

**The 1938 Georgia Democratic Senatorial Primary:
The Repudiation of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's
'Purge Campaign'**

By

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Thesis

**Submitted to the Faculty of the Department of History of Vanderbilt
University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in
History**

April 22, 2002


On the basis of this thesis and of
the written and oral examinations
taken by the candidate on

April 19 and on April 29

we, the undersigned, recommend

that the candidate be awarded

HONORS in History:



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Georgia's senior senator, Walter F. George, had represented his state in the United States Senate since 1922. The year 1938 marked the expiration of his constitutionally prescribed six-year term. Throughout his tenure, George had remained popular with constituents at home. From the emerging business classes in Atlanta to small farmers in rural portions of the state, the senator from Vienna, Georgia successfully represented those interests that mattered most to citizens eligible for participation in elections. As 1938 commenced many Georgians were eagerly waiting George's announcement to seek another term in Washington so they could graciously send him back to the nation's capital.

As subsequent events revealed, this shaped up to be anything but your typical Georgian contest. In most cases, ambitious, practical politicians would see little positive that could come out of challenging a popular incumbent. This senatorial race proved the exception to the rule, as two prolific candidates chose to challenge George in the all-important Democratic primary. The first to declare was the well-known former two-term governor Eugene Talmadge. During his stint in the governor's mansion from 1933 to 1937, Talmadge was an ardent opponent of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal reform package, claiming that the administration's policies would lead to an all-intrusive federal government that would dramatically alter conservative, traditional southern society. Talmadge believed he would attain election if he could successfully paint George as a New Deal lackey supporting every initiative that the president wished to see enacted.

Federal District Attorney Lawrence Camp's announcement for the senate seat, however, fundamentally altered the contest and created problems for Talmadge's strategy. As he declared his candidacy in late spring 1938, the federal attorney announced that he would run as a "One

Hundred Percent New Dealer.”¹ To complicate matters even more, President Franklin D. Roosevelt chose to intervene in this contest directly and declared his open support for Camp during a speech in Barnesville on August 10. The former governor would now have great difficulty in casting George as a political lackey for the president, when another prolific candidate was in the contest declaring that the senior senator on too many occasions had opposed the president. Along the same lines, Camp’s intention of critiquing George’s frequent opposition to the president seemed more difficult, as a vicious opponent to the New Deal also sought the nomination. Voters would ask themselves why the two challengers directed their attacks at the moderate George instead of at each other. If the candidates had chosen to attack each other, George would have won another term in Washington. Although the challengers directed most of their ammunition at George, that is indeed what unfolded that September, as George secured the Democratic nomination and punched his ticket back to the nation’s capital.

The 1938 Georgia contest is illustrative of some important trends in American and southern politics. First, the election results confirmed the waning support for FDR as the 1930s progressed. Following his 1936 landslide presidential victory, Roosevelt’s popularity had been at an all time high. As his second term progressed the president’s popularity fell, but remained above fifty percent.² When observing geographical regions, the president continued to enjoy his greatest and most overwhelming support in the South, although within the former Confederacy the president’s approval rating fell from eighty percent to sixty seven percent between March

¹ The Atlanta Constitution, June 5, 1938; “Camp Reaffirms Loyalty To F.D.R. In Opening Speech”.

² The American Institute of Public Opinion is used throughout this paper to gauge public opinion. Gallup polls, as they are more commonly known, have on a consistent basis since the 1930s accurately gauged public opinion on elections prior to their occurrence. The lone exception is the 1948 presidential contest in which Gallup mistakenly ceased polling ten to twelve days prior to the election. Throughout the 1930s, Gallup accurately predicted national election results. While unable to obtain data on who was exactly polled, we can assume that Gallup somehow distinguished between voters and non-voters in the suffrage restricted-South. The polling data is convincingly accurate and seems to rule out mere coincidence.

1937 and May 1938.³ Nonetheless, this subtle drop in popularity is a possible candidate for explaining FDR's legislative defeats in the Seventy-Fifth Congress and his unsuccessful attempts to influence the 1938 elections. Thus, continued strong national and southern support for FDR, the results of the Georgia contest paralleled national patterns of waning support for the American president.

Secondly, this particular senatorial contest played an important role in augmenting Roosevelt's already waning national popularity. The contest reveals a general uneasiness among the American public about federal intervention in regional and local affairs. When surveyed, Americans expressed their displeasure with the president. While remaining popular in Georgia following his open endorsement of Camp, Roosevelt's direct intervention was frowned upon in the state. The intervention in this and other Democratic primaries to defeat administration opponents, commonly known as FDR's Purge Campaign, increased opposition to the president nationally and further contributed to his already waning popularity. Survey results revealed that while FDR's popularity was waning, his intervention in Democratic primaries augmented and solidified increased opposition to the presidential administration. For instance, a survey conducted by The Atlanta Constitution revealed that in the immediate aftermath of his involvement, eighty-five percent of Georgians expressed opposition to the president's intervention.⁴ This disapproval, however, was not limited to Georgia as only thirty-nine percent

³ Gallup George H. The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971, Vol. 1: 1935-1948. (New York: Random House, 1972), 51, 99. "March 7, 1937, President Roosevelt's Voter Appeal: Would you vote for Franklin Roosevelt today? Yes—65.2%, No—34.8%. South, Yes—79%, No—21%. "May 1, 1938, President Roosevelt's Voter Appeal: Are you for or against Franklin Roosevelt today? For—55%, No—45%. South, For—66%, Against—34%."

⁴ Cobb, James C. "Not Gone, But Forgotten: Eugene Talmadge and The 1938 Purge Campaign." (Savannah: Georgia Historical Quarterly, 1975), 205.

of national Democrats approved.⁵ Thus, the nation rejected Roosevelt's intervention in state primaries, as administration sponsored candidacies faltered throughout the nation

While other contests across the nation pitted openly endorsed administration candidates against powerful opponents, political observers and national press agencies chose to pay great attention to the Georgia contest. The race generated great coverage in that it pitted a popular president against an entrenched, popular incumbent senator. Onlookers were interested in just how much sway a national chief executive could have on a state contest. The sixteen-year incumbent's reelection campaign appeared to the national media as the ideal test case for a personally popular president influencing voters in state primaries. Thus, the Georgia primary became the defining race in FDR's Purge Campaign. Given national opposition to this specific instance of intervention in regional affairs, the contest is representative of a more general pattern of hostility to increased federal intervention in all policy areas.

A third and final reason why this particular contest is important is that it illustrates the distinctiveness of southern politics in the 1930s. As occurred on the national stage, the president struggled within the region to defeat popular, entrenched anti-administration incumbents. While FDR's effort to lobby for candidates more likely to support his legislative agenda was a national phenomenon, various factors were present in the South that did not exist in other regions. First, the region differed from the remainder of the nation in that very few citizens participated in political elections. Numerous obstacles, most notably poll taxes, prevented poverty-stricken and even some middle class citizens from voting. For example, only twenty-one percent of

⁵ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 117. "September 11, 1938, The Roosevelt 'Purge': Democrats were asked: Do you approve or disapprove of President Roosevelt's campaign to defeat Democrats who oppose his views? Approve—39%, Disapprove—61%. South, Approve—34%, Disapprove—66%."

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Georgia's voting age population participated in the 1938 primary election.⁶ These restrictions allowed business and large landholding interests to have disproportionate influence on the southern political system. These wealthy interests were on record as being strong supporters of the incumbent.⁷ This phenomenon of a restricted electorate no doubt had ramifications on the 1938 contest in that it prevented many likely Talmadge or Camp voters from participating and perhaps allowed George sympathizers to have disproportionate influence on the eventual election outcome. Thus, a restricted electorate distinguished the Georgia contest from other national campaigns and helped George secure another six-year term in Washington.

The one-party political system is a second distinct characteristic of southern politics in the 1930s. This system had two primary effects on the region. First, numerous historians hold the system responsible for the South's underdevelopment since Reconstruction. Most noteworthy is the acclaimed V.O. Key. Key argued, "the South as a whole has developed no system or practice of political organization and leadership adequate to cope with its problems."⁸ This failure was due to the stranglehold large landholders in the Black Belt regions, business leaders, and other conservatives maintained over the political system. Beginning with the secessionist crisis in the 1850s, this powerful minority continued to dominate the political landscape into the 1930s and beyond. They feared that the creation of a two-party system would erode their control over the political system, as they would no longer be able to exploit the white supremacy issue for political gain. This exploitation existed in Georgia in the 1930s as evidenced during Eugene Talmadge's 1934 gubernatorial race. The governor rallied support when he brought to the forefront that under the National Recovery Administration's (NRA)

⁶ Shannon, J.B. "Presidential Politics in the South—1938, II." (The Journal of Politics, Volume 1, Issue 3, August, 1939), 285.

⁷ Patterson, James A. Congressional Conservatism and The New Deal: The Growth of the Conservative Coalition in Congress, 1933-1939. (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), 330.

minimum wage scale for highway workers, the predominantly black workers in this sector would make more per hour than the predominantly white workers in the textile industry.⁹ This race baiting argument paid dividends as Talmadge won a resounding reelection victory. While such arguments resonated in the South, they were unlikely to receive such an audience outside the region.

An augmented incumbency advantage is the second effect that the one-party political system had on southern politics. With no other viable political entity, candidates realized the necessity of winning the Democratic primary if they desired to attain election. In most instances, with no external party competition, winning the Democratic congressional primary was the equivalent of winning a general election. Thus, the one-party system decreased the likelihood that incumbents would fail in reelection bids. Indeed, Walter George's concerns over FDR's intervention likely eased when studying the political past in the one-party South.

Still, Roosevelt's Purge Campaign represented an atypical threat to southern incumbents, and more importantly the one-party system. If FDR were able to influence the electorate into voting for his candidate in the Democratic primary, he would have not only used his position to select the party nominee, but the congressional representative. This, however, was not the case in the remainder of the nation, as the Democratic primary winner was likely to experience a significant challenge against a Republican candidate in the general election. Secondly, if the president had succeeded he would have likely created a two-party system. On one side of the political spectrum would stand conservatives, while the other would consist of liberal-oriented politicians. Support of the New Deal would become the fault line in which politicians would

⁸ Key, V.O. *Southern Politics in State and Nation*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1950), 4.

⁹ Brattain, Michelle. *The Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 12-13.

divide themselves into the respective ideological camps. Thus, the 1938 Georgia contest and other southern contests were unique from others across the nation in that Roosevelt had the potential to exert greater influence in a one party dominated region.

A third way the South was distinct is that the greatest intra-party opposition to the New Deal appeared within the region. Beginning most notably with the Seventy-Fifth congressional session, 1937-1939, a conservative coalition formed within Congress comprised mostly of Republicans and southern Democrats opposed to the New Deal.¹⁰ Historian James Patterson contends that George was among those congressional members expressing reservations to many presidential initiatives. Many, including the Georgia senator, also endorsed the 'Conservative Manifesto' calling for a balanced federal budget, lower taxes, and states' rights.¹¹ This paper will attempt to discuss what caused southern Democrats, in particular Walter George, to voice increased dissatisfaction with presidential initiatives during the Seventy-Fifth congressional session.

Such opposition from his own party and his great personal popularity enticed Roosevelt to intervene in state primaries on behalf of alternative candidates who would side with his administration. Given that many intransigent Democrats were southerners, this effort was concentrated in the South. In Georgia, three prominent candidates sought the Democratic nomination. Walter George, Eugene Talmadge, and Lawrence Camp expressed varying opinions on the New Deal. Roosevelt later claimed that he had intervened in the Georgia contest to clarify the confusion and make certain to voters who was indeed the true Democratic candidate.¹²

Although Roosevelt's intervention failed to result in the nomination of his candidate, the 1938

¹⁰Patterson, Congressional Conservatism and The New Deal, vii.

¹¹ Ibid, 205-206.

¹² Rosenman, Samuel I., Ed. The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt. 1938 Vol., The Continuing Struggle for Liberalism. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), xxxi.

Georgia contest is worthy of study in that it illustrates the distinctiveness of southern politics when compared with American politics in the 1930s.

The 1936 Elections: The Triumph of the New Deal

Knowledge of the political events between 1936 and 1938 is imperative to understanding what led President Roosevelt to intervene in the Georgia senatorial primary. The 1936 election results included a landslide reelection for the president and Democratic congressional candidates. National results convinced the president that his New Deal policies had strong support.¹³ With this perceived mandate, Roosevelt expected Congress to go along with his proposals. As subsequent events revealed, however, the legislative branch failed to meet the president's great expectations. Given this intransigence in the face of the 1936 mandate, Roosevelt responded with the Purge Campaign to defeat anti-administration Democrats.

During Roosevelt's first term, 1933-1937, the president enjoyed his greatest, most consistent support from southern citizens and their elected officials. In the early years of his presidency, FDR had proposed numerous programs and initiatives that he claimed would reverse the severe economic downturn. The South stood to gain everything from increased federal economic assistance. While this represented a shift from the federal government's conservative and laissez faire economic policies of the past, the potential transformation is not as revolutionary as it might first seem. Roosevelt insisted that control of virtually all New Deal programs and relief agencies be placed in the hands of regional and local officials.¹⁴ In most cases this consisted of the ruling elite. Hence, the New Deal in its opening stages represented little challenge to the existing power structure. Roosevelt was a coalition builder and realized

¹³ Ziegler, Luther Harmon. "Senator Walter George's 1938 Campaign." (Atlanta: Georgia Historical Quarterly, 1959), 333.

