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Robert Floyd Kennon: Reform Governor.

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Robert Floyd Kennon: Reform governor

Carter, Doris Dorcas, Ph.D.

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ROBERT FLOYD KENNON: REFORM GOVERNOR

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by

Doris Dorcas Carter

B.A., Grambling College, 1969

M.A., Louisiana Tech University, 1971

August 1989

To my mother, Mrs. Willie B. Carter, who has been very supportive throughout the undertaking of this project.

Preface

This dissertation is a study of Robert Floyd Kennon, a conservative reformer, who served as governor of Louisiana from 1952-1956. He promised efficiency in the management of state government. Kennon left his reform mark on Louisiana, for he implemented his reform program of redistributing power and resources for societal benefit. My purpose in writing this dissertation is not only to describe Kennon's reform program, but to discuss those events in his life, before his governorship, that had an indelible impact on his actions as governor.

I should like to acknowledge my indebtedness to the many individuals whose assistance and encouragement made the writing of this dissertation a reality. First, I must thank my major advisor, Professor Mark T. Carleton, for his invaluable, incisive comments. Thanks are also due to the members of my reading committee.

I also owe a debt to members of my family who offered prayers and encouragement throughout my graduate schooling: my mother, Willie B. Carter; my sister, Willie Ruth; and my brothers, Jeff, Jr., and Joseph. My cousin, Wiley G. Carter, and Rosa D. Pearce, a family friend, are

not to be forgotten for their kindness in helping me to travel to various places. I would like to thank Minnie T. Bailey, emeritus head of the Department of History, Philosophy, and Geography, at Grambling State University, for motivation and encouragement. I also wish to express my appreciation to Janet Moore and Margaret Dunn, typists, for their patience, thoughtfulness, and cheerful demeanor.

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Archives; the Hill Memorial Library at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge; the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library at Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana; the A. C. Lewis Memorial Library at Grambling State University in Grambling, Louisiana; the Prescott Memorial Library at Louisiana Tech University in Ruston, Louisiana; the Webster Parish Library in Minden, Louisiana; the Louisiana State Library in Baton Rouge; the Shreve Memorial Library in Shreveport, Louisiana; and the Lincoln Parish Library in Ruston, Louisiana.

I am indebted to all of these people and institutions, but the responsibility for the contents of this work is mine.

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Abstract

This dissertation is a study of Robert Floyd Kennon, reform governor of Louisiana, from 1952-1956. Kennon was born on August 21, 1902, near Minden, Louisiana. He received his bachelor's degrees from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge in Liberal Arts and Law in 1923 and 1925, respectively.

In 1925, he began the practice of law in Minden, and was elected as mayor of the town at age twenty-three. Five years later, he sought and won, the office of District Attorney, for the Twenty-Sixth Judicial District, a position he held for ten years. He was a staff officer in Europe during World War II, then returned home, where he served as a judge on the state Court of Appeal, Second Circuit, and on the Louisiana Supreme Court.

In 1948, Kennon ran for the coveted spot of governor, but lost. Undaunted, he next sought a seat in the United State Senate, but lost again. In 1952, he finally won the governor's seat, after waging a brilliantly orchestrated campaign.

Kennon promised good-government reforms which would redistribute power and resources for societal benefit. He

pledged efficiency in the management of state government. The conservative reformer Kennon carried out his campaign pledges of reorganizing the Budget Office by consolidating the offices of Auditor and Supervisor of Public Funds. He secured constitutional status for the statewide civil service system. His administration established citizen boards to control and supervise the spending of the departments of welfare, highways, and institutions. All voting precincts received voting machines. Kennon helped to create a legislative council for bill drafting and analysis. He instituted prison reforms and closed statewide organized gambling and slot machine operations. The governor assured more independence to laborers by signing the "Right-to-Work" law. Governor Kennon reduced taxes and encouraged new industry. He left a surplus of over \$61 million.

CHAPTER I
The Formative Years

In 1953, Edward G. Luck wrote in The Phi Gamma Delta, that Robert Floyd Kennon, a jurist from north Louisiana, was elected to the governorship of Louisiana after promising to reduce the power of the governor. Luck asked the question, "What sort of man, then, is this . . . Executive of Louisiana?"¹

This study seeks to answer Luck's question, by providing some revealing insights into Kennon's life. Robert Floyd Kennon traced his ancestry back to 1634, when his "direct Kennon descendant landed in Virginia."² Kennon did not remember the name of this relative, but asserted that the descendant's sons moved to North Carolina where one of them became a member of the North

¹Edward G. Luck, "Meet the Governor of Louisiana, The Phi Gamma Delta, 75 (March, 1953), 339, hereinafter cited as Luck, "Meet the Governor." Luck and Kennon were members of the Phi Gamma Delta Fraternity which had opened a chapter at Louisiana State University in the late forties.

²Lewis Morris's Interview of Robert Floyd Kennon, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, January 6, 1983. Oral History Department of the Archives and Record Service, Office of the Secretary of State, State of Louisiana, Baton Rouge, p. 2; hereinafter cited as Morris's interview.

Carolina legislature during the American Revolution. Leaving North Carolina, the former legislator moved to Louisiana, after settling for a duration of time in Georgia. Kennon declared that his paternal grandfather owned a plantation near Minden and Dubberly, Louisiana. Both of his maternal grandparents were German immigrants, and one of his grandfathers was a Confederate soldier. His great grandfather was buried in Minden in the 1800's.³

Married on November 2, 1892, Robert's parents, Floyd Kennon and Annie Laura Bopp, had four children before Robert's birth on August 21, 1902. By May 1910, Laura had given birth to eight children: Katherine, born November 16, 1893; Sallie Elizabeth, born March 8, 1895; Emma Meyer, born July 26, 1897; Francis Edward, born July 21, 1899; Robert Floyd, born August 21, 1902; Laura Lucille, born April 3, 1904; George Webb, born March 12, 1908; and John Bopp, born May 15, 1910.⁴

Living in a rural setting, Laura suggested that the family should move to town since the growing children were reaching school age. Apparently, the mother was attracted to Minden by the opportunities that the town offered. Laura was keenly interested in having her children receive a sound education. She had been the valedictorian of the

³Baton Rouge State Times, May 12, 1952.

⁴Kennon Family Lineage, located in office of Michael Kennon, Minden, Louisiana.

Minden Female College in 1889. Floyd Kennon was amenable to his wife's suggestion, and the family moved to Minden, Louisiana, where Floyd established a grocery store, all before Robert reached the age of two.

Nestled in the piney wood section of northwest Louisiana, Minden, a thriving little town, had been sold to Charles Hance Veeder in the 1830's, by Adam L. Stewart. Veeder, a businessman from Kentucky, "became Minden's first merchant, built an inn ... and also sold dry goods and groceries."⁵ It is believed by some that Minden was named after the city of that name in Germany. (Veeder's ancestors had come from Minden, Westphalia.) However, others believe that Minden may have been named after a town in New York state.⁶ During the 1840's and 1850's settlers from the eastern states arrived and established homes in Minden. According to the census of 1860, the white population of Minden was 471.⁷

Geographically a part of Claiborne Parish until 1871, when Webster Parish was established, Minden proved to be a prosperous community because of its location along or near strategic waterways. Much produce was transported to Minden by way of the Red River.

⁵Morris's Interview, p. 6.

⁶Minden Press Herald, July 1, 1976.

⁷Ibid., June 27, 1986.

Boats loaded with merchandise from New Orleans plied through rivers, bayous and finally into Lake Bistineau, Minden being the head, and returned to Bayou Dorcheat loaded with cotton.⁸

Roadways also contributed to Minden's prosperity.

