truman. To Wallace, Pepper "spoke at some little length about his disillusion about the way things were going. He seemed to think there was danger of the present administration making many of the same mistakes that the Harding administration made."\textsuperscript{18} Some of his dislike of Truman may have come from Pepper's belief that he or Wallace, not Truman, should have had the 1944 vice presidential nomination, and thus the presidency.

On July 30, 1945, Pepper received an unsigned memorandum entitled "Your Personal Future." The plan called for Pepper to join the Truman ticket as a
vice presidential candidate in 1948, then become the Presidential nominee in 1952. Pepper was urged to be "an independent party regular with a personal following." The memo advised him to become "the prophet of the future. . . . the most active and best publicized liberal." But the memorandum cautioned that "The path of Pepper's significance does not lie in international affairs. It only lies specifically in the applications of the world trend in internal politics."

While Pepper accepted some of the advice, he rejected one part of it that cost him dearly. Instead of working to get on a ticket with Truman, he did as much as he could to antagonize the President. Instead of concentrating on domestic issues, he devoted his attention to foreign affairs, using his seat on the Senator Foreign Relations Committee to push his views. Pepper may have felt that pushing a domestic agenda could not advance his political fortunes. Some other Southerners had a national reputation, but there was one reality all Southern politicians faced: the race issue. Although it proved to be his undoing, Pepper's only route to higher office was through international affairs as he saw it. If he could become a world figure, it might overcome his region's racial views and secure his national ambitions.

During World War II, there was a feeling—and certainly a hope—that America and the Soviet Union might be able to maintain their good relationship after the war. Fortune magazine conducted a public opinion survey in 1943 that revealed that 81 percent of Americans thought the United States and Russia should work as equal partners after the war. There were attempts to make the
Russians look like Americans. *Look* magazine, seeking to make Stalin look like a regular guy, published a cover story entitled, "A Guy Named Joe." *Collier's* magazine offered a special issue which concluded that the Russian form of communism wasn’t so bad, but simply a "modified capitalist set-up," moving toward democracy. Life magazine called the Russians, "one hell of a people, who look like Americans, dress like Americans and think like Americans." Stalin’s brutal secret police were described as "a national police similar to the FBI." Pepper was one of the millions of Americans who shared the hope that Russia and the United States would coexist peacefully. In June 1945, in a nationwide radio address in June 1945, Pepper spoke on behalf of loaning money to Russia to rebuild when the war ended. "The next thing that we have got to understand with our heads and our hearts is that we cannot have world well being unless we help one another economically. We cannot have full employment, we cannot have prosperity, we cannot have stable political conditions or economic conditions unless the world generally is well off."

**Pepper in Russia**

In August 1945, one week after the war ended in Japan, Pepper left for a tour of Europe and the Soviet Union. Although he said he was going in an official capacity as a member of the Small Business Committee to look for foreign trade opportunities, he went at his own expense. To finance the trip,
Pepper agreed to write a series of articles for the North American Newspaper Alliance, a newspaper syndicate. The syndicate, in turn, sold the articles to a number of newspapers including The New York Times. He was paid $1,000 for articles about his trip. It was a most unusual arrangement; he met with world leaders as a member of the United States Senate, then wrote a story about the meeting as a journalist. The leaders he interviewed assumed he was approaching them as a member of the United States Senate, not as a journalism. He first visited London, Paris, Frankfurt, and Berlin. In Berlin he inspected Adolf Hitler's office in the Reich Chancellery and the air raid shelter "in which he and Eva Braun are supposed to have committed suicide. I don't believe either of them is dead."

On September 14, he flew to Moscow to meet with Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin. The interview lasted one hour, but haunted Pepper for the remainder of his Senate career. United States Ambassador Averill Harriman was out of the country when Pepper arrived, and it fell to diplomat George F. Kennan to arrange the interview. Kennan was clearly outraged that Pepper was traveling as both a Senator and a journalist. Kennan thought he was setting up a private and confidential meeting with Stalin for a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. On the evening before the interview, Pepper told Kennan about the newspaper deal. "I recall only a sense of hopelessness I experienced in trying to explain to the Russians why a distinguished statesman, discussing serious problems of international affairs with a foreign governmental leader, would be
interested in exploiting for a very minor private gain whatever value the interview might have," Kennan wrote.26

But Pepper was not the only one exploiting the meeting. The Russians were able to use it to obtain something they sorely needed—positive publicity. Pepper went on Soviet radio to make a speech, which was printed and distributed by the Russians. In his radio address, he called Stalin “one of the great men of history and of the world," and predicted that “Russia’s greatest era lies not in her glorious past but in her future.” He concluded by praising the Russians for working toward "the destruction of tyranny and the restoration of freedom and independence in the world."27

As part of his writing assignment, he wrote in The New York Times that he was "privileged to talk with the single most powerful man in the world, the man who is going to determine in a large way what kind of world ours is to be."28 Most Americans believed that it was the president of the United States who was the most powerful man in the world, not Stalin. In his regular column to Florida newspaper, Pepper continued to praise Stalin and the Russians: "The Russians like the Americans. They are generally a friendly agreeable people." Pepper said he did not think the Russians had aggressive intentions and urged the United States to cooperate with them.29

In his private notes, Pepper wrote, "As for foreign policy, the objective of the Soviet Union was to collaborate with other nations of the world in keeping peace."30 He said that when he and Stalin first met, Stalin asked about his age.
Pepper said he was forty-five years old. Stalin said, "I envy you." Pepper replied, "There are a great many who envy you, too." As a present, Pepper gave Stalin a copy of a Henry Wallace book, *Sixty Million Jobs*.31

His statements drew increasing attention from the *Daily Worker*, the communist party newspaper, with his trip abroad receiving regular coverage in the newspaper. When Pepper visited Paris, the paper reported, "Senator Claude Pepper urged in Paris that the atom bomb be placed at the disposal of the Military Staffs Committee of the United Nations."32

In December 1945, Pepper returned to the United States after four months in Europe and encountered a strong wave of criticism in Florida. The *Fort Lauderdale News* said, "Claude Pepper believes in Communism. WE DO NOT. That's why we suggest that the sooner you realize he is NOT a part of OUR AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE the better off we all will be."33 Even Pepper's friends were alarmed at the trip and its results. One wrote to a Pepper aide, "The Florida crackers are not interested in statesmanship, and they are not interested in Europe and world affairs. They are principally selfish and they think the Senator should be devoting his time and talent to the narrow interests of the state of Florida only, and it is going to take some good work . . . to overcome the ground that has been lost by his prolonged trip to Europe."34 One constituent advised that Pepper would do better to "spend more time in Florida and devote more attention to local problems."35 Pepper thought his trip could "make a greater contribution to future peace . . . and even if defeat should be the price
still I would have no complaint." He said he thought constituents "are going to complain always when I don't devote my whole time to their petty, personal matters," and felt he had five years to repair his base in Florida. Perhaps if he had started mending his relations with Florida voters then, he could have recovered by 1950 and won re-election. But for Pepper, things only got worse. He was never able to admit that the trip was a political mistake.

While he was away, there was a sea change in public opinion about the Soviets. Beginning in late 1945, the leaders of the West came to believe that the Soviets did not want peace, but rather wanted domination. Secretary of State James F. Byrnes reached what he thought was an understanding with the Russians over the structure of the governments in Romania and Bulgaria so that they would include more non-Communists. But many thought Byrnes was going too easy on the Russians. Within the State Department there were cries that Byrnes had not done enough for Romania and Bulgaria, and in Congress, Republicans complained that Byrnes had given too much to the Soviets in agreeing to share some atomic controls. Truman was angry because Byrnes had made the decisions without consultation with the White House. When Byrnes returned to Washington from Europe, an angry Harry Truman told him, "I do not think we should play compromise any longer. . . . I'm tired of babying the Soviets." Truman decided not to make further concessions to the Russians. Truman saw a shift in American attitudes toward Russia, and thought correctly that the Republicans would make it a campaign issue in 1946. Stalin stoked the
fights with a rare speech in February 1946 in which he said communism and capitalism were incompatible.\textsuperscript{41}

\textbf{The Growing Soviet Threat}

As 1946 began, the liberal movement in the United States split over the question of how to deal with the Soviet Union. Eventually, two wings emerged. One supported Truman's hard line policy toward the Soviet Union and was represented by such groups as the Americans for Democratic Action. The ADA saw the Soviet Union as a military threat and supported continuation of the New Deal. The other, the National Citizens' Political Action Committee (NC-PAC), believed the key to peace was through the maintenance of good relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. That group was willing to overlook Soviet aggression in Eastern Europe to maintain peace. They supported Soviet-American unity and were allied with the Congress of Industrial Organizations. Both Pepper and Henry Wallace became frequent speakers at NC-PAC events. Wallace was committed to NC-PAC, and Pepper certainly agreed with its goals.\textsuperscript{42} NC-PAC and the Independent Citizens Committee of the Arts, Sciences, and Professions merged to form the Progressive Citizens of America. The PCA had a number of Communists and fellow travelers among its members, but that did not deter Pepper from speaking at its rallies. The group could turn out thousands to cheer for Pepper, crowding his schedule with
appearances throughout the country. As Walter Reuther once observed, "Communists perform the most complete valet service in the world... they provide you with applause, and they inflate your ego." 

On February 27, 1946, Pepper spoke at the Red Army Day dinner in Chicago to raise money for Russian relief. According to an account in the Daily Worker, Pepper "wished a long life to the Red Army as a warning to all tyrants who might attempt conquest." Pepper said that the Soviet people want friendship but "our handling of the atom bomb does not ease their minds." There had been hopes that the United States would share the secret of the bomb, perhaps through the United Nations. Any chance that the atomic bomb would be placed under international control died with the growing anti-Soviet feeling in the United States.

The anti-Soviet sentiment was given a boost early in 1946, when former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill arrived in the United States for an extended vacation. In March, he spoke in Fulton, Missouri as Truman looked on. He warned that, "... an iron curtain has descended across the Continent." He seemed to be seeking an Anglo-American alliance to stand up to the Soviets. The following day, Pepper and two fellow senators, Harley M. Kilgore and Glen Taylor, criticized Churchill's speech. They said such an Anglo-American alliance would "cut the throat" of the United Nations.

On March 20, 1946, Pepper attempted to explain his views in a major Senate speech. He urged the United States to "destroy every atomic bomb
which we have, and smash every facility we possess which is capable of producing only destructive forms of atomic energy." He also urged an immediate summit meeting between Britain, Russia, and the United States. The speech received little coverage from mainstream newspapers in the United States, but was embraced by the Daily Worker. The front page headline read "TREAT U.S.S.R. AS FRIEND PEPPER URGES," and the story said that Pepper had "collided head on with the anti-Soviet hysteria now gripping the capital." On April 4, Pepper made another Senate speech, this one entitled "Peace Through Equal Justice For All Nations." He sharply criticized the foreign policy of Great Britain. Calling the United States the "guarantor of British imperialism." Pepper's speech implied that it was Britain, not the Soviet Union, that was responsible for the problems in the world.

The speech brought him the greatest criticism of his career, unleashing a stream of negative publicity that would continue until his 1950 defeat. He was out of step with the American people. A survey found that 60 percent thought the United States was too soft in dealing with Russia. The decline was dramatic. In March 1945, a public opinion survey showed that 55 percent of Americans said the United States could trust Russia. One year later, the percentage had fallen to 35 percent.

The day after Pepper gave the speech, Florida's senior senator, Charles O. Andrews, demanded an apology. Andrews said Pepper's speech, "does not represent the feeling and sentiment of the great mass of people of Florida."
Andrews singled out Pepper's charge that the United States and Britain were "ganging up" against Russia, but said he did not agree with "any part of his statement." Pepper did not respond to Andrews, and did nothing to slow down his criticism of American foreign policy and general praise of the Soviet Union.

In the United States, the only praise Pepper received came from the Daily Worker. In an editorial, the paper said Pepper's speech "can well be studied by every patriotic American . . . . It should raise to new heights the fight for an affirmative foreign policy for our nation." Russian newspapers gave Pepper's remarks more attention than a major speech by Truman in Chicago. The Washington Post carried an editorial entitled "Red Herring." It was the first time the word "Red" had been used in print in connection with Pepper. The editorial said, If he keeps it up, he will be making a strong bid for the distinction of being America's number one white-washer of aggression. . . . We don't see how the Senator's constituents can avoid asking him where his loyalties lie."

Before the controversy had quieted over his April speech, Pepper set off another firestorm with an April 8th article in The New Republic. In it he wrote, "The United States is nursing exclusive possession of the atomic bomb, seeking globe-girdling military bases and considering military conscription." Pepper again proposed the destruction of all atomic weapons, called on the United Nations Security Council to establish the joint occupation of all strategic bases outside their own homelands, and equal access to raw materials for all nations.
In Moscow, Pepper’s article received extensive coverage in the Russian newspaper, Pravda. A telegram to Secretary of State James F. Byrnes from the American Embassy in Moscow noted that the Russian newspaper "prominently publishes abbreviated translation of Pepper’s New Republic article." The telegram also noted the Russian newspapers reported on a Pepper speech, "in which he accuses the British of 'desiring to force US to shed American blood so that British may rule Palestine as a colony,' and asserts that US too often supports British in British-Soviet conflicts on interest in Europe and Middle East."

Pepper’s remarks and writings also brought scrutiny from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The Bureau prepared a memorandum about Pepper’s association with groups suspected of being communist fronts. The May 1 memo from FBI official D. M. Ladd to Director J. Edgar Hoover included a note, "I thought you would be interested in the following information further pointing out Senator Pepper's pro-Russian attitude." At the bottom of the note, Hoover wrote a personal note ordering that the report be sent to Truman aide Harry Vaughan at the White House. "I thought the President and you would be interested in the following information. . . . concerning the continued pro-Russian attitude of Senator Claude Pepper about whom previous information has been furnished to you by me." A second memo from Ladd to Hoover contended that “Senator Pepper has been associated with, given approval to, or spoken before at
least twenty-three Communist Front organizations. . . Pepper has consistently followed the general Communist Party line in his political views since as early as 1940.\textsuperscript{59}

The memo also noted that "a number of his speeches since early 1946 have been written by individuals who are prominent Communists or who travel in high Communist circles."\textsuperscript{60} The speech writer the memo referred to was Charles Kramer, who was also known as Charles Krivitsky and Charles Krevisky. Kramer, who had been active in communist affairs, worked for Pepper's House Subcommittee on Wartime Health and Education beginning in 1945. Kramer had editor of the Communist publication "New Masses" until 1931, and had been identified as a Communist and a member of the "Soviet espionage apparatus." The FBI identified Kramer as the source of government information being passed to the Soviets. Beginning in 1946, the FBI placed Kramer under surveillance. In March, the surveillance showed that Pepper held a meeting in his office with Kramer and three other men suspected of being involved in Soviet espionage. In 1947 the surveillance took them to Pepper's Washington apartment, where Pepper met with Kramer and three others with communist links for more than six hours.\textsuperscript{61}

It is not known whether Pepper knew of Kramer's links to the Communist Party, or those of his associates. But for a man already linked to left-wing causes, hiring someone such as Kramer only served to rouse the
interest of the FBI. After leaving the Senate, Robert M. LaFollette published an article in which he said that four Senate committees, including Pepper's, had been infiltrated by Communists. LaFollette wrote, that the staff of the Pepper subcommittee, "Probably did great harm to the cause of improved health in this country by its reckless activities." When Kramer's past became public, Pepper fired him.

Pepper managed to further connect himself to communists with an ill-advised decision to write the introduction for a book entitled The Great Conspiracy, a blatantly pro-Communist book published by the International Workers Order, which was linked to Communists. Pepper wrote that "A continuation of the disastrous policies of anti-Soviet intrigue so vividly described in this book would inevitably result in a Third World War." From Kramer to Wallace to Raymond Robins, nearly all of the people Pepper listened to were on the far left.

Even when he engaged in national affairs, Pepper managed to anger Truman. A nationwide strike of railroad workers had disrupted the nation's transportation system. On May 17, Truman seized the railroads under his wartime powers, but workers walked off the job on May 23. Truman asked Congress for the authority to draft the workers. The House went along, but the Senate balked, largely because of the opposition of the Senate Republican leader Robert A. Taft, and Pepper. Pepper said he saw nothing
which "justified the effort which was made to rush, in a unseemly and hasty manner, this measure into law."\textsuperscript{64}

Truman expected Taft's opposition, but was very angry about Pepper's criticism. At a cabinet luncheon in late May, the discussion centered on the railroad legislation. According to Wallace, Truman said "Pepper is purely opportunistic."\textsuperscript{65} The opposition of Taft and Pepper slowed down what had been a stampede to draft the workers. The measure was defeated 70 to 13. As historian David McCullough observed, it failed with "the initial cries of Taft and Pepper having grown to a chorus."\textsuperscript{66} Although Pepper thought he had done the right thing, his union support did little to help him in Florida, and his opposition served to separate him further from Truman.

Pepper's main concern remained international affairs, and he believed Truman was pursuing a disastrous course. He wrote to Robins complaining, "This that we are doing now is essentially American imperialism as the imperialists of McKinley's day. . . . They want the United States to dominate the world's economy and with our own force give shape and direction to the whole trend of things on earth."\textsuperscript{67}

It was a heady time for Pepper. He had met with world leaders, including Stalin, fought and won a battle with President Truman, had a calendar full of speaking engagements throughout the nation, and his opinion was routinely sought by journalists. His political successes fueled
his ambition for higher office. Amid all of this Pepper failed to see that his actions were hurting him in Florida and would imperil his re-election in 1950.

Notes

3. Pepper to Sherman Minton, 10 March 1945, Pepper Papers.
5. Pepper to Minton, 10 March 1945, Pepper Papers.
12. Chafe, 82.


19. Unsigned memorandum to Pepper, 30 July 1945, Pepper Papers.


21. Ibid.


25. Pepper, "Russia In Transition," newspaper column, 27 September 1945, Pepper Papers.


29. Pepper, "Russia In Transition."

30. Pepper, notes, 14 September 1945, Pepper Papers.

31. Ibid.

32. Daily Worker, 7 February 1945.

33. Fort Lauderdale News, 21 September 1945.
34. Moorman M. Parrish to James C. Clements, 20 November 1945, Pepper Papers.


36. Pepper to Parish, 17 December 1945, Pepper Papers.


38. Ibid., 36-37.


40. Ibid., 289.

41. Ibid., 299.


43. Diggins, 105.

44. Daily Worker, 27 February 1946.

45. Gaddis, 309.


47. Daily Worker, 21 March 1946.


49. Gaddis, 315.


52. Daily Worker, 6 April 1946.


54. The Washington Post, 10 April 1946.
55. The New Republic, 8 April 1946, p. 471.

56. Department of State, telegram to Secretary of State, 28 June 1945, File 94-4-684-47, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington, D.C.


60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.


64. Congressional Record, 79th Congress, 2nd Session, vol. 92, 5819-5822.

65. Wallace, 575.

66. McCollough, 506.

67. Pepper to Robins, 5 June 1946.
CHAPTER 6
THE CONTROVERSIAL POLITICIAN

From 1944 to 1950, Pepper received a stream of negative publicity for his support of the Soviet Union. Except for the Soviet newspaper, Pravda, and the newspaper of the American Communist Party, Daily Worker, it is difficult to find a pro-Pepper article in any newspaper or magazine. Time, Newsweek, U.S. News, and nearly all of the Florida newspapers criticized Pepper harshly and often. As for his hope of being a national candidate, only the Daily Worker saw him as a viable candidate. On June 6, a Daily Worker story headlined "More Third Party Talk," said, "Senator Claude Pepper, rather than Henry Wallace, is the figure most often mentioned as a possible standard bearer. . . . The Floridian has caught the public imagination."1

In the wake of his speech about Britain and his stand in the railroad case, it was difficult to pick up a magazine or newspaper and not read an article about Pepper. The day after the Daily Worker article appeared, United States News carried a story on Pepper with the headline, "Senator Pepper's Emergence as Champion of Left-Wing Groups." The story was unflattering both in its tone and selection of facts. "Senator Claude Pepper has bobbed up suddenly as an outstanding hero of the labor unions and leader of the country's liberal to
leftward groups. . . . In such circles and among labor leaders, Senator Pepper's name now is being bracketed with that of Henry A. Wallace when 1948 presidential campaigning is discussed."12

The stories about Pepper were increasingly hostile. A *Washington Times-Herald* columnist sought to link Pepper to the communists, when he spoke to the American Slav Congress, a group with strong links to Communists. "I heard from the lips of that great soldier, that dynamic leader, the man that drove the Nazis out of Yugoslavia, Marshal Tito, the story of the partisan struggle in Yugoslavia. . . . I saw a republic being born in Yugoslavia," Pepper told the group.3

At the end of August, the *Saturday Evening Post*, one of the largest magazines in America, published an article entitled "Pink Pepper." The article said, "The Communist press whoops it up for Pepper because he has been taking Russia's side in international disputes . . . . When he first came to the Senate he followed the straight Roosevelt line. People said he was a stooge, a mere loud mouth from the South. But that still leaves Pepper himself unexplained. What is he up to?"4 It was a good question. With the election still two years away, he had tried to cast himself as a running mate for both Truman or Wallace, and as a presidential candidate himself.

Three months after carrying a critical profile of Pepper, *United States News* again reported on Pepper's activities. " Senator Claude Pepper, a foremost advocate of a go-easy with Russia policy, is emerging as the forthright leader of America's more extreme or radical liberals. . . . Mr. Pepper more
recently has been building a record that led some to accuse him of following the Communist line. . . . The Senator, of course, has his eye on the Presidency."\(^5\)

The same week, *Newsweek* also contained an unflattering article. "Months ago talk on the left fringe of American politics had begun to revolve about Pepper as the best for Democratic Vice President or third-party leader in 1948. At 46, Pepper appears to regard himself as a man of considerable destiny." *Newsweek* repeated Pepper’s praise of Tito in Chicago.\(^6\)

In October, there were two more critical articles in national publications. *The American Mercury* ripped him as “Claude Denson Pepper of Florida—the current darling of the ultra-left wing press . . . . the fellow who made a pilgrimage to the Kremlin for a cozy, confidential chat with Comrade Stalin barely a year after he had campaigned for the Senate re-election on a platform that included white supremacy for the South” The magazine became the first to write Pepper’s political obituary. “Pepper’s career has probably reached its zenith. Though the United States electorate makes mistakes, it is usually quick to tell the synthetic or imported from the genuine.”\(^7\)

The second article appeared in a magazine with a small circulation, but with a major impact. *Medical Economics* was read primarily by doctors, who were already suspicious of Pepper’s views of government-funded medical care. "He represents, not Florida, but that vague area known as the left-of-the CIO-PAC, the American Labor Party, and the 'friends of the Soviet Union.' . . . The big red
faced gentleman from Florida has an uncanny talent for making the opposition look bad. And he has no compunction about selecting facts to gain an end. . .