¹⁴ Brinkley, Alan, "The New Deal and Southern Politics," The New Deal and the South, Eds. James C. Cobb and Michael V. Namorato. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984), 98-102.

that a perceived usurpation of regional and local authorities would alienate the southern wing of the Democratic congressional caucus. Southern support was imperative if FDR wished to see his reform package passed in the Congress. As long as Roosevelt worked within the traditional framework and relied on the entrenched political establishment he enjoyed widespread support within the South.

Results in Georgia in 1936 deviated little from those across the country. First, Roosevelt went on to an easy victory against his Republican opponent, Alf Landon of Kansas. A second noteworthy contest was the race to succeed Eugene Talmadge as governor. Engaged in a long-standing feud with the presidential administration and unwilling to witness the ascension of a New Dealer to the governorship, Talmadge endorsed a political ally, state senate president Charles Redwine. At a July 4, 1936 campaign kickoff, Redwine outlined the platform that he would run on with hopes of succeeding the current governor. The historian William Anderson argues that Redwine's platform was overtly anti-New Deal. Planks included a commitment to work for states' rights, opposition to labor unions, and a continuation of Talmadge's conservative economic policies.¹⁵ Given the recent historical past in which he had used such issues to attain election, Talmadge expected a similar result for his protégé.

Coincidentally, Redwine's most serious opposition also announced his candidacy on the Fourth. Ed Rivers initiated his drive for the governor's mansion and outlined a program that he labeled a "Little New Deal". Anderson declares that the platform was the most liberal in Georgia history, as Rivers "latched onto Roosevelt's coattails with fingers, teeth, and toes, promising total emulation of the big New Deal."¹⁶ In essence, this appeared as a contest that

¹⁵ Anderson, William. The Wild Man From Sugar Creek: The Political Career of Eugene Talmadge. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 157.

¹⁶ Ibid.

carried on the Roosevelt-Talmadge rivalry. As was occurring simultaneously on the presidential level, the New Dealer would emerge victorious over his opponent.

While an important and symbolic victory for the New Deal reform movement within the state, the gubernatorial contest proved far less significant and telling than the senatorial contest matching the powerful Talmadge against the incumbent Richard B. Russell. Talmadge immediately followed Redwine on the Fourth in announcing his candidacy for the senate seat. He espoused a lengthy platform that was very much in line with his states' rights and conservative ideals. The governor called for a smaller and balanced federal budget, strict interpretation of the constitution, low taxes, and conservative economic policies.¹⁷ Clearly, Talmadge was running a campaign anti-New Deal in nature. Russell realized this, but was also initially wary of adopting a campaign strategy similar to Rivers' all-out endorsement of New Deal policies that the governor would attack incessantly. Given Talmadge's overwhelming 1934 re-election victory, the junior senator was convinced that the governor had a strong following within the state. Russell lacked confirmation that FDR enjoyed similar support since the voters had not wholly expressed their opinion since 1932. Thus, the junior senator hesitated in adopting a strategy encompassing an all-out endorsement of the New Deal.¹⁸

While Russell resisted adopting a campaign strategy similar to that of Rivers', another prominent politician came forth suggesting that support of the New Deal was the central issue in this contest. That individual was the popular and respected senior senator, Walter George. George was one politician who expressed great reservation and fear that a Talmadge primary

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, 159.

victory would signal to the presidential administration that Georgia opposed the New Deal.¹⁹

According to Anderson:

George wanted no part of the Russell race, but he saw a Talmadge victory as an endorsement of all Gene espoused. If Gene won, it could hurt George, because George was a lot more New Way than he was Old Way; and if Gene proved that the people wanted the Old Way back, his power in the state would be vastly enhanced. He would be in a position to run Georgia politics from state house to Congress. So Walter George came out on a very bad day, with all of the conviction of a man talking to his dentist about the value of pulling teeth, and endorsed Dick Russell by endorsing the good deeds of the New Deal.²⁰

One should conclude that the “Old Way” referred to the political environment prior to 1932

when the federal government played little role in ensuring a decent welfare for its citizenry. In

contrast, the “New Way” referred to the notion that the national government should take an

active role in providing relief during economic crises and should take the necessary measures to

prevent another catastrophic downturn. Thus, Anderson concludes that George was much more

a supporter of President Roosevelt and his policies than the conservatism Talmadge espoused

during his two terms in the governors mansion. George desired a New Deal supporter to join

him in the U.S. Senate for the Seventy-Fifth congressional session.

What, though, were George’s motives in endorsing Russell? Was he supporting Russell for ideological reasons or was he more concerned with the personal threat that a Talmadge victory might create? While not an ardent supporter of everything that the New Deal represented, George feared that a Talmadge victory would further enhance the governor’s control over the state political system. Due to his rancorous politics, Talmadge would no doubt overshadow George within the U.S. Senate. In addition, George realized that many constituents supported the president and his policies. The New Deal resulted in millions of federal dollars being poured into the state economy. A Talmadge victory would likely make the Roosevelt

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

administration less inclined to contribute so generously to a state that had elected such an ardent opponent to his policies. While credited for the large infusion of dollars, George would also be blamed if the funds dried up. Although expressing greater sympathy for the New Deal than Talmadge's conservatism, George probably endorsed Russell more for political gain than ideological conviction. This point must be taken into consideration when considering George's later increased reluctance to side with the president during the Seventy-Fifth Congress.

Prior to George's endorsement, critics charged that the Russell campaign lacked a fiery approach they deemed imperative if the junior senator were to turn back Talmadge's challenge. Following the senior senator's endorsement, Russell attempted to seize the initiative, but the race still appeared too close to call. In the weeks leading up to the late summer primary, the city of Griffin issued an invitation for all statewide candidates to meet there about ten days prior to the primary contest. With primary day drawing painstakingly close, the Griffin event offered Talmadge and Russell an ideal opportunity to make a case for their respective candidacies.

At the event Russell seized the initiative accusing the governor of dodging the draft during World War I.²¹ More damaging to the Talmadge candidacy, however, was Russell's onslaught concentrating on the notion that Talmadge's panaceas for the rural Georgian farmer would never come to fruition if he refused federal funds from Washington.²² Thus, the junior senator finally relented in his earlier inhibition and released the fury of the New Deal on Talmadge. As events on that day unfolded, Russell's return to the Senate in 1937 went from questionable to almost a guarantee as the junior senator convinced the voters that Talmadge was an enemy of the man they credited with their increased prosperity, Franklin D. Roosevelt.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, 163.

Talmadge's failure to support the popular president created additional problems for the governor. Newspaper editors argued that this consistent criticism could only mean one thing: Talmadge was not a true Democrat, but rather a Republican sympathizer. The Atlanta Constitution offered a stinging indictment of Talmadge during the hard-fought campaign, "When the Governor was obsessed with the idea that he was presidential timber, he traveled over the nation, speaking to gatherings of Republicans and joining with them in traducing the Democratic administration and repudiating its achievements."²³ In the one-party South, serious accusations questioning one's Democratic loyalties meant certain defeat. As events unfolded, even the "Wild Man from Sugar Creek" proved unable to recover from this indictment.

The September 10 results validated what the pre-election polls were saying: Russell in a landslide. The final results revealed that the incumbent junior senator had carried 143 counties and amassed 256,154 votes, while Talmadge was able to carry only 16 counties and 134,695 votes. Furthermore, in an analogous fashion Rivers won the governorship over Talmadge's handpicked successor, Redwine. These results, coupled with Roosevelt's overwhelming victory in November, appeared to indicate that the Georgia electorate had embraced the basic New Deal principles. President Roosevelt believed that these victories revealed that his popularity had reached a new high point in Georgia.²⁴ Thus, for at least the time being, Georgia chose to support the New Deal reform package and abandoned Talmadge's conservative agenda.

Pro-New Deal sentiment also played out on the national scene as American voters made their voices heard in November 1936. In one of the most overwhelming political landslides in national history, the Democratic party maintained control of the executive branch and vastly increased its majorities within the United States Congress. Thus, Franklin Roosevelt and his

²³ The Atlanta Constitution, September 1, 1938; "Democracy At Stake".

²⁴ Zeigler, "Senator Walter George's 1938 Campaign", 333.

administration viewed the 1936 election results as a mandate for reform and the continuation of the New Deal. While Roosevelt received an unprecedented sixty-one percent of the nationwide popular vote, his margins of victory in the South were even more impressive. Of the eleven former confederate states only one failed to give him over seventy percent of the vote. Georgia's vote totals were typical of the great support FDR enjoyed across the region. The incumbent won over eighty-one percent of the vote in the state he considered his second home.²⁵ Given the overwhelming victory, many in the administration assumed that reluctant New Dealers within the Congress now had no choice but to go along with the administration. The 1936 election results, particularly in Georgia, revealed that voters would not tolerate politicians who chose to oppose the president's policies. Thus, failure to support the administration would result in political suicide.

Roosevelt often stated that the three previous national elections had demonstrated that the public supported his programs, and thus a mandate existed for the New Deal reform package, "The vast program of recovery and reform which had been begun by the new administration on March 4, 1933, had been overwhelmingly approved in the elections of 1934 and 1936."²⁶ Before pressing onward, one must question whether the election results did in fact confirm that FDR had a mandate for reform. Did the voters support Democratic candidates in 1932, 1934, and 1936 for other reasons than out of support for the New Deal? A further investigation of this question is needed.

The first potential explanation for the election of Roosevelt and large Democratic congressional majorities is that American voters were simply turning to the only other political

²⁵ McGillivray, Alice V. and Richard M. Scammon, Eds. America At The Polls: 1920-1956, A Handbook of American Presidential Election Statistics. (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1994), 13.

²⁶ Rosenman, Samuel I., Ed. The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt. 1937 Vol., The Constitution Prevails. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), XLVII.

alternative. As most are no doubt aware, the American economy collapsed following the stock market crash in October 1929. Occupying the White House under Herbert Hoover and possessing large congressional majorities, the American public looked toward the Republican party for leadership in formulating strategies to rejuvenate the economy. Under Hoover's leadership, the Republicans refused to abandon their conservative economic policies and remained steadfast in their commitment to the notion of limited governmental interference in business affairs. The administration encouraged businesses to participate voluntarily in programs that they hoped would alleviate the suffering. Unfortunately for the Republicans, the economic situation further deteriorated as the unemployment rate continued to rise. By 1932, the American public had lost faith in the Republican party's ability to return the nation to prosperity. Thus, in that year's national elections they granted the only other national political party an opportunity to lead.

During the presidential campaign, Roosevelt remained vague on how he would combat the bank closures, massive unemployment, and food shortages. The then New York governor simply promised that he would deliver "a New Deal for the American people."²⁷ One could conclude then that the president was simply just running as an alternative to the very unpopular incumbent. Not formulating a legislative agenda of their own, Democratic congressional candidates employed a similar strategy. The message to the American people was simple: the Republican leadership had proven unable to alleviate the massive suffering and return the nation to prosperity. Thus, give the Democratic party an opportunity to lead the nation out of the doldrums. The electorate responded to this message in November 1932 in sending FDR to the White House and overwhelming Democratic majorities to the Congress.

²⁷ Kennedy, David M. Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 98.

Given the Democratic party's 1932 campaign strategy, Roosevelt and other New Deal supporters could not assume that Americans voted for Democratic candidates because they supported the president's proposals. The only thing the voters were committed to was repudiating the Republican leadership, and permitting the Democrats an opportunity to reverse national fortunes. David Kennedy comments, "...Roosevelt's victory was less an affirmation of his policies than a repudiation of Hoover's. He remained inscrutable, his exact intentions a mystery."²⁸ Nonetheless, Roosevelt and the Democratic congressional majorities wasted little time in seizing the initiative with the noteworthy Hundred Days legislation. He had hinted at such experimentation during the 1932 campaign in a speech delivered in Georgia, "The country needs and, unless I mistake its temper, the country demands bold, persistent experimentation. It is common sense to take a method and try it: If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something."²⁹ Nevertheless, the voters in November were not yet aware of the measures the presidential or Democratic congressional candidates would use to combat the Great Depression. As FDR assumed the presidency the New Deal was simply rhetoric with little substance. Thus, a mandate did not yet exist for the New Deal.

The first possible opportunity for that to be potentially revealed were the 1934 mid-term congressional elections. While Franklin Roosevelt erred in claiming that the American voters had endorsed the New Deal in the 1932, the assumption does have more merit when applied to the 1934 elections. American voters returned increased Democratic congressional majorities for the Seventy-Fourth Congress. These gains were most apparent in the Senate, as Democrats increased their already large majorities with an additional ten seats.³⁰ Thus, one could conclude,

²⁸ Ibid. 102-103.

²⁹ Ibid. 104.