The federal government in 1827-1828, constructed a road five miles east of Minden which connected Fort Jesup to Forts Smith and Gibson in Arkansas and Fort Towson in Oklahoma. Another road, the "Wire Road" (so named because of paralleling telegraph wires) was built directly through Minden.⁹

Minden, too, experienced a brief period of railroad building. In 1899 the Louisiana and Arkansas Railroad was extended to Minden by William Buchanan, a prominent Southern lumber baron. By 1902, the Louisiana and Arkansas was 125 miles long, and the longest railroad in the United States at that time with no bonded indebtedness.¹⁰

Nineteen-two was also a memorable year for Minden's female population. On October 17th, the Civic Club, a women's organization, came into being. It was the intent of the members of the club to make Minden a more attractive community. These civic-minded women worked not

⁸Minden Signal Tribune and Springhill Journal Centennial Historical Edition - December 31, 1934, July 4, 1976, hereinafter cited as Minden and Springhill Journal.

⁹Minden Press Herald, June 27, 1986.

¹⁰Ibid.

only for the planting of beautiful flowers and shrubs, but for the removal of trash and other unseemly debris.¹¹ Also, in 1902, W. S. Hunter founded the North Louisiana Bottling Company. This firm was later absorbed by the Coca-Cola Company.¹² Another attractive feature of the town was the insatiable desire for good schools that Minden's early pioneers possessed. It is probable that Minden's first educational institutions were lacking in most aspects. Wayne W. Williams stated that the first schools were one-room private institutions, with ill-prepared teachers and substandard facilities. Teaching in log buildings a few months out of the year, most of the instructors received only three to four dollars a month per student, or were paid in produce--meat and vegetables.¹³

Minden's founder, Charles H. Veeder, appreciated the importance of an educated citizenry, and was instrumental in the construction of the Minden Academy. The school was organized in 1838 and served both girls and boys until

¹¹Christine Hunt, "Minden, Louisiana: A History," (1965), p. 48. Paper located in Webster Parish Library, Minden, Louisiana: hereinafter cited as Hunt, "Minden, Louisiana."

¹²Ibid.

¹³Wayne Williams, Jr. "The History of the Webster Parish Public School System," (1971), p. 1. Paper in possession of Mrs. Harolyn Thompson, Minden, Louisiana, hereinafter cited as Williams, "Webster School System."

1850, when the name was changed to the Minden Female Academy with enrollment limited to girls. (Males attended the newly organized Minden Male Academy.) The academic year was divided into two twenty-week terms.¹⁴

By legislative act of 1854, the Minden Female Academy was changed to the Minden Female College. Rodney Cline, an historian of education in Louisiana, has concluded that many young females received their education at Minden Female College. Elaborating further, he asserted that the "intellectual, cultural, and moral principles instilled in them there have undoubtedly had a salutary effect upon their children,"¹⁵ and the entire society.

The Webster Parish School Board, in 1897, provided for a public high school in Minden, to teach students from the entire parish, which at first included both grammar and high-school-aged boys and girls.¹⁶

Laura Bopp Kennon, a graduate of Minden Female Academy, was attracted to Minden's educational opportunities and wanted her children to benefit from the town's good schools.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 4, 5.

¹⁵Rodney Cline, "Minden Female College," North Louisiana Historical Association's Newsletter, VII (October, 1966), 1.

¹⁶Hunt, "Minden, Louisiana," p. 46.

Young Robert, known as "Chummy" to his friends, "enjoyed a typical Tom Sawyer boyhood."¹⁷ He worked in his father's store on Saturdays and during school vacation. The future governor, who sold sodas and worked as a delivery boy, said of his job: "[My father] had two mules--Susie and Shorty. People would phone their orders in and I'd deliver them on the mule cart." He additionally claimed to have "been in nearly every kitchen in Minden."¹⁸ Not a lazy child, Kennon worked at a number of jobs. He labored "in a sawmill where he sorted freshcut lumber, and sweated during hot summer months torch-cutting steel oil tanks to dismantle them."¹⁹ But there was also time allotted for play. Friends recalled that "Chummy" swam in swimming holes, engaged in at least one boyhood fight, and was in a sandlot baseball club.

And he got a kick out of throwing cornstalks at a playmate when they ran through farmer Tillman's field. When a stalk struck him in the ear, Kennon raced home bawling.²⁰

Mrs. Kennon made freezers of homemade ice cream for children in the neighborhood.²¹ A childhood friend of

¹⁷New Orleans Times-Picayune, May 11, 1952.

¹⁸Baton Rouge State Times, May 19, 1985.

¹⁹Ibid., May 12, 1952.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Author's interview with Mrs. Louis Scruggs, Minden, Louisiana, September 27, 1986.

Kenyon said, "He [Kenyon] never dressed up very much, didn't take much pride in his looks, but everybody liked him. He never said anything against other people."²² When in August, 1914, World War I began, the reverberating effects were felt in the United States. American society gradually mobilized in support of the allies' cause. Not only were 4.8 million men and women inducted into military service between 1917 and 1918, once the United States had entered the war, but the economy expanded to include production and distribution of war material. Various federal agencies such as the War Industries Board, Food Administration, Fuel Administration, and others, established guidelines and set priorities for organization of the American war effort.

Private organizations such as the Boy Scouts of America contributed greatly to the cause. In the years before World War I, "Chummy" became interested in the Boy Scout organization which was organized in the United States before he reached the age of ten. During World War I, the Boy Scouts of America,

sold \$3.5 million in Liberty Bonds . . . collected over 100 car loads of fruit pits for use in gas mask filters, operated 12,000 war farms and gardens, . . .

²²Baton Rouge State Times, May 12, 1952.

and cooperated in numerous ways with many organizations.²³

"Chummy" Kennon had become a boy scout prior to World War I. His scoutmaster was Rod Grigsby, the owner of a large library. An avid reader, Kennon may also have been lured into scouting by Grigsby's collection of books as well as by the scouting organization itself. Speaking of Grigsby, Kennon said years later:

. . . I was a Boy Scout and my scout master was a very fine man. By the way, he had a large library and he let me read all his books, and I did a lot of reading. When I was growing up, I got hold of the books over at Mr. Rod Grigsby's house and he let me read 'em and borrow 'em and bring 'em back of course. I did a whole lot of reading as a child, growing up in Minden.²⁴

During Kennon's childhood, the scouting phenomenon took hold and captured the hearts of thousands of boys in America. By 1911, the Boy Scouts of America could boast of 5,000 scouts and 14 merit badges that they could earn. Two publications of the organization were Scouting, for the adult leaders, and Boys Life, for the boys themselves.²⁵ Perhaps because Kennon loved to read, he kept abreast of scouting activities. He became an Eagle

²³The Official Scout Master Handbook (7th ed., Irving, Texas: Boy Scouts of America, 1981), p. 359, hereinafter cited as Scout Master Handbook.

²⁴Morris's Interview, p. 7.

²⁵Scout Master Handbook, pp. 358-359.

Scout "and did all of the work to do as a Boy Scout."²⁶ Years later, Kennon contended that he was still "familiar with the Boy Scout history and requirements."²⁷ Kennon developed many of his values and personal qualities, as he engaged in activities with other scouts. Boy Scouting has three aims. One aim "is growth in moral strength and character." The second aim "is participating citizenship." Boys were taught how to interact in a positive manner with each other and to accept the responsibility that one has for the society in which he lives and of the government which governs that society. The third aim "is development of physical, mental, and emotional fitness."²⁸ These aims so thoroughly established in the Boy Scout program, were not lost on the young charges. Leadership skills, and the ability to overcome life's obstacles and enhance self-growth were developed through Kennon's personal experience with the Boy Scouts. Later in Kennon's public life, the impact of his scouting days remained strongly evident. Even at the age of eighty, Kennon could still recite part of the Scout

²⁶Morris's Interview, p. 9.

²⁷Ibid., p. 30.

²⁸Boy Scout Program Helps, 1985-86 (Irving, Texas: Boy Scouts of America, 1985-86), p. Inside Cover.