Despite the criticism, Pepper continued to attack American foreign policy and urge support for Russia. Speaking at a Labor Day Rally in Los Angeles, Pepper said, "These foolish people who tell us we can never get along with Russia and encourage us to widen instead of bridge the gap between the two nations, who want us to go back to the Hoover and Coolidge and Harding enmity for Russia instead of the Roosevelt friendship, will divide the race of Man into two mutually destructive forces." Pepper saw himself as pursuing the policy Roosevelt would have followed if he had lived. As Newsweek observed, "His colleagues believe he has become convinced that he is heir to FDR's big mantle, especially in matters concerned with foreign policy, and that he speaks today as FDR would have spoken." There was reason for Pepper to feel that way. Three days before he died, Roosevelt had written a letter to Pepper that influenced him for the remainder of his career. Regarding Pepper's views on foreign policy, Roosevelt wrote, "I like what you say, and it is perfectly clear that fundamentally you and I mean exactly the same thing." Referring to the Russians, Roosevelt wrote, "nations are coequal and therefore any treaty must represent compromises." As the Truman administration became more antagonistic toward Russia, Truman remembered Roosevelt's words and thought he was doing as Roosevelt would have done.
Time after time, Pepper took to the Senate floor to explain his position in lengthy speeches. He thought the United States should loan money to help Russia rebuild from the devastation of World War II. In 1943 there had been discussions about a loan to the Russians, who wanted a billion dollars. The loan had widespread backing, including support from Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr., and the president of the United States Chamber of Commerce. But the loan clashed with Truman's increasingly hostile view of the Soviets. The Russians filed a loan request in August 1945, but seven months later, the State Department, in a silly statement, announced that it had lost the application. Pepper called for Truman to meet face to face with Stalin (there was no meeting between an American president and a Soviet leader between 1945 and 1955), but no one was willing to listen. Just as they had when he called for greater military preparedness before World War II, he was ridiculed and isolated. As Thomas Paterson observed, “His opponents were annoyed by his persistent questioning, derived largely from his belief that Americans applied one set of standards to the international behavior of other countries and another set to that of the United States.”

**The 1946 Elections**

Despite the negative publicity, Pepper began to discuss openly his national ambitions. A small publication, Readers Scope, carried a series of
articles about possible presidential candidates and included Pepper as one of
the potential candidates. He received encouragement from Dr. Francis E.
Townsend, the father of the pension plan which bore his name. Townsend wrote,
"I think you are the logical choice for the Democrats as candidate for the
presidency." Pepper also began to get questions from reporters about his
political ambitions. On August 13, he had a conversation with reporters in which
he discussed numerous possibilities for 1948. The United Press story showed
Pepper to be aligning himself with anyone who would have him. He said he
would "not run away" from the Democratic presidential nomination, although he
predicted Truman would be re-elected. Pepper also said he would be delighted
to be a vice presidential candidate for either Truman or Wallace, but said he
preferred Wallace. "I would be happy to be on a ticket with anyone." The wire
service story caught the eye of the Truman's staff and was placed in the files of
Truman's secretary.

Pepper saw the 1946 congressional elections as a referendum on his
views. Victories by liberal Democrats would show that there was support for his
position, he believed. He traveled throughout the country in the summer and fall
of 1946, campaigning for Democratic candidates. But Pepper's tour was a
disaster. Although he had bragged about how many invitations he had received
to speak, most were from far left-wing groups. In Boston on October 9, his
speech was boycotted by the Democratic candidates he was supposed to be
speaking for. In Michigan, he was heckled when he spoke on behalf of a candidate opposing Republican Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg.

The most memorable appearance came in September. The left-wing National Citizens Political Action Committee and the Independent Citizens Committee of the Arts, Sciences, and Professionals planned a huge political rally at Madison Square Garden as part of the campaign against New York Gov. Thomas Dewey’s re-election. NC-PAC, a creation of those who wanted close relations with Russia, later evolved into Wallace’s Progressive Party. Pepper was a favorite speaker at NC-PAC events. The main speaker was Wallace, with Pepper serving as a secondary speaker.

Wallace was to speak on Republican obstructionism in Congress, but the NC-PAC organizers learned that he had privately urged Truman to change his thinking on American-Soviet relations and Wallace was asked to talk about that. Wallace had cleared the speech with Truman, and while it generally agreed with the administration’s foreign policy, it was different in significant ways. Before 18,000 people, Wallace criticized what he said was British imperialistic policy in the Near East. “The tougher we get, the tougher the Russians will get,” Wallace warned.

The Wallace speech was far milder than the speech Pepper gave. Pepper held nothing back in his criticism of the Truman administration. “With conservative Democrats and reactionary Republicans making our foreign policy as they are today, it is all we can do to keep foolish people from having us pull a
Hitler blitzkrieg and drop our atomic bombs on the Russian people." He added, "I think we ought to remember, however that the last two fellows who tried to get rough with the Russians, you may remember them from their first names, Napoleon and Adolf, did not fare well."²¹

The crowd at Madison Square Garden cheered wildly for Pepper, who asked, "What do you expect in a foreign policy which really meets the approval of Senator Vandenberg and John Foster Dulles?" Wallace’s more temperate remarks often brought boos and catcalls. In the Soviet Union, it was the Pepper speech that drew the most attention and praise for his opposition to those who "undermine the foundations of peace, poison and international atmosphere and provoke conflicts among great powers."²²

Even though Truman had initially approved Wallace’s remarks, the President began to back-peddle. Secretary of State James F. Byrnes was in Paris for the Council of Foreign Ministers meeting. With Byrnes in Paris was Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg—the subject of the Pepper attack. Truman and Byrnes worried that Vandenberg, and other Republicans, would drop their support of the president’s foreign policy, and turn the entire incident into a campaign issue. The meeting represented the first use of the get-tough policy Truman had adopted for dealing with the Russians. On September 20, Wallace received a letter from Truman asking for his resignation. Despite his bumbling of the situation, Truman had little choice than to fire Wallace. Historian John Lewis Gaddis wrote that "Keeping Wallace would have alienated
Vandenberg and brought about the collapse of bipartisan unity on foreign policy.

... It would have meant repudiating a course of action which Truman himself strongly believed to be right.²³

The Wallace firing drew criticism from liberals, who saw Wallace as the last true New Deal member of the Truman Administration. A Chicago Sun Times editorial spoke for the liberals: "The New Deal as a driving force, is dead within the Truman administration."²⁴ Although Wallace was disliked in the South, the firing did little to help Truman. As Robert J. Donovan observed, "The South perceived that Truman had replaced Roosevelt's advisers but not his policies."²⁵

In Florida, Pepper's remarks drew a great deal of attention. The Lakeland Ledger editorialized, "The Russians liked Senator Pepper's Madison Square Garden speech a great deal more than they liked the one by Secretary Wallace, although the Florida Senator and the former vice president have been running neck and neck for leftist honors."²⁶ But for Pepper, the biggest mistake was not what he said, but who he was seen with. A picture taken at the rally showed Pepper with Wallace and Paul Robeson, one of the best known blacks in the country and a known communist sympathizer. The picture was circulated throughout the state.

Just how far Pepper had moved from his party's position on Russia became clear on September 21 when John J. Sparkman, the head of the Democratic National Committee's Speakers' Bureau announced that Pepper would not represent the national party during the 1946 campaign. Sparkman,
who was also running for the United States Senate in Alabama, said "Certainly we don't want to send out anyone who is advocating the election of Republicans to Congress, as it appears from the press dispatches that Mr. Pepper has done. Certainly we don't want to send out anyone who is going to stab the President; we don't want those stabs, whether from the right or the left. And certainly Mr. Pepper has been attacking the President." Sparkman also said Wallace would not be allowed to appear as an official representative of the party.

Pepper was in Tallahassee when the announcement was made, and he quickly responded. He said his removal from the speakers' list showed "a determination to have a purge of all those who believe in progressive leadership." He said Sparkman's announcement "is not very likely to have any practical effect on what I do." Pepper said he had more speaking invitations than he could fill. The Wallace firing brought Truman even more criticism, and imperiled the Democratic campaigns for the House and Senate just seven weeks before the November election. Party leaders could not tell whether removing Pepper as a speaker would help or hurt. They decided it might hurt, especially in the North. The day after Sparkman read Pepper out of the party, Robert E. Hannegan, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee welcomed him back in. Hannegan denied that Pepper had been removed from the speakers' list. In fact, Hannegan and Pepper held a series of what were described as "peace talks" to work out Pepper's role in the fall campaign. Under the plan, Pepper would concentrate on liberal groups.
In a sense, Pepper had been lucky. Wallace's remarks and his subsequent firing by Truman received nearly all of the attention. Instead of realizing that he would have received more negative publicity if his remarks had drawn more attention, Pepper was disappointed that his speech "was lost generally under the Wallace speech." Even before the furor over the Madison Square Garden speech died, Pepper gave another controversial speech. He told a union convention in Jacksonville, that Truman was being advised by the same type of reactionaries in foreign policy that were advising him on domestic issues. At the same time he kept up his praise for Wallace, calling him a "great American statesman." While nearly everyone considered Wallace to represent the Democratic Party's left wing, Pepper disagreed. "I don't know exactly what a left-winger is, but I regard Wallace as just a good Democrat who believes in democracy and wants to see it become effective." Pepper held Truman in growing contempt. He wrote to Robins, "The presidency is just over his head and he not only is not big enough for the job, but not good enough for the job."

Pepper ended his 1946 campaign swing in New York, where he encountered some of the most serious criticism of his tour. He was there to address a street rally sponsored by the communist-influenced Fur and Leather Workers Union. The New York News said his appearance meant "the radical part of the Democratic mixture is grooming Wallace and Pepper for President and Vice President in 48." But the most stinging criticism came from the right-wing New York Mirror which used the term "Red Pepper" for the first time and
said he was from "Florida, where he stands for Bilboism—for inequality in America—for 'white supremacy.'" The New York Times Magazine said that "it is a good bet that if Mr. Pepper had to run now he would face an extremely difficult campaign for re-election. However, 1950 is a long time off." The lengthy article appeared two days before the election and repeated the "rumor circulated in the Capitol Hill cloakrooms by the anti-Pepperites that the Senator from Florida is after something bigger. They say he would like to be a 'labor President'—at least a Vice President—of the United States."36

Despite the critical comments, Pepper was encouraged by the reception he was receiving. He wrote to a fellow Senator, "I am convinced by everything I have seen that we can and will win again a Democratic Congress by a good margin. . . . I have found an overwhelming sentiment among the people to retain and extend the gains of the Democratic administration both at home and abroad."37

The 1946 election was a disaster for the Democrats in general, and for the candidates Pepper backed in particular. In New York, James M. Mead and Herbert Lehman both lost, and Vandenberg was easily re-elected in Michigan. The Republicans won control of the House of Representatives for the first time since 1931, with of margin of 246 to 188, and of the Senate for the first time since 1933 by 51-45. The Democrats lost 55 House seats and 12 Senate seats. But the losses and the string of critical articles had no apparent effect on Pepper. He blamed the firing of Wallace by Truman, not the struggling economy
or the Communist threat. And he was unable to see that he might have played a role in the losses, even though the candidates he campaigned for either lost, or avoided the rallies where Pepper spoke. He continued his pattern of speaking to left-wing groups.

After the 1946 election, Pepper questioned his future. He was unable to blame himself for any of the problems, and said the Democrats had lost the fall elections because of the firing of Wallace. "The last link with Roosevelt, now willfully cast out by Truman," he wrote in his diary.38 Earlier in 1946 Pepper had noted in his diary that "about 10% of those who have previously supported me have left me."39 In the wake of the 1946 election losses, Pepper began to feel that he could not win in the South and might do better to move to what he considered a more liberal state. He wrote in his diary, "Can I survive in the South and give liberal national leadership?... If not, and I have such an ambition would not the earliest defeat and removal to NY [New York] or Calif. [California] be preferable?"40 Pepper's diary entry shows how out of touch he was with political reality. To believe that any state in the North would elect a candidate who had run as a white supremacist and had filibustered against anti-lynching legislation was unrealistic, if not absurd.

He also continued to believe that he had a future in national politics, and that relations between the United States and Russia would improve. In December, Pepper met with William D. Pawley, a leading Democrat and ambassador to Brazil. Pawley said he had asked Pepper about his pro-Russian
views. Pepper said that he would not change his stand, and did not want to talk about the matter any more. Pepper said that Franklin Roosevelt was a man who could look ahead five years and that Pepper believed that "in the not too distant future the entire world, including the United States, would be supporting Russia wholeheartedly." Pepper said that "when that day arrived, he wanted it to be known that it was Senator Pepper who championed close, friendly, and cooperative relations with Russia." Pepper declared he "naturally wanted to take advantage of the prestige he would reap, stating he would have hopes of being considered as a Presidential candidate."41

Pepper also received encouragement for his views from Charles E. Marsh, a newspaper publisher and backer of Lyndon Johnson, who wrote a memo entitled, "Thoughts on Pepper." He presented a five-year plan he thought would put Pepper in the White House. Marsh said he considered Pepper "A noble man, the best we've got in this country." But Marsh added that Pepper was "really a dawdler when he is not kicked in the butt. He loves the good things of this life, but above all loves to bask in his achievements and compliments of little people."42

During this period, Pepper turned to William Carleton, a University of Florida professor and a supporter of the Soviets, and Raymond Robins, who was close to the Soviet leadership, for political advice. Robins had made a fortune as a mining engineer, worked for Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive Party in 1912, then joined the Republicans. He had been a Congregational minister, an
evangelist, and was the Progressive candidate for the Senate from Illinois in 1914. As a member of the Red Cross Commission sent to distribute supplies to Russia after the fall of the Czar in 1917, he became vitally interested in the fate of the country. During the nearly 15 years that the United States did not have diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, Robins served as an unofficial ambassador. In that role, he met frequently with Bolshevik leaders and, when he returned to the United States, he urged recognition of the Soviet Union. Robins never became a member of the Communist party, but he was certainly a fellow traveler who admired Lenin and Stalin. He wrote to Carleton that “all of Lenin’s prophecies have now been fulfilled,” and said that for peace to be assured the United States needed to recognize the Soviet Union as “the first power of Europe.”

Robins moved to Chinsegut, an estate near Brooksville, Florida, and in 1937 he began writing to Pepper. Soon, the two were communicating regularly. Robins saw Pepper as “a dark horse . . . to take his place in time among the great presidents.” As late as 1949, Robins was predicting that Pepper would be president. Nearly every piece of advice Robins gave Pepper turned out badly. It was Robins who suggested that Pepper write the introduction to the “The Great Soviet Conspiracy.” Robins and Carleton became Pepper’s closest confidants in foreign affairs and constantly pushed him to support Russia as a means of securing the presidency.
The Truman Doctrine

As the 1947 session opened, Pepper lost his seat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to Senator Carl A. Hatch of New Mexico, who was placed on the committee as part of an effort to force Pepper off. One newspaper said he had been "squeezed off the Committee by a neat little bit of technical legerdemain." Pepper wrote to Robins that "by a skillful intrigue I was removed from the Foreign Relations Committee by a Senator who had some seniority in the service of the Senate over me." It was never clear whether Truman was involved in the decision to push Pepper from the Foreign Relations Committee, or if Pepper's fellow Democrats in the Senate had made the decision. It was yet another instance in which his own party was isolating him. Pepper took a seat on the Agriculture Committee, but clearly missed the Foreign Relations Committee. The Tampa Tribune editorialized that "while Russia loses a friend in Foreign Relations, Florida gains a friend in Agriculture."

Although Pepper was off the Foreign Relations Committee, it was still the area he devoted the most time. Nearly all of his speeches dealt with foreign affairs, and his continuing campaign for better relations with Russia. The result was that the publicity he received throughout the country dealt almost exclusively with his stand on Russia.

In March, Pepper's connection with the extreme left wing was again spotlighted when the Chicago Star, a Communist party newspaper, announced
that Pepper had agreed to write a column for the newspaper. "Sen. Claude Pepper, Florida's fighting liberal, is a hard hitter. His courageous and often brilliant speeches confound his reactionary enemies in Congress . . . . Look for "Pepper Pot," a new Star column!" The National Catholic Welfare Conference criticized Pepper for furnishing the Star with the column, calling Pepper, "Next to Wallace the Communists' main front man." Pepper claimed that the column was one he sent to a regular mailing list of newspapers and radio stations, but he ordered the Star taken off the mailing list. Newsweek commented that Pepper's "colleagues now call him "Red" Pepper. But the pro-Communist left returns his affection. Only Henry A. Wallace outranks Pepper on their popularity scorecard."

Early in 1947 the British informed the United States that they could no longer provide military and financial support to the Greek government. Truman wanted the Republican-controlled Congress to appropriate money for the United States to take over the British role, but the Republican leadership was leery of spending tax dollars to help the Greeks. Even administration officials knew that the Greek government was corrupt and inept, and that there was little evidence that the Russians were directly involved in trying to overthrow the Greek government. It was a difficult sell, and forced Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson to sound the alarm of communism. He warned the Republicans that communism was on the march; Greece was just one step on the road that would lead through Turkey and Iran, then Africa, and all of Europe. The strategy
worked, and the Republican leaders promised Truman their support. Historian Melvyn P. Leffler argued that the Soviet actions, "hardly justified the inflammatory rhetoric Acheson and Truman used." In March, Truman proposed an aid package to Greece and Turkey that became known as the Truman Doctrine. When the Senate held hearings on the Greek-Turkish aid bill, Pepper arranged to rejoin the Foreign Relations Committee as a guest, a practice which allowed senators with a special interest in a subject the opportunity to ask questions. When Acheson testified before the committee, most of the questions were friendly, except for Pepper's. Pepper said he thought the Truman Doctrine would "destroy any hope of reconciliation with Russia." To make it clear he was opposed to the spread of communism, Pepper said he wanted to "stop Russian aggression wherever it exists . . . but that does not mean that we are going to intervene in every country where there is communism." In a column to Florida newspapers, he wrote, "Should we commit ourselves to fight Communism in every country of the world with unlimited money and, if necessary, with military force?" Pepper came up with his own version of the Truman Doctrine, calling for aid to Greece, but not Turkey, the exclusion of military supplies, and the administration of the program through the United Nations. For the first time in several years, he was not alone. John Knight, publisher of the Miami Herald wrote, "for once, I agree with Senator Claude Pepper in his suggestion that the Greek question be referred to the United Nations . . ."
After speaking against the bill, Pepper said he would still vote for it. He realized that to vote against the measure would eliminate any standing he enjoyed in foreign affairs within his own party. He wrote to his friend Robins that he was voting for the measure as "a personal sacrifice of my convictions on the measure as a part of the price of attaining greater future usefulness in international affairs."60

As the vote drew closer, however, Pepper continued to speak against the measure, and gradually, he became a leading opponent of a measure he said he would support. Pepper pushed for his alternative, aid to Greece, but through the United Nations. He was joined by Senator Glenn Taylor of Idaho, who became equally controversial for his support of Russia. During the debate over the Truman Doctrine, Taylor spoke to the National Press Club and to the tune of "I'm Going Crazy," he sang:

"Now we're scuttling the UN for Greece and Turkey
There's no one again' it but Pepper and me."

Pepper's speeches against the Truman Doctrine brought him more criticism. He responded by saying that given the political climate, even Thomas Jefferson "would be afraid to speak his own mind," if he were alive.61 In the left-wing journal In Fact, Pepper wrote that "We must constantly be reminded that Hitler and the Nazis built up their vicious system on the pretense of fighting Communism. Lots of people in this country are actually fighting democracy under that guise."62
His criticism of the Truman Doctrine, and defense of Russia, became more pronounced as the vote drew closer. On April 17, Pepper spoke for four hours to the Senate about the aid package. He urged that the Senate adopt his substitute, a $100 million aid package with no military aid—just for Greece—administered through the United Nations. One of the reasons the administration wanted to prop up Turkey was to keep the Russians out of the Dardanelles. But Pepper, in the midst of an increasingly angry debate said, "The Russians have as much right in there as we have to be in Panama, to be perfectly frank." Pepper complained that "the Russian viewpoint had been ignored."63

In late April, just before the final vote, Pepper attended a World Federation luncheon where the speaker talked about the importance of the United Nations. Pepper decided that "beyond any question that I would not and could not vote for the Truman Doctrine because I hated it and I knew it betrayed American and America's stead in the United Nations which was the hope of the world's peace."64 On the day of the vote, Pepper announced that he would vote against the measure.

The decision heartened Pepper, who wrote, "I never felt better in my conscience than when I finally resolved against the most intense persuasion of some of my dearest and best friends." But he also realized that it would hurt him politically in Florida. He found that the change made him "subject to constant harassment at home, and generally in the nation. . . . Whatever the
consequences may have been or may be to me in Florida I would not change that vote."\textsuperscript{65}

Pepper's stand on the Truman Doctrine brought praise from just two quarters, the \textit{Daily Worker} and the Russian newspaper, \textit{Pravda}. Whenever one of the communist publications praised Pepper, an American newspaper or magazine reported the information, usually adding critical comments. When \textit{Pravda} gave Pepper high marks, \textit{Newsweek} reported: "\textit{Pravda} last week counted Soviet Russia's many blessings one by one, and the results were gratifying. There was so much the Russians could be thankful for, the Moscow daily exulted, particularly their American friends," including Claude Pepper.\textsuperscript{66}

\textbf{Notes}

2. \textit{United States News}, 7 June 1946: 56
4. \textit{Saturday Evening Post}, 31 August 1946, 19, 118.
11. Roosevelt to Pepper, 9 April, 1945, Pepper Papers.
13. Ibid., 118.
17. Detroit Free Press, 26 October 1946.
21. Ibid.
25. Ibid., 230.
26. Lakeland Ledger, 16 September 1946.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
32. Miami Herald, 18 September 1946.
33. Pepper to Robins, 14 October 1946.


37. Pepper to Mike Monroney, 23 October 1946, Pepper Papers.

38. Pepper Diary, 20 September 1946.

39. Pepper Diary, 2 June 1946.

40. Pepper Diary, 4 November 1946.

41. Special Agent in Charge to J. Edgar Hoover, File 64-4480-467, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington, D. C.

42. Charles E. Marsh to Pepper, n. d., Pepper Papers.

43. Robins to William Carleton, 10 August 1945, Carleton Papers.


45. Tampa Morning Tribune, 18 July 1949.

46. Salzman, 374-376.

47. PM, 7 January 1947.


56. Congressional Record, 80th Cong., 1st sess., 93: 3281-3289.

57. Ibid., 3592.


60. Pepper to Robins, 5 May 1947.


62. Ibid.


64. Pepper to Robins, 5 May 1947.

65. Ibid.

In August 1947 Pepper met with Truman as part of a congressional delegation and emerged to say, "the President should be and will be nominated and should be and will be elected." Pepper said he had given up the idea of supporting a third-party movement being considered by Henry Wallace. "I think Mr. Wallace can render his best service by continuing to be a private citizen who speaks his mind freely." When reporters asked who Truman should pick as his vice presidential running mate, Pepper did not name any names, but clearly described himself. "Somebody who subscribes as completely as possible to the views of Franklin D. Roosevelt. He ought to be someone who can command not only the strong but enthusiastic support of organized labor and the working people in general." Time magazine wrote, "No one doubted that Claude Pepper friend of Russia and darling of the left wing was looking in the mirror as he was speaking."¹ A few hours later, Pepper appeared on "Meet the Press" and again voiced his support for Truman. After the broadcast Truman called Pepper to thank him.² Pepper wrote to former Senator Sherman Minton, "You know there never was any question but that I was going to support the President."³
While Pepper was talking publicly about backing Truman for re-election in 1948, privately, he was considering other options, including challenging Truman for the Democratic nomination or a third-party bid. He asked his friend Carleton if the time was right for a third party, or "if the Democratic Party's liberal wing should be built up?" Carleton wrote him, "If the situation shapes up in such a way in 1948 for you to make a contest for the Democratic presidential nomination, I hope to God you will seize the opportunity." To Raymond Robins, he wrote that he wanted to be able to have the support of the Florida delegation to the convention in case an opportunity for him should develop.

In order to have any chance at a spot on the national ticket, Pepper needed to have his own delegation to the Democratic National Convention behind him. In 1940 and 1944, Pepper had been the chairman of the Florida delegation, but by 1948 the opposition to him both as leader of the delegation and as a Senator had developed to the point that the question was no longer whether Pepper would chair the delegation, but whether he had enough support to even go as a delegate.