³⁰ Moore, John L., Jon P. Preimesberger, and David R. Tarr, eds. Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections. 4th ed. (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2001), 1570.

as the president did, that the American people supported the administration's policies. The electorate had given the administration a mandate to continue implementing policies that would alleviate their suffering. Thanks to the creation of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) ordinary Americans could now confidently place their holdings in banks, while farmers experienced newfound hope with the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA). The president and his administration argued that the American voters had used the 1934 election as their forum to endorse the New Deal. Thus, the administration had public approval to continue with its radical experimentation in curing the nation's ills.

The administration pressed forward with radical experimentation during the Seventy-Fourth congressional session. Most representative of this was the Social Security Act in 1935. From the administration's viewpoint, the American electorate again endorsed the New Deal in the 1936 presidential and congressional elections. Given this perceived mandate, the administration prepared a legislative agenda for the Seventy-Fifth congressional session that would incorporate and expand on many of the policies implemented during Roosevelt's first term.

Georgians appeared to have embraced Roosevelt and the New Deal legislative agenda in 1936. The Atlanta Constitution's headlines following the Democratic primary spoke volumes, "Talmadge Crushed By New Deal Vote Throughout State: Democratic Georgia Repudiates Foe of Roosevelt Administration."³¹ In every statewide contest, Georgia voters had overwhelmingly selected pro-administration candidates. Given the post-election headlines and concurring results, the president and administration officials concluded that the New Deal had strong support within the state.

³¹ The Atlanta Constitution, September 10, 1936; "Talmadge Crushed By New Deal Vote Throughout State".

Pre-election press coverage and subsequent polling surveys did little to dissuade administration officials from the notion of a mandate for the continuation and expansion of the New Deal. The Atlanta Constitution defined the contest immediately following Talmadge's entry into the contest against the incumbent Russell, "The issue is definitely whether the prosperity of the Roosevelt administration should be continued, or shall the country return to the chaos of republican misrule. In such a contest, if sanity prevails, there can be no question of the outcome."³² The press was attempting to convince the public that a vote for Talmadge or any of the candidates that he backed was a vote against the Roosevelt administration. Thus, a victory for Talmadge would brand the state as anti-New Deal and anti-Democratic.

As the primary approached, the press continued to laud the administration, "The new prosperity that has come to the farmer, the laboring man, the merchant and the industrialist in the south is the result of the beneficial policies of the administration."³³ The prominent publications continued to argue that the administration's policies were directly responsible for the newfound prosperity. Furthermore, the press demonized Talmadge for not supporting these beneficial policies and indicted him for abandoning the party, "Governor Talmadge has criticized practically every policy of the Democratic administration, has denounced President Roosevelt and has promised to 'run him and his gang out of Washington.' He is the president's most violent accuser."³⁴ Thus, the press contended that the people of Georgia could not vote for Talmadge if they were thankful for the newfound prosperity.

Finally, other elected officials entered the fray on Russell's behalf. Representative Malcolm C. Tarver offered this endorsement:

³² The Atlanta Constitution, July 5, 1936; "The Issue Plainly Stated; Two Paths Ahead".

³³ The Atlanta Constitution, September 1, 1936; "Democracy at Stake".

³⁴ The Atlanta Constitution, September 6, 1936; "No Greeks Bearing Gifts For Democracy of Georgia".

The fight in Georgia today is only a part of a nation-wide struggle and upon the outcome of that struggle depends the welfare of yourselves and your children for years to come. If you favor a continuance of the present Democratic administration, you should vote for Russell. His defeat would be heralded throughout the land as Georgia's repudiation of Roosevelt and the Democratic party. If you want to bring about that result, vote for Talmadge. There is no more bitter enemy of Roosevelt in America today.³⁵

Senator George offered similar reasons for supporting Russell. The senior senator argued, "I can't see how any Georgia farmer can fail to realize that...Roosevelt has been the greatest friend of southern agriculture since the War between the States."³⁶ In parallel fashion with the press, prominent politicians lauded the New Deal. A consensus existed that a vote for Talmadge was incompatible with a vote for Roosevelt in the presidential primary. The men possessed diametrically opposed ideological beliefs. The senatorial election would confirm what path the citizens of Georgia wished to support. That path appeared as if it were a wholehearted endorsement for the Roosevelt administration and the New Deal.

The Decline of the New Deal: The Seventy-Fifth Congress

Given his defense of the New Deal during the Russell-Talmadge campaign, one would have expected Senator George to support the administration during the Seventy-Fifth Congress. The Atlanta Constitution's depicted the senior senator in 1936 as "a staunch supporter of the President, and a leader in New Deal activities in the senate."³⁷ At least on the surface, George intervened in the 1936 contest because he believed Talmadge posed a threat to the New Deal reforms that had proven so beneficial to Georgia. George supported Russell in the 1936 contest because, "No one with decency would wipe out what Roosevelt has done. Every Georgian has

³⁵ The Atlanta Constitution, September 9, 1936; "Democracy at Stake".

³⁶ Anderson, The Wild Man From Sugar Creek, 159.

³⁷ The Atlanta Constitution, September 6, 1936; "Fort Valley Address Planned by George".

reason to remain loyal to President Roosevelt and the New Deal.”³⁸ Given such statements, one would expect to find George as an ardent New Deal supporter between 1936 and 1938.

Contrary to expectations, even prior to the 1936 senatorial contest, in which he used support of the New Deal as basis for his endorsement of Russell for another six-year term, George had expressed opposition to the president and some New Deal initiatives. According to Allan Michie and Frank Ryhlick, “Walter George opposed Franklin D. Roosevelt as early as the Chicago convention of 1932, but he had no opportunity to express himself. Personally, there is between the two men a mutual respect common to men of learning. Politically, they have never spoken the same language.”³⁹ James Patterson discusses the progression of George’s policy opposition, “By the end of the 1935 session, George was unenthusiastic about the New Deal. He would support it when his careful mind allowed him to do so, but no longer would he do so out of sympathy or party loyalty.”⁴⁰

Patterson contends that early opposition was in large part due to his support of conservative business interests. Throughout his presidency, Roosevelt experienced strained relations with the business community. FDR even went so far as to indict them for the economic downturn beginning in mid-1937.⁴¹ George opposed New Deal proposals deemed adverse to business interests such as the utilities “death tax” clause and the wealth tax.⁴² Nevertheless, more often than not, Georgia’s senior senator had chosen to side with the president and support his policies. Since 1933, George had voted for thirty-four Roosevelt bills in the senate while only opposing ten. The senior senator had supported noteworthy legislation such as the

³⁸ Anderson, The Wild Man From Sugar Creek, 159.

³⁹ Michie, Allan A. and Frank Ryhlick. Dixie Demagogues. (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1939), 189.

⁴⁰ Patterson, Congressional Conservatism and The New Deal, 45.

⁴¹ Kennedy, Freedom From Fear, 352.

⁴² Patterson, Congressional Conservatism and The New Deal, 45.

Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) passed in 1933 and the Social Security Act in 1935.⁴³ Thus, while displaying some opposition to the New Deal, George remained highly respected and viewed as a true statesman by most state politicians and eligible voters.⁴⁴ Based on his New Deal defense during the Russell-Talmadge contest, one should have expected George's continued cooperation and support for most presidential initiatives in the Seventy-Fifth Congress.

The 1936 results left many within Congress convinced that the American public endorsed the president's program. Public surveys in the aftermath of the 1936 elections appeared to confirm that a mandate for the New Deal did exist. A Gallup Poll conducted in March 1937, about a month following FDR's second inaugural, revealed that over sixty-five percent of Americans would still vote for the president. The national chief executive's popularity was even greater in the South, as seventy-nine percent of respondents stated their support.⁴⁵ Thus, as the Seventy-Fifth congressional session opened it appeared as if only a severe reduction in FDR's popularity would prevent the continuation and expansion of the New Deal. If he continued to operate as he had during his first term, then a significant drop in his popularity seemed unlikely. After experiencing the calamities of the Hoover presidency, Americans had arrived at the conclusion that the federal government did indeed have a role in ensuring a decent standard of living for its citizenry. Americans were willing to tolerate a broad expansion of the federal government's powers. Thus, the administration should have expected congressional support in pressing forward with its legislative agenda.

Since FDR's inauguration, southern conservatives such as Carter Glass, Harry F. Byrd, and Josiah Bailey had offered stiff resistance to New Deal initiatives. James Patterson

⁴³ Zeigler, "Senator Walter George's 1938 Campaign", 333.

⁴⁴ Anderson, The Wild Man From Sugar Creek, 169-170.

1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions.

2. It is essential to ensure that all entries are supported by appropriate documentation and receipts.

3. Regular reconciliation of accounts is necessary to identify any discrepancies or errors in a timely manner.

4. The second part of the document outlines the procedures for handling customer inquiries and complaints.

5. All staff members should be trained to provide a high level of customer service and to resolve issues effectively.

6. It is important to maintain a positive attitude and to listen carefully to the customer's concerns.

7. The third part of the document details the process for managing inventory and stock levels.

8. Regular audits should be conducted to ensure that inventory records are accurate and up-to-date.

9. Proper storage and handling of goods are crucial to maintaining their quality and value.

10. The fourth part of the document describes the methods for analyzing financial performance and trends.

11. Key performance indicators (KPIs) should be identified and tracked to measure the success of the business.

12. Regular reporting and analysis are necessary to make informed decisions and adjust strategies as needed.

13. The fifth part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate financial statements.

14. All financial transactions should be recorded accurately and in a timely manner.

15. The sixth part of the document outlines the procedures for handling payroll and employee benefits.

16. It is essential to ensure that all payroll calculations are accurate and that benefits are administered correctly.

17. The seventh part of the document describes the process for managing contracts and legal agreements.

18. All contracts should be reviewed carefully and signed by the appropriate personnel.

19. The eighth part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate tax records.

20. It is essential to ensure that all tax obligations are met and that records are kept for the required period.

21. The ninth part of the document outlines the procedures for handling insurance claims and policies.

22. It is important to understand the terms and conditions of all insurance policies and to report claims promptly.

23. The tenth part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all business activities.

categorizes these 'irreconcilables' as "Opposed to heavy government spending, fearful of the spread of federal bureaucracy, loud in defense of states' rights and individual liberty."⁴⁶ This group, however, lacked the numbers to prevent most of the New Deal reform package from passing Congress.⁴⁷ They failed to mount a challenge to the historic Hundred Days legislation or later proposals such as the Social Security Act. Unfortunately, in their path as the Seventy-Fifth Congress commenced in 1937 stood a popular chief executive with an impressive mandate for his agenda. As they had during the past four years, congressional conservatives prepared themselves to execute the people's will and reluctantly support the New Deal. Patterson suggests, "Conservative prospects had never looked so bleak."⁴⁸ As long as they worked within the traditional framework and consulted congressional leaders prior to launching policy initiatives, the administration could expect Congress to pass most proposals.

Unfortunately for the second-term president and those who favored a continuation of the New Deal, a conservative coalition emerged within Congress that erected barrier upon barrier in attempts to thwart presidential initiatives. Patterson argues that this conservative coalition arose in part as a response to the perceived liberalization of the New Deal.⁴⁹ Liberalization in legislation included the introduction of such bills as a controversial anti-lynching proposal, numerous pieces of labor-friendly initiatives, and a wages and hours bill. While generating great opposition in Congress, the president's endorsement of such bills would not likely have created enough dissent to produce a formidable coalition against the president. Congressional members would have hesitated to challenge a presidential administration that the American public had just overwhelmingly endorsed. However, the public's negative reaction to Roosevelt's attempts to

⁴⁵ Gallup, The Gallup Poll, 51.

⁴⁶ Patterson, Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal, 13.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

enlarge the Supreme Court provided reluctant congressional members with an opportunity to challenge the president's policies.

FDR's Court Plan and the Rise of Congressional Resistance

While achieving great legislative successes during his first four years in the presidency, Roosevelt experienced far greater difficulty in convincing the third branch of government of the need for radical experimentation and the expansion of federal authority. During his first term the un-elected Supreme Court invalidated several New Deal proposals. The administration's prized National Recovery Administration (NRA) and Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) were among the victims.⁵⁰ Pulitzer Prize winning historian David M. Kennedy argues that as Roosevelt began his second term he was deeply troubled by the prospect that the Supreme Court might invalidate the entire New Deal reform package.⁵¹ Roosevelt discussed his frustration in his public papers, "The executive and legislative branches of the government had gone into action immediately in 1933. But they soon found that, athwart the path of progress along which they were moving, a majority of the Supreme Court of the United States was erecting a barrier which it was impossible to climb over, under, or around."⁵² Frustrated with judicial setbacks and fearing for his legislative accomplishments that Americans endorsed, FDR undertook an aggressive step that, if adopted, would have potentially altered the federal government's balance of power. The president's plan called for the addition of a new justice for every current one over the age of seventy that refused to retire.⁵³ This would allow Roosevelt to appoint men sympathetic to the New Deal. Thus, on February 5, 1937, the president announced his intention

⁴⁹ Ibid, vii.

⁵⁰ Kennedy, Freedom From Fear, 324.

⁵¹ Ibid, 324-325.

⁵² Rosenman, Samuel I., Ed. The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt. 1937 Vol., The Constitution Prevails, L.

⁵³ Kennedy, Freedom From Fear, 325.

to expand the membership of the Supreme Court with the 1937 Reorganization of the Judicial Branch of the Government Act, or more commonly known as the Court plan.