Law: "A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful and thrifty."²⁹

Robert Floyd Kennon graduated from Minden High School in 1919. In 1906, C. A. Ives had become principal of the school. As in most public schools throughout Louisiana, there was a scarcity of college graduates in teaching positions. Most of Kennon's teachers probably lacked a college degree since most of Minden's instructors held only first- second- and third-grade certificates which were based on special examinations. Possessing knowledge of high school subjects, entitled one to a first-grade certificate. Second- and third-grade certificates were awarded to those who passed examinations for elementary school subjects. Only three teachers during Mr. Ives' principalship were college graduates of Louisiana State University, Peabody and Auburn. All others held teaching certificates.³⁰

A turn of the century pamphlet revealed that Minden High School was in fact a combined elementary and secondary institution with only two high school instructors (including Principal Ives), seven elementary school instructors, a music teacher, and an instructor of

²⁹Morris's Interview, p. 9.

³⁰Hunt, "Minden, Louisiana," p. 47.

"elocution."³¹ An historian of public education in North Louisiana, writing of fledgling institutions in young Kennon's time, stated that the meager offerings of early schools had "to be viewed in light of the school building facilities, the training of the teachers, the length of the school year, and the limited finances."³² He added that the core subjects were the basics of reading, spelling, writing and arithmetic.

In all likelihood, young Kennon's course of study at the elementary level included: language, mathematics, reading and spelling, history, geography and nature study, writing, and drawing. Robert was taught in grammar school how to communicate well, by developing his skills in writing, speaking and listening. His computational skills were enhanced as he was taught how to understand and utilize numbers. Good character development was stressed in his history and geography courses.³³

The high school curriculum included a planned sequence of subjects. Minden High was a somewhat comprehensive senior high school, offering its students general business, industrial or vocational and college

³¹"Minden High School, 1906-07." Pamphlet in possession of Mrs. Harolyn Thompson, Minden, Louisiana, p. 4, hereinafter cited as "Minden High School, 1906-07."

³²Earvin Ryland. Public Education in Lincoln Parish (Ruston, Louisiana: M & M Publishing Co., 1984), p. 55.

³³Minden High School, 1906-07," pp. 5-15.

preparatory courses. Young Kennon was not only a good student, but a determined one as well. He received high grades during his entire four years of high school. During his first year he took English, Latin, botany, physiology and algebra. The second year was devoted to English, Latin, algebra, and history. The third year his course of study included English, Latin, physics, geometry and history. His senior year was spent with English, Latin, arithmetic, history and geometry.

As did all other students, Kennon had to purchase his textbooks, because free textbooks were not provided until 1928, after Huey P. Long became governor. At the time, grammar school books ranged in price from six to ninety cents, while high school books cost between twenty-five cents and \$1.35.³⁴ Guidelines and rules pertaining to student conduct at Minden were probably similar to those in practice at other rural schools. Students were punished for using tobacco, fighting, writing or using profane language. Any pupil who failed to make the required average of 75 percent was subject to failure.³⁵

Robert's brilliance and perceptiveness were probably enhanced by the well-structured educational environment.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 30-31.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 22-24.

Floyd Kennon said of his son, "Bob stuck to his books in school, [and] never caused any trouble."³⁶

After Kennon graduated from Minden High School, he enrolled at Louisiana State University in September, 1919. Graydon S. Kitchens, Kennon's roommate for four years, asserted that he and Robert were assigned to the "A" Building in the Pentagon Barracks.³⁷ The two remained congenial, and years later, became partners in a Minden law firm.

At LSU, Kennon chose the liberal arts curriculum. His freshman and sophomore years included approximately forty hours of courses. Students were required in 1919 to take English, a foreign language, mathematics, science, social sciences, and history, with electives also included. Junior year included fourteen to fifteen hours of courses in philosophy, psychology, or education. Senior year was reserved entirely for electives.

Parents and guardians were apprised of the status of students. Reports were frequently sent--term reports, and, when necessary, monthly reports for all students

³⁶New Orleans Times-Picayune, May 11, 1952.

³⁷Author's interview with Graydon K. Kitchens, Sr., Minden, Louisiana, August 12, 1986, hereinafter cited as Interview with Graydon K. Kitchens.

failing in a specific number of courses.³⁸ Records of Kennon's courses are not available, but at the end of his first year, he received the freshman medal, and also the alumni medal for the best scholastic record in the entire school. Recalling this memorable event many years later Kennon said:

At the close of the first year, I went back home to Minden and got a letter that I had the best scholastic record in the freshman class. And one of the fraternities. . . gave me a gold medal, which I kept, of course. A week later I got a letter that I had the best scholastic average in the university for the year. The alumni association gave me a gold medal for it. But if I didn't want the gold medal, they said they would give me forty dollars. I never did see the gold medal.³⁹

An old aphorism states that "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." Young Kennon was not a "dull boy." At LSU he soon became involved in not only his academic studies, but extra-curricular activities as well. Originally founded in 1860 as a military academy, LSU was affectionately referred to for many years as "The Ole War Skule." Kennon joined the Reserve Officer Training Corps

³⁸J. Arthur Pritzen, ed., The L.S.U. Student's Handbook: Commonly Called "The Freshman's Bible" (n.p.: Young Men's Christian Association of Louisiana State University of Louisiana State University and A. & M. College, undated), p. 26, hereinafter cited as Student's Handbook, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 10, located in Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, hereinafter cited as Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, with appropriate box.

³⁹Morris's Interview, p. 12.

which then consisted of four companies of infantry. By his senior year, he was captain of Company A, which in 1923, received the Pugh Loving Cup for the best-drilled unit in the Corps. (Roommate Graydon Kitchens served in the same company as a First Lieutenant.) The Adjutant General of Louisiana served as one of the judges.⁴⁰ Kennon's company won an intramural football championship the same year. Kennon also joined Scabbard and Blade, a national military fraternity. He served as president and treasurer of the Young Men's Christian Association, and within this organization he was chairman of the Fraternities committee. Academically, Kennon "was a member of four honor fraternities, a mark seldom equalled by an undergraduate student."⁴¹ Finally Kennon joined a social fraternity, Theta Theta, one of twelve Greek-letter organizations then on the LSU campus.

Kennon's status as a leader elevated him to the vice-presidency of the Interfraternity Council and of the Pan Hellenic Council. He worked with the Honor Council and was on the staff of the Reveille, the university's student newspaper, the same year (1922-23). One issue of the Reveille included an article on Kennon, entitled "Some

⁴⁰Luck, "Meet the Governor," p. 340; Morris's Interview, p. 15, Shreveport Journal, April 10, 1940; Interview with Graydon K. Kitchens.

⁴¹Biographical Material, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 9.

Student Leaders." According to the writer, "Possibly few LSU students have earned a more enviable record in scholastic, athletic and military honors than he."⁴² Kennon received additional honors as a member of the debating team and became a member of Tau Kappa Alpha, a national debating fraternity.

Kennon's versatility also extended into the field of varsity athletics. Although his small size inhibited him somewhat, he compensated for the liability with intelligence and determination. Kennon's closest childhood friend, Louis Scruggs, said of Kennon's athletic prowess in 1952: "I wouldn't say he was outstanding at sports. He knew how to use his head instead of his muscles. He never lost an argument with the umpire."⁴³ Kennon was determined to play on the football and tennis teams, and his perseverance served him well. Despite the fact that football is a violent collision sport, Kennon played center, admitting later that he had weighed only "150 pounds, and [was] just crazy enough to get in front of any thing."⁴⁴ Kennon played on the LSU varsity football team from 1922 to 1924, and acquired a varsity

⁴²Baton Rouge, Reville, n.d., in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 29; see also, Luck, "Meet the Governor," p. 340.

⁴³New Orleans Times-Picayune, May 11, 1952.

⁴⁴Ibid.

letter the last year, by which time he was in LSU's law school.