The delegates to the convention were chosen during the May Democratic primary with the voters selecting twenty-eight delegates, twelve with a full vote and sixteen with one-half of a vote. In January 1948, the Democratic Executive Committee met in Jacksonville. The meeting seemed routine until the final fifteen minutes when Pepper opponents complained about the procedures for electing executive committee officers. They moved to elect a new state Democratic
chairman to replace Pepper's friend and supporter, Volusia County Sheriff Alex Littlefield. The executive committee was dominated by Pepper supporters, including Littlefield, State Railroad Commissioner Jerry Carter and Key West attorney William Albury. They might have been able to maintain control, but putting it to a vote was risky. The Pepper supporters suggested delaying the vote until after the May primary, but the opposition moved for an immediate vote. By a 58 to 55 vote, the Pepper supporters delayed the election of officers until June, one month after the primary.\(^8\) The Orlando Sentinel called the victory a "typical Pepper coup. He learned of the danger, worked quietly to avert it until the day of the showdown, then appeared personally to insure its safety."\(^9\) He had, nevertheless, come perilously close to being repudiated by members of his own party in Florida.

The Pepper opponents worked under a number of banners, primarily the Florida Democratic Club, which had been organized in the wake of the 1944 Pepper victory by Jacksonville public relations executive Dan Crisp and financed by Ball. Their immediate goal was to control the 1948 delegation to the Democratic convention, but their true purpose was to unseat Pepper when he faced re-election in 1950. Two longtime opponents of Pepper, Charles E. Sheppard and Frank Upchurch were selected as officers. Both men were close associates of Ball.

The group said it was opposing Pepper because of his "official acts, and unofficial speeches and statements, since the 1944 election is conclusive proof
that he had deserted the Democratic Party to promote the interests of the radical elements in their propaganda for the communistic ideology and communistic infiltration into our American governmental institutions and organizations." The group said that his call for destroying American atomic bombs and giving Russia financial aid showed that Pepper "is not a good American." Pepper's close friend, Chester Dishong, the sheriff of Desoto County, told him bluntly, "You better use your head a little son as you are in a hell of a spot."

Pepper's reaction to the meeting was to increase his presence in Florida. In February he wrote to a friend "I suppose you may imagine I have been having my own troubles in Florida where reaction is very much entrenched and very vigorous. Hence I went to Florida three times in January, have just returned from a trip there, and am scheduled for every weekend this month to go there." He also modified his stand on the Soviet Union. In March, he criticized the Soviets for the first time. "The Soviet Union has been guilty of aggression which offends and affronts our sense of independence and dignity and freedom for the peoples of the world."

In putting together delegate support, Pepper faced two problems, the opposition from the Florida Democratic Club, and his inability to come up with a candidate to support. He told Robins that he was putting together "a delegation to the convention which will be friendly to me, and of course, getting a group of friends to run as unpledged delegates. I am not so much concerned as to what their attitude will be toward the President as I am that they are friends of mine in
case any opportunity on my behalf would develop, and they could be counted on. We are going to have a scrap."\textsuperscript{14}

Pepper knew that a slate pledged to him would have little success, and a slate pledged to Truman would not do much better. He needed to pledge his support to a candidate who might attract votes. On January 24, 1948, Pepper had praised General Dwight Eisenhower's decision not to become a candidate: "It was laudable of Eisenhower to stay out of the political arena, as it was best that military officers do no enter the political fields."\textsuperscript{15} But a few months later, Pepper saw an opportunity to use Eisenhower to help elect a pro-Pepper delegation.

Despite the general's protests that he had no interest in politics, Pepper wrote to a friend that Eisenhower was "the only one between us and defeat."\textsuperscript{16} If Pepper was to have any chance of capturing control of the delegation to the Democratic National Committee, he needed Eisenhower. Eisenhower not only had tremendous popularity in the South but also had the advantage of having never taken a political stand. There was nothing he had said or done to alienate voters in the South. Pepper ignored Eisenhower's decision to stay out of the race. "He may be pulling the door a little closer to him, but I didn't hear the lock click."\textsuperscript{17} In an April speech in Los Angeles he again mentioned Eisenhower as a possible candidate.\textsuperscript{18}

Without consulting Eisenhower, Pepper decided to use his name. Pepper called his slate "Loyal Democrats for Eisenhower and States Rights." Pepper
hoped to use Eisenhower to attract votes for himself, and threw in states rights as an appeal to Southerners alarmed by Truman's civil rights program.

Pepper's position on civil rights was complicated. He had opposed most civil rights legislation but had not joined with his fellow southerners who made race-baiting a major part of their agenda. His solution was to downplay civil rights as an issue in selecting the Democratic presidential nominee. "We are faced with a grave international crisis. War itself could come almost any day. As important as are these civil rights matters, they are not the only things that should be considered in choosing the Democratic nominee for President."

While the Florida Democratic Club moved quickly to put together its slate, Pepper procrastinated, waiting until late April to assemble his delegates. Despite knowing he faced a difficult fight, Pepper failed to campaign for his slate. It was a problem Pepper wrestled with throughout the 1940s: the choice between staying home and dealing with political problems in Florida, or answering the calls of those who saw him as a national figure and wanted him to speak throughout the country. Ten days before the May primary, Pepper went on a nationwide speaking tour that included stops in Montana, Nebraska, South Carolina, and California. Meanwhile, Pepper picked up another opponent when Governor Millard Caldwell announced that he would offer his own slate. Caldwell said he was not trying to decrease Pepper's influence at the convention, but of course that would be the result.
Of the three Florida slates, none was pledged to Truman. The Caldwell slate was unpledged, and the Florida Democratic Club supported Mississippi Governor Fielding L. Wright, an old-line states rights champion. The Wright slate promised to "work as a team with other Southern States against Truman and against the so-called 'Civil Rights Program.'" In a slap at both Pepper and Truman, the club claimed, "The present leaders of the Democratic party in an appeal to radical minority groups in the large cities of the North, East, and Midwest are determined to sacrifice our traditions and way of life in the South."22

Despite Eisenhower's name, and the use of the term "state's rights," Pepper's slate fared poorly. The Florida Democratic Club slate won with 11 ½ delegate votes, Pepper's slate captured 6 ½ votes and Caldwell's slate took just two votes.23 Not only would Pepper not have the support of his own delegation, two thirds of the delegates would oppose any effort to advance his cause. The only good news was that the gubernatorial candidate Pepper favored, Fuller Warren, won the Democratic nomination. Still, he did not see it as a repudiation of his views. He wrote to Robins, "On the whole, the elections turned out very favorably for me, for a number of sheriffs in the big counties, some of whom I actively aided, were elected, and others who can be of value to us in 1950."24 It was difficult to see how Pepper could be encouraged by the results. Although a number of his supporters had won local elections—and would be able to help him in 1950s—the voters of Florida had rejected him and his slate. Although his friend, Littlefield, was re-elected state chairman, Frank Upchurch, a leading
Pepper opponent, was chosen as chairman of the delegation to the Florida delegation to the Democratic National Convention. For the first time since being elected to the Senate, Pepper would not be the chairman of the Florida delegation.

The Challenge to Truman

After the election, Pepper's public statements became more erratic. In early May he called Wallace a good American and backed off his earlier statement that Truman would win the election. Two weeks later he said he was "neither for nor against Mr. Truman," but pledged to support the Democratic nominee. And despite his earlier praise of Wallace, he said Wallace and his party were hurting "organized labor and the country as a whole." In late May he wrote to Robins that he did not believe Truman could win. "The national situation alternates as far as Democratic chances are concerned between confusion and hopelessness."

The best hope, Pepper decided, was Eisenhower, who had repeatedly made it clear that he did not want to be a candidate. Pepper's earlier interest in Eisenhower brought him into contact with Leonard V. Linder, the publisher of the Manchester Union-Leader, and the man who had first floated the idea of an Eisenhower candidacy. Linder told Pepper a strange story: Eisenhower did not want the Republican nomination because the Republican leaders were selfish
and shortsighted. But Linder said Eisenhower had told him privately that he was willing to run as a Democrat because he "felt differently about the Democratic Party."³⁰

On June 26, as the Republican National Convention came to an end, Linder claimed he met with Eisenhower and that the General had not made up his mind about running for President, but "would be greatly affected by the action of the Republican convention." The Republicans had already nominated Thomas Dewey when Linder wrote his letter and Eisenhower had given no indication he was unhappy with the choice.³¹ Pepper admitted to Robins that there was not much chance Eisenhower would be nominated, but said he would continue to work for it.

While he was supporting Eisenhower, Pepper also saw himself as a potential candidate. He wrote to a friend that if he "were to follow the inclinations of my heart, I should be out fighting in the way that Henry Wallace is fighting."³² Amid the dozens of often conflicting stands Pepper took on his political future, it is unclear if he ever had a single, clear goal in mind. Did he really think that Truman would pick him as a vice presidential nominee after Pepper had opposed Truman, and many of his programs, for four years? Did he believe that Eisenhower would really be a candidate for president, or was he using him as a stalking horse to mask his own ambitions? Did he believe that if Eisenhower became president, he might name Pepper to a major job, perhaps secretary of state?
Pepper became a leader in the drive to dump Truman and recruit Eisenhower. The movement included people with little in common except a desire to nominate anyone but Truman. The unofficial leader was James Roosevelt, the California state chairman and the son of Franklin Roosevelt. The list also included New York Mayor William O'Dwyer, Minneapolis Mayor Hubert Humphrey, Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, Senator Richard Russell of Georgia, Nebraska state chairman William Ritchie, and Pepper. On July 4, Roosevelt sent a telegram to each of the 1,592 delegates to the Democratic National Convention inviting them to attend a special caucus on July 10 in Philadelphia, site of the convention.33

The Eisenhower effort had the quiet backing of the CIO Political Action Committee, one of the most active political organizations in the country. The union distributed literature and encouraged union locals to pass resolutions supporting Eisenhower. CIO officials believed "It was quite clear that the movement had sufficient strength to assure a nomination of Eisenhower by the Convention in the absence of any statement in the contrary from him."34

The Eisenhower coalition had little hope of success however, even if Eisenhower wanted to be president. It assumed that he would sweep the convention, although Truman controlled a majority of the delegates. While his backers agreed that Eisenhower was the best candidate, they knew little about his views. For example, where did he stand on civil rights? What would have happened to the support of Southern Senators Lister Hill, John Sparkman,
Claude Pepper, and Governor Strom Thurmond if it had turned out that Eisenhower embraced a strong civil rights platform? And how would O'Dwyer, Humphrey, and organized labor have reacted if Eisenhower sided with the Southern position on civil rights? The chances of the coalition holding together were very slim.

But the specter of an Eisenhower candidacy did worry Truman. He had Secretary of the Army Kenneth C. Royall contact Eisenhower to work out the wording of a withdrawal statement. On Monday night, July 5, Eisenhower issued a statement saying, "I will not, at this time, identify myself with any political party, and could not accept nomination for any public office or participate in a partisan political contest." The statement seemed final, but a few diehard Eisenhower supporters would not give up. Roosevelt sent a telegram to Pepper interpreting Eisenhower's words to mean that he would not "seek partisan political office," but would accept the nomination as a "unity candidate." Roosevelt said Eisenhower should still be a candidate "unless he refuses to accept after the convention nominates him."

Pepper agreed with Roosevelt that there was still a glimmer of hope that Eisenhower might become a candidate. On July 6 he sent a telegram to Roosevelt saying, "This man cannot refuse a truly national draft to a truly national leadership in the salvation of his country." Pepper's idea was to "make the Democratic National Convention the expression of a national draft of General Eisenhower." He sent a copy of the telegram to Eisenhower with the
note, "You will understand that I neither expect nor desire either an acknowledgment or reply."

Pepper released a public statement saying that "The Democrats must be prepared to let General Eisenhower be a truly national President." Not only would the Democrats have to give him their nomination, but also the Republicans. "He could not be expected to accept the nomination if it narrowed him to the limits of a party candidate. The Democratic party's rewards would lie in the tributes it would gain for its magnanimity in a time of crisis." Pepper said Eisenhower should also be allowed to write his own platform and select his own running mate.

But Eisenhower genuinely did not want to run for President. To the professional politicians, it seemed as if Eisenhower was merely being coy, a typical posture of denying interest while waiting for the right moment to become a candidate. Truman wrote in his diary that the Democrats opposing him were "double dealers all. But they'll get nowhere—a double dealer never does."

For the third time in six months, Eisenhower was forced to deny he was a candidate. On Friday, July 9, he sent a telegram to Pepper: "... I respectfully and earnestly request and urge that you drop such intention because I assure you that to carry it out would result in acute embarrassment to all concerned as well as confusion in the minds of many of our citizens... I would refuse to accept the nomination." Although Eisenhower had said the telegram was
"personal for you," Pepper quickly released it to the press, which as Pepper knew would happen, "dominated the headlines."

Nearly all of the Eisenhower support fell away, and most of those who had opposed Truman now realized that his nomination was inevitable. But the hard-core Truman opposition remained, led by Roosevelt, Pepper, Americans for Democratic Action Chairman Leon Henderson, the Nebraska Democratic chairman, William Ritchie, and the CIO-PAC leadership. Truman did not realize that much of the opposition to Truman was personal, not political. Ritchie and Truman had had a falling out, and even after Truman was nominated, Ritchie said, "I'm convinced that he cannot be elected. He has muffed the ball badly." Truman and Roosevelt had been feuding for some time and in June had an argument in a Los Angeles hotel suite. Roosevelt, who had been as assistant to his father in the White House, was best known for his love of fast cars and good times. He met with Truman, who ended up jabbing his finger into Roosevelt's chest and saying, "But get this straight: whether you like it or not, I am going to be the next President of the United States. That will be all. Good day." With that, Truman turned and walked out. Henderson did have influence, but with only about 120 delegates.

Some Truman opponents turned to Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas as a possible candidate. Douglas had been a strong supporter of the New Deal and was very popular. Henderson said "the Democratic Party must choose Douglas or invite a disaster that will imperil the future of progressivism in
Douglas had expressed no interest in the nomination, and his views on many subjects were unknown. Those views that were known were very close to Truman's.47

Jack Kroll, the leader of the CIO-PAC arrived in Philadelphia on Saturday, July 10, and met with Roosevelt to discuss the options and a rumor that Pepper might become a candidate. According to detailed notes kept by Tilford E. Dudley, a CIO official, Kroll and Roosevelt then met with Pepper and several other union officials. Pepper told them the anti-Truman forces were falling apart and that they needed a candidate. He said that he was willing to serve as that candidate. Those at the meeting, however, did not embrace the Pepper candidacy. Instead they suggested that Pepper conduct an informal survey of delegates to see if he had any support, and that he play "hard to get."48 No doubt Kroll realized that Pepper was no improvement over Truman—and would almost certainly have hurt the party even more—but did not want to offend one of the leading supporters of the labor movement. And there was an additional problem for Kroll and the CIO. Pepper was fine as a pro-labor, Southern senator, but the CIO could not support a national candidate who had campaigned in his last election on a platform of racial superiority.

While waiting for Pepper to conduct his informal survey, the CIO decided to support Douglas. Two hours later, a caucus of the remaining anti-Truman forces was held in the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel. Each time the anti-Truman forces met, the turnout was smaller, the options became more limited, and those
in attendance were largely those who personally disliked Truman, and who held little influence at the convention. The caucus, which became known as the "Pepper Caucus," failed to agree on anything, but they kept open the possibility of a Douglas or Pepper candidacy.49

When the caucus adjourned, a smaller meeting was held with Roosevelt, Kroll, and Pepper. Roosevelt said that if Pepper could attract commitments from Southern delegates, then Roosevelt could deliver support from California and some Northern states. Kroll again recommended surveying the delegates to see how much support Pepper had. Pepper should have realized just how weak his position was. Kroll embraced Douglas, a candidate he had not spoken to, and who had expressed no interest in the nomination, while stalling Pepper. Roosevelt had sent him to seek votes among Southern delegates, where Pepper’s views had made him highly unpopular. In exchange, Roosevelt held out the lure of a large block of votes from the California delegation, even though he could not deliver its votes to Pepper.50

That night, at 10 p.m., another anti-Truman caucus was held, this time at the Drake Hotel. A small number of delegates from Nebraska, Kansas, California and a few other states attended, along with Kroll and some other CIO officials. There was little enthusiasm after Eisenhower’s firm withdrawal, but a committee was named to see how much support there was for Pepper. William Ritchie, the Nebraska chairman was elected to lead the committee.51 Even before he conducted the survey, Ritchie let it be known that Pepper would declare his
candidacy the following day. The last of the anti-Truman advocates were so
desperate that they had been reduced to finding a candidate who met just two
criteria: a liberal and someone willing to "give definite assurance that he will take
the nomination."52

Pepper offered a different version of the events in his autobiography. He
said that on Saturday, a number of Democratic congressmen and columnists
came to his room for breakfast to discuss a possible Pepper candidacy. At that
breakfast, Pepper said, Ritchie agreed to lead a movement on his behalf.
Pepper said that eventually "a large number of labor delegates and liberals filled
a large room to overflowing and agreed that I should be the candidate to oppose
President Truman."53

On Sunday, July 11, a CIO caucus was held. Nearly 100 delegates who
were either union members, or close supporters, attended. There was still a
great deal of anti-Truman sentiment, but little support for another candidate such
as Pepper or Douglas. That afternoon, Douglas announced that he would not be
a candidate, and asked that effort on his behalf stop. Kroll held a news
conference to announce support for an open convention. He said Pepper's entry
as a candidate would be welcomed, but said the CIO-PAC would not endorse
any candidate.54 Pepper should have seen what was happening. Hours earlier,
the CIO had been ready to endorse a laundry-list of candidates, most of whom
they had never spoken with. Instead, they refused to endorse the candidacy of
Pepper, who wanted the nomination and who was a strong supporter of the CIO.
On Sunday evening, Pepper announced his candidacy at what had been the Eisenhower headquarters. In a large room, surrounded by the leftovers of the Eisenhower campaign, he said, "This is no gesture, this is a fight and I believe we can make it a winning fight, even if we are starting tardily." He said "This is not the time for politics as usual, for this nation is trembling on the brink of war and our national economy is threatened by an economic depression." He said he had been urged to run by members of the Ritchie Committee, even though it is unclear whether the Ritchie Committee ever found any support for Pepper. Ritchie was named as chairman of the Pepper campaign committee. Ritchie, like James Roosevelt, held little influence within his own delegation.

That night, CIO officials met to discuss the Pepper candidacy. Pepper told a Kroll aide that he "hoped to pick up the support of individual delegates from the different states," but that he had no large commitments. Pepper said he did not expect a CIO endorsement, but did ask that they canvas delegates and rally people on his behalf. Kroll said the CIO-PAC would assist Pepper with the canvas.

While proclaiming himself a liberal, he made it clear he was a "practical" Southern liberal and criticized Truman's civil rights program as "a snare and a delusion." Pepper and his supporters also announced their support for restoration of the two-thirds rule. The rule, which had been in operation until Franklin Roosevelt became president, required that the winning candidate have two-thirds of the vote to be nominated, not just a majority. The anti-Truman
forces believed that they could deny Truman the nomination if he had to get two thirds of the votes of the convention.  

Pepper claimed to have enough support to deny Truman the nomination on the first ballot with votes from twenty-two states. Ritchie said there were between three hundred and four hundred first-ballot votes for Pepper. But when he was pressed for details, Pepper said he could only count on the 6 ½ votes from his home state. When Pepper sought support from the other Florida delegates, they sat silently and did nothing.  

The New York Times said the Pepper announcement was the "hottest and funniest" part of the convention. The newspaper observed that while the anti-Truman forces had sought a name to unify the opposition, Pepper's name "had the directly opposite effect."  

Pepper had always had his eye on the presidency. In 1940, while in Orlando to address a club meeting, he told one of the members that he felt, 'In some strange way I should be president.' But this was certainly the strangest way, challenging an incumbent president who already had enough committed delegates to win on the first ballot. 

The Florida newspapers had a field day. The Fort Lauderdale News referred to the "sad spectacle of Senator Claude Pepper nominating himself as a Democratic presidential candidate." The Miami Daily News said, "Senator Pepper is not a proper candidate for the Democratic party." The Tampa Morning Tribune, in a front-page editorial, called his candidacy preposterous.
John Knight, the publisher of *The Miami Herald* wrote, "Some men in public life simply cannot resist the temptation to thrust themselves into the spotlight."\(^{67}\)

Democratic leader James A. Farley called Pepper's candidacy "stupid and fantastic," and said Pepper was being laughed at by the delegates.\(^{68}\) An attempt to stage a demonstration for Pepper was a failure.\(^{69}\) Even those who had seemed determined to nominate anyone but Truman rejected Pepper. Leon Henderson, the ADA chairman said, "We have already had two dark horses shot from under us. Why the hell should we get up and ride on a red roan?"

Truman made no public statement about Pepper's candidacy, but in a letter to A. J. Angle, the collector of customs in Tampa, he wrote, "...the antics of one of the Florida Senators is right in line with what he usually does at every convention. He is merely a publicity hound."\(^{70}\)

Pepper had been swept up in the convention fever. He watched as people sought desperately to find a candidate to challenge Truman. When candidate after candidate refused, Pepper thought he could fill the breech, but no one wanted him. He tried to put the best face on his withdrawal. He said he met with four advisers who he said "thought it the best thing for me to do was to issue a clear, courageous statement and withdraw my candidacy for President."\(^{71}\) Even though he had found only a handful of delegates, he made his cause sound more impressive by telling reporters, "I release all promises of support and request that I not be nominated for any office within the powers of this convention."\(^{72}\) On the floor of the convention hall, a 22-year-old girl tried to ride a
horse onto the floor, but was stopped at the door. She said she was campaigning for Pepper. "Everybody likes horses, everybody likes Pepper," she told a policeman. The officer turned her away saying she should have tried a donkey.73

While everyone saw Pepper's candidacy as either lunacy or grandstanding, Pepper could not understand what had happened. He wrote to his friend Carleton, "When reflective eyes are turned back to the convention, they will conclude that I offered the only way by which the Democratic Party could have saved the disunity which now appears to be fatal in the coming election."74 He also viewed the rejection by his fellow southerners as a terrible mistake. "The South, had it rallied to me, who had never been extreme upon these matters, could have achieved the aim it was supposed to be pursuing of defeating the nomination of the president."75

Truman was nominated without opposition, and Pepper attempted to return to his good graces. He called Truman's acceptance speech the "most magnificent address of his career. I had the strange feeling that some of the spirit and magnetism of Mr. Roosevelt had come back to the party."76 In the fall, Pepper campaigned for Truman, although a Truman friend urged that Pepper be kept out of Florida because "he will do more harm than good."77 He did campaign in a number of states including Illinois, Minnesota, and West Virginia, but as events would show, Truman did not forgive Pepper's actions at the convention.
He realized that the entire fiasco may have hurt him in Florida, telling Carlton, "my course may prove fatal in the next election. Yet, as I said to President Roosevelt . . . "We cannot stand for election always."

The Fort Lauderdale News thought Pepper's actions at the convention had destroyed any chance he had for re-election in 1950. "When the Senator went crawling back to Truman after the acceptance speech, he lost what little following he had among Florida's political leaders."

For the progressives, the 1948 election signaled an end to their political dreams. The idea of a liberal party, which seemed so promising two years earlier, was a failure. Truman won the election with 49.5 percent of the vote to Dewey's 45.1 percent. Thurmond won just 2.4 percent, but he was able to carry four southern states. Wallace finished fourth, with 2.3 percent of the vote and no electoral votes. In Florida, Truman won with 48.8 percent of the vote.

With his re-election in hand, Truman began to cultivate a friendship with George Smathers, a young Florida congressman. Truman wrote to Smathers' mother that he "Had a good visit with George at Key West. He's the only public official I invited to see me! The others invited themselves."

Pepper did not realize it, but he had become a man without a party. When Wallace left the Democratic Party, he took with him the extreme left wing. That was also the core of Pepper's national support, the people who had filled his calendar with speaking invitations throughout the country. He had alienated himself from the Democrats, and now stood alone.
His isolation came as Pepper began to reconsider his view of the Soviet union. In 1948 there were a number of events which forced Pepper to reassess his position. The Communist takeover of Czechoslovakia and the collapse of Chiang Kai-shek in China led him to attack what he called the "Russian onslaught." He said, "Hell is not hot enough for those Red criminals who have thrust upon a world still groaning from one war, another war. . ." He now supported the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and for a increased arms appropriations. But it was too little, too late. His own re-election was fast approaching and Pepper’s views on the Soviet Union posed a serious problem for him, as relations between the United States and the Soviets deteriorated rapidly.