Roosevelt and his advisers believed that the public would endorse such a measure given his impressive 1936 re-election triumph.⁵⁴ They reasoned that Americans had voted for Roosevelt in 1936 because they supported his legislative agenda. The Supreme Court was simply an unrepresentative body operating against the will of the people. To the administration's surprise, however, the Court plan did not receive broad based support. Kennedy espouses, "From the moment of its unveiling, his Court plan stirred a nest of furies whose destructive power swiftly swelled to awesome proportions, well beyond the president's ability to control."⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the president persevered and attempted to persuade the American public to support the plan during a Fireside Chat on March 9, 1937 by invoking the government's futility in coping with the severe economic conditions during the Hoover presidency.

The American people have learned from the depression. For in the last three national elections an overwhelming majority of them voted a mandate that the Congress and the President begin the task of providing the protection—not after long years of debate, but now. The Courts, however, have cast doubts on the ability of the elected Congress to protect us against catastrophe by meeting squarely our modern social and economic conditions.⁵⁶ Roosevelt's message was simple: an un-elected body should not have the powers to invalidate legislation that the public has endorsed through democratically held elections. Unfortunately for the administration, the American public and the previously cooperative Congress were unwilling to subscribe to his seemingly logical reasoning.

Congressional critics quickly emerged to denounce the president's plan. Some criticism the administration expected. Senator Carter Glass (D-VA) illustrated his opposition during a

⁵⁴ Patterson, Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal, 85.

⁵⁵ Kennedy, Freedom From Fear, 331.

⁵⁶ Rosenman, Samuel I., Ed. The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt. 1937 Vol., The Constitution Prevails, 123.

Senate debate, “This infuriated propagandist for degrading the Supreme Court practically proposes another tragic era of reconstruction for the South.”⁵⁷ Given the stance he displayed toward the New Deal since FDR’s first term, Glass’ opposition to the Court plan likely surprised very few. According to Patterson, “To southern irreconcilables such as Bailey and Glass the Court plan sought not only to destroy the last bulwark against the New Deal but it was also the first step toward the destruction of white supremacy.”⁵⁸ As Roosevelt viewed the Court’s actions during his first term with utter distaste, the irreconcilables found solace in the invalidation of New Deal proposals they depicted as a threat to their society. Packing the Court with New Deal sympathizers would eliminate what Patterson depicted as “the last bulwark” against an intrusive federal government. Thus, these administration opponents were willing to go to great lengths to defeat the plan.

The intransigence others displayed, however, caught the administration off-guard. For varying reasons, several usually reliable senators abandoned the president in this particular debate. Kennedy argues that the Court plan “opened Roosevelt to charges of seeking ‘dictatorship’ by weakening other branches of government and aggrandizing the power of the presidency.”⁵⁹ Patterson contends, “Perhaps no presidential message has excited such an immediate and enraged outcry.”⁶⁰ The Executive Reorganization Bill introduced later that year, designed to increase the size of the executive branch to manage the growing federal bureaucracy, exasperated this criticism.⁶¹ Roosevelt and his advisers again believed that such a proposal would enjoy widespread public support, thus resisting a potential compromise.⁶² Reform was needed to address the expanded federal bureaucracy that would implement the policies designed

⁵⁷ Freidel, Frank. *F.D.R. and the South*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 93.

⁵⁸ Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal*, 99.

⁵⁹ Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*, 332.

⁶⁰ Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal*, 86.

to alleviate “a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished.”⁶³ Clearly, the American people supported the president and had elected overwhelming Democratic majorities in both congressional houses to implement his agenda. Public opinion surveys, however, revealed that many held great reservations. For instance, a Gallup survey on February 28, 1937 revealed that only forty-seven percent supported the initiative.⁶⁴ With little popular support, recalcitrant congressional members expressed little hesitation in denouncing the proposal. The president’s proposal encountered great resistance and demonstrated that in no way did he enjoy the privilege of *carte blanche* in dealing with Congress.

Scholars of the Roosevelt presidency agree that the Court plan had everlasting effects on the president’s relationship with Congress. Patterson contends that the plan “undermined Roosevelt’s powerful senatorial coalition,” and helped ferment a conservative coalition that stymied future legislative proposals.⁶⁵ Kennedy argues, “The struggle had inflicted such grievous political wounds on the president that the New Deal’s political momentum was exhausted by mid-1937.”⁶⁶ James Farley, Chairman of the Democratic National Committee and an FDR confidant, stated that it was the president’s worst defeat since his run for the vice presidency in 1920.⁶⁷ Unfortunately for the administration, this would not be his last legislative defeat, as Congress expressed greater reservation before passing presidential initiatives. Walter George is an ideal candidate to illustrate this increased intransigence to the presidential agenda.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 217.

⁶² *Ibid*, 122.

⁶³ Rosenman, *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*. 1937 Vol., *The Constitution Prevails*, 5.

⁶⁴ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 50. “February 28, 1937: Supreme Court, Are you in favor of President Roosevelt’s proposal to reorganize the Supreme Court? Yes—47%, No—53%. South, Yes—53%, No—47%.”

⁶⁵ Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal*, 126.

⁶⁶ Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*, 337.

⁶⁷ Farley, James A. *Jim Farley’s Story: The Roosevelt Years*. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1948), 95.

During the Seventy-Fifth congressional session, 1937-1939, George's New Deal opposition, like many southern conservatives, became more pronounced. The senior senator voiced his opposition to several Roosevelt measures, including reorganization of the Supreme Court, the executive branch reorganization bill, and the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).⁶⁸ George joined other senators in adopting the conservative manifesto toward the conclusion of 1937.⁶⁹ Included in this declaration were calls for a balanced federal budget, reduction in federal taxes, and greater respect for states' rights. The senior senator was in fact one of the ten that participated in intense discussions held to draft the document.⁷⁰ The proclamation was based on the notion that it was time to cease government interference with private enterprise. Such conservatives believed that the New Deal had run its course and it was time to return to fiscal orthodoxy.⁷¹

While possible that George and others came to this conclusion during the Seventy-Fifth Congress, a far more plausible explanation is that the political context now permitted the senior senator to express his views. For the first time in his presidency, Roosevelt did not find himself in a position where he could use his personal popularity to generate congressional acquiescence of his policies. Albeit slightly, the Court plan controversy had undercut the president's popularity, as public opinion polls indeed revealed a decline in popularity for the seemingly immune chief executive in the months following its introduction. Throughout 1937 Gallup conducted a series of surveys asking voters if they favored "President Roosevelt's proposal to reorganize the Supreme Court?"⁷² Nationally, by the slimmest of margins, survey participants consistently responded that they opposed the measure. Forty-seven percent responded favorably

⁶⁸ The Atlanta Constitution, April 1, 1938; "'Not Candidate' Now for Any Office, Rivers says After Seeing President".

⁶⁹ Patterson, 262-264.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 201.

whereas fifty-three percent expressed opposition. Southern respondents, however, consistently favored the proposal, but by small margins, fifty-three percent to forty-seven percent.⁷³

Nevertheless, this is a far cry from the eighty-two percent of national respondents that favored the Civilian Conservation Corps only a year earlier.⁷⁴ Thus, less public support for his initiatives invited greater opposition from congressional members.

Over about the same period, however, Gallup conducted a second polling question on multiple occasions that suggests the New Deal as a whole continued to remain popular in the South even as its elected officials offered increased opposition to the president's legislative program. The survey question was as follows: "Democrats were asked: If President Roosevelt is not a candidate for reelection in 1940, would you prefer a conservative type of candidate or a 'New Dealer'?"⁷⁵ The question was first asked in June 1937, and again in January 1938. On the first occasion national results revealed two out of every three favored a New Dealer, while the remaining respondents voiced their support for a more conservative candidate. Similarly, sixty-eight percent of southern respondents answered a New Dealer, while thirty-two percent supporting a conservative candidate.⁷⁶ The January survey, however, revealed that nationally only sixty-three percent favored a New Dealer, while in the South only fifty-five percent favored

⁷¹ Ibid. 204-205.

⁷² Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 50.

⁷³ Ibid, 50, 54, 57. "March 28, 1937, Supreme Court: Are you in favor of President Roosevelt's proposal to reorganize the Supreme Court? Yes—48%, No—52%. South, Yes—54%, No—46%." "May 2, 1937, Supreme Court: Should Congress pass the President's Supreme Court plan? Yes—47%, No—53%. South, Yes—53%, No—47%."

⁷⁴ Ibid, 27. "July 1, 1936, Civilian Conservation Corps: Are you in favor of continuing the C.C.C. camps? Yes—82%, No—18%."

⁷⁵ Ibid, 64, 88. "July 25, 1937, Democratic Party: Democrats were asked: If President Roosevelt is not a candidate for reelection in 1940, would you prefer a conservative type of candidate or a 'New Dealer'? New Dealer—67%, Conservative—33%. South, New Dealer—68%, Conservative—23%." "February 6, 1938, Democratic Presidential Candidates: Democrats were asked: If President Roosevelt is not a candidate for reelection in 1940, would you prefer a conservative type or a 'New Dealer'? New Dealer—63%, Conservative—37%. South, New Dealer—55%, Conservative—45%."

⁷⁶ Ibid, 64.

a New Dealer.⁷⁷ Although still favoring the New Dealer type, Americans, and more importantly, southerners were less willing to support a candidate who shared views similar to those of Roosevelt. This subtle decrease in popularity presented congressional members with an opportunity to oppose the chief executive on a more frequent basis. Thus, as 1938 mid-term elections drew nearer, more Americans were becoming less enthusiastic about the New Deal.

Many would likely conclude that the administration lost its mandate because of the legislation it had proposed during the Seventy-Fifth Congress. Most notable was the Court plan. The Gallup poll results, however, suggest that the New Deal maintained strong support following the legislation's defeat in mid-1937. The June 1937 survey revealed that most southerners favored a New Dealer for the presidency in 1940. In addition to the unpopular Court plan another force or series of forces was also at work that helped undermine the administration's popularity and its mandate from the 1936 election. The most viable candidate is the economic recession that commenced in mid-1937.

The economic recession, often referred to as the Roosevelt Recession, likely began in earnest in the Summer of 1937, but the administration paid little heed to it until a cabinet meeting in November. At that gathering, Secretary of the Treasury Morgenthau and Postmaster General Farley pressed Roosevelt that action was needed to confront the economic downturn. They stressed that improved relations with American business was the most necessary course.⁷⁸ Others measures they insisted upon included a balanced federal budget. Farley recalls the president resisting this advice; instead claiming a Wall Street conspiracy against him was responsible:

And I know who's responsible for the situation. Business, particularly the banking industry, has ganged up on me. They are trying to use this recession to

⁷⁷ Ibid, 88.

⁷⁸ Kennedy, Freedom From Fear, 351-352.

force me to let up on some of my programs. They want to get back the control they had in the past, to get back what they feel is theirs. They want to increase the power of wealth without government restriction in the future. There is no doubt what they want, although they won't admit it and they are taking it out on the present situation to put over their own ends.⁷⁹

Such presidential sentiment inspired fervent New Dealers to blame the government for the

recession. They cited changes in fiscal and monetary policy as hindering economic growth.⁸⁰

Whatever or whomever was responsible for the austere economic conditions, the president could not refute that the country had stumbled into a recession. This downturn, in addition to unpopular legislative initiatives, is an ideal candidate for helping to explain the national Democratic party's hardships in the 1938 elections. The economic downturn further reduced the prestige of the New Deal. For the first time since Roosevelt's inauguration, the economy regressed. The president could no longer gloat over how the New Deal had increased prosperity. Instead he had to prepare himself to receive blame similar to what Hoover had received in the not so distant past. With the economy in distress, the president lost much of his luster and acclaim.

Thus, a combination of controversial legislation, the emergence of a conservative coalition within Congress, an exaggerated mandate, and a struggling economy appear responsible for producing a far less favorable context for FDR in 1938. Despite great congressional and popular opposition to his Court plan and the economic recession, the president still remained personally popular at the conclusion of 1937, as sixty-two percent of Americans responded favorably when asked about Roosevelt's performance. Similar to earlier surveys, the president enjoyed overwhelming support in the South, as three-quarters of citizens responded favorably.⁸¹ Thus, the American public as a whole and the southern citizenry continued to

⁷⁹ Farley, *Jim Farley's Story*, 106.

⁸⁰ Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*, 355.

⁸¹ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 83.

express support for the president even as his legislative agenda experienced setbacks within the United States Congress. The new political context would no doubt play an important role in shaping the upcoming congressional elections. Nowhere was this more apparent than in his intervention into the 1938 Georgia Democratic Senatorial primary.

The 1938 Georgia Democratic Senatorial Primary

As had been the case in 1936, Georgia proved once again a political battlefield featuring New Deal reformism and southern conservatism. As aforementioned, scholars largely attribute Richard Russell's 1936 senatorial election victory to Walter George's endorsement and the stressing of New Deal reformism versus southern conservatism. This result, coupled with Ed Rivers' gubernatorial victory, led most political observers to conclude that Georgia was firmly in the New Deal camp. However, less than two years later the New Deal consensus within Georgia appeared as if it were withering away. National issues discussed earlier had seeped their way into state politics. As was commonplace in most of the nation, FDR's popularity suffered in Georgia. Although remaining well above fifty percent, the popularity drop is significant because most Georgians expressed Democratic sympathies. As Roosevelt's popularity dropped and his proposals became more controversial, prominent Georgian politicians were on more occasions choosing to challenge the president. First and foremost on that list was the same man who had vibrantly defended the New Deal two years earlier. Coincidentally, he also stood for reelection to the United States Senate in 1938. That man was Senator Walter F. George.