The head football coach of LSU during Kennon's playing years was Mike Donahue, who had accepted the position in 1923 at an annual salary of \$10,000 (which then exceeded the governor's salary.) Although the team's record for 1924 was unimpressive (5-4-0), Dan Hardesty, respected sportswriter, has written "the year 1924 . . . provided a great landmark which still stands tall and proud--Tiger Stadium."⁴⁵

The recently constructed stadium was located on the new campus, and the LSU-Tulane contest of 1924 was the first football game played in the now famous facility. For player Kennon, the game remained memorable. Because the stadium was near the railroad tracks, a shuttle train was used to transport individuals from the city of Baton Rouge to the stadium. Falling somewhat short of the expected crowd of 20,000, about 18,500 fans arrived for the game. (Colonel Teddy Roosevelt, Jr. was lauded as a special guest.) The new stadium had no dressing rooms, so the Tulane Team dressed on the train while the "Tigers" dressed at the old campus north of town and then travelled to an agricultural building on the new campus. From there

⁴⁵Dan Hardesty. The Louisiana Tigers, LSU Football (Huntsville, Alabama: The Strode Publishers, 1975), pp. 58, 61.

they walked to the stadium, only to be defeated by Tulane, 13-0.⁴⁶ Kennon recalled later, "I am sorry to say that Tulane beat us. . . ." ⁴⁷

Kennon also played tennis and had been the tennis champion in his hometown. When he arrived at LSU, however, Kennon discovered that the school had no tennis team. Kennon helped to organize the first LSU tennis team, and was himself a varsity player in 1924-25. In 1922-23 he had won the fraternity and open championships. The school's first season of intercollegiate tennis occurred in 1925.⁴⁸ Kennon was one of only two netmen to letter in 1925, and in 1925 he reached the semi-finals in the Southeastern Conference tournament.⁴⁹ Possessing managerial ability as well, Kennon had served as an assistant athletic manager from 1921 to 1922.⁵⁰

On June 15, 1923, when Robert Floyd Kennon received his bachelor's degree in Liberal Arts, he had spent an active and pivotal four years at Louisiana State

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 64.

⁴⁷Morris's Interview, p. 14.

⁴⁸Scott Rabalais's letter to Doris D. Carter, November 5, 1986.

⁴⁹Morris's Interview, p. 11.

⁵⁰Theta Theta Fraternity of Louisiana State University (Baton Rouge: The Franklin Printing Co., December 1, 1924), p. 12, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 10.

University. Later that year, he entered the LSU Law School. Kennon recalled that as an undergraduate he "took what courses [that] went with law the first two or three years," because he had decided firmly to become a lawyer.⁵¹ On June 25, 1925, Kennon received the degree of Bachelor of Law. The following month, he passed the bar examination and was admitted to the Louisiana Bar. Of all the applicants, who applied for the examination, his grades were among the highest.⁵² Years later, a roommate of his said, Kennon "gave the impression then of knowing what he wanted and where he was going."⁵³

Apparently, Kennon was encouraged to "make something" of his life. With his mother's scholastic mind and his father's keen business sense, Kennon was reared in a highly nurturing environment and was provided the financial security and the educational support needed to foster greater self-confidence and self-awareness. He was taught the value of work, while at the same time, the importance of recreation. From his scouting experiences, he probably learned to share responsibilities and live with others. Since the ideals of scouting, called for boys to constantly improve, Kennon possibly worked to

⁵¹Morris's Interview, p. 12.

⁵²Minden Webster Signal, March 18, 1926.

⁵³Baton Rouge State Times, May 14, 1952.

reach those goals. Evidence of this is the fact that he worked to become an Eagle Scout.

In college and in law school, he availed himself of the opportunity to offer leadership in various situations. His record of academic excellence, involvement in extracurricular activities and his varsity status in football and tennis, all show that Kennon was not the "run of the mill" student. He was not mediocre. Kennon's grades were excellent, but he did not spend all his time studying. Apparently, he did not want to remain in the background and to let others receive all of the "limelight." He was ambitious and aggressive.

CHAPTER II

The Municipal Reformer

After receiving a law degree from Louisiana State University, Kennon returned to his hometown of Minden, where, in the summer of 1925, he opened a law office in the Miller Building.¹ The following year, on September 13, he entered into partnership with his former university roommate, Graydon K. Kitchens.² His interests, however were not limited to practicing law, for Kennon remained keenly interested in his military reserve activities.

In 1923, he had been commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army reserve. Promoted to first lieutenant in 1925, Kennon joined the 156th Infantry of the Louisiana National Guard, in which he established a machine gun company and became the unit's first captain.³

Because of the poor attendance record of a Shreveport infantry unit, the Louisiana Adjutant General had considered moving the company to another location. Kennon claims to have persuaded the Adjutant General to transfer

¹Minden Webster Signal, March 18, 1926.

²Minden Press Herald, September 7, 1926.

³Minden Herald, January 10, 1941.

the unit, Company H, 156th Infantry, to Minden.⁴ This group of "foot soldiers" contained fifty-two non-commissioned officers and privates.

Desiring to become a more professional officer, Kennon attended both reserve camps and the United States Army Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia. Apparently he still possessed his youthful adventurous spirit and yearned for tougher challenges. As a citizen-soldier in the infantry, he learned survival skills for self-preservation and how to care for others.⁵

It was while he was at Fort Benning in 1926 that Kennon received telegrams and letters requesting him to run for the office of mayor of Minden. His father later quipped, "While Bob was away at LSU I paid his dollar poll tax. When he came back the people asked him to run for mayor and since I had paid for him he was eligible."⁶ The disgruntled Mindenites were opposed to the incumbent mayor, Connell Fort, who had been elected four years earlier. Fort had vetoed an ordinance to change the status of Minden from town to city. Instead, Mayor Fort

⁴Lewis Morris's Interview of Robert Floyd Kennon, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, January 6, 1983. Oral History Department of the Archives and Record Service, Office of the Secretary of State, State of Louisiana, Baton Rouge, p. 19, hereinafter cited as Morris's Interview.

⁵Minden Webster Signal, June 3, 1926.

⁶New Orleans Times-Picayune, May 11, 1952.

stressed the importance of acquiring "new and adequate fire fighting apparatus,"⁷ and the installation of a fire alarm system.

Kennon's acceptance was in the form of a letter, printed in the local newspaper. Endorsing the change from a town to a city, he wrote:

Some considerable thought has convinced me that the next Mayor has a REAL JOB ahead. Minden will doubtless meet the legal requirements and become a city thereby taking a step forward that might well have been taken to advantage some years ago. The city's financial condition demands careful management and the most rigid economy in order to retire the existing debts and at the same time meet the new public needs of a growing and prosperous city.

Essential too, is a studied and careful readjustment of our city government to fit Minden's present size and importance, with allowance for continued growth. All this must be done in co-operation with Parish and State authorities and with full financial aid from the State and Parish as provided by law.⁸

He also wrote that his responsibilities at Fort Benning would not allow him to return to Minden "until almost election day."⁹ That meant Kennon would do little campaigning, but he had little to worry about. Recalling the election almost sixty years later, Kennon said,

My daddy had a grocery store People would phone their orders in and I'd deliver them on the mule cart. I had been in nearly every kitchen in

⁷Minden Webster Signal, April 1, 1926.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

Minden, so when the time came, I beat the incumbent.¹⁰

The date set for the primary election by the parish Democratic Executive Committee was April 13, 1926. On April 15, the Webster Signal proclaimed, "Kennon is Elected Mayor of Minden."¹¹ Kennon had received 360 votes to Fort's 303.¹²

In the general election held on June 15, only 45 persons voted and not one of the votes was dissenting. All Democratic candidates who had won nomination in the primary won in the general election. Officially, Kennon was mayor.¹³ The election received national attention because of Kennon's young age. At twenty-three, he was one of the country's youngest mayors. Kennon compared himself to Great Britain's Prime Minister, William Pitt, The Younger, who had been taunted in Parliament because of his age. Pitt had replied "that his youth was a fault

¹⁰Baton Rouge State Times, March 19, 1985.

¹¹Minden Webster Signal, April 15, 1926.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., June 17, 1926.

that he would outgrow."¹⁴ On Monday, July 5, Kennon and the Board of Aldermen assumed office. His political career had begun.