Notes

2. Ibid.
5. Carleton to Pepper, 22 March 1946, Pepper Papers.
6. Pepper to Robins, 6 March 1948, Pepper Papers.
11. Chester Dishong to Pepper, 2 April 1948, Pepper Papers.
18. Los Angeles Post, 14 April 1948.
20. Pepper to Robins, 6 March 1948, Pepper Papers.
21. Miami Herald, 1 April 1948.
25. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Leonard Finder to Pepper, 26 June 1948, Pepper Papers.
32. Pepper to Raymond A. deGroat, 7 June 1948, Pepper Papers.


35. McCullough, 635.


37. James Roosevelt to Pepper, 5 July 1948, Pepper Papers.


42. Eisenhower to Pepper, 9 July 1948, Pepper Papers.

43. Pepper, Eyewitness, 164.

44. Ross, 83.

45. Donovan, 401.


47. Dudley Memo, Kroll Papers.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.


53. Pepper, Eyewitness, 166.

54. Ibid.

56. New York World Telegram, 12 July 1948
57. Dudley Memo, Kroll Papers.
58. Ibid.
63. Pepper Diary, 6 December 1940.
64. Fort Lauderdale News, 13 July 1948.
66. Tampa Morning Tribune, 12 July 1948.
68. Lake Worth Leader, 13 July 1948.
74. Pepper to William Carlton, 12 August 1948, Pepper Papers.
75. Ibid.
77. A. J. Angle to Truman, 14 September 1948, Truman Papers.
78. Ibid.
80. Truman to Mrs. Frank Smathers, 29 November 1948, Truman Papers.
81. Paterson, 132-134.
CHAPTER 8
THE OPPONENT

If Claude Pepper had someone who was his exact opposite, it was George Smathers. Life came easily to Smathers, who excelled at everything he tried. The most noticeable difference was their looks. Pepper was short and unattractive. Even he wondered if his life would have been different if he had not had terrible acne scars. Smathers was so handsome, that his political opponents tried unsuccessfully to dismiss him as a pretty boy. Where Smathers was agile and athletic, Pepper was awkward. Smathers was born to a wealthy family, while Pepper’s family always flirted with financial disaster. Smathers got attention naturally, while Pepper seemed to have to seize center stage. While Pepper was unpopular in Congress, Smathers was one of the best liked. It was a tribute to his ability to get along that two of his best friends in Congress were John Kennedy—he was in Kennedy’s wedding—and Richard Nixon, who first visited Florida at Smathers’ urging.

Smathers was born in New Jersey where his father, Frank, practiced law. Frank Smathers became involved in the 1910 gubernatorial campaign for Woodrow Wilson and, after Wilson won, Smathers was named to a state circuit court. But his health was fragile and a doctor advised him to head South to seek
relief for chronic arthritis. In 1920 the Smathers family moved to Miami, where Smathers opened a law practice.

At Miami High School, George Smathers was elected student body president, the first of more than a dozen elections he would win without a loss. He was offered a scholarship at the University of Illinois but turned it down so he could attend the University of Florida. His father thought the young man might have political possibilities and believed that attending a state university would help him.\(^1\)

Smathers breezed through college as he did through life. Unlike many students, he was not affected by the financial hardships of the Great Depression. He was the captain of both the basketball and track teams, and was readily accepted into the prestigious Blue Key society. Smathers excelled in debate and he received his undergraduate degree in 1936. Then he went to the university's law school, winning the school's "Best All-Around Man" award in his first year. During his second year of law school, Smathers met the state's new senator, Claude Pepper, who was running for re-election. Smathers was impressed and volunteered to help run the Pepper campaign on the university campus. He found that there was little organization in the Gainesville area, and soon was running the Pepper effort in all of Alachua county.

In 1940, Pepper helped Smathers obtain a job as an assistant federal district attorney for Florida's southern district. In later years, there was some dispute over exactly how large a role Pepper had played. While it is clear that
Pepper helped, Smathers had a very influential family and the backing of the state's other senator, Charles O. Andrews, whose son had gone to college with Smathers, and it is probable that Smathers would have gotten the job without Pepper's help.²

It was a wonderful opportunity for Smathers. The southern district covered much of Florida, stretching from Tampa to Miami. The United States attorney had his headquarters in Tampa, giving the Miami staff a great deal of autonomy. Smathers took on high profile cases and quickly began to make a name for himself. Smathers recalled later, "When you are twenty-five and twenty-six, as I was, there is not much grey area. It is either all white or black. You are either right or you are all wrong and we put everybody in jail. Nobody was safe."³ One of his first cases involved a white slavery operation in Key West. He faced Bart Riley, one of the state's most successful attorneys, who was so confident of victory that he failed to put on a defense, relying on his closing argument to carry the day.⁴ He underestimated Smathers. The Miami Herald reported that "if Riley was depending upon the strength of his indubitably fine oratory, he reckoned without George, who is himself one of the finest orators Florida had produced in this generation."⁵

The cases were hardly earthshaking, but they did afford Smathers significant public attention since they involved corruption, sex, and often lurid details. He followed the Key West victory with an even more impressive win over Georgia and Al Youst, the owners of the infamous La Paloma night club, a South
Florida center for gambling and prostitution. The two were charged with bringing in five young women from Tennessee and Georgia for immoral purposes. The testimony was so lurid that newspapers used phrases such as "testimony went beyond all printable bounds." Al Youst was suffering from tuberculosis and, in deference to his health, the court sessions lasted just two hours a day. That served to drag the trial out and keep the story on the front page until Smathers obtained a conviction. Ironically, Al Youst, a veteran criminal from New Jersey, said that after being convicted of a crime in New Jersey, the judge had suggested he leave the state and move to Florida. Youst took the advice and headed South where he ran into George Smathers. The New Jersey judge, who gave him the advice, was William Smathers, the uncle of George Smathers. "I guess the Smathers family is bad luck for me."

The Miami Junior Chamber of Commerce named Smathers their "Outstanding Young Man for 1940 and there was increasing speculation that he would become involved in Democratic politics. The Miami Herald predicted that "the bigwigs of the national Democratic Party are going to discover what a great logician, rhetorician and orator the party has in George Smathers." The Herald editors thought that Smathers would emerge as a candidate for office in 1944, but the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, changed his plans. Smathers wanted to join the Marines, but as a 27-year-old federal prosecutor with a wife and son, he was low on the priority list and the government wanted Smathers to concentrate on eliminating the threat of
German espionage in South Florida. The Marine Corps enlistment office was next to the federal building where Smathers worked, and he became a regular visitor, repeatedly asking when he would be taken, and becoming increasingly frustrated with the delay. In 1942, the Marines took Smathers and sent him to Paris Island, S.C., for basic training, then to Quantico, Virginia for Officer Training School, and finally to the Pacific theater. He saw combat in Bougainville, serving as a member of a Marine Bombing Squadron and rose from first lieutenant to captain. He returned to the United States in early 1945 to a desk job he did not like. The fighting was over for Smathers and, like millions of others, he wanted to get on with his life. He launched a campaign to get out of the military, writing to a number of officials, including Pepper and the attorney general.

Smathers wrote to William Paisley, an aide to Attorney General Tom C. Clark, to say that Pepper would be contacting Clark about a possible opening for Smathers in the Justice Department. In a note to Clark, Paisley said that Smathers "is an exceptionally able trial lawyer, well connected, and will be heard from." Finally Smathers wrote directly to Clark, claiming that his military job was inconsequential. Smathers got his discharge, just days after the atomic bomb was dropped on Japan and the war came to an end.

As soon as he was out of the service, politics became a driving force in his life. He looked at the options, including a run for the United States Senate, but the next Florida senator up for re-election was Spessard Holland, who was
extremely popular and would be impossible to defeat. Claude Pepper would not stand for re-election until 1950. Smathers rejected a run for the Florida Legislature as not worth his time. “I wouldn’t give two hoots in hell for all the seats in the legislature in Florida.” But he noted that “a start has to be made,” and settled on a seat in Congress as his first goal.¹³

The seat was held by Pat Cannon, who had served three terms without distinction, seemed to be popular, and certainly had the common touch. He was raised on a South Carolina farm, won a football scholarship to Stetson University, joined the Miami Police Department in 1925 in the midst of the Florida land boom, and earned a law degree at the University of Miami while he worked on the force. He failed in two attempts to win a seat on the Miami city council, and lost a run for congress before being elected in 1938. He was the largest man in Congress, weighing over 300 pounds, and probably the most self-effacing man in politics. He told his constituents he was “your fat friend,”¹⁴ and said he was an “errand boy for the public.”¹⁵ Although Cannon had done absolutely nothing of importance during his six years in Congress, he was well-liked and there seemed to be no reason to remove him from office.

Smathers had been out of the public eye for nearly three years and he needed something to put his name back on the front pages of the South Florida newspapers. He found it in the case of John Henry Colt, the chairman of the World War II Office of Price Administration price panel. Colt was accused of taking bribes in exchange for favorable rationing decisions. Nearly all Americans
had suffered under wartime rationing, and the case of a man charged with taking bribes in exchange for rationing decisions was explosive.

It was perfect, save for one thing: it was not Smathers’ case. An assistant attorney general named Fred Botts was assigned to prosecute the case, but Smathers was not to be put off. He wrote directly to Attorney General Tom Clark, telling him the Colt case was perfect for putting him “back in the public eye—and quick.” Smathers wanted Clark to intervene and get the United States Attorney Herbert S. Phillips to put Smathers on the case. Smathers admitted that winning the Colt case would help his political career in 1946. Eventually, a compromise was reached, and Smathers and Botts shared the case. They won, and Smathers garnered the headlines that went with the victory. He was back in the public eye just in time.

Pat Cannon was not expecting opposition in 1946. A Miami Herald columnist reported that only “tiny rumblings of opposition” were expected. Smathers kept his pending candidacy a secret from nearly everyone, and Cannon announced his candidacy on January 25, unaware of what awaited him the following day.

On January 26, Smathers entered the race for Congress. “Since my return from the Pacific, I have strong felt the need for aggressive representation of all the people of his district regardless of position or special interests. ... I know I can represent this district in a progressive, honest and able manner.” Perhaps Cannon did not see what was happening throughout the country. A new
A generation of political leader was springing up. Those who had come of age in the Great Depression and had been tested during World War II, were now seeking power. A survey by Army Times showed that the two major political parties had nominated a total of 183 candidates for Congress in 1946. Of those, 69 were elected and would make up nearly one seventh of the new Congress.19

When Smathers resigned as an assistant United States attorney in January, Richard Danner, who had run the Federal Bureau of Investigation office in Miami for much of the war, also resigned. Danner agreed to sign on as Smathers campaign manager.

Politically there was not much difference between Smathers and Cannon. They were both moderate Democrats who had never had to deal with the race issue, but they did split over international affairs. In the months after World War II, the Soviet Union had gone from being an ally to an enemy. The hope that the end of the war would mean a world at peace quickly vanished. Smathers saw the threat that Russia posed and said the United States would have to play a major role in world affairs to counterbalance Soviet aggression.

Pat Cannon did not see it that way. Sure there were problems, but there was not much the United States could do, and absolutely nothing that he personally could do. Cannon said that the problems simply defied solution and pointed to the ongoing plight of the Armenians, who he said "...have been starving all my life. We cannot subsidize the world."20 Cannon was equally
unmoved by the rising Soviet threat, calling Russia a "third-rate power." At no point during the campaign did he seem to take Smathers seriously.

Smathers had done his homework, pouring over copies of Congressional Quarterly to analyze Cannon’s record. He hammered at Cannon for missing 37 out of 75 votes in 1945, including votes on veteran’s housing, school lunch programs, and the controversial Office of Price Administration. These were issues which raised strong passions. Smathers promised to be “a congressman willing to stick to the job. . . . And give Pat Cannon a chance to devote his full time to the thing which he seems best at—being absent.” But Cannon tried to ignore the charge, saying he had “answered every roll call that the American people would want me to.” But Smathers kept up his attacks, comparing Cannon’s missed votes to "...a man in the army saying, 'I know we are going to win the battle,' and not going out to fight.”

Cannon’s tried without much success to attack Smathers’ privileged background and his good looks. He referred to his challenger as “pretty” and Cannon’s followers began calling Smathers “Gorgeous George,” the name of a popular wrestler. He also attempted to link Smathers to Pepper, who had become increasingly unpopular in the state.

Cannon stepped up his personal attacks in the final days of the campaign. To the Dade County Young Democrats rally he said, “This young gentleman is beaten this very minute . . . [Smathers] has no more chance to go to Congress than a mountain goat . . . . Never, as long as time lasts, will that boy
go to the American Congress." As part of a smear campaign, his workers distributed handbills reading "Vote for George Smathers," but signed by the "Communist Party of Miami." Smathers picked up the endorsements of both the Miami Herald and the Miami Daily News. The Daily News picked up on the Smathers' charge Cannon's missed votes and an indifferent foreign policy. On election day, Smathers won by a surprisingly wide two-to-one margin. He won all but three of the ninety-two precincts in Dade County, carried Monroe County, and lost only in lightly populated Collier County. He ran a nearly flawless campaign, learning to keep attacking, work hard, and exploit the friendships he had made in Miami and at the University of Florida.

Congressman Smathers

When Smathers took the oath of office in January 1947, the world was in the midst of turmoil with the Russian threat seeming to grow greater each day. Smathers thought the threat was real and that the United States should be wary of Russia. While Pepper had become the leading opponent of Truman's get tough with Russia plan, Smathers wholeheartedly endorsed it.

Smathers began to gather influence in Washington, far beyond what would normally be expected of a freshman congressman. In October 1946, even before taking the oath of office, Smathers met with President Truman to discuss
keeping the Opalocka Naval Station open. By any standard, his first term was a success. In the House he made friends with the large number of World War II veterans who were also new to Congress.

In the 1948 presidential election, Smathers faced the same difficult choice as other politicians in the South. President Truman was running for re-election, but was clearly the underdog, and had been written off by most. Many Southern Democrats rushed to support Dixiecrat Strom Thurmond, while others, such as Pepper, sought alternatives to Truman, offered half-hearted support, or sat out the campaign. Smathers, however, endorsed Truman and campaigned for him. Smathers predicted that Truman would carry Florida, although most thought it a lost cause. Truman carried Florida and the nation, and Smathers won the gratitude of the president. After the election, the Miami Daily News commented, "Representative Smathers can have virtually anything he wants in the House. As long as Mr. Truman is in the White House, the door will always be open to him."

In early 1949 Pepper became suspicious that Smathers was preparing to run against him. Pepper wrote in his diary that Smathers "seems to be toying with the idea of running against me next year but he is not determined to do so and many of his friends are counseling him against it. I suppose, however, that some one or more will give me the usual race." By spring, Pepper thought that either Governor Millard Caldwell or Smathers might run against him, but thought both would back out "when the showdown comes." Pepper did not understand
how much trouble he was in. He wrote, "I felt, however, that the situation will work itself out." By August 1949, Pepper believed that he had escaped a challenge by both Caldwell and Smathers. He thought they were "nearing a decision not to run against us next year." Pepper said it was because "they don't think they can win."

Pepper's situation remained precarious. He managed to needlessly anger an executive of the National Association of Manufactures, a group already working for his defeat. During hearings by the Public Welfare Committee, Ira Mosher, an official of the National Association of Manufactures, the umbrella organization for Florida's Associated Industries, and other state business groups, was testifying against the repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act. Suddenly, Pepper blasted Mosher, saying that "... it was the poor people whose sons went to the battle fields and a lot of the manufactures' sons who stayed at home and got rich." Mosher became angry and replied, "I lost three members of my family in the war." The Washington Sunday Star called Pepper's remarks "the all-time low," adding, "To put it bluntly, Mr. Pepper's performance was an affront to common decency, and it will be resented as such by every decent Senator and ever decent citizen." The Tampa Tribune observed that Pepper was "driving away from his support from those Floridians who would otherwise be inclined to favor his reelection."

Pepper's leading challenger appeared to be former Gov. Millard Caldwell, who decided not to run. Caldwell said he preferred the "liberty of a private
citizen" to a seat in the Senate. But Smathers said there was another, more personal reason. Caldwell was a congressman before becoming governor, and while living in Washington his son was killed in an automobile accident in Washington. Caldwell told Smathers, "I don't want to go back to Washington because it brings back bad memories." 

In August, just as Pepper was deciding that Smathers would not be a candidate, President Truman intervened. Truman invited Smathers to the White House and told him to "go down to Florida . . . make a survey and report." Smathers remembered Truman telling him to go out and defeat "that son-of-a-bitch Claude Pepper." The president's secretary did not record any such words, but it is not difficult to imagine Truman using them. Smathers went to Florida and began talking to people about a possible Senate bid.

Smathers said he had examined the situation for nearly a year. He looked closely at Pepper's 1938 and 1944 voting totals and found weaknesses. In 1938, Pepper had defeated five candidates by a total of nearly 70,000 votes. In 1944 he overcame four candidates by a total of 9,600 votes. Smathers saw that while Pepper was thought to be strong in his home area of North Florida he had not done well, getting a minority of the votes in more than half the counties in 1944.

A September column in the Orlando Morning Sentinel said that three candidates were being mentioned as opponents for Pepper, including Caldwell, Smathers, and former Rep. Emory Price of Jacksonville. "The dopsters now
believe that 1944 will be repeated in 1950 unless some strong candidate emerges, who will define the issues right down the line somewhere close to the Dixiecrat platform, but without its label."44

Smathers said that he went to see Pepper before entering the race and warned him that he was in trouble. “Claude, you got to do something, somebody is going to beat you. And a lot of people have approached me about it.” Smathers said that Pepper replied, “George don’t worry, if I go over the state and make speeches I’ll turn the whole thing over.” Smathers also said he went to see Pepper aide Bob Folks and said, “Somebody has got to rescue your guy or he is going to be defeated. . .I’d like to be a senator some day and this is my chance.”45

Smathers went to Florida and talked with a variety of people about his candidacy. One of those he met with was Ed Ball, the longtime Pepper enemy. The two had first met in 1946 when Smathers and another attorney tried to get Ball to invest in Florida’s first television station. Smathers recalled that Ball rejected the idea, saying, “We don’t spend money on these damned foolish ideas.”46 In 1950, the president of Ball’s Florida National Bank in Miami arranged a luncheon for Ball and Smathers, but no firm endorsement came from that meeting. A second meeting was arranged by Herbert E. Wolfe of St. Augustine. Wolfe was one of the state’s leading road builders and one of the most politically well-connected people in the state. Wolfe was close to Ball, disliked Pepper, and persuaded Ball to support Smathers. At the same time, Wolfe signed on as
Smathers’ state fundraiser. After that, Ball and Smathers met again several times in Ball's Jacksonville hotel suite to share drinks and the names of people who might help Smathers.47

Smathers contacted the White House on October 26 and told Truman aide Matt Connelly that it was important that he see the president. He visited Truman on November 8. There is no written record of the meeting, but it is clear that Smathers told Truman he would oppose Smathers. Within a week, the Miami Herald reported that Smathers was all but declared, "now that (he) has seen the president."46

In later years, Pepper accused Smathers of demanding a deal. According to Pepper, Smathers said he would not be a candidate in 1950 if Smathers received an appointment as United States solicitor general, veto power over any appointments by the governor to fill empty United States Senate seats, and agreed to support Smathers in the 1952 election for governor. In his memoirs, Pepper says he rejected the deal immediately.49 Pepper's memory seems questionable, however. There is no way Truman would have allowed Pepper to choose someone for a high government post. If Smathers wanted to be solicitor general, he would have had a better chance by calling on Truman personally, or his close friend, Supreme Court Justice Tom Clark.

By October, Pepper realized that the Smathers' threat was real. "He may win, although I don't think so, but I have regretted to see what has happened to him, already, spiritually."50 Seven months before the primary, Pepper offered his
friend Raymond Robins an analysis of the campaign. "It will be a spirited campaign, with his youth and handsome charm, energy and money, not to speak of all those selfish and shortsighted forces who will array themselves with him. But those people haven't been winning lately, and the people have a way of understanding the issues. I suspect they will pretty clearly understand this battle and its significance."  

Pepper was unable to find fault with himself and to view events realistically. He never blamed himself for his dramatic loss of popularity in Florida, or for the loss of supporters. Pepper knew the chances he had taken with his controversial stands. In 1948 he had said, "Time and again I have gone contrary to public opinion. If they catch me at a moment when public opinion is against me they may throw me out, but I am going to continue to fight for what I believe to be right." By 1950 Pepper had positioned himself contrary to Florida public opinion on a series of issues ranging from Russia to civil rights. This situation boded ill for his political future.

Notes

1. Smathers, interview by Donald Ritchie, 1 August 1989, Senate Historical Office, Washington, D. C.
2. Ibid.
5. Miami Herald, 10 May 1941.
8. Ibid.
9. Miami Herald, 10 May 1941.
12. Smathers to Clark, 2 July 1945, box 73, Clark Papers.
15. Miami Herald, 1 May 1946.
17. Miami Herald, 6 January 1946.
20. Miami Herald, 7 February 1946.
23. Ibid.
27. Miami Herald, 4 May 1946.


30. Memo, 8 October 1946, box 561, President’s Personal File, Truman Papers.


32. Pepper to James Flanagan, 28 February 1949, Pepper Papers.

33. Pepper to Robins, 13 May 1949, Pepper Papers.

34. Ibid., 13 May 1949.

35. Ibid., 22 August 1949.


38. Tampa Morning Tribune, 23 February 1949.


41. Transcript of Truman-Smathers meeting, 10 August 1949, official file, box 977, Truman Papers.


43. McGill, 33.

44. Orlando Morning Sentinel, 4 September 1949.


46. Danese, 293.

47. Ibid., 293-294.


49. Pepper, Eyewitness, 196.
50. Pepper to Robins, 22 August 1949, Pepper Papers.


52. Los Angeles Daily News, 6 April 1948.
CHAPTER 9
THE CAMPAIGN BEGINS

World War II had a dramatic impact on Florida. More than two million men and women underwent military training in Florida, and many liked what they saw and returned after the war. Thousands more returned home, but made plans to come back when they retired. The war also poured billions of federal dollars into the state, reviving ship building in Pensacola, Panama City, Jacksonville and Tampa.¹ There were books published to lure people to the state, “How to Retire in Florida,” and “Florida Today: New Land of Opportunity.” Two of the biggest boons for Florida, however, were not related to the war. Air conditioning, a luxury once reserved for movie theaters and department stores, became practical after World War II. In 1945 just over 1,000 room air conditioners were shipped, in 1946 the number jumped to nearly 30,000, and by 1950, it had risen to 193,000.² Scientists also came up with a way to control the mosquitoes that had plagued residents and tourists. In 1950, Florida’s population reached 2,771,305, an increase of 46 percent over 1940. The increase was not the result of a high birth rate, but immigration. In twenty years, the state’s population had nearly doubled, while the population in the rest of the nation increased by just twenty percent. The influx also changed the population distribution of the state. In 1930, four out
of ten people lived in North Florida, another four out of ten in Central Florida and two out of ten lived in South Florida. By 1950, a third of the residents lived in North Florida, while 37 percent lived in Central Florida and 28.7 percent were in South Florida. The new arrivals were older. The percentage of those over 65 years of age living in the state increased from 4.8 percent in 1930 to 8.5 percent in 1950. An examination of the population shift shows that there was an immigration of conservative, white, middle-class voters from the North, an immigration of elderly voters, who tended to be conservative and were more likely to vote for Republican candidates, and finally, the percentage of African-American voters dropped dramatically from 44 percent in 1900 to about half that percentage in 1950. It was a very different state from the one Pepper had found in the 1920s, even different from the one that had re-elected him to the Senate six years earlier. And unlike his previous campaign, he would not have a president vitally interested in his success.