Although George enjoyed broad-based support as 1938 began, two politicians expressed some interest in challenging the incumbent senator. Roosevelt had grown frustrated with George's opposition to many of his policies. A second was the incumbent governor, Ed Rivers. Rivers' enthusiastic support for the New Deal put him at odds with the increasingly intransigent

senator, and made him an attractive possibility to unseat George if the senator continued to exhibit his increased opposition to the Roosevelt agenda. With rumors circulating concerning the September primary contest, the president descended on the state in late March to help celebrate the rehabilitation of Gainesville. A tornado had ravaged Gainesville two years prior, but the town had been reconstructed with federal assistance. Such a setting offered Roosevelt an opportunity both to praise the ways in which federal intervention could benefit local communities and apply pressure on the recalcitrant George. The president was not one to let such an opportunity to pass.

For several years FDR had considered Georgia his second home. It was there that the once promising politician suffering from polio had come seeking rehabilitation in Warm Springs. Georgians reciprocated his sentiments and eagerly welcomed the president back to his second home. As The Atlanta Constitution described the event, “It was a spontaneous outpouring of ‘good neighbors’, who wanted a genuine friend to know they feel gratitude and warm fellowship to one of the most human of all the men who have occupied the White House.”⁸² Governor Rivers was quick to praise the president for his ongoing efforts to assist the less fortunate.⁸³ Even George was quick to applaud Roosevelt’s accomplishments and offered praise; “Our great President has the happiness and welfare of every person of the nation at heart than any other leader in the land before him. He is the greatest leader among English speaking people at this hour anywhere on earth.”⁸⁴ Following such praise-laden introductions, the president went on to laud the Gainesville citizenry for coming together to help rebuild their town.

While most expected such words, many were caught off-guard as Roosevelt attempted to use the speech to justify his position on wage and hours legislation and criticize those whom he

⁸² The Atlanta Constitution, March 24, 1938; “Self-Evident Truth”.

⁸³ The Atlanta Constitution, March 24, 1938; “Chief Executive Hits Selfishness, ‘Feudal System’”.

perceived stood in his way. Roosevelt clearly did not journey to Gainesville just to praise the town's citizenry for rebuilding the city. The president was quick to seize the opportunity in demonstrating how his New Deal programs could benefit the nation, and in particular the South. While most explicitly lobbying for the passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act, the speech also sought to indict those southerners whom the president believed were opponents to needed reform. Roosevelt claimed that certain individuals were interested in negating the progress achieved during the first five years of his presidency. Some were even interested in returning to a "feudal society". The president argued that increased wages served as a foundation that would prevent a return to destitution, "And let us well remember that buying power means many other kinds of better things—better schools, better health, better hospitals, better highways. These things will not come to us in the south if we oppose progress—if we believe in our hearts that the feudal system is still the best system."⁸⁵ Roosevelt declared that forces existed that did indeed desire a return to the past, but the nation could and would not allow this to happen; "One thing is certain—we are not going back to the old days. We are going forward to better days. We are calling for co-operation all along the line and the co-operation is increasing because more and more people are coming to understand that abuses of the past which have been successfully eradicated are not going to be restored."⁸⁶

The president's speech posed several more questions than it answered. What did FDR mean when he said that some were willing to witness and even facilitate a return to a "feudal society?" A reasonable guess was that the president was warning of a return to the age of laissez-faire conservatism and a reserved role for the federal government. If so, what individuals desired this return? Certainly, if he were referring to anyone in Georgia it must have

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ The Atlanta Constitution, March 24 1938; "Text of Roosevelt's Address at Gainesville".

been former governor Talmadge. Or was the president directing his comments toward another prominent politician? Although unlikely to be desiring a return to the past and recreation of a “feudal society”, Walter George was likely the politician FDR was indicting. The senior senator was on record as opposing the Fair Labor Standards Act.⁸⁷ Roosevelt was no doubt looking for cooperation from the man who introduced him that day, Walter George. During the Seventy-Fifth congressional session, Georgia’s senior senator had chosen not to cooperate with the president on several occasions. Most noteworthy was his opposition to the Court plan, executive reorganization, and wage and hours legislation. The question remained: Was such support coming, and if not, would the president take action to get someone who would?

Although increasingly in disagreement with Roosevelt’s agenda, George’s reelection appeared a foregone conclusion. His increased opposition seemed justified, with less public support for FDR in Georgia. In addition, what rational politician would believe he could unseat the popular George? As events unfolded, however, many politicians came to believe that was indeed a possibility. Foremost among this group was the President of the United States.

Correspondence and events prior to FDR’s Gainesville address suggest that the president did not wish to see George returned to the Senate for the next congressional session. With opposition to the 1935 public utilities holding company bill, the administration’s court proposal, the executive reorganization bill, and the wages and hours bill, the senior senator had become in the administration’s eyes an opponent of the New Deal.⁸⁸ According to his personal confidant and most trusted advisor, James Farley, the president so desired to see George defeated that he was willing to endorse even his tenant farmer.⁸⁹ Thus, Roosevelt instructed New Deal

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ The New York Times, August 12, 1938; “Yes-Men Wanted”.

⁸⁸ Shannon, J.B., “Presidential Politics in the South—1938, II”, 278-279.

⁸⁹ Farley, Jim Farley’s Story: The Roosevelt Years, 133.

sympathizers within Georgia to find a candidate to replace the recalcitrant George.⁹⁰ The president summed up this need to defeat the obstructionist George in a conversation with the treasurer of the national Democratic party, “It’s as simple as this. Senator George’s position in the Senate is such that anything he advocates, you can count on at least forty members going with him. I can’t pass legislation without him and I cannot depend on him being with us. We’ve got to get somebody in there who’ll think our way. I want you to talk to our friends in Georgia and get their support in beating George.”⁹¹ This, however, would likely prove a difficult task given George’s great popularity within the state. Farley attempted to dissuade the president,

Boss, I think you’re foolish. I don’t think George can be beaten. The only man who could possibly defeat George would be Governor E.D. Rivers and I don’t think he would run. And, if he did, he might do you more harm than good. Rivers’ nomination would raise the Klan issue and I don’t think you want to go through that again so soon.⁹² Don’t misunderstand me; he’s a fine fellow and a personal friend of mine, one for whom I have a genuine regard, but you must face the facts.⁹³

Despite this advice, the president remained committed to defeating someone he perceived as a rabid New Deal opponent. After contemplating the pro-New Deal governor Ed Rivers, the administration settled on federal district attorney Lawrence Camp.⁹⁴ While some Roosevelt advisers feared that outright support of Camp would ensure the election of former governor Talmadge, an even more hostile opponent to the New Deal than George, the president saw this as an ideal opportunity to increase support within the Senate and remove one of his most troublesome critics.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Anderson, *The Wild Man from Sugar Creek*, 173.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁹² Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*, 336. Farley was referring to the uproar that resulted from Senator Hugo Black’s (D-AL) Supreme Court nomination in 1937 due to his past membership in the Ku Klux Klan. During his legislative tenure, Black demonstrated his commitment to the New Deal agenda. Hence, the president’s decision to appoint him to the previously intransigent Supreme Court.

⁹³ Farley, *Jim Farley’s Story: The Roosevelt Years*, 122.

⁹⁴ Shannon, “Presidential Politics in the South—1938, II”, 278-279.

⁹⁵ Anderson, *The Wild Man From Sugar Creek*, 174-175.

Although this was the administration's position on George, its official stance was not revealed until later on in the year. Throughout the spring and summer speculation intensified as to whether the president would take an active role in this contest. In earlier contests, such as the Kentucky primary, the president was uninhibited in declaring his support for candidates whom he believed would be most inclined to support his initiatives. In late June, Roosevelt declared that as head of the Democratic party he reserved a right to intervene in his party's primaries. The Atlanta Constitution summarized the president's intent and rationale:

President Roosevelt strongly indicated tonight that he would personally take up the election fight for congressional candidates who support his administration... Vigorously, he claimed the right, as head of the Democratic party, to intervene in party primaries on behalf of candidates who support 'the definitely liberal declaration of principles' embodied in the party's 1936 platform.⁹⁶

Roosevelt would spend the summer traveling across the nation stumping for candidates most likely to support his legislative agenda. This journey would culminate in Barnesville, Georgia on August 11, 1938.

The president's speaking engagement on August 11 was ostensibly scheduled so he could help dedicate a Rural Electrification Project developed with New Deal funds.⁹⁷ Most, however, were not fooled by this false pretense. Political insiders believed that Roosevelt would use his Barnesville speech to make his preferences known in the Georgia contest. Most were expecting some sort of endorsement to be forthcoming for Camp. The Atlanta Constitution foreshadowed later developments, "Circumstances under which an invitation to speak August 11 at Barnesville, Ga., was extended and accepted at the White House left little doubt Senator George is marked for punitive action for failure to come up to New Deal standards of liberalism."⁹⁸ Paradoxically, on the same day the Atlanta paper ran a story suggesting that if the president used

⁹⁶ The Atlanta Constitution, June 25, 1938; "Claims His Right To Enter Battle As Head of Party".

⁹⁷ Zeigler, "Senator Walter George's 1938 Campaign", 340.

the same logic as he had in supporting Alben Barkley in his reelection contest in Kentucky, then George would be his man. The Constitution reasoned, “Political leaders believe the President will find it difficult to explain why Kentucky should return a veteran senator and why Georgia should send a very ‘junior senator’ to replace the veteran Walter F. George.”⁹⁹ Thus, as late as early August doubt still existed as to whether the president would directly intervene in the contest or tacitly support George’s defeat. Nevertheless, a general consensus existed that FDR did not wish to see George returned. It was now just a question of whether he would officially make that known.

That question was answered on August 10, 1938, at the much-anticipated Barnesville event. The Valdosta Daily Times explained a seemingly foregone conclusion: “...there is a feeling of uncertainty and apprehension on the part of many Georgians on the occasion of this latest visit. This feeling is brought about by the possibility that President Roosevelt will endeavor to take a hand in the senatorial race in Georgia. Supporters of Lawrence Camp are hopeful that President Roosevelt will give their candidate a pat on the back”.¹⁰⁰ The president did not disappoint the Camp supporters as he officially endorsed their candidate.

Most Georgians, however, were taken aback at the enthusiasm the president displayed in announcing his support for the Camp candidacy and the vicious attack he directed at the senior senator. Not only did the national chief executive praise Camp as worthy of election, he assailed George for his opposition to New Deal policies, portrayed him as a political obstructionist, and even questioned his loyalty to the Democratic party. According to Allan Michie and Frank

⁹⁸ The Atlanta Constitution, July 9, 1938; “Personal Crusade in South May Be Aim of Roosevelt”.

⁹⁹ The Atlanta Constitution, July 9, 1938; “Roosevelt’s Reasons for Supporting Barkley Apply With Equal Logic to Senator George”.

¹⁰⁰ The Valdosta Daily Times, August 10, 1938; “The President’s Visit”.

Ryhlick, FDR castigated George as a demagogue while explaining two types of leadership existed that threatened the continuation of economic and social progress¹⁰¹:

The first type of political leadership which is dangerous to progress is represented by the man who harps on one or two remedies or proposals and claims that these one or two remedies will cure our ills. The other is represented by the man who says that he is in favor of progress but whose record shows that he hinders or hampers new measures. He tells his friends that he does not like this, that, or the other detail, and, at the same time, he utterly fails to offer a substitute that is practical and worthwhile.¹⁰²

One can deduce that the president was referring to Talmadge in the former definition of leadership. Later, the chief executive ridiculed the former governor's candidacy by saying that he has read "so many of his panaceas that I am very certain in my own mind that his election would contribute little to practical government."¹⁰³ The latter "political leadership which is dangerous to progress" is no doubt a direct indictment of George for presenting himself as a liberal, when in fact he had become according to the president an ardent opponent of many New Deal proposals. FDR had no desire to see such an individual returned to serve in the Seventy-Sixth Congress.

The president went on to challenge George's devotion to his legislative agenda. The president portrayed the senior senator as one who "too often...has listened to the dictatorship of the small minority of individuals and corporations who oppose the objectives themselves."¹⁰⁴ FDR went on to further challenge George's support of his initiatives, "Let me make clear that he is, and I hope always will be, my personal friend. He is beyond question a gentleman and a scholar—but so also are other gentlemen for whom I have an affectionate regard but with whom I differ heartily and sincerely on the principles and policies of how the government of the United

¹⁰¹ Michie, Allan A. and Frank Ryhlick, *Dixie Demagogues*, 6.

¹⁰² Rosenman, Samuel I. *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 1938 Vol., *The Continuing Struggle for Liberalism*, 465.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 470.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 468.