Kennon worked diligently to improve conditions in Minden. His motivation was part of a national phenomenon already underway. During the first decades of the twentieth century, many Americans became more concerned about perceived imbalances and injustices in their society. "Reform" and "progress" became key words as an aroused middle class attempted to lead the nation in new directions. Composed of young, professional men and women who were college and university-educated, this "Progressive" middle class consisted of lawyers, academicians and social workers.¹⁵ They believed in progress and in the ability of man to make a better world. Kennon was a "progressive" Louisianian in the 1920's. These reformers relied upon positive governmental action as the principal agent to effect change.¹⁶

The Progressive Movement lacked great momentum in the South. But it did make some inroads. In all likelihood,

¹⁴Biographical Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 9, located in Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, hereinafter cited as Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, with appropriate Box.

¹⁵For additional information, see Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick, Progressivism (Arlington Heights, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, 1983), chapter one.

¹⁶Ibid.

the young Kennon was impressed with the reforms of Louisiana Governor John M. Parker, who had been elected in 1920. Called "a gentlemen reformer"¹⁷ by political scientist Allan P. Sindler, Parker had been responsible for drafting a new state constitution in 1921, providing additional state revenues in the form of severance and income taxes, constructing a new Louisiana State University campus, and establishing a modern state highway system.¹⁸ Parker was governor from 1920-24, while Kennon was a student at LSU. Possibly, Kennon may have closely observed the actions of Parker. That Kennon was a product of his times is apparent. He was a young, educated professional with progressive ideas and objectives.

To prepare for his job, the young mayor-elect visited the nearby city of Ruston, Louisiana, in April, 1926, to observe first hand municipal activities in a comparable community. The Ruston Daily Leader stated that Kennon toured the fire station and investigated Ruston's street paving system. Apparently he expressed his desire to

¹⁷Allan P. Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana: State Politics, 1920-1952 (Reprinted ed.; Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1980), p. 40, hereinafter cited as Sindler's, Huey Long's Louisiana.

¹⁸Bennett H. Wall, ed., Louisiana: A History (Arlington Heights, Illinois: The Forum Press, 1984), p. 240, hereinafter cited as Wall, Louisiana. For information on progressivism in the South, see George B. Tindall, The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945 (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1967), pp. 1-32.

return for a more extensive visit, because the paper said he would "return within the next two months to go into the paving system here more thoroughly."¹⁹ Additionally, the editorial said of Kennon, "he comes to his post with ideas untrammelled by sordid motives, [and] free from cliques, clans or factions."²⁰ With such favorable endorsements, the young, progressive-minded Kennon had a great challenge ahead of him.

It was a specific duty of Mayor Kennon to meet with the town council members on a regular basis. He also delegated administrative responsibilities; signed warrants on money paid out of the city treasury; supervised the operation and administration of various city departments; called special and emergency meetings with the council members; and performed other prescribed duties as the need arose. One of his first obligations as newly elected mayor, was to deliver a welcoming address to the North Louisiana Press Association's meeting in August, 1926.²¹ Minden was host city that year for the gathering of newspaper editors and publishers from various areas of North Louisiana. Kennon's college debating experience

¹⁹Ruston Daily Leader, April 15, 1926.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Minden Webster Signal, August 19, 1926.

probably made his tasks easier. Kennon was later known for his superb speaking abilities.

A particular concern of Mayor Kennon and the council was Minden's inadequate fire department, inherited from his predecessor's administration. When the former mayor, Connell Fort had campaigned for office, he, too, had pointed out the shortcomings of the fire department, so that by Kennon's mayoralty, the department's deficiencies were notorious.²²

The department's insurance rates were almost prohibitively high. The sole fire truck, a Ford Chemical engine, lacked modern equipment. Kennon suggested that an additional Auto Truck Pumper with a pumping capacity of 600 to 750 gallons-a-minute would save the city in excess of ten thousand dollars annually in insurance premiums. To enhance the system further, the mayor supported installing an alarm system which would identify the location of fires. At the August 2nd, meeting, Kennon and Councilman Ronald Murph were authorized to sign a contract to acquire a fire alarm system. The Water and Light Department was assigned the task of securing prices for the installation, and Kennon appointed Councilman W. B. Life chairman of a committee to find and obtain the cost

²²Ibid., April 1, 1926.

of a suitable location for a new fire station.²³ Council members Life and W. R. Garrison were eventually authorized to purchase a lot which had been used as a Baptist parsonage for construction of the station. The bid of F. C. McClanahan for the construction of the fire station was accepted by Mayor Kennon and the Council. McClanahan bid \$18,588, and was to be paid on the first and fifteenth of each month.²⁴

Minden's new fire station was dedicated on April 22, 1927, with visitors from surrounding cities enjoying the "music, speeches, coffee and punch."²⁵ Kennon served as master of ceremonies and as one of the speakers. Live music was another feature of the program. How proud Kennon and Mindenites must have been at this dedication service; for much hard work had been done. Four months later, the mayor and council authorized the Commissioner of Public Safety to pay the firemen \$5.00 monthly and the Fire Chief \$100.00 annually. In an earlier meeting the council had authorized the Fire Chief to insure the firemen.²⁶

²³Minutes and Reports, City of Minden, From July 1924 to June 1928 (Minden, Louisiana, August 2, 1926). Hereinafter cited as Council Minutes.

²⁴Council Minutes, December 1, 1926, January 3, 1927.

²⁵Minden Tribune, April 20, 1927.

²⁶Council Minutes, August 17, 1927, February 25, 1927.

Mayor Kennon and the council not only modernized the Fire Department; they also provided for other needed improvements in the city. They purchased two trucks for "city sanitary work," and planned to repair the city clock.²⁷

Kennon considered that one of his "crowning achievements" as mayor was the building of an armory in Minden for the Louisiana National Guard, and the transfer of the National Guard Company from Shreveport to Minden in 1926.²⁸ Representing Company H, 156th Infantry, Second Lieutenant James E. Pitcher requested the Council to provide funds for the Armory Building. The council agreed to pay a monthly appropriation of \$50.00. The money was for purchasing the Armory Building, the purchased stock to revert to the city of Minden if the National Guard Unit became defunct. The commanding officer of the unit was still Mayor Kennon, and the Company's First Lieutenant, Arthur Life.²⁹

A memorable occasion for the fifty-five men of Company H occurred in April, 1925, when the unit was inspected by Colonel (?) Eggerly of the Mississippi National Guard. Kennon was lauded for his exceptional

²⁷Ibid., September 29, 1926, December 17, 1926.

²⁸Morris's Interview, p. 19.

²⁹Council Minutes, August 17, 1926, August 31, 1926.

leadership of the company.³⁰ Even if it meant leaving his responsibilities as mayor on a temporary basis to answer the call of duty, Kennon took his reserve military commitment seriously, and in any event was obligated to obey the orders of his superiors, whether in wartime or in dealing with the various peacetime emergencies and natural disasters the Guard is summoned to confront.

In May, 1927, for example, Kennon's Company H was ordered to LaBorde School House near Marksville, in Avoyelles Parish, Louisiana. The unit was assigned to night patrol on several miles of the swollen Red River at a spot crucial to the security of several levees within surrounding parishes. The company remained on actual duty until June, 1927, when the unit moved later to Mansura, and then to Camp Custer, located in Marksville.³¹

When not on duty with the Guard, Kennon remained in Minden as mayor. One of his duties as a small town mayor was to preside over the Mayor's court, trying breaches of various ordinances, and levying fines and imposing imprisonment. Working with Kennon was city Marshal B. G. Gantt. Both men submitted monthly reports. The mayor decided cases of gambling, drunkenness, and reckless driving, and imposed fines usually ranging from \$1.00 to

³⁰Minden Webster Signal, April 7, 1927.

³¹Ibid., May 5, 1927.

\$25.00. Apparently, not many of the petty offenders were imprisoned, because most chose the option of paying a fine over spending time in jail.