On January 12, 1950, Smathers announced his candidacy to supporters in Orlando and on a network of twenty-two Florida radio stations. He had urged his supporters from throughout the state to gather in Orlando and motorcades had been organized from throughout the state and rally at the city coliseum. Under the slogan, “Make Yours a Double-Duty Vote, for Florida, for America,” he spelled out what would become the dominant theme for the campaign—communism: “You will not find in me an apologist for Stalin, nor an
associate of fellow travelers, nor a sponsor of communist-front organizations." . . . The people of our state will no longer tolerate advocates of treason."

Although communism would be the dominant theme, Smathers also said he would attack Pepper's positions on national health insurance, race relations, unions, and government spending issues. Smathers said he would oppose the Truman administration's efforts to pass a national health insurance plan, fight the repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act, and oppose Truman's civil rights program.5

Pepper was hurt by Smathers' opening remarks and promised never to speak to Smathers again. Smathers fired back, "...probably now neither Joe Stalin, Henry Wallace nor Paul Robeson will speak to me again either. . . . All their minds must run along the same channel."6

Smathers knew that to win he would have to take some positions opposing Truman, especially on civil rights, but he wanted to make sure the president knew that he still supported the administration. In a letter to Truman aide Matthew J. Connelly, Pepper said, "I have supported the Administration more than has any other Florida congressman in the history of the state. . . . In every election Pepper has run, about a year before the primary comes off, he grabs onto the coattails of the President and clings there steadfastly until he is re-elected, after which it is his custom to take off in all directions." Smathers asked that Connelly offer some protection from some of Pepper's "columnist friends."7
In the 80th Congress, Smathers supported the president's proposals ninety-three percent of the time, but in the first session of the 81st Congress, his support fell to eighty-four percent. Pepper, who supported Truman eighty-seven percent of the time in the 79th Congress, became Truman's most loyal supporter in the Senate in the 81st Congress, voting with the President ninety-nine percent of the time.  

Despite the Smathers challenge, Pepper waited six weeks before announcing his candidacy. Perhaps he believed what the St. Petersburg Times said about his "uncanny knack for landing on his feet by always showing up at the eleventh hour to do and say exactly the right thing." He appeared to be confident, predicting that Smathers would get "the thrashing of his life." Smathers replied, "He's a very nice man personally, but I disagree with his basic policies and that's why I'm against him." There was reason for Pepper to believe that he could make amends with Florida voters. The St. Petersburg Times was not alone in its belief that Pepper could always land on his feet. Six months before the primary, the landmark study of Southern politics, Southern Politics in State and Nation was published. Author V. O. Key praised Pepper's "superb performance on the stump," and said the "professional politicians look with great admiration of his ability to come back to the state for a few weeks and wipe out the opposition in a whirlwind campaign." But Key cautioned, "There are those who remark somewhat sadly that, 'Claude is not the same Claude that we knew when he started out back here in Florida.'" Key wrote that "...
Claude's most ardent admirers, as 1950 approached, were wondering whether he was going to be able to talk himself into another term in the Senate."

Speaking to a large crowd in Miami, and a state-wide radio network, Pepper launched his campaign by hammering on themes that had served him so well in the past. "For nearly fourteen years I have worked tirelessly in the service of every part of Florida. During that time the federal government has spent for the welfare of the citizens of Florida over a billion-and-a-half dollars and has loaned almost a billion dollars more to our businessmen, to our farmers, and to our veterans." He outlined his platform, which included a New-Deal-like government benefit for nearly everyone. He promised price supports for farmers, aid for education, loans to businessmen and veterans, a pension for everyone over 60, national health insurance, more hospitals for veterans, federal aid to fight beach erosion, and completion of South Florida flood control projects. And for the first of hundreds of times during the campaign, he evoked the memory of the Great Depression. "You know what that crowd promised us back in 1928... They promised us two cars in every garage and a chicken in every pot. What did we get? When we got them out, we didn't have any cars, we didn't have a garage, we didn't have a chicken. We didn't even have a pot." Pepper based his campaign on his seniority in the Senate, on the contention that Smathers was really a Republican running as a Democrat, and on telling voters that his opponents were not trying to defeat him, but to defeat the New Deal. Seniority was to be treasured, especially in the South, where
northern superiority in numbers meant that if the South was to have power, it needed to rely on Southern politicians holding power for long periods, and gaining committee chairmanships. Pepper pointed out that “at 49 years of age I am the youngest Senator with nearly 14 years of experience and seniority in the Senate. I have just reached my greatest capacity for service to Florida.” Pepper was one seat away from being the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Smathers, however, turned the seniority issue against Pepper. “My opponent says he will continue fighting communism. Let us hope he will not fight it as he has in the past. . . . If he is re-elected, and one Senator dies, he will become chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and will be the man to deal with Russia in seeking a lasting peace.”

No Pepper speech was complete without a description of what he had brought the state during his 14 years in office. In Clewiston, he pointed to the giant sugar mill; in Tampa, he cited the lifting of the toll on the Gandy Bridge in 1944, and in Plant City he told voters about securing funds for the hospital. Pepper promised to support Truman’s domestic program, with the exception of the Fair Employment Practices Commission and civil rights. There was much Pepper could claim credit for. He had helped thousands of Florida voters with everything from routine requests for information to huge government contracts. One voter in St. Petersburg said, “I don’t agree with Claude Pepper on a single national question but I’m going to support him because he did me a mighty big
favor when nobody else seemed able to." Pepper also had the support of the
state Democratic committee chairman and the governor, Fuller Warren. Pepper
had supported Warren's campaign in 1948, and expected that Warren would put
the state bureaucracy behind Pepper. It was typical for both state and federal
workers in Florida to campaign and contribute to the candidate of the political
party in power. Pepper asked various federal government agencies for the
names of Floridians they employed, but at least one agency rebuffed him. His
nemesis, J. Edgar Hoover wrote to a subordinate, "No such list is to be furnished
anyone least of all Pepper. H." Smathers poked fun at Pepper's constant promises, which he called the
"promise derby." In Jacksonville he said, "If I should promise you a new 27-story
federal building, he would come here tomorrow night and raise it to 30 stories." Speaking in the rain in Lake Wales, Smathers said, "I know you need rain but
unlike my opponent, who takes credit for everything, . . . I won't claim full credit
for this. I will only say I hope I helped." On the same day Pepper declared his candidacy, a third candidate,
James G. Horrell of Orlando, withdrew and endorsed Smathers. The Horrell
withdrawal was significant because it meant that there could not be a runoff
election. One of the two candidates would win the May primary and the Senate
seat. Horrell had done his homework in preparing to be a candidate, including
research on Pepper's problems and the state voters. Horrell recommended that
while Pepper's opponent should "carry on a clean but strong campaign, it was
also thought that a little mud and a little name calling by local supporters in the right places and at the right time would do some good.” Horrell wrote that “in rural areas, particularly in West Florida, use of States’ Rights, Civil Rights, [and] Communism [will] create a winning psychology and dispel the aura of invulnerability which Pepper has built up about himself.” He also prepared a list of all of the organizations identified as Communist-front groups Pepper had spoken to. In withdrawing from the race, Horrell gave the report to Smathers, who made good use of it. He adopted much of the Horrell strategy and put to good use the list of Communist-front groups.\(^{21}\) Smathers asked the House Un-American Activities Committee for information to use against Pepper and the committee provided reports linking Pepper to pro-Communist groups and individuals.\(^ {22}\)

Smathers and Pepper had both supported the European Economic Recovery Program, European military aid, the peacetime draft, the minimum wage, pensions for veterans, slum clearance, and agricultural price supports, but on some significant domestic matters they took different stands. Pepper favored a limited form of a national health insurance bill, Smathers was against it. Pepper was opposed to Taft-Hartley and Smathers voted for it. Pepper was a leading supporter of federal aid to education, while Smathers opposed the idea. Pepper was opposed to a bill to limit the extension of Social Security benefits and Smathers supported the limits.\(^ {23}\) While Smathers pointed with pride to his
support of much of Truman's Fair Deal, Pepper remained committed to the more expansive New Deal philosophy.

Smathers made Pepper’s stand on the Soviet Union—including Pepper’s relationships with left-wing groups—the leading issue. This was the theme he emphasized day after day. There were others issues, but communism was the club he used against Pepper in every speech. There was also Pepper’s very limited support for the Fair Employment Practices Committee, his relationship with the Congress of Industrial Organizations, race relations, national health insurance, and the federal bureaucracy that were occasionally highlighted. In addition, Smathers knew that because of Pepper’s involvement with the Florida East Coast Railway, the usually reliable union support for the incumbent counted on, was badly divided. And Smathers had the support of the duPont interests.

The basic approach to daily campaigning by the two candidates was very similar. They crisscrossed the state, giving up to eight speeches a day. Before a candidate arrived, a car with a large speaker entered the town and urged people to turn out. Most speeches were given in front of the courthouse, although appearances at night were usually held in a hall. Sometimes the speeches were broadcast on local radio stations, and both candidates had national broadcasters on their side. Robert Montgomery and Fulton Lewis, Jr., used their radio programs to boost Smathers, while Elmer Davis made frequent positive comments about Pepper on his network program. The American Federation of Labor sent two of its radio commentators to Florida in the final weeks of the
campaign to broadcast appeals for Pepper. There were local bands to warm up the audience and, for both candidates, the song “Dixie” was usually played. Pepper frequently spoke in front of huge portraits of Roosevelt, Truman, and himself, and talked about how he had fought beside Roosevelt and Truman for the past decade. The candidates generally took off Sundays, although both usually attended church services and shook hands with parishioners. By April, the pace was beginning to show. Smathers told one audience, “They talk about the New Deal and the Fair Deal. Ladies and gentlemen, this is an Ordeal.” Smathers went through three pairs of shoes and lost 11 pounds by April 2.

In what was a serious campaign marked by vicious charges, there was some humor. Pepper’s opponents distributed horn-rimmed classes and a large plastic nose to mock him. He joked about it, “They can call me a Red and a Black, but when they attack my beauty, that’s too much, I think I’m getting mad.” The Smathers’ camp passed out cards reading, “Bring prosperity to Florida. Join and support Florida’s fastest growing industry, Canning Pepper.”

The Smathers campaign was well organized by Dick Danner, who had run Smathers’ 1946 campaign. Smathers organized his headquarters in Jacksonville as part of an effort to show that he was a statewide candidate and probably to be close to the offices of his major backers, Associated Industries and Ed Ball. The Smathers workers, known as the “Goon Squad” fanned out across the state to organize each county. The strength of the Smathers organization was clear when car caravans were organized to accompany the candidate. On April 25,
400 cars led Smathers into Tampa and later in North Florida the motorcade reached 700 cars. The motorcades served two purposes: they rallied the faithful, and they were excellent at drumming up publicity and attention for the candidate’s appearance.

In 1950 Smathers rewrote the rules for Florida campaigns. He introduced direct mail, letters tailored to the individual interests of thousands of Florida voters. Within days of his announcement, the letters began filling mailboxes throughout the state. To doctors went letters reading, "We are engaged in a struggle of two basic philosophies – our Democratic way of life and communism. Your individual initiative and freedoms are being threatened today and various attempts are being made to socialize the professions of our nation." To a member of the Junior Chamber of Commerce, he wrote, "As a fellow Jaycee and past president of the Dade County Junior Chamber of Commerce I have always enjoyed a close relationship and pleasant association with Jaycees throughout the state." To a businesswoman he wrote, "The Federation of Business and Professional Women Clubs has upheld the motto, 'Better Businesswomen for a Better Business World.' I more than appreciate the part that women are playing in shaping the destiny and future of our state." Other voters received a "Smathers-Gram," which looked like a telegram, and read, "George Smathers is a liberal. Not a Radical." And to the state's most significant group of voters—the alumni of the University of Florida, the Smathers' appeal highlighted his university ties. "Today as a candidate for the Senate of the United States, I am
confident that the same spirit displayed on the campus will be revitalized by fellow alumni in the forthcoming campaign.\textsuperscript{34} Smathers noted that the university alumni "are legion and there's one of them in virtually every cross roads community from Pensacola to Key West. Usually they're pretty influential locally."\textsuperscript{35}

Smathers also utilized sophisticated advertisements placed in newspapers. One, supposedly from a North Florida farmer was addressed to the People of Florida:

\begin{quote}
I know plenty families right here and I know how they get their money to live on. They get it from the Government – I call it PEPPER PROSPERITY. I know one family that gets $50 a month assistance. I know another who gets blind assistance but who can see well enough to get around and get drunk, for I paid $15 one time to get him out of the jail house. . . . I offered them land and a mule to plow to make a garden, but they could not turn their fishing down! . . . This is the kind of folks our government is sponsoring – just laziness and no work! It is ruining our country!\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

The campaign even had its own newspaper, The St. Augustine Observer, an eight-page publication with headlines such as 'Pepper and Commie Front Organizations," and "Pepper Hot Over Negro Photo Spread." Inside were pictures of Pepper with Wallace and Paul Robeson.\textsuperscript{37}

But his best tool was a forty-eight-page booklet entitled "The Red Record of Senator Claude Pepper." It was a collection of newspaper clippings listing Pepper appearances before left-wing groups and his comments about friendly relations with Russia. On the cover was an unflattering photograph of Pepper with his eyes bulging. Taken together, it was a devastating document. Many of
the stories were from the Daily Worker. The booklet was put together by Lloyd C. Leemis, a former Federal Bureau of Investigation agent and published in Jacksonville. Although it carried a price of one dollar, tens of thousands of copies were given away throughout the state. Smathers claimed that he did not print or distribute the booklet: It appears likely, in fact, that it was paid for by friends of Ed Ball. "Ed Ball was running his own campaign against Pepper," Smathers said. FBI agents in Florida kept Director Hoover informed about the campaign, and an April memo to Hoover speculated that Leemis had help from Associated Industries, which was largely financed by Ball companies and Ball associates. Both Leemis and Associated Industries were working out of the Graham Building. "It is believed that former Special Agent Leemis was probably assisted in the compilation of the material in this book by an organization known as Associated Industries of Florida. . . . This organization is reported to have some remote connection with the Ball-DuPont interests in Florida, and to serve as a confidential information service for the Ball-DuPont's many business interests. . . ."

The booklet was nothing new for Ball. During the 1928 presidential election he had organized Florida Democrats for Hoover and arranged to print 150,000 leaflets carrying a photograph of a Negro man dictating a letter to a white girl. The caption said, "If you want this to happen in Florida, vote for Alfred E. Smith." Smathers referred to the "Red Pepper" booklet in his speeches. "These are grave and serious charges to bring against a public official, but they
are supported by the record which is open for all to see. It is these charges and the indisputable proof of them that is giving my opponent so much concern and discomfort now that the truth is out." Pepper responded that it was "The most scurrilous and vicious document even to besmirch a Florida political campaign."42

The first poll of the campaign, conducted by the *Jacksonville Journal* in late February and early March, surveyed eleven key counties and found Smathers ahead by an astounding two-to-one margin. According to the poll, Smathers held commanding leads in Duval (Jacksonville), Volusia (Daytona Beach), and Pinellas (St. Petersburg) counties. He was even in Dade (Miami), Escambia (Pensacola), and Hillsborough (Tampa) counties. In none of the counties was Smathers behind.43

**The Communist Issue**

Pepper had hoped that he might use the issue of friendly relations with Russia to become president. Instead, it was threatening to end his political career. Not only did Pepper have to fight Smathers, he had to battle world events. It was difficult to find a major event in the world between June 1948 and May 1950, that did not work against Pepper. In June 1948, the Russians began a blockade of Berlin, which threatened to turn into war, and resulted in the Berlin Airlift. In December 1948, Alger Hiss was indicted for perjury. He had been
accused of handing over government secrets to the Soviets and indicted for perjury for denying involvement. In March 1949, Judith Coplon, a Justice Department employee, was arrested while carrying secret documents she was thought to be delivering to a Russian agent. In September 1949, the Russians detonated a nuclear bomb. Truman had thought the Soviets were three years away from successfully testing a bomb. In October 1949, China fell to the communists and 500 million people—a quarter of the world’s population—fell under communist rule. Three months later, Alger Hiss was sentenced to five years in prison. The Hiss conviction suggested that if he could be a Soviet spy, then there might be others in Washington. In February 1950, Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy unveiled what he said was a list of Communist Party members working in the federal government, setting off what would become a national obsession with the threat of communism. That same month Klaus Fuchs surrendered on charges of passing American atomic secrets to Soviet operatives while working at the American nuclear facility at Los Alamos, New Mexico. He confessed and began naming those who he worked with. That chain eventually led to the arrest of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.44

Even good news for the nation seemed to work against Pepper. In May 1949, the eleven-month Berlin Blockade finally came to an end, demonstrating that Truman’s tough strategy of dealing with the Russians, had paid off. Secretary of State Dean Acheson gave his “situations of strength speech” in February 1950 calling for the United States to negotiate from strength. In his
speech, Acheson rejected the defensive posture that containment was usually associated with. It would include furnishing allies with more military aid.45

Communism was a simple issue for the voters to understand and in 1950 it seemed as though Communists were everywhere. What was strange was that as Americans became more and more concerned about communism, the Communist Party in the United States declined dramatically. During the Great Depression, thousands of Americans in desperation turned to communism. They thought capitalism had failed and communism might be the answer. Membership in the party grew from about 7,500 to 55,000 during the decade. But the members, many of whom saw communism as an alternative to fascism, were shocked when Germany and Russia signed a treaty in 1939. The party line suddenly embraced the Nazis. Two years later, when Germany invaded Russia, the party shifted again. The result of all of this was that faith in the party waned and membership declined.46

Use of the communist issue was nothing new in American politics. As early as 1936, Alf Landon’s running mate, Frank Knox, charged that Roosevelt was leading the United States toward Moscow. Eight years later, the Republican vice presidential candidate, John W. Bricker, charged that American Communist Party leader Earl Browder had been released from prison to organize party members to vote for Roosevelt’s fourth term. In 1948 Earl Warren, the Republican nominee for vice president, said Truman had been too soft on the
communists. The presidential nominee promised that "There will not be any Communists in the Government after January 20 [1949]."47

Pepper tried to rebut the pro-communist allegations against him by linking Smathers to Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin, who in February launched his crusade to uncover communists in government. But Smathers responded by ridiculing Pepper's own words. He would ask his audience if they had "prayed today for a long life for Joe Stalin. He could always count on a chorus of "nos" to come from his audience. Then, Smathers told the crowd, "For every one of you who wants to preserve our great American heritage, the time has come to take off your coat... and join our holy crusade to preserve America for honest-to-God Americans."48 Actually, what Pepper had said in a radio broadcast from Moscow was "People everywhere are looking prayerfully toward us and counting upon us to fulfill our great missions to mankind."49 But it mattered little. Anti-communism was sweeping the country. In the Eighty-first Congress, a total of thirty-eight anti-Communist bills were introduced. The one that passed was the McCarran Act of 1950, which created a five-person Subversive Activities Control Board to identify Communist, Communist-front, and Communist-infiltrated organizations.50

Many suggest that Truman and the Democrats were not victims of what became known as McCarthyism, but its architects. Historian Athan Theoharis contends that the Truman administration had legitimized red baiting with is loyalty-oath programs and the creation of communist-front lists by the attorney
general. In 1946, Truman created a committee to review loyalty programs and recommend changed. On March 25, 1947, he issued an executive order creating a new loyalty program. It would result in thousands of Americans either losing government jobs or being denied employment.

Pepper's attempts to deny that he supported communism suffered a devastating setback in April when The Daily Worker officially endorsed Pepper's candidacy. The endorsement was written by state party leader George Nelson, who wrote, "The Communist party of Florida has called upon all voters to work for the defeat of Smathers. . . . His victory would strengthen the Dixiecrat-KKK forces in Florida as well as throughout the South." The endorsement said the party, with the aid of the CIO's Political Action Committee and the AFL's Political Education Committee would work to register 250,000 black voters for the primary.

The Daily Worker endorsement was a disaster for Pepper. It gave Smathers all the ammunition he needed to attack Pepper: civil rights, labor unions and communists. Papers throughout the state reprinted the endorsement on their front pages. Pepper tried to make it appear to be a political dirty trick. "They know that I, fighting always for a stronger American, am a more formidable foe of Communists than those who would weaken America. I strongly denounce the Communists and communism and very much suspect that the Communists and our opposition in this matter are fellow travelers." Nelson, the author of the endorsement, said that he had been approached by both the Pepper and
Smathers' camp to endorse the other. He said the endorsement was sincere, although Nelson added that the endorsement was more anti-Smathers than pro-Pepper.54 Smathers rejected Pepper's charge that it was a trick saying, "Year after year my opponent has received the endorsement, the praise and the favorable comment of Communist writers. But this is the first time he had hollered 'trickery.'"55

Pepper asked Ross C. Beiler, a professor of government at the University of Miami, for help in dealing with the communist issue. Beiler urged Pepper to try humor and make light of Smathers' charges. "When dealing with the Communist and FEPC charges, couple some unimpeachable associations that reveal the insincerity of these charges with gentle, droll ridicule that makes Smathers appear ridiculous, and not merely mistaken or overzealous in his charges."56 Pepper took the advice. At political rallies, he pulled his collar up on his coat, put his head down mysteriously and said, "The other crowd would have you believe that I slipped out of the house while my wife as asleep . . . crept along the wall of the Kremlin until I came to a door marked 'Stalin,' knocked on the door, and when the man came, I said: 'Joe, here's Claude, I got some secrets.'"57 The technique did not work. Life magazine dismissed his strategy, saying Pepper "tried to clown his way out of the accusations he was a Communist sympathizer. . . ."58

On March 28, Smathers announced that every day until the May primary he would name a different communist-front organization that Pepper had
addressed. He kicked off his list with the American Slav Congress, listed as subversive by the attorney general. One of those Smathers' named, the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, wasn't on the attorney general's list and in many cases, Pepper had spoken to the groups before they were put on the attorney general's list. The so-called "attorney general's list" was begun by Attorney General Francis Biddle, who was trying to come up with some type of standard to guide the Department of Justice. Government officials who were interviewing job applicants could not judge whether an applicant's list of organizations was suspect or not. Names such as the "Friends of the Soviet Union," clearly set off alarm bells, but could the interviewer know that the "Detroit Youth Assembly" was also suspected of being linked to communists. The list was only intended as a guide, a factor to be considered along with many others. Then, Martin Dies, the chairman of the House Un-American Activities Committee, obtained a copy of the list and inserted it in the Congressional Record. Quickly it went from a guide to a blacklist. Despite Truman's protest that the list was only a "factor to be taken into consideration," membership in the groups on the list cost many their jobs.

A Smathers newspaper advertisement said, "Pepper spent most of his time in the period 1945 to 1948, visiting Joe Stalin, Russia, and the satellite states and thereafter making speeches to radical organizations from coast to coast praising Dictator Joe Stalin, instead of working for Florida's interest in Washington." The communist issue kept Pepper on the defensive throughout
the campaign. Although Pepper was certainly not a communist, or a fellow traveler, his actions between 1944 and 1950 had created the impression that he at the very least had been duped by the Communists. No matter how much he denied the charges hurled by Smathers, Pepper could not overcome his meeting with Stalin, his opposition to the Truman Doctrine, the endorsement of the Daily Worker, and his association with groups identified as communist fronts.