States ought to be run.”¹⁰⁵ Roosevelt did not practice any restraint in declaring that George was an obstructionist in the U.S. Senate and one who had played an important role in preventing the passage of his initiatives.

While stinging indictments, they are mild in comparison to the president’s questioning of the senior senator’s party loyalty. As recent Georgia political history had displayed, serious accusations questioning a candidate’s loyalty to the Democratic party often meant his demise. Governor Talmadge’s 1936 defeat by Richard Russell was largely due to the fact that the Russell campaign had convinced many voters that he was in fact a Republican. Little doubt exists that the acceptance of such rhetoric played an important role in the incumbent’s victory over the anti-administration governor. In a likewise fashion, Roosevelt questioned George’s allegiance to the Democratic party in that he had all too frequently failed to support either the president or the majority of Democrats within Congress. FDR viewed this as unacceptable:

To carry out my responsibility as President, it is clear that there should be cooperation between members of my own party and myself. That is one of the essentials of a party form of government. The test is not measured, in the case of any individual, by his every vote on every bill. The test lies rather in two questions: First, has the record of the candidate shown, while differing perhaps in details, a constant active fighting attitude in favor of the broad objectives of the party and of the government as they are constituted today, and secondly, does the candidate really, in his heart, believe in the objectives? I regret that in the case of my friend Senator George, I cannot answer either of these questions in the affirmative.¹⁰⁶

Thus, the president concluded that being a Democrat meant siding with him on most legislative issues.

This, coupled with other indictments questioning his political ideology and loyalty to the New Deal, verified that indeed the president was an ardent opponent of George. How would the senior senator respond to a man whom many southerners believed, and he even credited, as

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 469.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 469-470.

largely responsible for the restoration of their economic and social fortunes? George's response to the president following the conclusion of his remarks is indicative of how the senior senator would conduct the campaign, "Mr. President, I regret that you have taken this occasion to question my democracy and to attack my record. I want you to know that I accept the challenge."¹⁰⁷ Walter F. George was prepared to defend his record, define the contest in his terms, and in the process win a new six-year term to the U.S. Senate.

George wasted little time in counterattacking the presidential onslaught. In his speech on August 11, the president attempted to make the central issue in the election George's apparent lack of support for administration initiatives. In essence, the election would serve as a referendum on the New Deal. Based on his personal popularity within Georgia and the 1936 election results, FDR believed that its citizens would respond to his call to retire the recalcitrant senator and replace him with someone who would support his policies. Such logic seemed perfectly acceptable based on the polling results of the moment. For instance, a July 17 American Institute of Public Opinion survey revealed that sixty-seven percent of southerners would have supported the president if he were standing for election at that point in time.¹⁰⁸ One could make the logical inference that a similar result was likely if just Georgians were being polled. Furthermore, the poll revealed that FDR's greatest strength was in the South. For example, the president polled only fifty-four percent in his native Northeast.¹⁰⁹ If the president were to persuade citizens to follow his call and repudiate members of Congress, the South appeared as the ideal region.

¹⁰⁷ The Valdosta Times, August 13, 1938; "Senator Accepts F.D.R. Challenge, Plans Campaign".

¹⁰⁸ Gallup, The Gallup Poll, 111. "July 20, 1938, President Roosevelt's Voter Appeal: If Franklin Roosevelt were running for President today, would you vote for or against him? Middle Atlantic, For—54%, Against—46%; South, For—67%, Against—33%."

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 111.

Unfortunately for the president, the senior senator succeeded in redefining the election not as a referendum on his support for New Deal initiatives, but rather as a one on Roosevelt's intervention in Georgian affairs. George's personal response to Roosevelt following his Barnesville address was just a precursor of what was to come. On the following day the senior senator began his endeavor to refute the presidential indictment. First, George attempted to dismiss the president's claim that party members must always support the chief executive's position, "The Democratic party is not a one-man party, but a party for the great rank and file of American men and women who love justice, liberty, equal rights for all and special rights for none."¹¹⁰ On most occasions the senior senator supported presidential initiatives. The New York Times confirmed this in an editorial on August 12, which in great depth examined the senior senator's voting record:

It [The record] has been set forth here in some detail, because only by considering it in detail is it possible to realize how generally Mr. George has supported the purposes and methods of the Administration, in what comparatively few matters he has differed with it, and how great a degree of intellectual servitude the President now requires of his followers.¹¹¹

The president, not George, was the one interested in curbing legislative dissent, and thus fostering the strength of any accusations of creating of a dictatorship. The senior senator assumed the role of the individual fighting to preserve democracy in America as totalitarianism overwhelmed the European continent.

A few days later George expanded on this idea of occasionally needed party dissension in the contest-defining address at Waycross:

The Democratic party is not and cannot become a one-man party. It must allow freedom of opinion and speech if it is to remain a true liberal party. I am a Democrat. I fought the party's battles in congress and have fought the party's

¹¹⁰ The Valdosta Daily Times, August 13, 1938; "Senator Accepts F.D.R. Challenge Plans Campaign".

¹¹¹ The New York Times, August 12, 1938; "Yes-Men Wanted".

The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that every entry should be supported by a valid receipt or invoice. This not only helps in tracking expenses but also ensures compliance with tax regulations. The second part of the document provides a detailed breakdown of the company's financial performance over the last quarter. It includes a comparison of actual results against budgeted figures, highlighting areas of over and under performance. The third part of the document outlines the company's strategic goals for the upcoming year. It focuses on increasing operational efficiency, expanding market reach, and investing in research and development. The final part of the document provides a summary of the key findings and recommendations. It suggests that the company should continue to monitor its financial health closely and adjust its strategy as needed to stay on track with its long-term objectives.

battles upon the hustings; and now for 16 years I have with-held my hand in the political contest of the national business of my party.¹¹² George's remarks were no doubt an answer to Roosevelt's claim that he neither adhered to the core beliefs of the Democratic party nor did he believe in its objectives. Therefore, the president argued, George was not worthy of receiving the party's nomination. As the above evidence suggests, the senior senator wasted little time in responding to these accusations and reaffirming his loyalty to the Democratic party.

Having defended his record and allegiance to the Democratic party, the senior senator then attempted to redefine the election on his terms. The Waycross address four days after Roosevelt's stinging indictment illustrated George's attempt to transform the election into a referendum on whether Georgia's citizens would determine Georgian issues. George argued:

The issues now raised in this campaign overshadow the minor questions heretofore presented to the people of Georgia. The issues are: 1—The white Democrats of Georgia are capable of choosing their own representatives. 2—The character of our government demands each of the sovereign states to select its own representatives in the house and senate. 3—The federal power cannot be rightly used to elect and defeat any candidate in a sovereign state for any office solely in the keeping of the people of that state. 4—The executive and legislative powers were ordained as separate and independent, of each other. 5—The Democratic party is not, and cannot become a 1-man party. It must allow freedom of opinion and speech if it is to remain a true liberal party.¹¹³

The senior senator refrained almost entirely in the address from discussing his support for the New Deal reform package. Instead, he focused on Roosevelt's intervention in the contest. The evidence suggests that George had adopted a strategy that would discuss on very few occasions his opposition to specific New Deal initiatives. Instead, the senior senator pinned his hopes of nomination on demonstrating to voters that he would remain his own man and vote in the best interests of his constituents. No president, no matter how popular or of what party, was to dictate his voting behavior. In essence, George attempted to demonstrate that he was a defender of the

¹¹² The Atlanta Constitution, August 16, 1938; "Senator Certain He'll Win Despite 'Uneven Contest'".

constitutionally mandated separation of executive and legislative powers. The question remained, however, would the senior senator be successful in his endeavor to redefine the issues? The empirical evidence suggests that he was indeed.

Before focusing all our attention on the George—Roosevelt showdown, one must not forget that the senior senator was not running against the popular president. Between George and the all-important Democratic nomination stood two competent candidates, Eugene Talmadge and Lawrence Camp. The former governor was a legitimate contender for any office that he sought in Georgia. “The Wild Man from Sugar Creek” put forth proposals that might have very well resonated with voters. Such provisions included “free land for the unemployed, high protective tariffs¹¹⁴, and improvement and expansion of the Civilian Conservation Corps.”¹¹⁵ While supporting some administration initiatives, the former governor in general, as in his earlier years, maintained his general opposition to the New Deal. One area of concern was increased federal relief, “If the government keeps handling relief, manicuring ladies’ nails and giving relief people cars to ride around in, it will stifle religion in the country and all religion will just dry up. Let the communities take care of relief through their religious organizations”.¹¹⁶ At the root of this opposition was his belief that the New Deal would lead to an all-intrusive federal government that would eventually destroy white supremacy. Such sentiment was representative of the former governor’s general disposition. To attain election, Talmadge had simply

¹¹³ The Valdosta Times, August 16, 1938; “Senator Answers FDR Challenge In Militant Waycross Address; Declares He Is A True Democrat”.

¹¹⁴ The Savannah Morning News, September 9, 1938; “Coming Events Cast Their Shadow”. While southern interests traditionally opposed tariffs to assist northern industry against European goods, Talmadge argued, “These imports are starving American farmers, laborers and manufacturers.” Clearly, this was an appeal to his rural base supporters.

¹¹⁵ The Atlanta Constitution, May 20, 1938; “Talmadge Opens Senate Campaign”.

¹¹⁶ Bartley, Numan. The Creation of Modern Georgia. (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1990), 173.

formulated a campaign strategy to appeal to the downtrodden farmers' economic disposition and white supremacist sentiments.

The state's electoral system also had the potential to assist Talmadge in winning a ticket to Washington. Under the county unit system, rural counties disproportionately exerted influence over elections. V.O. Key explains the electoral system, "...it is an indirect system of nomination under which each county has a specified number of unit votes. Nominations are determined, not by popular votes, but by unit votes. The unit votes of a county go to the candidate with a popular plurality in the county."¹¹⁷ The county unit rule worked in Talmadge's favor due to his strong support in rural counties, and helped his family dominate Georgian politics for several years.¹¹⁸ Potentially, the former governor could lose the popular vote totals, and still emerge victorious. Thus, even following FDR's intervention Talmadge remained a legitimate threat to George's re-nomination efforts.

Federal Attorney Lawrence Camp also posed a threat to the 16-year senate veteran. In announcing his candidacy, Camp declared himself a solid supporter of the president and his legislative agenda. The Atlanta Constitution elaborated, "He pledged his support to the entire Roosevelt program, including the wage and hour bill, and declared that if elected he would compose any difference which arise between him and the president."¹¹⁹ The New Dealer also lashed out at George for opposing many of the president's programs and offering no solutions to alleviate the nation's suffering; "The national congress, of which Senator George was a part, failed to do anything to relieve terrible conditions (prior to Roosevelt's election). Senator Walter F. George came forward with not a single measure or suggestion to relieve his people in their

¹¹⁷ Key, Southern Politics in State and Nation, 119.

¹¹⁸ Cobb, "Not Gone, But Forgotten: Eugene Talmadge and The 1938 Purge Campaign", 197-198.

¹¹⁹ The Atlanta Constitution, June 5, 1938; "Camp Reaffirms Loyalty to F.D.R. In Opening Speech".

dire desire.”¹²⁰ This was the case, Camp contended, because George was beholden to big business interests, “The record of Senator George during his sixteen years of service in the Senate discloses that he has been the Senate leader of the forces of entrenched greed, big business and its millionaire owners of the country.”¹²¹ The federal attorney argued that the senior senator did not deserve a new term because he was “hostile to the President and to the masses of the people” that had overwhelmingly reelected him in 1936.¹²² Georgians deserved someone in Congress who would support the policies that would help alleviate their suffering. Roosevelt’s, Camp believed, offered the best hope to increased prosperity.

Although Camp was a solid supporter of the popular president, his candidacy was not taken seriously until the president formally endorsed him during his speech at Barnesville. Camp supporters believed that their candidate only stood a chance with a whole-hearted endorsement. That is indeed what the president delivered at the Barnesville event, “Therefore, accepting the request from many citizens of Georgia that I make my position clear, I have no hesitation in saying that if I were able to vote in the September primary in this State, I most assuredly would cast my vote for Lawrence Camp.”¹²³ With the popular chief executive’s all-out endorsement, Camp was without a doubt a legitimate contender.

With only a month remaining until the scheduled primary, the nomination appeared very much up for grabs. Many observers believed that the Georgia race was destined to be a close, hard-fought contest. The Atlanta Constitution concurred, and declared that Georgians were likely to experience “another hot summer” politically speaking.¹²⁴ Given the stature of the candidates in the field, why would one not assume a competitive contest? Declared candidates

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Zeigler, “Senator Walter George’s 1938 Campaign”, 340.

¹²² Ibid.

included a popular former governor with a strong following, a candidate sponsored by an overwhelmingly popular president, and a sixteen-year senate veteran who remained popular within the state. One should have expected a competitive contest.