As mayor of a progressive little city, Kennon remained a busy elected official. He and the council were empowered

to exercise full jurisdiction in the matter of streets, sidewalks, sewers, and parks; to open, layout and construct the same; to repair, maintain, pave, sprinkle, adorn, and light the same.³²

When several residents who did not have them requested sidewalks and sewerage disposal, Kennon's street and sewerage committees provided the necessary facilities.³³

The city's utility company presented problems for Mayor Kennon and council members, who convened a special session on March 2, 1927, to discuss petitions from disgruntled residents of the city who complained of low pressure in gas lines. Kennon appointed a special investigating committee to meet with gas company officials. Several nights later Jasper Goodwill, representing Minden Gas Company, Inc., met with the council and agreed to resolve the problems. One of the

³²James H. Brown, comp., State of Louisiana, Lawrason Act (1981), 15, hereinafter cited as Brown, Lawrason Act.

³³Council Minutes, September 21, 1926, October 4, 1926, October 20, 1926, November 8, 1926, December 17, 1926, February 7, 1927, March 7, 1927, April 4, 1927, August 8, 1927, November 7, 1927; Minden Webster Signal, April 7, 1927.

city's newspapers, the Webster Signal, reported on March 10th that the gas company had promised to spend about \$800 to improve gas mains.³⁴

Minden continued to have problems with the gas company, because on December 5th of the same year the council instructed a committee "to take up the gas situation with the gas Company and [to] report back to the Council."³⁵ At a meeting on March 5, 1928, a representative of the Moran Gas Company of Shreveport "made an offer for a Gas Franchise" in Minden.³⁶ At a later meeting when the Moran representative was asked to increase his "bond for performance of the conditions of the franchise from \$5,000 to \$25,000," he refused.³⁷

The offer of Moran Gas company provided the incentive for the Minden company to present a more competitive offer. In a letter to the council dated March 21, 1928, officials of the Minden company guaranteed to build gas lines from its source, the Cotton Valley Field. The company included a check for \$25,000 "as evidence of our [their] faith in carrying out the transaction", including the statement that Minden would not "grant any other gas

³⁴Council Minutes, March 2, 1927, March 7, 1927; Minden Webster Signal, March 10, 1927.

³⁵Council Minutes, December 5, 1927.

³⁶Ibid., March 5, 1928.

³⁷Ibid., March 19, 1928.

franchise."³⁸ When the council met on March 21st to consider the two proposed gas franchises, the Minden Gas Company offering a bond of \$25,000, and the Moran Corporation one of \$5,000, local citizens were encouraged to participate in the deliberations. Following executive and open sessions, the Council voted unanimously to accept the proposal of the Minden Gas Company.

The city's municipally-owned Light and Water Department fell into precarious condition during part of Kennon's administration. The financial stability of its plant became so marginal that some suggested the facility be sold. Kennon adamantly opposed this solution and worked tenaciously to restore light and water operations to a stable basis.³⁹ On February 7, 1927, the council resolved that the Light and Water Committee be empowered to buy "an extra unit" for the local plant, and that Mayor Kennon and councilman S. H. McCrary take responsibility for ensuring that its purchase was paid for.⁴⁰ The council in a special session of May 20, agreed that the money, borrowed from the Bank of Minden, would be secured by the revenues of the department. What happened between May 20 and August 8, is not known; however, it may be

³⁸Ibid., March 21, 1928.

³⁹Author's Interview with Graydon K. Kitchens, Sr., Minden, Louisiana, August 12, 1986.

⁴⁰Council Minutes, February 7, 1927.

assumed that the light and water plant continued for a while in a state of indebtedness. On August 8, the council authorized the Commissioner of Public Utilities to "execute a contract with the Louisiana Power and Light Company to provide Minden the necessary utilities."⁴¹ Two months later, J. Steel, on behalf of the Texas and Louisiana Power Company, offered to buy the financially burdened local light and water department.

The council did not settle the issue until January 9, 1928. Councilman J. H. Nelson, Kennon's appointee to chair an advisory board, assessing the two offers, reported that he and his colleagues "did not consider either one of the offers an adequate one,"⁴² and the council accepted Nelson's recommendation. Steel withdrew the offer of Texas and Louisiana Power Company and requested the return of his firm's papers and certified check. Later, the bid and check of the Louisiana Power and Light Company were also returned. Minden continued to operate its own light and water plant as efficiently as possible. Successful in his determination to reserve the municipally-owned light and water department, Mayor Kennon had demonstrated early in his political career a resolution for which he was later admired.

⁴¹Ibid., August 8, 1927.

⁴²Ibid., January 9, 1928.

Louisiana mayors and councilmen in the 1920's were also required by state law to establish regulations for slaughter houses, dance houses, and desecration of the Sabbath Day. They were also empowered "to provide for the punishment of persons who engaged therein."⁴³

On March 5, 1928, the Reverend Frank Tripp appeared before the council to protest the showing of motion pictures on Sundays. The council took no action on Tripp's complaint. One week later after discussing an ordinance prohibiting motion pictures and other commercial activities on Sundays, the council again took no action. On March 19, the First Baptist Church requested an ordinance specifically prohibiting Sunday movies. Once again, action was deferred, this time to March 21.⁴⁴ Mysteriously, the recorded minutes of that and subsequent meetings of the council say nothing about whether the proposed ordinance was ever approved or rejected. Possibly, just as many Minden citizens approved of Sunday movies as opposed them, and the mayor and council chose not to commit themselves on the controversial matter one way or the other. On a much safer question, the council at its March 21st meeting adopted an ordinance closing houses of prostitution in Minden. Also, at the same

⁴³Brown, Lawrason Act, p. 13.

⁴⁴Council Minutes, March 5, 1928, March 12, 1928, March 19, 1928.

meeting, and doubtless at Kennon's urging, the council voted to continue its support of the local Boy Scouts for 1928.⁴⁵

Upton Sinclair's novel, The Jungle, which graphically described conditions in unregulated meat packing firms had deeply shocked many Americans earlier in the century. President Theodore Roosevelt thereafter supported passage by Congress of the Federal Meat Inspection Act in 1906. The federal statute did not, however, require inspection of meats slaughtered and prepared locally and not destined for interstate commerce. Minden's city council decided to protect local citizens by requirements of its own. The council adopted a resolution providing for a municipal slaughter house, and defining the type and specifications of the facility. Additionally, they provided for the regulation of slaughtering animals and for local inspection of fish, meat and other foods.⁴⁶

The council next discussed the feasibility of employing a city meat inspector. After consulting the City Health Officer of Shreveport, regarding the merits of employing a city inspector, the council appointed a "sanitary committee" to investigate the matter further.

⁴⁵Ibid., May 21, 1928.

⁴⁶Minden Webster Signal, April 7, 1927; Council Minutes, August 8, 1927, December 19, 1927.

The sanitary committee's report was accepted, and the council appointed K. W. Franks and T. L. Adkins, Chief and Assistant Meat Inspectors, respectively, on a permanent basis, upon the recommendation of city health officials. The inspectors were authorized to inspect meat and fish markets at least three times a week. Franks would receive a monthly salary of \$25.00, while Adkins would be compensated by fees.⁴⁷

Minden had a municipal park, the upkeep of which fell under the jurisdiction of Mayor Kennon and the city council. Kennon's keen interest in the maintenance of the outdoor facility may be attributed to the legacy of his Boy Scout days. The Council voted to employ a tree specialist to service the park's trees for a fee of \$200. At a later meeting, Kennon produced a revised estimate from the provider, S. E. Clayton, asking for approximately \$200 more. For some reason, this portion of the minutes was "x-ed" out, with "omit" written in the margin. However, in a later "statement of General Funds" for the city, S. E. Clayton is listed as receiving \$100 on March 25, 1927, \$100 on April 13, and \$185 on May 11.⁴⁸ Evidently, Mayor Kennon had persuaded the council to

⁴⁷Council Minutes, November 7, 1927, January 9, 1928, February 13, 1928.

⁴⁸Ibid., March 7, 1927, March 16, 1927, March 25, 1927, April 13, 1927, May 11, 1927.

appropriate additional money in order to assure that Minden's trees received the best care.

Just as Kennon wanted to beautify his city, he was equally concerned about potentially hazardous situations. In the spring of 1927 Mayor Kennon persuaded the council to condemn a number of old buildings. Despite resistance by one of the owners, the council eventually ordered that the dangerous structures be destroyed.