Notes


11. Ibid.


14. Ibid.

15. Pepper, campaign speech, 2 March, 1950, Pepper Papers.


18. FBI memo, 14 October 1949, file 94-4-684-69, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington, D. C.


20. Ibid., 6 April 1950.


24. Ibid., 26 April 1950.

25. Ibid., 23 February 1950.

26. Ibid., 2 April 1950.

27. Ibid., 31 March 1950.


29. Ibid., 1 May 1950.


31. Smathers to Al Block, 18 January 1950, Pepper Papers.


34. Smathers to Hugh McArthur, 26 January 1950, Pepper Papers.

35. Miami Herald, 10 April 1950.


37. St Augustine Observer, 22 April 1950.


40. Lincoln, 159.


42. Miami Herald, 30 April 1950.


44. Pleasants and Burns, 97.


48. Miami Herald, 4 April 1950.

49. Pepper, radio address, 18 September 1945, Pepper Papers.


52. The Daily Worker, 9 April 1950.

54. Ibid., 11 April 1950.

55. Ibid.

56. Ross C. Beiler to Pepper, 23 March 1950, Pepper Papers.


60. Goulden, 313.

61. Florida Times-Union, 1 May 1950.
CHAPTER 10
THE CAMPAIGN AND RACE

Although communism was the main issue Smathers used against Pepper, he also hammered away at a short, but effective list of domestic issues led by civil rights. In previous elections, opponents had used the race issue against Pepper, but it had only been effective when used by Trammell in 1934. In 1938 and 1944 the issue failed as Pepper carefully maintained his support for segregation.

Pepper’s position on civil rights was a hodgepodge of shifting sentiments and a desire to be attractive to Northern liberals and retain office in Florida. During his 1944 re-election campaign, he ran as a white supremacist saying that the “South will allow nothing to impair white supremacy.” In the Senate, he had never voted for a civil rights measure, although he had stopped joining his fellow Southerners in filibusters against anti-lynching and anti-poll-tax efforts.

By 1950, civil rights had emerged as a more complicated issue for southern candidates. In 1946, Truman created the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, which produced a report calling for federal action to overcome racial discrimination in the United States, and on February 2, 1948, the President called for anti-lynching laws, abolition of the poll tax, outlawing of segregation in
interstate transportation and establishing the Fair Employment Practices Commission as a permanent body. The platform was condemned by Southern politicians. Truman’s proposals forced moderate Southern politicians to take firm stands.

Blacks returning from World War II were not willing to settle for the second-class citizenship awaiting them in the South. Nearly three million blacks registered for the military and half-a-million were stationed overseas. In the United States, nearly a million blacks moved into factory jobs. At the same time, the Supreme Court issued rulings favorable to blacks. In Smith v. Allwright (1944), the court ruled that blacks could not be barred from voting in Democratic primaries. The court ruled in Morgan v. Virginia (1946) that it was unconstitutional to require segregation on carriers moving across state lines, and in 1948, the court ruled that state judicial enforcement of racial restrictive covenants constituted state action in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment.

The combination of the court rulings, Truman’s civil rights legislation, and the growing militancy of blacks alarmed southerners, who responded with violence. In 1946 in Batesburg, South Carolina, returning veteran Isaac Woodward, was removed from a bus, beaten, and blinded by the chief of police. In Columbia, Tennessee, two blacks were shot and killed jail as Ku Klux Klansmen terrorized the town. In Monroe, Georgia four blacks being transported by a white farmer were shot to death.
Racial violence occurred throughout Florida as well. In early 1950, as the campaign began, there were cross burnings across the state. Five took place in Jacksonville, ten in Orlando and Winter Park, and seventeen in and around Tallahassee. A report by the Workers Defense League stated, “Terror is spreading in Florida.” The WDL found that “More forms of forced labor are more widely practiced in Florida than in any other state. It’s legislature, by successive enactments, has most consistently attempted to evade or ignore U.S. Supreme Court decisions.”

One of the most sensational case occurred in Florida in 1949. Early in the morning of July 16, 1949, in the tiny Central Florida community of Groveland, Norma Padgett told officials she had been raped by four black men. Sammy Shepherd and Walter Irwin, Ernest Thomas and Charles Greenlee were identified as suspects in the rape case. Three were quickly arrested, but Thomas eluded police for a week before being shot and killed 200 miles north of Lake County.

The NAACP entered the case to help the three defendants and, questioned whether Norma Padgett was raped, or was seeking to cover up a beating by her husband. As their trial began, the local newspaper, the Orlando Morning Sentinel, ran a front page editorial cartoon showing the defendants in the electric chair. There was little doubt about the outcome of the case. The three were convicted after the jury deliberated just ninety minutes. Irwin and
Shepherd received the death penalty, but the sixteen-year-old Greenlee was spared the death penalty.

Pepper had nothing to do with the case and had not made any public comment about it, but in April 1950, the Groveland case became a campaign issue, and added to Pepper’s woes. The St. Petersburg Times published a series of articles questioning how Greenlee could have been involved in the rape of Norma Padgett because at the time the alleged assault took place, he was being arrested nineteen miles away. The Times also substantiated alibis for Shepherd and Irwin, who were near Orlando the night the alleged attack took place. The stories attacked the methods used by the courts and police.

Lake County State Attorney J. W. Hunter, who prosecuted the case, was a major Pepper supporter in Central Florida, where Pepper needed all the help he could get. One year earlier, Hunter had written to Pepper, "If you are defeated, there will be no one in Florida to stand against two aggregations of capital— the Dupont [sic] monopoly in business and the Perry monopoly in the newspaper field." Hunter demanded that Pepper repudiate the Times’ stories. Pepper argued that he had not seen the articles and saw no reason to get involved. Hunter angrily denounced Pepper, and threw his support to Smathers.

The Groveland case was one of the civil rights issues sweeping through Florida in the late 1940s. As a result of Smith v. Allwright, blacks could no longer be kept from registering to vote in the Democratic party. In 1944 there were no blacks registered as Democrats in Florida, and about 20,000 registered as
Republican. By 1950, there were 106,420 blacks registered as Democrats. The number of registered black Republicans fell to 9,725 during that period.11

The elections of 1946 were the first in which Florida blacks could vote as Democrats. Despite a ruling by the Supreme Court and a statement by Florida Attorney General Tom Watson stating that “For the first time in modern history, Negro citizens of Florida will cast their votes in the Democratic primary in the coming month of May,” thousands of blacks were denied the right to register by local election officials, who came with dozens of excuses for denying blacks the right to register.12

Harry T. Moore, the leader of the Florida NAACP began sending regular letters to blacks urging them to fight for their rights.13 Moore’s formed the Progressive Voters League to encourage black registration and to endorse candidates. The PVL endorsed Truman’s re-election in 1948, and was active in turning out black voters. Moore’s PVL was beginning to be heard by the state’s politicians. In the fall of 1949, Moore held meetings with Governor Fuller Warren, Attorney General Richard Ervin, and State Education Superintendent Thomas D. Bailey. The Miami Times, a black-owned newspaper, commented that “Not since the Reconstruction Period have Negroes representing a statewide political organization been able to sit down and talk with high state officials as full fledged voting citizens.”14

In 1949, at a gathering of Young Democrats at the University of Florida, Pepper stunned everyone by announcing that it was his “intention to support
President Truman’s whole program of civil rights even if it beats me in the next election.” Pepper said he did not think his stand would have much effect on his support because of the fairness of the American people.  

But when the campaign began, he told crowds that he was “Absolutely opposed to any attempt by the government to abolish or interfere in any way with the customs and traditions of the Southland.” Smathers pointed to Pepper’s promise to support civil rights and said, “Where is this courageous fellow now?”

Pepper had never voted for a civil rights bill, leaving Smathers searching for an issue connected to civil rights. He found it in the Fair Employment Practices Commission. The FEPC had gone from an obscure agency to become a litmus test for every southern politician. In 1941, Roosevelt issued an executive order forbidding discrimination in defense industries and made nondiscrimination clauses in defense contracts mandatory. To enforce this, he created a five-member commission to evaluate complaints. Even though the committee’s guidelines were voluntary, it seemed to be a dastardly civil rights measure to white Souther politicians. Roosevelt knew that Southern members of Congress would block attempts to finance the committee, so he paid for it with a discretionary fund and some small legislative appropriations.

There were numerous attempts by southerners in Congress to kill the commission, primarily by eliminating funding. On June 20, 1944, Pepper had voted against a motion by Senator Richard Russell of Georgia to kill a $500,000 appropriation for the committee. At the same time, he voted against another
motion to strip the committee of what did power it had. When Truman became president, he asked Congress to make the committee permanent, and its rulings compulsory. In 1945 Pepper voted against creating a permanent committee, and in 1946 he voted against even holding hearings to discuss keeping the committee alive. With the southerners conducting a filibuster, the legislation died and the FEPC died with it.\(^{18}\) Even though the FEPC had expired four years earlier, thanks in part to Pepper’s opposition, Smathers successfully used it against him in 1950.

The FEPC allowed Smathers to raise the race issue without appearing to join the Southern politicians who had turned red baiting to a campaign staple. Smathers pointed out that after running as a white supremacist in the 1944 election, Pepper had turned around and voted in the Senate Labor Committee to continue FEPC.\(^{19}\) In Belle Glade, Smathers hammered on the FEPC issue. "I would have had a lot more respect for my opponent if he had just one stand on this issue. But he has two stands. It appears to depend entirely on whether he is making a speech before northern audience or whether he is making it down here in the South. You have green peppers and red peppers. Keep the green ones too long and they turn red."\(^{20}\) Smathers’ campaign ran an advertisement stating, "The wily Senator Pepper, with his oily-tongued oratory, is endeavoring to lead the unwary Florida voter into an FEPC-Civil Rights trap." Smathers also linked the FEPC to communism. "This vicious legislation, conceived in Communistic Russia in 1917, is sponsored by Senator Pepper in an attempt to regiment and
control our way of life, and with whom we work, worship and associate," Smathers said. In other speeches, he said it came from the 1936 platform of the Communist party—instead of the 1917 origin—to "revolutionize the political, economic, and social relations between the whites and the Negroes in the South." Smathers had white racial sensibilities on his side and his advertisements hammered at Pepper's votes. "You will not find me guilty of voting for FEPC in non-election years and saying I am against it during election years." Pepper maintained that he had voted for the FEPC only as a wartime measure, and had thereafter opposed the legislation. "For 200 years I haven't had an ancestor who lived north of Virginia. I was born in Alabama and spent the last 25 years in Tallahassee. Is that young duPont lawyer from Miami who was born in New Jersey . . . going to tell me how to handle problems like this?" He would wave a copy of Smathers' New Jersey birth certificate over his head in the rural areas and call him "That Miami lawyer from Sunset Island." Pepper said that he was "in favor of retaining social segregation." Pepper produced a letter from Leslie Biffle, the secretary of the Senate, stating that Pepper had not introduced FEPC legislation. Joseph McMurray, a staff member of the Senate Education and Labor Committee sent a signed statement that Pepper had voted against the measure in the committee. Pepper told a Leesburg audience that the FEPC charges were part of a larger scheme to link him with blacks. Smathers, of course, was trying to link the FEPC
to race. He warned crowds that "If they can pass the FEPC, which tells you whom you must hire without regard to race, creed, or color, it is a logical step for them to be telling you whom your daughter can marry without regard to race, creed, or color."  

Smathers' charge that Pepper was out of touch with other Southern leaders on the race issue got an unexpected boost early in 1950 when Pepper was not included in a meeting of Southern senators. Eighteen Southern members of the Senate gathered in Raleigh, North Carolina to come up with a plan to defeat Truman's civil rights proposals. Pepper's fellow southerners had not even bothered to invite him to the meeting. The other two Southerners who were not invited were Sen. Frank Graham of North Carolina and Sen. Estes Kefauver of Tennessee, whose views on civil rights were suspect by white southerners. It provided another opportunity for Smathers to attack. "When you send me to the United States Senate you will find me with Dick Russell of Georgia, Spessard Holland of Florida, and other Southern politicians."  

Both Smathers and Pepper wanted the black vote, without white voters finding out. As Hugh Douglas observed in his study of black voting in Florida, "The Negro vote is too large for conservative candidates to risk indulging in undiluted Negro-baiting, but neither do liberal candidates dare expose a too pro-Negro program or make too open a bid for Negro support." Or, as The New York Times noted, "both are courting the Negro vote as much as they can without offending white voters." The St. Petersburg Times reported an almost
comical series of events involving Smathers's effort to get black votes. Two Smathers' workers attended a meeting with black voters, but the two workers denied they had been there. The newspaper responded with an article asking "Do Johnny Burroughs and Aubry Moorefield have doubles in St. Petersburg?"

The paper reported that Burroughs' car was outside the meeting, and that people in the meeting identified Burroughs and Moorefield as the speakers.

"Moorefield said last night he wasn't there. He said there were two or three fellows around town who looked like him. . . . Burroughs claims he and Moorefield and Smathers were in the Pheil Hotel at the time. . . . Furthermore he said no Smathers meeting with the Negroes had been scheduled."33 Smathers issued leaflets listing his contributions to blacks in his district, but devoted most of his efforts to warning blacks that whites "were watching to see whether you will prove that you are independent, free thinking citizens or whether your votes will be controlled by the red-tinged group who seeks to cause strife and bloodshed among the whites and Negro people."34

During the campaign, Miami Life, a newspaper aimed at black readers, published an article entitled, "George Puts It in Black and White, A Few Things George Smathers Had Done for the Negro Race." It was based on a memo Smathers had written, but when it appeared in print, Smathers assumed it was a Pepper trick. Smathers' Dade County coordinator, Sloan McCrea, sent a telegram to Pepper's campaign manager, Jim Clements, calling the article misleading. "It is unfortunate that this type of strategy which appears to be a
desperate last-minute effort. . . . should be injected into the campaign."^{35}

Clements responded that "as far as dissemination and circulation of malicious literature and advertising is concerned, your state committee is a past master at this game."^{36}

Pepper had played a dangerous political game with the race issue, and in 1950 it came back to haunt him. He had attempted to moderate his racial views in an effort to become a national political candidate, all the while seeking to retain his seat as a Southern senator. He failed in 1950 because the rising tide of civil rights had spurred both blacks and whites to action. Pepper could no longer merely say he was against equal rights for blacks, white voters expected him to come up with plans to battle civil rights. His personal beliefs, and his desire for national office, would not allow him to join the race baiters who were winning Southern elections. But without such an approach in 1950, he could not win.

Notes


85. **St Petersburg Times**, 2 April 1950.


15. **Florida Alligator**, 17 December 1948.


20. Ibid., 2 April 1950.


24. Miami Herald, 1 April 1950.

25. Ibid., 31 March 1950.


33. St. Petersburg Times, 8 April 1950.


CHAPTER 11
OLD FRIENDS, NEW ENEMIES

In the election of 1938 and 1944 Pepper had been able to count on the support of nearly all of the state's newspapers and union members. By 1950 he had lost nearly all of his newspaper support and the backing of one significant union. The state's physicians, who began to desert Pepper in the 1944, organized a massive campaign to defeat Pepper over his support of a national health insurance plan. It was not that any of them wanted Smathers to win as much as they wanted Pepper to lose.

Pepper and the CIO

Five days after Smathers announced his candidacy, Pepper supporter Jerry W. Carter, the Florida Democratic national committeeman, sent the first of several letters to leaders of the Congress of Industrial Organizations pleading for help. "... They [Smathers and his backers] seem to have unlimited funds and have done some very effective work in coordinating and drilling the anti-Pepper forces and I will have to admit they have made considerable gains."
Pepper believed he could count on strong labor support because he was one of labor's most loyal friends in the Senate. To labor groups Pepper said, "...you can help elect a friend of labor or you can permit the selfish anti-Roosevelt forces to put a man who has shown himself to be the enemy of both organized and unorganized labor." Pepper opposed the Labor-Management Relations Act of 1947, known generally as the Taft-Hartley Act, while Smathers had voted for it. Union leaders despised Taft-Hartley because it outlawed the closed shop, which forced all workers to join a union if the majority of the workers voted for it, required unions to give sixty days notice of a strike, and restricted union political contributions.

Compared to Smathers' aggressive, modern campaign, Carter admitted that Pepper "knows nothing of the art of modern politics and is far from a shrewd political manipulator." One reporter noted, "If any real organization work has been done for Pepper, it was a closely guarded secret." Carter asked the CIO "to come into this state of Florida and bring as many others as necessary to arouse labor and other groups to this danger and put them earnestly to work." The CIO role became a major campaign issue, and the union presence gave Smathers an issue in a state where union membership was small and the labor movement was unpopular.

Ten days later, Carter wrote to Jack Kroll, the political director of the CIO. "I am writing you because I feel it is my duty as Democratic National Committeeman to send out the alarm and acquaint you with the definite fact that
the enemies of the New Deal and the Fair Deal are making their most decisive
efforts to capture Florida. . . .” Kroll already knew that Pepper was in trouble. In
mid-January, the CIO’s political research department had listed seven
Democrats, including Pepper, it felt were in “grave danger.”

The CIO support was a two-edged sword for political candidates in the South. Endorsement by the labor federation brought money, organizing support, and votes. But the CIO supported a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission, repeal of Taft-Hartley, and Truman’s civil rights program, all measures opposed by most white southerners. But it also brought the specter of communist involvement, racial integration, and the accusation that the CIO operatives were outsiders who sought to change the way of life in the South.

During World War II there were dramatic increases in Southern CIO membership, but most workers remained unorganized. In 1946, the CIO launched the Southern Organizing Committee to extend the membership gains. It became known as “Operation Dixie.” For the CIO there was the prospect of millions of potential members in textiles, steel mills, transportation, lumber, and other industries.

The CIO Executive Board committed one million dollars to the effort and hired two hundred labor organizers. The American Federation of Labor set up its own, less publicized, campaign. There were some small victories, but the CIO drive sputtered and ended largely in failure. The union organizers anticipated opposition from the owners, but were surprised to find that the
employees were often antagonistic. What the South offered was cheap labor. That is why manufacturers in the North moved their operations to the South. Workers, frightened that any association with the union would cost them what many considered very attractive jobs, sometimes turned on the union organizers, telling them to leave, or in some cases physically assaulting them. Although the drive failed, it left a legacy in the South. Businessmen reacted with alarm at the mention of the “CIO,” and the anti-CIO effort had convinced many voters that the CIO was in league with Joe Stalin.

From its founding in 1935, the CIO had counted communists and other radicals among its most ardent members. The communists provided organizing strength when the CIO was launched. In the 1940s, communists and their allies controlled nearly a dozen unions, led by the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers. The presence of communists gave a wide range of opponents the excuse they wanted to work against the union. Employers said they would not negotiate with communists, and told employees that by joining a CIO union they were helping communism. In 1949-50, they drove eleven affiliated unions out of the federation as part of the anti-Communist purge. As historian Robert Zieger noted, the loss of members “underscored the continuing weakness of the CIO as a central labor federation.”

The Southern membership drive was not the only sign of new activity by the CIO in the South. In 1946 Daniel Powell became the Southern director for the CIO-Political Action Committee. Like the union organizing drive, the CIO
political operation arrived with flags flying. Each union member was supposed to contribute a dollar for political action, with half going to the national CIO-PAC, and the remaining fifty cents divided between the members' local union and the member's political action group.\textsuperscript{10} It was difficult to get the members to contribute, however. Often, an individual member's political views were in conflict with the national union.\textsuperscript{11}

Just as it did when the CIO launched Operation Dixie, the CIO-Political Action Committee made its entry into Florida very public. Its high profile made it difficult to determine whether the organization was trying to help Pepper or demonstrate its political influence. Even after it became clear that the CIO's involvement in the campaign provided Smathers with an important issue, the labor federation continued its efforts to promote its influence in the election. Just days before the election, Jack Kroll, the CIO political director, told an Alabama union meeting that "Pepper appeared to be a defeated man, but the CIO-PAC got busy, and now it begins to look as if he holds the edge."\textsuperscript{12} Florida newspapers widely reported the speech.

The CIO-PAC sent Philip Weightman, a black official, to Florida to direct the registration of blacks. The gains in black voters had been dramatic, mainly due to the work of the Progressive Voters League and the CIO. Weightman was able to put together an organization in Miami, but had trouble in Jacksonville, where he found "Negroes who are favorable but reluctant to take an active part on a committee on the Senator's behalf. Weightman found a black dentist to
head the Pepper campaign in Miami, but admitted that "Among the Negro, there is a group who are opposed to the Senator's re-election because of his stand in support of National Health Insurance." He also found that there was no white organization supporting Pepper in Jacksonville.13

The CIO became a target for Smathers, who received a copy of a CIO report entitled, "Survey of Negro Vote in Florida." The report showed that labor organizers were working to register black voters in Florida for Pepper. The report, from George Weaver, the assistant to the union's secretary treasurer, detailed efforts to register blacks primarily in Jacksonville, Miami, and Tampa.14 Smathers held the speech above his head and told crowds, "We now have the full documentary proof to show that he conspired with the paid and imported organizers of the CIO. . . . to register and deliver the Negro vote for him, as a bloc."15 Smathers charged that northern labor bosses were using large slush funds to defeat him and that "150 paid labor organizers" were in Florida to help register Pepper supporters, including blacks. Smathers said that ". . . some Negroes had received $1.50 and $2.00 for registering and in Miami we are told some were handed free movie passes."16 Smathers ran a newspaper advertisement featuring a photograph of blacks waiting to register to vote and the caption, "Doesn't this make your blood boil?"17

The registration effort no doubt hurt Pepper more than it helped. The registration drives did produce greater numbers of black voters in Jacksonville, Miami, and Tampa. But in some smaller counties there was no gain, and the
attention may have actually discouraged blacks from registering and voting in rural counties. Newspapers around the state carried front page stories about the registration efforts, which Smathers used to alarm whites. In late March, the Miami Herald reported on one such effort under the headline "Voting List is Swelled by Negroes:" The newspaper reported, "In some areas, registration clerks were quoted to the effect that most Negroes were coming in to register in the company of the same four or five Negro men, and one courthouse report had the recruiters getting twenty-five cents a head."18

The registration rolls closed on April 1 and showed 1,006,560 registered Democrats, including 106,420 blacks.19 But registration did not necessarily translate into votes. One Hillsborough County election official said after the election, "They had three months to get the Negroes registered but only one day to get them voted."20

Pepper fought back by pointing out that in the 1946 election Smathers asked for the union's endorsement in his race against Pat Cannon. Now, said Pepper, Smathers was "running against labor, trying to make the CIO the whipping boy." Smathers tried to deny that he had ever received union aid, but Pepper produced an affidavit from the assistant direction of the CIO Political Action Committee, which said, "Mr. Smathers said that if he were elected to Congress he would be known as a liberal Democrat by his voting record, and that he would approximate in the House of Representatives the record and work of Claude Pepper in the Senate."21
The Railroad Workers Abandon Pepper

Pepper had the wholehearted support of the American Federation of Labor, and its affiliate union, the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks, but many Florida railroad workers campaigned to defeat him. At issue was Pepper’s opposition to Ed Ball’s acquisition of the Florida East Coast Railway. George M. Harrison, the national president of the clerks, wrote letters to Florida union members asking them to “join in the effort to return one of the greatest of Liberals to the Senate of the United States.” But W. F. Howard, chairman of the Florida Brotherhood of Railway Clerks, rejected the appeal. He sent his own letter to labor leaders urging members to vote against Pepper because of his involvement in trying to keep Ed Ball from acquiring the Florida East Coast Railway. “I do not, of course, know whether or not the duPont interests are leading the fight to defeat Pepper, but I certainly hope and pray they are. Why should we be concerned over a strong financial interest leading a fight to defeat the man who is out to destroy our jobs and our homes? I think we should lend assistance to that strong financial interest.”

Howard said he did not care about Pepper’s national union support, adding, “I would vote for anyone opposing Pepper. No one in my opinion could be any worse nor less desirable than Claude Pepper.” In effect, local union members were at war with the national leadership. Frank Upchurch of St. Augustine, where the FEC was based, sent out a letter saying that the Pepper-
backed merger would "rob St. Augustine of its principal payroll, one-third of its population and reduce property values 50%." Both the union members of the Florida East Coast Railway and the line's owner, Ed Ball, were working toward the same goal—defeating Pepper.