As events unfolded, however, the outcome was never in doubt, as the senior senator succeeded in transforming the contest into a referendum not on his lack of support for the New Deal, but rather one on Roosevelt's intervention. Little doubt exists that George's Waycross speech played a major part in redefining the major issues. A survey of immediate response to Roosevelt's intervention and George's response indicated overwhelming subscription to the views the senator put forth. The Valdosta Daily Times accepted George's argument that members of the legislative branch reserve the right to question the judgment of the executive even if that branch is controlled by a member of his party: "He (George) has reserved the right to think for himself and to vote his honest and sincere convictions. Senator George is no coat-tail-grabber. He believes that the people of the state would have him represent them and their interests and not merely sit in the Senate and follow the crowd. Senator George is a Democrat and he will always be a Democrat."¹²⁵ Similar reactions appeared across the state, as with The Columbus Enquirer: "The Democrats of Georgia are quite capable of determining for themselves how to cast their votes. They will resent outside interference and will not be swayed from the course they deem right because of somebody else's expressed hope that a certain candidate will be nominated. They do not like the intimation that they are not capable of self-governing."¹²⁶ Finally, The Savannah Evening Press equated the president's action with a threat to the state's independence: "Georgians hate a dictatorship. They resent being told how they

¹²³ Rosenman, Samuel I. The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1938 Vol., The Continuing Struggle for Liberalism, 470.

¹²⁴ The Atlanta Constitution, June 2, 1938; "A Hot Summer Coming".

¹²⁵ The Valdosta Daily Times, August 11, 1938; "Ill-Advised Endorsement".

must vote for handpicked candidates. For more than a century Georgia has been politically independent. We know of no period in its history when it was more determined to emphasize this independence than it is during the present crisis it confronts.”¹²⁷

This survey indicates that the state’s press resented Roosevelt’s involvement in the contest. But one must question their representativeness of ordinary Georgians. Would they, too, adopt George’s definition of the issues, or would they side with the president they much adored? A brief inquiry reveals both a subscription to the senior senator’s views, and a rebuttal of the president’s actions.

As noted earlier, FDR’s popularity had begun falling following the defeat of his Court plan and as the nation entered an economic recession in late 1937. In an April 30, 1938 American Institute of Public Opinion survey the president’s popularity had dropped to its lowest level since early 1934.¹²⁸ While no doubt troubling to the administration, the results likely produced the greatest alarm about what they said about the South. As Gallup discussed: “Today’s Institute barometer shows that the drop in Roosevelt’s popularity covers all sections of the country. Most affected of all is the Democratic south, where Roosevelt polled 76 per cent of the major party vote in 1936. Today, the institute finds Roosevelt’s vote in the southern states averages 66 percent—or a drop of 10 points since election day.”¹²⁹ In his analysis, Gallup attempted to explain the drop in FDR’s popularity. The continued economic recession, less popular presidential proposals, and increased opposition in Congress were cited as possible explanations for the drop in popularity.¹³⁰ While interesting that the president was experiencing rising unpopularity across the nation, most important to this particular study is the fact that his

¹²⁶ The Valdosta Daily Times, August 12, 1938; “Georgia Editors Resent Interference of Roosevelt In State’s Own Primary”.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ The Atlanta Constitution, May 1, 1938; “Poll Shows F.D.R. Popularity Drops Sharpest in Four Years”.

support was most waning in the region in which he attempted to use his personal popularity to sway voters. Roosevelt's noticeably declined popularity should have warned administration officials that it might have been more difficult for the president to exert great influence on the primary contest. Unfortunately, no one appears to have successfully warned the president.

Although his popularity had fallen a significant amount within the region since his great triumph in 1936, the South continued to remain the president's strongest region. Perhaps this motivated and convinced the president that if he were to knock off a New Deal opponent with his popularity, then Georgia was his state. Less than a week following his outright endorsement of Camp and condemnation of George, however, an American Institute survey revealed that FDR's intervention had not turned the tide in favor of the district attorney. A September 4 survey indicated overwhelming support for the incumbent in the primary.¹³¹ A September 9 survey revealed little deviation from earlier results. Fifty-four percent of respondents answered the senior senator, while the remaining electorate split their vote between Camp and Talmadge. Thus, George appeared to be in the driver's seat as the contest headed towards Election Day.¹³²

As September 14 drew nearer all indications predicted a resounding victory for the senior senator and a great embarrassment for the president. An American Institute survey was conducted in the days leading up to the election and revealed in detail where each candidate received his support.¹³³ The results indicated that George was especially strong with those in the

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid, 117. "September 4, 1938, Georgia Senatorial Primary: Georgia Democrats were asked: Whom do you favor in the forthcoming primary, Walter George, Lawrence Camp, or Eugene Talmadge? George—52%, Camp—28%, Talmadge—20%."

¹³² Ibid. "September 9, 1938, Georgia Senatorial Primary: Georgia Democrats were asked: Whom do you favor for United States senator in the forthcoming primary, Walter George, Lawrence Camp, or Eugene Talmadge? George—52%, Camp—24%, Talmadge—24%."

¹³³ Ibid, 118. "September 13, 1938, Georgia Senatorial Primary—Final Poll: Georgia Democrats were asked: Whom do you favor for United States senator in the forthcoming primary? Walter George—46%, Eugene Talmadge—28%, Lawrence Camp—25%, William McRae—1%. By Income, Upper: George—71%, Talmadge—11%, Camp—17%, McRae—1%. Middle: George—54%, Talmadge—23%, Camp—22%, McRae—1%. Lower:

upper and middle-income brackets. Given his strong support of business interests, such an outcome did not come as a surprise. In addition, the senior senator garnered substantial majorities in the more urban counties, but also possessed majority support in the rural areas. This was especially key in that the contest would be determined by the rurally biased county unit system.¹³⁴ Such a system would under normal circumstances favor Talmadge, but the polling results revealed that the senior senator was able to offset these advantages. In previous elections the former governor's strength was among the poor and those living on farms. While still garnering plurality support among those groups, Talmadge's narrow margins were so small that they almost seemed to ensure the senator's re-nomination. Thus, the senior senator appeared to have limited this threat to his candidacy. Based on the results, the American Institute predicted, "A study of Senator George's strength by counties indicates that his vote in the convention will be about twice as large as the combined votes of his two principal opponents."¹³⁵ With apparently solid, overwhelming support, all George needed to do to secure victory was to ensure that his supporters got out and voted.

Election Day arrived with all interested parties expecting an overwhelming George victory. While impressive, George's triumph was less convincing than the American Institute surveys had predicted in the days leading up to the voters' decision. The senior senator failed to obtain a majority of popular votes cast, but received sixty percent of the all-important county unit

George—34%, Talmadge—36%, Camp—29%, McRae—1%. By Community Size, 10,000 and over: George—59%, Talmadge—12%, Camp—28%, McRae—1%. 2,500-10,000: George—64%, Talmadge—12%, Camp—23%, McRae—1%. Rural: George—54%, Talmadge—21%, Camp—25%, McRae—less than 1%. Farms: George—36%, Talmadge—43%, Camp—20%, McRae—1%.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 118. "Under Georgia primary law, candidates are nominated by county unit votes rather than by popular votes. Each county has from two to six votes in the nominating convention. There are 410 unit votes in all, and whoever receives a majority—206—wins.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

system vote.¹³⁶ Likely because of his always-motivated voter base and the rurally biased electoral system, Talmadge exceeded expectations and received about one-third of both the popular and county unit vote. Most alarming to the Roosevelt administration was the poor showing of their candidate, Lawrence Camp. The federal attorney received about one-quarter of the popular vote, but had a dismal performance in the county unit system vote. The president's man and "One Hundred Percent New Dealer" secured less than five percent of the vote that determined the nominee.¹³⁷ Senator George had secured the Democratic re-nomination, and for all intents and purposes had his ticket punched for a return trip to Washington.

Upon receiving these results, administration officials most likely began to question what had gone wrong in the contest. Did the New Deal message of reform and relief no longer have an audience in Georgia? To some observers the obvious answer must have been yes. Georgians had chosen to send back to the U.S. Senate a man who had become a frequent opponent of many presidential initiatives. The president had made his preferences clear a month earlier. Did the call fail to resonate with the voters? A further inquiry reveals that Georgians did comprehend the president's message and remained supportive of most of his initiatives. However, Georgians were unwilling to let a federal authority, no matter how popular, intervene in their affairs and tell them who to vote for. Senator George's, and not Roosevelt's message was the one that resonated with the voters.

The Role of Federal Interference in George's Victory

The 1938 congressional elections in general represented a fundamental departure from a previous regarded norm of limited executive involvement in party primaries. This is the issue

¹³⁶ Shannon, "Presidential Politics in the South—1938, II", 285. "Under the Georgia county unit system, Senator George, with 43.9% of the vote, obtained 59% or 242 of the 410 unit votes; Talmadge, with 32.1% of the popular vote, had 148 or 36.1% of the unit votes; and Camp, with 23.9% of the popular vote, accumulated a bare 4.9% of the unit votes."

that came to define most contests in which the president chose to intervene, most notably the Georgia race. The president firmly believed that the voters in 1936 had selected Democratic candidates because they supported the administration and its New Deal reform package. The preceding analysis confirms that that was probably an accurate assessment. Many congressional Democrats, the president argued, had failed on too many occasions to support the administration. Most noteworthy was opposition to his Court plan, executive reorganization, and minimum wage legislation. These congressional members were ignoring the mandate that the American people prescribed in the last national election. By stating his opinion, the president reasoned that the public would now know for certain what candidates were anti-administration, and thus not true Democrats. The voters would then defeat these candidates in their primary elections. This was at least what the president expected.

Without any other information few would likely contest Roosevelt's reasoning. In order for this line of reasoning to hold, however, we must assume that voters in 1936 had selected Democratic candidates because they supported the national administration. This appeared the case across the nation as Democratic candidates ran on their support for the New Deal. The gubernatorial and senatorial races in Georgia epitomized this campaign strategy. Thus, we should conclude that a mandate for the New Deal did exist, especially in Georgia. Nonetheless, less popular legislation, greater congressional resistance, and the recession that began in 1937 all played a role in diminishing Roosevelt's popularity and with it support for the New Deal. The president failed to realize this was the case as he pressed forward with his efforts to purge intransigent congressional members.

When formulating the notion to purge reluctant congressional members, the president failed to take into account information that suggested such efforts would result in disaster. James

¹³⁷ Ibid.

Farley comments that the president's notion of the Purge Campaign had first appeared immediately following the Court plan failure. While frustration cooled over this particular episode during the following months, the president continued to experience difficulty in obtaining support for his initiatives. This had helped commit Roosevelt to the Purge by January 1938.¹³⁸ The president's most trusted confidant cautioned against the move. He realized that the recession had undercut the administration's popularity and voters would resent outside interference in local and state affairs. The Democratic national chairman demurred, "It was my contention that it was perfectly proper for the people, in their wisdom, to punish those who had voted against him on the Court bill, wage and hour legislation, and the like; but quite another thing for the national organization to call for their defeat."¹³⁹ Farley recognized the potential for disaster and attempted to dissuade his boss. Nevertheless, the trusted confidant's efforts proved futile, as Roosevelt pressed forward in his effort to cleanse the party.

The president's decision to press forward is further surprising when one considers public opinion surveys. As early as September 1937, Gallup polls were being conducted asking voters if they favored Roosevelt intervening in contests to defeat Democratic candidates that had opposed his Supreme Court plan. The response was an overwhelming no, as only twenty-seven percent of respondents favored an active administration effort. That negativity was even more pronounced in the South, as only nineteen percent of respondents answered in the affirmative.¹⁴⁰ In July 1938 the situation remained bleak. Nationally only thirty-one percent favored the

¹³⁸ Farley, *Jim Farley's Story*, 120.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 121.

¹⁴⁰ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 70. "September 26, 1937. President Roosevelt and the Congressional Elections. Democrats were asked: Do you think the Administration should try to defeat the reelection of Democratic congressmen who opposed the Supreme Court plan? Yes—27%, No—73%. South: Yes—19%, No—81%."

administration launching concerted efforts to defeat recalcitrant congressional members.¹⁴¹ Lastly, Roosevelt should have seen the writing on the wall as his popularity had dropped a subtle, but important ten percentage points since the beginning of the year.¹⁴² Nonetheless, the president remained compelled to eliminate these obstructionists in his effort to create a truly liberalized Democratic party. The American people, however, remained reluctant in fulfilling the chief executive's desires in that they opposed his decision to assert his role in what they regarded as state affairs.

As discussed earlier, FDR's intervention was not limited to Georgia. From California to South Carolina the president sought to assist candidates who would support his agenda and work to defeat incumbents who had proven themselves hindrances. The Georgia contest, however, came to symbolize the Purge Campaign and the unprecedented federal intervention in state political primaries. While the president saw these elections as a referendum on his initiatives and an opportunity to reconfirm his 1936 mandate, an important issue in almost every contest was FDR's decision to intervene in the race. The Georgia contest is representative in that it demonstrated a national trend of apprehension towards the president's action. Studying local reaction to the contest reveals the concerns citizens expressed across the nation.

After examining the senatorial primary results, little doubt remains that Georgian voters overwhelmingly rejected the president's venture into what they considered state and local affairs. The question remains, however, on what grounds did they reject the intervention? While suffering from a notable decrease in popularity, the president continued to remain popular in the

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 109. "July 1, 1938. Democratic Primaries. Democrats were asked: Do you think the Roosevelt administration should try to defeat in the primary elections Democratic senators who opposed the President's plan to enlarge the Supreme Court? Yes—31%, No—69%."