Kennon's success at modernizing Minden's municipal government was a major achievement during his administration. The Webster Signal noted on April 8, 1926, that a committee of the town council, formed to explore the possibility of changing the form of Minden's government from a town to a city, had also recommended the creation of a city court for Minden and Ward Four of Webster Parish.⁴⁹ State authorization was required for both requests, and a bill to accomplish that purpose sponsored in the state senate by Senator Coleman Lindsay, passed both houses unanimously. Governor Henry Fuqua signed the bill and issued a proclamation proclaiming Minden a city and granting it a city court.⁵⁰

Kennon also recommended that a portion of Minden's 1853 charter be repealed. He wanted to replace the

⁴⁹Minden Webster Signal, April 8, 1926.

⁵⁰Ibid., June 10, 1926.

position of constable with a chief of police, and to create the new position of city tax collector. Kennon appointed a committee composed of himself, City Attorney W. B. Life, and Councilman J. R. Murph to draft the proposed charter amendment. Kennon and Judge S. Drew had first "to draft a City Criminal Code for punishment of the law violators."⁵¹ The proposed amendment had next to be published in the official parish journal, the Minden Tribune, once a week, for three weeks. If there were no objections, then the mayor was required to send the proposed amendment to Governor O. H. Simpson and Louisiana Attorney General Percy Saint for their approval. Simpson and Saint approved this measure on October 21, and November 23, 1927, respectively.

Mayor Kennon and the council also extended the city's limits and more effectively zoned business and residential areas, in compliance with recommendations of the Louisiana Fire Insurance Bureau. The council created a zoning commission on October 5, 1927, and named five Minden residents as members. The council authorized the commission

to have full power and authority . . . to make regulations. . . and to pass said regulations for the approval of the Council in regard to zoning the city and establishing residential, business and other

⁵¹Council Minutes, January 3, 1927.

districts for the promotion of health, safety, morals and general welfare of the City of Minden.⁵²

The Minden City Court commenced operations under Kennon's administration in the fall of 1926. The first judge was Allen S. Drew; Ward Marshal, Larkin B. Turner; and the first clerk of court, L. C. Lowrey.⁵³ Typically, the Minden court had authority to decide various criminal cases and civil disputes involving specified amounts of money.

On September 7, 1926, Judge A. S. Drew asked the Council for office equipment. The Council deferred action on Drew's request until specific prices could be considered.⁵⁴ The council next appointed a committee to investigate the operation of other city courts and present their recommendations to the council.

While Kennon was mayor, he helped maintain the fiscal soundness of the city. Minden continued to sustain itself on funds collected from fines, taxes, and user fees for the Light and Water Department. Despite the fact that an occasional overdraft resulted, the city remained solvent. Kennon was a capable administrator who continued to utilize progressive means for correcting problems and improving the operation of city government. When his

⁵²Ibid., October 5, 1927.

⁵³Minden Webster Signal, October 22, 1926.

⁵⁴Council Minutes, September 7, 1926.

constituents demanded better sidewalks and sewerage facilities, Kennon complied with their desires. He implemented other public improvements as well. Relatively generous funds were allocated in the budget to the Street Department each month. An increase may be noticed in official salaries during his administration as compared to those during his successor's tenure. The Minutes did not state why the salaries were increased. Possibly, the raise may have been attributed to the hiring of additional city employees or simply inflation. Under Mayor Fort, salaries for the months of July and August 1926 were recorded as \$567.37 and \$478.82. In September, 1926, the salaries had reached \$758.90. Exactly one year later in September 1927, the salaries were listed at \$735.16, and by April, 1928, the salaries were over \$750.⁵⁵ It is true that the salaries did fluctuate from month to month, but a raise under the Kennon administration may be observed.

The Light and Water Department provided most of Minden's income. User fees collected varied, but apparently were consistently higher. Impressed by the profitable operation of the department, and with Kennon as Minden's chief executive officer, the Louisiana Municipal Association invited Kennon to address its Third Annual Convention in Eunice, Louisiana, in March 1928. Kennon's

⁵⁵Ibid., July 1926, August 1926, September, 1926, September 1927, April 1928.

address was entitled "Municipal Ownership of a Light and Waterworks Plant in a Small City."⁵⁶ Kennon was himself a vice president of the L.M.A. at the time, and may have used his influence within the organization to obtain his invitation to speak before the convention, knowing that press coverage of the event could not hurt his political career.

Mayor Kennon kept busy during 1927. He served as a special attorney for the Parish Police Jury, assisting them in passing a bond issue and creation of a Sub-Road District. The police jury served as governing authority for the new Sub-Road District #5, an area including territory in the northwest section of the parish. At the behest of property tax payers, the governing body created the sub-road district, but had to observe certain procedures required by law. Legal notice of the creation had to be published weekly for four consecutive weeks and an open session convened to hear objections. The police jury discussed the feasibility of holding a special election on September 20, 1927, to authorize the sale of road and bridge construction bonds. The election was duly

⁵⁶Printed programs, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 9.

held, and a majority of voters within Sub-Road District #5 approved the sale of \$115,000 in bonds.⁵⁷

The year 1927 was indeed a pivotal one for Kennon and for Minden as well. The council allocated funds for construction of a demonstration parish library, for which Webster Parish had been designated by state officials as the area to be served, and Minden chosen as the site. Miss E. M. Culver, a librarian from Baton Rouge, had visited several locations in Webster parish, including Minden, during April, 1926, attempting to inculcate the importance of a parish library system. A relatively new concept in Louisiana, the parish library was embraced by businessmen, club women, farmers and educators.⁵⁸ (It will be recalled that Kennon as a boy scout devoured the books in his scoutmaster's private library. Consequently, as mayor years later Kennon was an enthusiastic supporter of the library idea.) Minden was also receptive to having a parish library and provided \$2,000 for construction. Other parish agencies gave \$6,000 combined while the

⁵⁷Minden Signal Tribune, April 20, 1930; Minutes of Webster Parish Police Jury (1927), (Minden, Louisiana, July 5, 1927, October 4, 1927).

⁵⁸Minden Webster Signal, April 1, 1926; Christine Hunt, "Minden, Louisiana: A History," (1965), p. 51. Paper located in Webster Parish Library, Minden, Louisiana: hereinafter cited as Hunt, "Minden, Louisiana."

Rosenwald Fund contributed another \$8,000. The facility opened on October 3, 1929.⁵⁹

Mayor Kennon continued to support institutional progress and municipal efficiency. Realizing that further modifications in the city's form of government had become necessary,

He [Kennon] turned lobbyist, and hastened to the state capital. He got a bill passed to change Minden's government to a five-man commission, each member with definite tasks.

"I wanted everyone to have a definite job with responsibilities," he recalled. "I always have been a firm believer in finding good people and giving them something important to dom."[sic]⁶⁰

Kennon was a capable and effective mayor of Minden. Had he decided to run for re-election, quite possibly he might have been successful. Heeding the advice of his father, however, the "tall lanky man with a friendly drawl and a wide grin"⁶¹ declined to run for a second term. A 1930 editorial in the Minden Signal Tribune, said of Kennon,

He states that he desired to retire from the Mayor's Office in order to devote more time to the study of Criminal Law, and other matters in preparation proper for one seeking the office of District Attorney.⁶²

⁵⁹Hunt, "Minden, Louisiana," p. 51.

⁶⁰Baton Rouge State Times, May 12, 1952.

⁶¹Baton Rouge Morning Advocate, May 13, 1952.

⁶²Minden Signal Tribune, April 20, 1930.

Kennon obviously had political ambitions beyond serving, however well, as Mayor of Minden.

CHAPTER III

The Young District Attorney

When Huey P. Long became Governor of Louisiana in 1928, a vacancy occurred on the Louisiana State Public Service Commission, of which Long had been a member since 1918. Kennon was advised by friends to become a candidate, and he toured the twenty-nine parishes included in Long's North Louisiana public service commission district.¹ But Kennon never offered himself as a candidate. Apparently, his thoughts were definitely on the District Attorney's office.