After the election, a friend wrote to Pepper, "It is my considered judgment that it is your activities in this ACL-FEC [Atlantic Coast Line-Florida East Coast] case which cost you reelection to the United States Senate." The faith of the workers turned out to be misplaced. In 1964 the railroad unions struck the Florida East Coast Railway. Within days, the owners announced that service would resume without the workers. It then started hiring replacements and imposed new work rules.

**Pepper and the Press**

Just how much support Pepper had lost in Florida could be seen in the state's newspapers. In 1944, all but two of the daily newspapers had endorsed his re-election, but in 1950 the situation was reversed. Pepper was supported only by *The St. Petersburg Times* and *The Daytona Beach News Journal*. The opposition should not have come as a surprise to Pepper since the editorial pages of most Florida newspapers had criticized him for five years.

The Perry newspapers, which had close financial links to Ed Ball, had made defeating Pepper their primary goal. Although they were called the "Perry"
newspapers, they were in fact the “duPont” newspapers. By 1946, John Perry had acquired fourteen weekly newspapers, seven dailies, and four radio stations.27 His acquisitions had been financed by Ed Ball through his Florida National Bank. As the election approached, Pepper decided to publicize the link between Perry and Ball, although he knew it would “intensify Perry’s bitter fight against me but he has been carrying it on anyway so I don’t think I have much to lose by letting the tie up between him and the duPonts become public.” Pepper said Perry came to Florida from New York to spread “Republican propaganda in over twenty newspapers throughout the state.”28

Newspapers with no connection to Ball were also opposed to Pepper. The Tampa Morning Tribune sought to defeat Pepper as part of its crusade against big government. To the Tribune, Pepper’s continued support for creating New Deal programs meant a bigger and more menacing national government. The Miami Daily News said that “...Senator Pepper has gotten away from the people of Florida.”29 The Miami Herald, a one-time strong supporter of Pepper, praised Smathers as representing “basic Americanism, liberally interpreted and administered with a minimum of government control.” The paper dismissed Pepper as supporting “the big welfare state, big government, deficit spending, and global largesse.” The Herald said the election was “a trial of radicalism and extremism, with all of the United States as an observer.”30 Miami Herald Publisher John S. Knight referred to Pepper as “Pink” and “Red Pepper.”31 The Leesburg Commercial, a Perry newspaper, also joined the parade to endorse
Smathers: "He [Pepper] has proclaimed Stalin one of the greatest men of history. He has shouted that he instinctively trusted Stalin. . . . We will vote for George Smathers and the welfare of this Republic."³²

Pepper berated his opponents in the press, saving his greatest criticism for Martin Anderson, the publisher of the Orlando Morning Sentinel, who supported Pepper in his two previous elections, but "turned against me because he became too rich to remain a Democrat."³³ He also railed against James Cox, "whose Miami Daily News in its feeble way is spreading vicious venom."³⁴

Anti-Pepper newspapers went to extraordinary lengths to deny his supporters access to voters. In late April, Washington columnist Drew Pearson criticized Smathers as a candidate of wealthy Republicans and business. But a number of newspapers friendly to Smathers refused to carry the column, and the Perry papers would not even run the column as a paid advertisement.³⁵

The Orlando Morning Sentinel was particularly hard on Pepper. First, the newspaper ran a large, front-page picture of Pepper shaking hands with a black voter, implying that he was seeking black support. Pepper reacted angrily, saying, "They planted several colored people in the audience and tried to rush them up to me. . . . They pushed a colored woman up to me, and as I reached out my hand they took a picture." The Sentinel, after running the picture, then became a champion of blacks. "Now, Claude, let's get right down to cases. What's wrong with shaking hands with a colored woman, especially one who has registered and, therefore, a fullfledged citizen with the right to vote? . . . There is
nothing wrong with shaking hands with colored people, Claude."36 Pepper said blacks were being planted at his rallies and at least one had been paid twenty-five dollars to shake hands with him while a photographer took a picture.37

Meanwhile, the Sentinel lavished attention on Smathers. In December 1949, even before Smathers announced, the paper found him to be "a good speaker, a fine able handshaker. Young people—especially those who went to the University of Florida with him—adore him and admire his intellect. Women think him handsome. His colleagues in Washington think him studious, brilliant."38 Following Smathers' announcement, the Sentinel praised him again. "Those who saw and heard George Smathers launch his U.S. Senate campaign here Jan. 12 knew immediately that this was going to be a different kind of Florida political campaign."39

Headlines in the pro-Smathers newspapers belittled Pepper. "Pepper's Campaign Sinks to Final Low," said the Miami News; "Pepper Has Many Wealthy Friends Ready to Help Meet His Vote Getting Costs," said the Miami Herald. Some of the headlines were designed to scare white voters, warning that "304 Negroes Register in Day."40

The two dailies and the handful of weeklies supporting Pepper did their best to help the incumbent. The St. Petersburg Times said Smathers was "a politician who tried to trim his sails to each new gust of public opinion... Smathers launched his campaign with an appeal to ignorance, and prejudice and sly bigotry."41 Days before the election, the newspaper said Smathers had
done "greater violence to our institutions of self-government than any single man in the past thirty years." 42

The Doctors Organize

As if the opposition of the newspapers and railway workers were not enough, Pepper faced another new group of powerful opponents in 1950—the state's doctors. The doctors were not so much concerned with electing Smathers as defeating Pepper, who they labeled the champion of "socialized medicine." 43

Twice, Pepper had sponsored health insurance legislation, which he called an "an extension of social security, like unemployment compensation and other insurance." 44 Pepper said he wanted to create a way "by which every man or woman gainfully employed could pay for and get the health care they need." 45 The Truman administration had proposed a plan for assist mothers and children with medical needs, and more money for medical research, hospitals, and physicians. Pepper supported the administration proposal, but wanted to go further. He said he wanted a comprehensive program of "complete medical, and hospital, dental and home nursing care." 46

As early as 1946, a medical journal carried an article about Pepper and what it called "socialized medicine." 47 Smathers charged that health insurance was "paving the way for a Soviet Union of the United States." and was lifted "from the Communist Party platform." 48
Pepper had badly underestimated the power of the doctors. He met with Florida medical leaders but said he could not agree with their position. Pepper told them, "I'm sticking to the Administration's health plan. I just don't care about your 2,000 votes in this state." In response, the medical community worked hard to defeat Pepper. One of the leaders of the effort was Jacksonville physician Frank Slaughter, who was best known as the author of popular novels. Slaughter said, "The immediate task of Florida doctors... is to unseat Claude Pepper, one of their high priests of the administration sect which seeks to control the people of this country through the socialist state."  

The doctors organized anti-Pepper efforts in every county and asked each physician to contribute $100 toward the effort. Money, however, was secondary to the involvement of the doctors themselves in every part of the state. After the election, an article in Medical Economics said, "Professional reserve melted away. Doctors got out their patient lists, dashed off hundreds of personal letters... No politician running for office in this state will ever again discount the power of the physicians... On election day, medical workers phoned every professional man in the state before noon... In some small towns every phone number in the book was called." Midway through the campaign, Pepper realized what his stand meant. "It might have been better for me politically to line up with the other side... The medical lobby is trying to defeat me, but a man in politics has to make up his mind whether he is on the side of special interests." One week before the election, the Florida Medical
Association held its regular meeting in Hollywood, Florida where Dr. Walter C. Payne, the FMA president, urged members to "elect members of Congress who will stand out against socialism."52

Pepper Fights Back

Although the polls showed Smathers ahead, Pepper remained optimistic. Less than a month before the election, The New York Times reported that " Senator Pepper and his associates remain confident. They believe their man is a "slow starter and fast finisher," that Representative Smathers "reached his peak too soon" and is beginning to lose ground."53 There was no reason for Pepper's optimism. All of the polls showed him trailing and he was constantly on the defensive.

Pepper tried to portray Smathers as an ingrate, who had courted his support when convenient, then turned against him. Smathers said he had not betrayed the friendship, but rather that his faith in Pepper was destroyed by the appearances Pepper had made with Henry Wallace and Paul Robeson. Smathers said he was putting "patriotism above friendship."54 Smathers told audiences that he was walking through the streets of New York in the fall of 1946 when he suddenly looked up and saw a "red banner" announcing an appearance by "Claude Pepper, Henry Wallace, and Paul Robeson, the noted Communist Negro leader."55 According to Smathers, "that was the beginning of
the end of our friendship.  Smathers' outrage did not prevent him from asking Pepper for assistance or from continuing to call Henry Wallace "a good friend."  As Smathers continued his attack, Pepper was repeatedly forced on the defensive. Pepper claimed, that he had "never been on the same platform with Henry Wallace after he was vice president or since he quit the Democratic Party." Pictures of Pepper at rallies in New York and Washington were produced to show that the two had appeared together. At one point he declared that "I never spoke anywhere with Henry Wallace after he got out of the vice presidency," even though the two had appeared together in Madison Square Garden in 1946 and at a Southern Conference on Human Welfare meeting in Washington in 1947.  

Increasingly, Pepper took aim at those he said were behind Smathers, including Republicans, big business, and the duPont interests. Speaking in Jacksonville on March 10, Pepper criticized what he called the "big monopoly crowd," and said, "No wonder the Republicans of Florida are teamed up solidly behind this kind of opposition. Having nothing to offer themselves, this desperate opposition has no weapon against me but money and smears." Smathers claimed that Pepper had received duPont money in his 1938 election, and that the Pepper campaign manager in Dade County, William G. Wood, was the duPont representative in South Florida. Smathers did not mention that his own law firm was located in a Ball-owned building in Miami, and that the firm did
work for Ball. Newspapers around the state carried the stories linking Pepper and du Pont.

Smathers had charged Pepper with being both a friend to the communists and du Pont. Pepper asked audiences how he could be working for Wall Street and the Kremlin, and called the charges an "insult to the intelligence of the people of Florida." Pepper said Smathers was "conducting the most bigoted, prejudiced campaign against me in the history of Florida." Smathers responded angrily to the charges that he was a Republican disguised as a Democrat. Smathers pointed to his voting record, which showed that his support of Democratic legislation in the House was higher than any one in the Florida delegation in the Eightieth Congress and second in the Eighty-first Congress. Pearson tried to help Pepper by writing a column about the Republican charge, but Smathers labeled Pearson an "unmitigated liar."

Still, it was one of the few issues Pepper had, and he kept using it, especially in North Florida. "You won't find me getting elected as a Democrat, then voting with the Republicans." Pepper tried to tie Smathers to a nationwide effort to roll back the work of the Roosevelt administration. "They are not interested in personalities; they are interested in whether the weather vane of national politics in Florida points towards the election of a Republican Congress in the Fall. My opponent is the spokesman of the anti-Roosevelt forces in this state and this nation that are out to beat me. They think if they can knock me out, it will be the beginning of the end for the New Deal."
There was ample evidence that the Republicans were supporting Smathers. The president of the Florida Young Republican Club told members to forget the party and concentrate on beating Pepper. A "Young Republicans for Smathers Committee" was formed. Pepper produced a letter from Joseph S. Bair, the President of the Young Republican Club of Volusia County allocating $2,455 to help Smathers win.

There was hardly a Pepper speech in which he did not mention Roosevelt and his loyalty and commitment to Roosevelt and the New Deal remained undiminished. He talked of "Roosevelt prosperity," and claimed that Smathers "has arrayed himself with the selfish groups who always fought Roosevelt." Pepper ran full page newspaper advertisements showing pictures of him with Roosevelt. He also invoked Truman's name, telling audiences that those who opposed him, "fought Truman's election...they fought me in every election." He did not mention that he was one of those who had fought Truman's election.

Smathers reacted with humor, saying, he would not have entered the race if he knew he would have to run against Roosevelt. He said that if the voters found Roosevelt's name on the ballot, "by all means vote for him." He said Pepper was running on Roosevelt's record, "because he can't defend his own record."

Pepper's hope that Governor Warren would be able to help ended on February 20, when one-time Warren supporter C. V. Griffin broke with the governor and released secret financial documents. Griffin said that he had
contributed $154,000 to Warren's campaign and that two other men, financier Louis Wolfson, and a dog-tract operator named William Johnston, had each contributed the same amount, even though candidates for governor were limited to spending $15,000. In exchange for the contributions, the three men virtually ran the state government, controlling most of the appointments to state office. One reporter noted that the problem with the Warren administration was the lack of Warren appointees in it. A Miami Herald columnist said bluntly, "Actually there is not and never has been a Warren administration, since it has been divided from the start, like all Gaul, into three parts—the factions led by C. V. Griffin, Louis Wolfson and William H. Johnston." For Warren, the duties of being governor seemed to be more than he could handle. During the Pepper campaign, Warren said being governor was, "... the roughest, toughest, most terrifying task I ever confronted." Warren did campaign with Pepper, but there was little indication that he was willing or able to put the state bureaucracy behind the Pepper effort. One reporter wrote, "Wags around the capitol are saying the Warren administration, despite the gnawing desire of the Governor to be helpful, is giving Senator Claude Pepper all aid short of actual assistance in his campaign for re-election." Pepper's campaign became increasingly isolated. One newspaper noted that "Some of his long-time friends appear to be afraid to cheer openly for him, probably fearing business or political reprisals. Many of them come around to his
hotel with their well wishes when the public meeting is over. They assure him they’re working for him—but quietly. No state political aspirants show up."

In mid-March columnist Drew Pearson one of the few Pepper loyalists in the national media remaining, launched an attack on Smathers, which backfired. Pearson questioned Smathers’ patriotism by publishing excerpts from the letters Smathers had sent to Pepper in 1945 requesting help in getting an early discharge. Smathers had written to a number of people, including Pepper, seeking a discharge after he returned to the United States from the Pacific theater. On June 11, 1945, Smathers wrote, “Can’t possibly tell you how anxious I am to get out and start ‘doing.’” Two days later there was another letter saying his “services could be better utilized in the Justice Department.” He wrote that his military assignment was “equivalent to being 2nd deputy sheriff of Collier County. And I can’t wear a star nor high top boots. . . . Let me assure you of my gratitude in rescuing me from this mental Sahara.” Two weeks later, he wrote “Another lawyer . . . got out of the service last week. Senator Morris [Wayne Morse] of Oregon was his benefactor so it is being done.” There was even a letter from Smathers’ mother, Lura, saying “we are deeply appreciative for what you have done and are doing for our son George. We know you are a very busy man and a very big man. . . . We will continue to hope and pray that all goes well—and for your success too. . . .”

Ordinarily such a charge by one of the nation’s leading columnists would have seriously hurt Smathers, but it was clear that Smathers had served with
distinction for 39 months and that when the request came, the war was all but over. Smathers was like millions of other soldiers who wanted to get back to their civilian lives as fast as possible.

Moreover, the column brought into focus Pepper’s war record, or more accurately his lack of a war record. His two months of service on the University of Alabama campus, was in stark contrast to Smathers’ service in the Pacific. “Which will you believe? The political propaganda of a desperate Senator with but 66 days service in two World Wars and on a University campus—or the open un-biased record of the greatest fighting Marines this country has ever known,” a Smathers advertisement proclaimed. To keep the issue alive, Smathers produced letters from Marine officers attesting to his service. The Veterans of Foreign Wars gave Smathers a boost when the state commander accused Pepper of using a VFW appreciation scroll, which was given as a thank you to many people, as an endorsement.

Only one of the letters Pepper released caused Smathers any embarrassment. During the 1946 campaign against Pat Cannon, Smathers asked for Pepper’s help to delay a government project. Cannon told voters in Key West to expect an announcement that the Naval Station would be expanding. Smathers told Pepper, “If that happens it will ruin me there—Will you check into this and if possible find out why it cannot be delayed at last until after May 7th [after the election].” Pepper also released copies of Smathers’ letters requesting Pepper’s help in the 1946 congressional race against Pat Cannon.
The letters came too late in the campaign to arouse much interest. Smathers called it "a last desperation effort," and then stopped commenting on the letters.84

One of the lasting contributions of the Pepper-Smathers campaign to the lore of American politics is a speech Smathers supposedly gave. Two weeks before the election, Time magazine carried a report on the Florida election and reported that Smathers had prepared a speech just for the state's cracker voters. "Are you aware that Claude Pepper is known all over Washington as a shameless extrovert? Not only that, but this man is reliably reported to practice nepotism with his sister-in-law, and he has a sister who was once a thespian in wicked New York. Worst of all, it is an established fact that Mr. Pepper before his marriage habitually practiced celibacy."85

There was no indication where the speech was given, but over the years, it has grown and become a legend. By 1987, the speech was nearly ten times longer as people added to it: "...His great-aunt expired from a degenerative disease. His nephew subscribed to a phonographic magazine. His wife was a thespian before their marriage and even performed in front of paying customers. And his own mother had to resign from an organization in her later years because she was an admitted sexagenarian."86

Word of the speech spread throughout the country, growing with every retelling. In October, Time's sister publication, Life reprinted the Time quote.87 By 1971, the speech had acquired dramatic detail in the Miami Herald's retelling:
"A scenario of the spring of 1950: George Smathers, eyes glinting like Clint Eastwood in an Italian-made Western, entertains—and confuses—a gathering of North Floridians with the most famous phraseology of the campaign."

No other reporter claimed to have heard the speech. Pepper himself, in his autobiography, claims that Smathers did give the speech, but he offers no proof, merely writing, "Well, it strikes me as a little odd that Time would make that up." But *Time* apparently reported the story with tongue in cheek. *Time* called the story a "yarn" and said it showed that "Smathers was capable of going to any length in campaigning." *Time* claimed that the quotes had appeared in "Southern newspapers."

The speech may have been a joke that was started by a Pepper aide. Nine days after the *Time* magazine article appeared, George Dixon, in a column for King Features Syndicate, wrote that he knew of the origin of the "speech." Dixon wrote that a Pepper spokesman, William Daffron, was in the bar at the National Press club in late March or early April and began talking about an idea he had for a "whispering" campaign. Daffron said, "These Florida crackers don't know any big words. Senator Pepper could use a batch of harmless words and those dumbbells would think he was accusing Smathers of unspeakable depravity." According to Dixon, those at the bar "fell into the spirit of the thing and began to offer suggestions. They finally agreed that 'extrovert' and 'thespian' and 'nepotism' were the most suggestive of the lot." The "speech" began to make
the rounds, but as it spread, it was Smathers who was supposed to have given
the speech, not Pepper.91

Another theory involved William H. Lawrence of The New York Times and
Stephen Trumbull of The Miami Herald. They covered the Florida campaign and
often heard the same speech six times a day. Trumbull noted that reporters
could fill in for the candidates in case of illness because they knew the speeches
so well.92 The two may have played with variations of the speech and began
substituting different words. After the election, Smathers offered a $10,000
reward to anyone who could prove that he had actually delivered such a speech.
No one ever claimed the money.

As the campaign neared its end, Pepper desperately needed help and his
supporters argued that he should seek an endorsement from Truman. Although
Pepper maintained in his memoirs that Truman offered to campaign for him in
1950, there is absolutely no indication that Truman wanted Pepper to win re-
election.93 After all, Pepper tried to deny Truman the vice presidency in 1944
and the presidency in 1948. Every private statement Truman made about
Pepper was disparaging, but the Pepper supporters saw Pepper as the
champion of Truman’s Fair Deal, and assumed the president would prefer
Pepper to Smathers. In mid-April, Truman vacationed in Key West but said
nothing about the primary contest. He came back to the state to make an
appearance in the Panhandle, but again there was no endorsement.
Pepper tried unsuccessfully to appeal to the Florida tradition that one Senator represent South Florida and the other, North Florida. It was a tradition dating back to the days when the Legislature chose senators, rather than the voters. Pepper said that to elect Smathers would mean there would be no senator from North Florida. But the issue did not have any resonance with the voters.

Both candidates were required to file financial disclosure statements, although they bore little resemblance to reality. In 1949 the Legislature had removed spending limits for candidates, only requiring that candidates file two financial disclosure forms, one on April 22, the second on June 2. In the first statement, the two candidates said they had spent a total of $74,481. Pepper listed $43,723.59 in contributions and Smathers $30,758.03. Both sides claimed that the other had really spent hundreds of thousands of dollars (Pepper eventually said Smathers spent two million dollars), but determining the real amount spent is impossible. Both sides had too many free agents working on their behalf, Pepper had the CIO and Smathers had Ed Ball.94

One month before the election, most of the predictions indicated that Smathers would win. John Kilgore, the state’s leading political writer, thought Smathers would win by 26,000 votes.95 The New York Times called the race even. Pepper had no polls to show that he was ahead, but said, “people will rebuke the smear campaign that has been waged against me.”96
Smathers was confident of victory, telling his campaign workers, "We got him down. He's mortally wounded. Now all we've got to do is keep our foot on his neck until May third."97 That is exactly what Smathers did, keeping up his offensive in constant attacks against Pepper.

By the time the campaign neared its end, tempers became frayied, and there were reports of violence. The Miami Herald counted four violent acts, with the worst one coming in Fort Meade, a heavily unionized town.98 Smathers said that when he reached the city limits there were trucks across the road to stop his car. When he attempted to speak, he was told, "Get out of here," but refused to leave. As he spoke, the crowd began heckling and throwing things. As he left the podium, a women approached and spat tobacco juice in his eyes. "It really hurt." Smathers said that he fell to his knees and the crowd began clapping and saying, "Give it to him again, give it to him."99

On the eve of the election, both candidates believed their strategy had triumphed. Smathers thought he would win by a 30,000-vote margin in Dade County, his home, and that the margin would be enough to carry him to victory. Pepper thought he could carry Dade, or even lose by a small margin, then carry Duval, Hillsborough, Monroe and Pinellas counties and do well in north and west Florida.100

An hour after the polls closed, it became clear that Pepper's re-election was in trouble. Florida Secretary of State R. W. Gray had predicted that 60 percent of the state's one million registered Democrats would turn out.101
Instead, 70 percent of the voters cast ballots. Smathers received 387,215 votes, and Pepper received 319,784. Smathers won by 67,431 votes, far more than anyone had predicted. Pepper received 45 percent of the vote and became the first Florida senator to lose a re-election bid.

Pepper conceded at 1:15 a.m. on May 3 with only about 20 percent of the precincts reporting, but with Smathers ahead by 50,000 votes. In county after county, Pepper saw his percentage of the vote decline from the 1944 election. In Hillsborough (Tampa) he lost 6.6 percent, in Dade 7.7 percent and in Orange County, where The Orlando Morning Sentinel had led the crusade against him, he lost 25 percent of his 1944 vote.

Even in the counties where Pepper had tremendous support from local politicians and newspapers, his results were dismal. In Volusia County, where he had the active support of the daily newspaper and the sheriff, he lost by 4.1 percent. In Pinellas County, where The St. Petersburg Times had been Pepper's most eloquent champion, he lost. St. Lucie County went to Smathers despite the backing of Vero Beach Mayor Alex MacWilliams. Only in a handful of small counties did Pepper do better than in 1944. The only thing Pepper could point to with pride was that he had managed to carry Smathers' home county—Dade—by 914 votes.
Placing the Blame

Almost from the time the polls closed, reporters began to assess Pepper’s defeat. The St. Petersburg Times reported, “The tide that swept Pepper into defeat really started when he aligned himself with Henry Wallace. The Nation also saw Pepper’s relationship with Wallace as the major reason” for his defeat. Pepper was vulnerable to charges of leftist affiliation which are applicable to no other candidate except Glen Taylor of Idaho. . . . He was left without the full backing of either the right or the left wing of his party.”

Life magazine blamed Pepper. “In 14 years in the Senate, Pepper had become a cocky, perplexing figure. . . . After the war he persisted in saying Communism was no real danger and the U.S. could make friends with Stalin, whom he had visited and liked.” The New Republic—a Pepper supporter—thought that “The defeat of Claude Pepper in Florida demonstrates the power of the smear. Senator Pepper was driven from the office he has held with honor and distinction for 14 years by an emotional appeal to the basest prejudices of the Florida voters.”