¹⁴² Ibid, 83, 105-106. "January 5, 1938, President Roosevelt's Voter Appeal: Are you for or against Franklin Roosevelt today? For—62.1%, Against—37.9%. South, For—75%, Against—25%." "June 5, 1938, President Roosevelt's Voter Appeal: Are you for or against Franklin Roosevelt today? For—54.4%, Against—45.6%. South, For—68%, Against—32%."

South, more so than in any other region. If he were going to exert influence, Georgia appeared as the ideal venue. However, as was occurring across the nation, objections quickly arose on the grounds that the president was attempting to create a dictatorship similar to those that were simultaneously overrunning the European continent. The president was attempting to insert congressional representatives that would side with him on every legislation question. Georgia voters were simply unwilling to allow the nation to go down that path. Nationwide results in the November 1938 elections lend credence to the assertion that their sentiments were widespread across the country. In those contests, the Republicans gained eighty seats in the House of Representatives and six seats in the Senate.¹⁴³

Even prior to the president's official endorsement of Lawrence Camp at Barnesville in August, the Georgia press was equating such a move to the president attempting, in their minds, to seek dictatorial powers. This potential action, coupled with earlier proposals such as his Court plan and executive reorganization, appeared eerily similar to how European dictators had diminished the role of legislative and judicial branches, while augmenting the executive. The Valdosta Daily Times argued, "in Germany, Italy, or Russia that sort of business is accepted as a matter of course," but not in Georgia.¹⁴⁴ The Savannah Morning News raised the issue in July, as the president's intentions were becoming public knowledge. The publication stated in an editorial:

If the voters of Georgia can be herded like sheep and coerced or persuaded to vote for a '100 percent New Deal' puppet candidate by the benediction or pat on the shoulder bestowed by the party chieftain during a brief visit to the state next month, then it may as well be admitted that conditions are little different in Georgia than in Nazi Germany and Austria where fear stricken subjects bow to the will of Hitler.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Moore, Preimesberger, and Tarr, Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections, 1570.

¹⁴⁴ The Valdosta Daily Times, August 13, 1938; "Doesn't Speak the Same Language".

¹⁴⁵ The Savannah Morning News, July 26, 1938; "Can It Happen Here?".

Thus, from the onset, interested observers spoke out against the president's likely intervention in the contest as the continuation of his desire to implement such "imperialistic measures as the Supreme Court packing proposal and the reorganization bill."¹⁴⁶ When looking back at his decision to intervene, the president could not claim that he was not forewarned.

Following his open declaration at Barnesville, the president encountered increased opposition. This disapproval continued to appear in both newspaper editorials and public opinion surveys. The Savannah Morning News wasted little time in denouncing the president's intervention in an editorial published the following day. The editors resurrected earlier opposition to the plan stating that the president had chosen "to vent his spleen against Senator George for refusing to go along with him in the attempt to establish a dictatorship on American soil."¹⁴⁷ The charge that Roosevelt was attempting to create a personal dictatorship solidified itself as the dominant issue in the campaign. The Savannah publication and other state press agencies continued playing this as the dominant theme, "If the President of the United States is permitted to hand pick the members of the legislative branch of the government, and will approve none but rubber stamps, than this country is rushing headlong into a dictatorship."¹⁴⁸ As the election drew nearer, other publications used the same theme in justifying their support for George. The Atlanta Constitution went so far as to indict the administration for abandoning democracy in favor of a dictatorship, "The administration, by its own admission, has deserted the party which placed it in office and is seeking to form a new party based upon dreams of left-wing advisers who would lead this country along the same paths of totalitarianism which have brought a new and fearful autocracy to the nations of Europe."¹⁴⁹ With the seemingly overwhelming

¹⁴⁶ The Savannah Morning News, July 26, 1938; "Can It Happen Here?".

¹⁴⁷ The Savannah Morning News, August 11, 1938; "A Premature Explosion".

¹⁴⁸ The Savannah Morning News, August 13, 1938; "Power of Attorney System".

¹⁴⁹ The Atlanta Constitution, September 11, 1938; "The Nation Needs George".

opposition in the state press, how would the voters respond to the popular president's intervention? A brief survey reveals not very favorably.

The American Institute of Public Opinion continued conducting scientific surveys following Roosevelt's Barnesville endorsement of Camp and indictment of George. As was the case prior to any formal announcement, respondents continued to answer negatively when asked about FDR's decision to intervene. Within a week of his Barnesville address, a survey was conducted and published demonstrating popular opposition similar to that newspaper editors were displaying. Seventy-five percent of respondents answered in the negative when they were asked whether "President Roosevelt should have made the Barnesville speech criticizing Senator George".¹⁵⁰ Further surveys revealed that the president's interference was providing minimal assistance in the Camp candidacy, as the district attorney trailed the incumbent senator by over twenty percentage points on the election eve.¹⁵¹ In this particular contest, Georgia voters had abandoned Roosevelt, the man that they had overwhelming endorsed less than two years earlier.

Despite all the support for the New Deal in the 1936 election two years earlier, Georgia voters were unwilling to go to what they perceived as such great lengths to ensure that Congress enacted the president's initiatives. With daily reports stressing the loss of personal freedom and civil liberties in Europe, Georgia citizens displayed an increased desire to preserve democracy in America. To them, Roosevelt's intervention appeared as an effort to undermine the American democratic system. Although probably not following through with the mandate the voters had issued for the New Deal two years earlier, congressional members were within their prerogatives to vote their conscience to defeat presidential initiatives. Roosevelt's argument that congressional members such as George had hoodwinked voters failed to resonate with the

¹⁵⁰ Gallup, The Gallup Poll, 115. "August 16, 1938, Walter George: Georgia voters were asked: Do you think President Roosevelt should have made the Barnesville speech criticizing Senator George? Yes—25%, No—75%."

electorate. Georgians sympathized with the senior senator on many of the occasions he opposed the administration, and when they did not, they supported his prerogative. An American Institute of Public Opinion survey demonstrated this sentiment as only twenty nine percent of southern respondents answered that they would have endorsed every policy President Roosevelt submitted to the Congress during the Seventy-Fifth Congress.¹⁵² If the senior senator disappointed them on too many occasions, the voters themselves would decide to elect a new representative. They resented the president's attempt to infringe on their prerogatives. In 1938, Georgia voters announced to the nation that in no way were they going to endorse presidential maneuvers that would lead America down the road to a dictatorial government.

The National Repudiation of Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1938 Purge Campaign and Continued Southern Allegiance to the Democratic Party

While the Georgia contest came to symbolize Roosevelt's 1938 Purge Campaign, one must not forget that the presidential intervention was not limited to just the southern state. Across the nation the president tried to exert his influence. In some instances he was successful. In Kentucky, for example, the president intervened on the behalf of Senate Majority Leader Barkley in his primary struggle against a popular governor. In most cases, however, the president failed, and was criticized for his efforts. Thus, the repudiation of the Purge was a national, not southern phenomenon. Nonetheless, this did not translate into total opposition to the national executive. While suffering the lowest approval ratings that he incurred during his presidency, the administration still had the support of a majority of Americans as demonstrated with the president winning an unprecedented third term two years later. This was most evident

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 117.

¹⁵² Ibid, 113. "August 7, 1938, President Roosevelt's Policies: If you had been a member of Congress during the past two years, would you have supported every bill recommended by President Roosevelt? Yes—23%, No—77%. South, Yes—29%, No—71%."

in the South, as the president enjoyed a sixty-nine percent approval rate.¹⁵³ Despite accusations of the president proposing dictatorial measures, the South remained supportive of the administration and the national party.

The results in other state primaries appeared to confirm this notion that most American citizens opposed the popular president on this particular occasion. The Valdosta Daily Times argued this point, “The nomination of Senator ‘Cotton Ed’ Smith in South Carolina and the defeat of Senator William G. McAdoo in California on Tuesday of this week do not constitute a repudiation of the New Deal and President Roosevelt so much as they provide strong evidence that voters resent outside interference in state affairs.”¹⁵⁴ The South Carolina contest offered many parallels to the Georgia race, as the president tried to use his influence to defeat what he perceived as an anti-administration southern senator. Like George, Smith offered his opposition to the Court plan, executive reorganization, and wages and hours.¹⁵⁵ The California contest differed as the president attempted to rescue an unpopular pro-administration incumbent. The publication claims that in both contests Roosevelt’s intervention turned the tide in favor of the eventual victors.¹⁵⁶ While other issues probably also played important roles in determining the eventual outcomes, one cannot refute that the president’s interference likely hindered the candidates he supported. Thus, national election results help confirm that Americans were very reluctant to support the otherwise popular Roosevelt in this crusade.

Finally, a Washington Post editorial helps to confirm this notion that the nation as a whole, and not just the South, opposed federal intervention in state affairs. By invoking the dictatorial issue, the editors chose a line of argument similar to the one Georgia publications had

¹⁵³ Ibid, 122. “October 16, 1938, President Roosevelt’s Voter Appeal: In general, do you approve or disapprove of Franklin Roosevelt as President today? Approve—59.6%, Disapprove—40.4%. South, Approve—69%, Disapprove—31%.”

¹⁵⁴ The Valdosta Daily Times, September 1, 1938; “The ‘Purge’ Fails”.

used to denounce the president's actions. The Post argued, "The issues involved are much bigger than that local (Georgia) election. It is whether, the President of the United States is, like Hitler, to have his 'exclusive prerogative' the final determination as to who is fit to pass the nation's laws."¹⁵⁷ National publications, like their southern brethren, were concerned that Roosevelt was attempting to expand significantly the powers of the executive at the expense of the legislative branch. Given the historical context, this was in the minds of many Americans. President Roosevelt seriously misjudged the political climate. With totalitarianism overrunning the European continent, this was not the time to expand the powers of the executive. His earlier actions, such as the Court plan and executive reorganization, coupled with intervention into state primaries led many to believe that significantly augmenting the executive was his intention rather than his stated intention of following through on the 1936 mandate. The dictatorial argument appears to have resonated with the American public as demonstrated by the defeat of numerous administration candidates. Thus, opposition to the intervention was a national, and not a southern phenomenon.

Although not limited to the South, Roosevelt's intervention in regional contests generated the greatest interest among political observers. This was in part due to the distinctiveness of southern politics. Such characteristics included limited participation in elections and the absence of a vibrant two-party system. The most important trait, however, was the concentration of intra-party resistance within the region. Throughout the Seventy-Fifth Congress, southern Democrats' opposition to several presidential initiatives prevented their passage. Kennedy argues that the Solid South had prevented Roosevelt from making "the Democratic Party the liberal party, the

¹⁵⁵ The Valdosta Daily Times, September 1, 1938; "The 'Purge' Fails".

¹⁵⁶ The Valdosta Daily Times, September 1, 1938; "The 'Purge' Fails".

¹⁵⁷ The Washington Post, August 13, 1938; "My Own Party".

party of a permanent New Deal.”¹⁵⁸ In order to fulfill this desire, the president needed to transform “the party’s historic base in the South.”¹⁵⁹ 1938 appeared an ideal time to create a truly liberal party, as several anti-administration incumbents stood for reelection. Thus, Roosevelt stood the most to gain in intervening in southern elections.

In a likewise fashion, southern Democrats stood the most to gain from resisting Roosevelt’s intervention. If the president had succeeded in defeating George and other southern Democrats, he would have taken an important step in creating a more liberal, New Deal party within the region. In effect, the region would now have enjoyed a two-party political system similar to the one that existed in the remainder of the nation. The new political context would have likely created a scenario with increased electoral participation. In order to maintain their political livelihoods, southern conservatives would have been forced to address other issues than just the preservation of white supremacy. Thus, George’s defeat would have dramatically transformed the southern political context. Fortunately for the entrenched establishment, but unfortunately for the administration, that fundamental alteration failed to come to fruition during Roosevelt’s presidency.

Less than a week after the bitter Georgia primary, sixty nine percent of southern citizens polled responded that they were still for the president.¹⁶⁰ Only in the western region of the nation was this support surpassed. Despite the unpopular intervention, the South remained committed in supporting the man they largely credited with their increased prosperity. The Valdosta Daily Times summed up southern sentiment, “It (reelection of George) will not be so much a repudiation of the New Deal and President Roosevelt, but it will mean that Georgia voters feel that they are able to select their own senator and the further fact that Georgia voters

¹⁵⁸ Kennedy, Freedom From Fear, 347.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

do not favor some of the more radical proposals which have been hatched in Washington.”¹⁶¹

Like a majority of Americans, Georgia voters displayed earlier opposition to the Court plan and executive reorganization. They again joined their countrymen in opposing the president on his intervention in state primaries. Overall, however, Americans and southerners remained committed to FDR and the New Deal. Two years later, in 1940, American voters elected Franklin Delano Roosevelt to an unprecedented third term. As it had in his two previous election triumphs, the South overwhelmingly cast its lot with the New Dealer. They simply demonstrated stubbornness when a popular individual tried to alter an even more popular system of government.

¹⁶⁰ Gallup, The Gallup Poll, 122.

¹⁶¹ The Valdosta Daily Times, September 1, 1938; “The ‘Purge’ Fails”.

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1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes that this is crucial for ensuring transparency and accountability in the organization's operations.

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