Washington columnist David Lawrence blamed the CIO for Pepper’s defeat. “The CIO is unintentionally responsible. . . . The defeat of Senator Claude Pepper by Representative Smathers was a clear case of labor union interference in the affairs of the State of Florida and an unwise stirring up of friction between whites and Negroes.” But Lawrence also saw the F.E.P.C as a
major factor, making the election a contest "between whites and Negroes." For The New York Times, "The primary campaign did no credit to either of the contestants, nor was it a compliment to the intelligence of the voters. Senator Pepper seems to have based his appeal largely on his ability to wangle extensive financial benefits out of Washington. . . . while Representative Smathers apparently spent much of his considerable energies in attacking Senator Pepper for being too friendly to Negroes and to Communists." Commonweal thought both men had run tawdry campaigns, but noted that "Pepper was vulnerable. He had a deadly record of friendliness towards the Soviet Union." The Christian Century also saw both men as having fought in the gutter. "Each tried to outdo the other in proclaiming his devotion to white rule and his abhorrence of President Truman's civil rights program. We believe both Mr. Smathers and Mr. Pepper to be better men than their campaigning indicated." The Tampa Times said that "Senator Pepper brought it on himself. His crushing defeat by Representative Smathers in yesterday's Democratic primary for the nomination for United States Senator is plainly traceable to his headlong and reckless course toward radicalism since his last election six years ago. . . . Florida is now in the vanguard of the march back to sanity and sobriety in national affairs. It was a day to make the judicious celebrate." Pepper himself thought the issue that beat him was race. He wrote to Herbert M. Davidson, publisher of the Daytona Beach News Journal [one of the
two daily newspapers to support him], "That's what made the children in the schools display the antagonism which they manifested and it was the thing which stole away from us thousands of working men and women to whom I devoted myself and my political career." But Pepper added that Truman bore part of the blame. "The President told me some time ago that he wanted me to win and did what he could to help me without sticking his neck out. They didn't do much, if anything—a rather sad commentary upon the faithfulness which with I have supported the Administration." Pepper wrote to Hugh DeLacy, the director of the Ohio Progressive Party, "No man in the South's history has ever gone as far and stayed in office as long as I. But they finally got me." Pepper said his loss was the result of "the combination of all the reactionary forces working in concert."111

Two days after Pepper's defeat, Truman was asked if the loss was a setback for the Fair Deal. He bluntly replied, "No." However, when asked about the defeat of Senator Frank Graham in North Carolina the following month, Truman said it was one of the "most serious losses for the administration."112

Truman's assistant press secretary, Evan A. Ayers, noted in his diary on the day after the Florida primary that Truman mentioned that he doubted that Pepper would be nominated. Ayers quoted Truman as saying that Smathers, "could have won if he [had] gone ahead on his record and never mentioned Pepper. . . . The president said he had told Smathers what he told us."
Nowhere was there praise of Smathers, and the campaign he had waged. Smathers had run a brilliant, flawless campaign and yet the consensus was that Pepper had victimized by a brutal, unfair opponent. Only Pepper could never see that he had committed serious errors which had cost him the election.

Notes


2. Ibid., 2 April 1950.


7. Ibid., 231.

8. Ibid., 236.


11. Ibid., 23.


15. Ibid., 27 April 1950.
16. Ibid., 6 April 1950.
27. Time, 24 June 1946.
31. Ibid.
32. Leesburg Commercial, 27 April 1950.
33. Ibid., 30 April 1950.
35. Miami Herald, 1 May 1950.
36. Orlando Morning Sentinel, 6 April 1950.
37. Affidavit of Willie Singleton, 1 April 1950, Pepper Papers


39. Ibid., 2 April 1950.


42. Ibid., 30 April 1950.

43. The Nation, 4 March 1950, 199.

44. Tampa Morning Tribune, 18 February 1950.

45. Pepper, campaign speech, "2 March 1950, Pepper Papers.

46. Ibid.

47. Robert M. Harlow, "Pepper With a Grain of Salt," Medical Economics, October 1946, 73.


51. Miami Herald, 6 April 1950.

52. Ibid., 25 April 1950.


54. Miami Herald, 5 March 1950.

55. Florida Times Union, 1 May 1950.

56. Ibid.

57. Smathers to Helen Robeson, 16 January 1946, Smathers Papers.

58. Tampa Morning Tribune, 4 March 1950.
59. Tallahassee Democrat, 5 March 1950.


61. Ibid., 5 March 1950.

62. Ibid., 30 March 1950.

63. Tallahassee Democrat, 5 April 1950.

64. Miami Herald, 26 March 1950.

65. Ibid., 14 April 1950.


67. Ibid., 22 February 1950.


69. St Petersburg Times, 2 April 1950.

70. Florida Times-Union, 30 April 1950.

71. Miami Herald, 4 March 1950.


73. Atlanta Constitution, 30 April 1950.

74. Tampa Morning Tribune, 26 February 1950.


77. Miami Herald, 8 February 1950.


80. Smathers to Pepper, June 11-26, 1945, Pepper Papers.

81. Tallahassee Democrat, 1 May 1950.
82. Miami Herald, 6 April 1950.
83. Smathers to Pepper, n. d., Pepper Papers.
84. Miami Herald, 17 April 1950.
85. Time, 17 April 1950.
86. Tallahassee Democrat, 1 November 1987.
87. Life, 23 October 1950, 28.
89. Pepper, Eyewitness, 204.
91. Baltimore Sun, 26 April 1950.
93. Pepper, Eyewitness, 168.
95. Ibid., 30 April 1950.
98. Ibid., 3 April 1950.
100. Miami Herald, 2 May 1950.
101. Ibid., 30 April 1950.
103. The Nation, 13 May 1950, 15.


111. Pepper to Herbert M. Davidson, 28 August 1950, Pepper Papers.


What is amazing is that Pepper did as well as he did in 1950. He managed to gather 45 percent of the vote despite almost six years of constant, negative publicity. Moreover, Pepper did not receive a single break in the campaign, and he was opposed by a bright, attractive candidate who had all but two of the state's newspapers behind him, and the support of business leaders and doctors.

What could Pepper have done to win the election of 1950? Pepper made dozens of mistakes and avoiding any one of them could have changed the outcome. He needed a shift of 34,000 votes to defeat Smathers. Pepper's defeat was the result of a combination of factors. His victories in 1938 and 1944 had given him a false sense of security. The victory in 1944 convinced him that he could overcome the opposition of Ed Ball.

If he had not antagonized Harry Truman by challenging him in 1944 and 1948, Truman might not have urged Smathers to run. If had not angered Ed Ball, Pepper might have retained his support. His efforts to deny Ball control of the Florida East Coast Railway failed miserably. By challenging Ball's control of the railroad, he also angered the line's workers, who almost certainly would have voted for him, but ended up voting against him while urging others to oppose
him. Except for Dade County, Pepper lost every single county the Florida East Coast Railway passed through. If he had not challenged the state's doctors, he would have avoided their grassroots campaign against him.

But Pepper's biggest mistake was losing touch with his state. For six years, Pepper ignored the warning signs of discontent in Florida. The state's newspapers had criticized him constantly for his position on Russia, his friendship with Henry Wallace, and his liberal views. Pepper had failed to heed the warnings. Between 1944 and 1950 he slowly lost support. In 1944, he received 51 percent of the vote in the Democratic primary. Six years later, he received 45 percent, a drop of just 6 points. He did as well as he did because he had been able to provide favors for thousands of constituents, there was still a strong appreciation of the New Deal in Florida, and Pepper was a great speaker, who could still electrify a crowd.

In his classic study of politics, Samuel Lubell blamed the defeat of Pepper on three trends in the South in the late 1940s: The failure of labor's drive to organize southern workers (he said that "Operation Dixie" had turned into "Operation Fizzle"), the rise of a more politically conservative middle class, and the reaction by whites to the increasing number of black voters. Lubell found that although Pepper and Smathers were both Democrats, the contest with was a trial run for an approaching Republican-Southern alliance with Smathers cast as the Republican and Pepper as the Democrat. He found that in the North Carolina primary—where Frank Graham also lost—and in Florida, the precinct
results were close to those in the 1948 presidential election. Smathers did well where Dewey and Strom Thurmond had done well. The ten Florida counties Dewey carried were won by Smathers. The three counties Thurmond won also went to Smathers. Pepper did well in areas where Truman did well. Pepper ended with about the same percentage of the Florida vote as Truman.²

Lubell’s theory about the importance of race in the election was rejected by Hugh Douglas, who found that “Pepper’s greatest loss of strength, in comparison to his successful 1944 campaign, was not in the racially sensitive Suwannee-Apalachicola region, but in the towns and small cities of central Florida and the East Coast.”³ Herbert J. Doherty found that Smathers was able to take away the lower class support that had returned Pepper to office twice before. Doherty, in examining voting patterns in Florida, found that Pepper had been particularly hurt in North Florida, “the section most receptive to Pepper’s stand on economic questions but also the most susceptible to racist fears.” Doherty also found, as others did, that Smathers did well among upper income voters.⁴

The Republicans saw the victory as a defeat for Truman and his Fair Deal. Republican National Chairman Guy Gabrielson said he was jubilant over the Smathers victory and claimed it marked a Republican trend away from Truman’s Fair Deal.⁵ Smathers fired back “I campaigned as a Democrat who had a high record of the support of the Democratic Administration in the 80th and 81st Congresses.”⁶ He sent a telegram to Truman stating that, “In my opinion our
victory does not mean a trend toward Republicanism nor in any sense does it mean a repudiation of the Democratic party or the Democratic principles, but rather a repudiation of extremism and radicalism. My record reveals that I am a liberal Democrat."7 Truman wrote back, "I appreciate your telegram of the fourth and I was also highly pleased to receive the copy of the message which you sent to Mr. Gabrielson. . . . When I get back from the Western trip, I'll be glad to see and talk with you. . . ."8

The Campaign Legacy

The Pepper-Smathers campaign was over, but its legacy was to endure. In the years since 1950, the defeat of Claude Pepper has been attributed to McCarthyism and the fear of communism. It is important to note that McCarthy did not make his first speech until February 9, 1950, more than a month after the Florida campaign started and just three months before the Florida primary. By that time, Smathers had already begun to hammer Pepper for his relationship with left-wing groups, closeness to Russia, support of the F.E.P.C, and civil rights. It was Smathers—not McCarthy—who showed how these issues could be used in a political campaign.

Smathers created a blueprint for other candidates to use. It was a blueprint that could be readily adapted to other campaigns in which a liberal Democrat was the opponent. For example, the F.E.P.C. issue and civil rights
might be dropped in the North and West, but the communism issue worked well everywhere. Candidates had used the communist issue for more than a decade, railing at the Democrats in Washington, and usually pointing to the State Department as a home for fellow travelers, communists, and left wingers. McCarthy followed the traditional pattern, criticizing the Democratic administration for what he saw as foot dragging in removing communists from government, and in its liberal policies toward the Soviets. demanding the removal of the bureaucrats he claimed were communists. What was different about Smathers was his target: Smathers aimed his charges not at the Truman administration, or at faceless bureaucrats, but at his opponent. He linked Pepper to left-wing groups, communist-fronts, and Russia. While never saying that Pepper was a communist, he left the clear impression that Pepper was either a dupe of the Russians, a diluted admirer of Joe Stalin, or perhaps a fellow traveler.

The theory that McCarthy was influential in securing the defeat of incumbent Democratic senators in 1950 has been questioned by a number of historians, including Robert Griffith, who argued that, "though Pepper's loss resulted from plural causes, and McCarthyism was not the chief of them, some observers erroneously exaggerated the impact of Smathers's Red-baiting." Griffith argued that in all of the 1950 elections, "Thanks to the unique conditions that prevailed in 1950 and to miscalculations on the part of the press and the politicians, an overstated assessment of McCarthy's electoral influence was
born. This exaggeration, by producing an expanded perception of McCarthy’s power, ultimately enlarged his power itself.9

Although Griffith is correct in discounting the importance of McCarthyism in Florida, he fails to understand that what Smathers did was different from McCarthy. And the results indicate that the Smathers approach was more effective than the McCarthy technique in defeating incumbent Democrats. The Florida primary was the first in the nation for choosing nominees and since Pepper’s campaign in 1938, was seen as a national weathervane, first for Roosevelt’s New Deal, then for Truman’s Fair Deal. A look at the 1950 Senate elections shows that those candidates who followed Smathers’s plan of attacking opponents on a laundry list of issues, including links with the C.I.O., being soft on communism, and in some cases using racial issues, did well. Those who failed to link their Democratic opponent with Communism, but simply attacked the Truman administration, and talked about communists in high government jobs, did not do as well.

The first place the Smathers method was tried was in North Carolina, where challenger Willis Smith was struggling to unseat incumbent U.S. Senator Frank Graham. The Florida results came three weeks before the North Carolina Democratic primary. According to historians Julian Pleasants and Gus Burns, Smith’s supporters “seized on the Pepper defeat as proof that Frank Graham could be beaten.”10 Jonathan Daniels, editor of the Raleigh News and Observer, and a Graham supporter, tried to downplay the Florida results. He wrote that it
would only be similar to the Florida campaign if one of the North Carolina candidates used the Smathers' techniques. But Willis Smith was immediately heartened by the results and said the vote was a "great victory for level-headed citizens."  

Graham did have many of the same political weaknesses as Pepper. Like Pepper, he had been involved with what many viewed as left-wing groups, and the CIO Political Action Committee operatives who had worked hard, if not successfully for Pepper, packed their bags and moved to North Carolina to "help" Graham. As in Florida, the CIO was a mixed blessing, generating more opposition than support. Lubell, in his analysis of the election, found that the CIO support was the "kiss of defeat" for Graham in North Carolina.

As the organization had done in Florida, the CIO made a public endorsement of Graham, giving Smith a ready-made campaign issue. The CIO endorsement came days after the Pepper loss in Florida, and it had obviously not registered on the CIO leadership that its endorsement could be the deadly for political candidates in the South. Smith seized the issue, just as Smathers had done in Florida, asserting that the labor support meant that Graham would push for their agenda including the F.E.P.C. and socialized medicine.

The CIO workers were not the only ones going North. Dan Crisp, the Ball operative in Florida, who had been so successful in helping to defeat Pepper, immediately moved to North Carolina to help Smith. Crisp claimed that he took with him money and the literature used in the Smathers-Pepper race.
In the first primary in North Carolina in late May, Graham came within a
hair of winning, getting 49.1 percent of the vote, while Smith received 40
percent. Graham came within 5,673 votes of avoiding a runoff.15 A friend wrote to
Graham, "What happened happily in the recent senatorial election in Florida
would happen here but for the wide popular knowledge of your personal
excellence."16 Smith agonized over whether to call for a runoff, but in the end,
decided to request one.

The second campaign lasted just seventeen days. Using a Pepper
technique, Graham tried unsuccessfully to label Smith as a Republican in
disguise. Smith, like Smathers, railed against the F.E.P.C., and the CIO.
Truman was clearly a Graham supporter, writing, "... Graham must win—we
can't possibly have a loss there."17 But Smith's campaign gained strength and he
upset Graham in the runoff by 20,000 votes.

The Graham defeat also illustrates how Truman felt toward Pepper. After
the election, Truman became a one-person employment agency for Graham,
offering him a number of jobs, including presidency of the American Red Cross.
For Pepper, there was not a single job offer from Truman.18

The Smathers campaign method was also used in California by one of
Smathers' closest friends, Richard Nixon. The relationship between Smathers
and Nixon was unusual. Smathers, Nixon, and John Kennedy all came to
Washington in the same Congress, members of the class of 1946. They were all
veterans of the war, all served in the Pacific, and all were ambitious. Smathers
became one of Kennedy's closest friends, and he also became friends with Nixon. It was Smathers who first invited Nixon to Miami and introduced him to Bebe Rebozo, who became Nixon's best friend.

In 1950, Nixon ran for the Senate against Democrat Helen Gahagan Douglas. The race was a carbon copy of the Florida election. When Smathers won in May, the headline in the Los Angeles Herald Express was, "Nixon Jubilant." Nixon said, "I am confident that the people of California, like those in Florida, also will register their disapproval at the polls this year."19 Like Pepper, Douglas was involved in left-wing causes and was susceptible to charges that she had been overly friendly toward Russia. While visiting Florida in 1950, Nixon asked Smathers for his strategy in the Florida campaign. Nixon used the plan well. While Pepper was "Red Pepper," Douglas became the "Pink Lady."20

In Ohio, Sen. Robert Taft successfully used the CIO-PAC as a whipping boy to help defeat Joseph T. Ferguson. A study found that Taft's overwhelming margin was the result of support from Catholics, Jews, and even labor union members, who resented labor's aggressive support of Ferguson.21 In Idaho, Glen Taylor, who along with Pepper had been identified as the most left-wing members of the Senate, went down to defeat. His primary challenger used the communist issue and made sure newspapers received copies of "The Red Record of Claude Pepper," which featured Taylor prominently. The Daily Statesman in Boise ran excerpts from the booklet. Taylor lost a close primary battle.22
Even the Republican National Committee picked up on the Smathers campaign, producing a booklet called “Red Herring and Whitewash,” a pale imitation of “Red Record,” featuring pictures of communists and newspaper clippings about what the Republicans saw as the rising tide of Communism.23

One of the most misleading post-election developments was the filing of financial forms by the candidates. Smathers reported collecting $63,767.75 and spending $63,711.88. Pepper claimed that he had spent $78,644.81 but collected just $59,849.50.24 Of course neither side listed the in-kind contributions from rich businessmen, doctors, unions and others with a stake in the outcome. The election was the first held in Florida without spending limits and was such a disaster that the legislature reformed the campaign spending rules. Both Pepper and Smathers claimed that the other spent much more money and as the years passed, the amounts grew.

By losing in the May primary, Pepper spent eight months as a lame duck. After the primary, he ran into Ed Ball at a dinner sponsored by the Florida Industrial Council in Washington. The annual event brought together elected representatives, lobbyists, and Florida business leaders. Pepper was no longer seated at the head table, although Ball was. Pepper congratulated Ball on what Pepper called Ball’s victory. Ball replied that he was happy to have won the last round. Pepper said that perhaps it was not the last round. As the crowd fell silent, Ball yelled at Pepper, “Claude, if you ever run for public office in Florida again we’ll lick you so bad you’ll think this time was a victory.”25
Late on the night of December 22, 1950, Pepper made his final speech to the Senate. It was a dark and moody address. "This is the darkest period of American history, if not human history. It is the first time that through the dark, impenetrable veil of the future there is no glimmer of that light of hope, save the confidence that is our faith."  

Pepper was not, however, through in politics. In 1952 he briefly considered running against Florida's other senator, Spessard Holland. In 1956 he decided against challenging Smathers, but he ran in the Democratic primary in 1958 against Holland. As in 1950, he received about 45 percent of the vote. In 1962, Pepper re-entered national politics, winning election to the U.S. House of Representatives from a Miami district. With the influx of Cuban refugees, the makeup of the district began to change. Pepper became strongly anti-communist, supporting the embargo against Cuba. He voted for both the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights act of 1965, and he held the seat until his death in 1989.

Smathers served three terms. He was a close personal friend of John Kennedy, and after Kennedy's assassination in 1963, the fun went out of politics for Smathers. He did not seek re-election in 1968. Much to his displeasure, the story about the speech he supposedly made using words such as "thespian," kept growing. With each retelling, it got longer and funnier. In 1954, William F. Buckley co-authored a book entitled, McCarthy and His Enemies, and quoted from what he said was a Smathers' speech. Smathers wrote that he had never
made the remarks." Buckley wrote back, "You will have a difficult time persuading the general public that you did not in fact make these remarks."29

It is ironic that half a century after the election, Smathers is best remembered for a speech he never gave, while the man he defeated is remembered fondly for his work on behalf of the elderly.

Pepper had gambled with his Senate seat and lost. He had bet that he could tailor his views to attract a national audience without losing his Florida constituency. It was not until the 1980s, when he became a champion of the elderly, that he was finally able to obtain both a national reputation and have a safe seat.

Pepper’s commitment to the New Deal led him to believe that it was the answer to both national and international problems. He did not see that the nation was moving away from the New Deal by the late 1940s, and that for many voters the New Deal had become synonymous with bloated bureaucracy, government control, and excessive spending. Pepper also saw the New Deal philosophy as a solution for international affairs. He pushed for a loan to Soviet Union as he would a New Deal spending program. He believed the loan would have allowed the Soviets to rebuild from World War II and be a peaceful member of the world community. Two decades later, another New Deal stalwart, Lyndon Johnson, would try to use the same New Deal strategy to try to bring the North Vietnamese to the negotiating table.
While he did understand the world and its problems, he did not understand a changing Florida, which no longer responded to his cries for a bigger and better New Deal. He could see the changes taking place in Europe before World War II, but he could not see that massive changes taking place in Florida. Of all the places in the world, he understood Florida the least.

Notes

2. Ibid., 113-114.
3. Douglas, 120.
7. Smathers to Truman, 4 May 1950, Truman papers.
8. Truman to Smathers, 5 May 1950, Truman Papers.
10. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 167.
14. Sherrill, 151.
15. Pleasants and Burns, 186.
16. Ibid., 189.
17. Ibid., 210.
18. Ibid., 279.
20. Smathers, interview with author, 27 February 1987
22. Griffith, 201.
25. Lincoln, 158.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Manuscript Collections


Pepper, Claude D. Papers. Mildred and Claude Pepper Library, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida.


Newspapers

Atlanta Constitution, 1950.

Baltimore Sun, 1950.

Boston Herald, 1946.


Daily People's World [Los Angeles], 1946.

Daily Worker [New York], 1945-1946.

DeLand Sun News, 1944.

Detroit Free Press, 1946.


Fort Lauderdale News, 1945, 1948.


Lake Worth [Florida] Leader, 1948.


Los Angeles Herald Examiner, 1950.

Los Angeles Post, 1948.


Miami Herald, 1934-1950.

Miami Times, 1950.
New York Mirror, 1946.
Ocala [Florida] Banner, 1934.
Orlando Morning Sentinel, 1934-1950.
PM [New York], 1947.
Tampa Daily Times, 1948.
Tampa Morning Tribune, 1940-1950.
Washington Herald, 1934.
Washington Post, 1946.

Public Documents


United States Senate. Senator Foreign Relations Committee. Senate Foreign Relations Hearings on Assistance to Greece and Turkey. 80th Cong., 1947.


______. Senate Subcommittee on Wartime Health and Education of the Committee on Education and Labor, Investigation of Manpower Resources. 77th Cong., 1942.
Secondary Works

Books and Articles


"Fireworks in Florida." *Newsweek*, 10 April 1950, 23.


1982.


_____. “America and the Peace Crisis.” Soviet Russia Today, June 1946, 9, 29.

_____. “A Foreign Policy to Win the War, Keep the Peace, and Promote the Welfare of our Nation and the World.” Foreign Policy Reports, October 1944, 167-176.


"Isn't Health Important to the Nation." New York Times Magazine, 20 May 1945, 12, 33-34.


"The New Deal – Dead or Alive?" Everybody's Digest, October 1946, 21-24.


"Things We Forgot About Russia." The Churchman, May 1946, 13-14.


1993.


Theses and Dissertations and Unpublished Materials

Crispeil, Brian L. “George Smathers and the Politics of Cold War America.” Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1996.


BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

David R. Colburn
Professor of History

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Samuel Proctor
Distinguished Service Professor of History

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Michael Gannon
Distinguished Service Professor of History

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Robert Zieger
Distinguished Professor of History

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Richard Scher
Professor of Political Science
I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Jeffrey Adler
Associate Professor of History

This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of History in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

December 1998

Dean, Graduate School