When Kennon returned to his law practice, he had come to understand the scope and limits of public office. He continued to practice law with Graydon K. Kitchens, who had become his law partner on September 13, 1926, and remained in partnership with Kitchens until 1941.² Kennon specialized in criminal law. As a defense attorney, Kennon was able to prepare himself for the office of

¹Newspaper clipping, Shreveport Journal, no month listed, 1927, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 13, located in Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, hereinafter cited as Robert Floyd Kennon Papers with appropriate Box.

²Minden Press Herald, September 7, 1986.

District Attorney, which he obtained later. No longer mayor of Minden, he devoted himself full time to his successful practice. Before and during criminal court proceedings, he actively studied the behavior of the judge, district attorney, jury and defendants. The old axiom "experience is the best teacher" was appropriate. Kennon knew that a trial lawyer's responsibilities were many. He was obligated by law to see that the accused's constitutional rights prior to the trial were safeguarded.³ It is possible that Kennon may have faced a dilemma as a defense attorney, who aspired to become a district attorney, because he was also an officer of the court who had ethical responsibility to the court, the public and the accused. However, when Kennon ran for the office of District Attorney, the local newspapers wrote positively of him. No record was found of any allegations that Kennon had engaged in unprofessional or unethical conduct.

³For responsibilities of a trial lawyer see the following: William J. Chambliss, Crime and the Legal Process (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1969), pp. 229-231, hereinafter cited as Chambliss, Crime; James Inciardi, Criminal Justice (New York: Academic Press, Inc., 1984), p. 409, hereinafter cited as Inciardi, Criminal Justice; Frank Miller, et al., Sentencing and the Correctional Process (2nd ed.; Mineola, New York: The Foundation Press, Inc., 1976), pp. 32-56; Susan Titus Reid, Crime and Criminology (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), P. 472; Joseph Senna and Larry Siegel, Introduction to Criminal Justice (3rd ed.; New York: West Publishing Company, 1978), pp. 240-243.

To expand his circle of useful connections, Kennon worked actively with such groups as the Junior Bar Association and the Lions Club of Minden. Printed in the Dallas Morning News was a photograph of Kennon and several other members of the Junior Bar Association. Kennon was the designated speaker of the group's meeting at Sanger's Cafe.⁴

In all likelihood, practicing as a criminal lawyer exposed Kennon to even more people than he saw while serving as mayor, for he helped to select jury members. Too, he was able to improve his ability to present oral arguments. The fact that he joined the Junior Bar Association, indicates that Kennon was ambitiously planning to further his political career.

Always civic-minded, Kennon joined the Minden Lions Club in 1926 and became president in 1930. When Kennon became a member, this organization was still in its formative stages nationally, having been organized in 1917 in Chicago. Kennon captured the concept of the International Association of Lions Clubs and strove to promote community service.⁵ Kennon, the now over-aged Boy Scout/Progressive/Lion expended many energies in civic-minded projects, all directed toward making Minden and

⁴Dallas, Texas Morning News, September 13, 1930.

⁵Minden Herald, May 31, 1940; "The Story of Lionism," The Lion, January, 1967, pp. 8-12, 60.

surrounding areas better places in which to live--and at the same time, enhancing Kennon's own reputation as a civic-minded leader.

Few records survive regarding Kennon's activities within the Lion's club. It may be assumed that Kennon, as president, along with other officers, was elected annually and that various committees were assigned specific tasks. Club meetings were probably held at least twice a month--one for business affairs and the other more of a relaxed dinner type meeting. Kennon had a busy year. At one meeting in 1930, Grover C. Thames, Superintendent of Recreation in Shreveport, addressed the Lions on the necessity of recreation not only for children, but adults as well. Stressing the need for tennis and basketball courts, and baseball diamonds, he downplayed, possibly because of the Depression, the more expensive recreational items such as swings and merry-go-rounds.⁶

The Minden Herald recorded the activities of the August 14, 1930 Lions Club meeting, at which President Kennon initiated three new members--W. F. Wright, purchasing agent for the Louisiana and Arkansas Railway Company; Jasper Goodwill, manager of the Minden Gas Company; and W. C. McKinney, secretary of the Minden Building and Loan Association. The club also named a

⁶Minden Signal Tribune, April 20, 1930.

committee to work with the Minden Chamber of Commerce relative to increasing the city's band master's salary.⁷

Kennon and the Minden Lions Club were concerned with the recreational needs of Mindenites as well as a law-abiding citizenry. Louisiana's Attorney General, Percy Saint, spoke to the club on "Duty of the Layman in the Enforcement of the Law." Another prominent speaker to address the club was Earl W. Hodges, president of the International Lions Clubs. Minden was the host city for the state meeting of Lions. Kennon's Lions were well organized. They were divided into various committees to orchestrate the state meeting, which was held in the Minden Armory.⁸

The Minden Lions were also a sociable group. They visited the weekly meeting of the Shreveport Lions Club on at least one occasion and listened to an address by the District Governor, J. L. McInnis.⁹

As Minden suffered through the throes of the Great Depression, the Lions discussed the feasibility of beginning a "curb market" as an incentive for farmers to increase their production of truck crops. Carefully studying the situation, the Lions' members felt that any

⁷Minden Herald, August 14, 1930.

⁸Ibid., November 13, 1930.

⁹Ibid.

produce not sold from the curb market could be canned. Pursuing the project, the members investigated the canning equipment of a Mr. Shadow.¹⁰ The canning process became such a phenomenal success that in a letter to the Webster Parish Principals, the Superintendent of Schools, E. S. Richardson, encouraged the group to "stay in good humor" while the Webster Parish Training school participated in the canning process.¹¹ Months later, "canning was still going on at full blast." Kennon and the Lions in an effort to promote increased home consumption, organized a co-operative canning plant.¹² Since the market price of English peas had dropped, farmers were urged to can and store their peas. They were allowed the use of free canners, water, and gas. Showing community spirit, the city provided water; the gas company, the gas; and the police jury, cans at a nominal charge.¹³

President Kennon and the Minden Lions invited H. S. Mobley of the International Harvester Company to address the club. Mobley urged the businessmen to help the

¹⁰Ibid., October 16, 1930.

¹¹Ibid., October 16, 1930.

¹²Ibid., May 1, 1931.

¹³Ibid.

farmers, and declared that farm animals would "increase the present productiveness approximately two times."¹⁴

A true representative of a farm implements company, Mobley advised the businessmen not to "change the whole system of things but to learn to live at home,"¹⁵ co-existing with the agrarian sector of society.

Kennon's tenure as president of the Minden Lions Club was well spent. An enthusiastic supporter of the Lions' program, he appeared in Bossier City, Louisiana, at that city's organization of a new Lions Club. He also attended Bossier City's Grammar School commencement activities.¹⁶ Even after his tenure as president had expired, Kennon was never far from the Lions Club. He participated in activities such as raising money for the needy, serving on the finance committee and appearing at various Club meetings.

Despite the demands of practicing law and working with the Lions Club, the young attorney also found time to continue his speaking engagements. Kennon addressed the Men's Club of Minden's First Presbyterian Church in 1929, where he spoke to approximately forty men. Rather than "preach" on a purely religious theme, Kennon focused on

¹⁴Ibid., April 17, 1931.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Plain Dealing Progress, April 17, 1930.

military training as a means of developing manly qualities. He cited his National Guard Unit, Company H, as an example and stated that the men were "receiving training in habits and appearance and bearing that will be invaluable."¹⁷

Kennon's involvement in politics and in community affairs kept him in the eyes of the public, as well as fostered in him a degree of personal fulfillment. However selfish or unselfish his motives were, he helped improve the quality of life for many as he aided in its transformation of communities into "better places in which to live."¹⁸ He participated enthusiastically in many community building projects. These were depression years, but Mindenites kept a positive attitude. The Lions always sought to improve conditions, even if it involved no more than discussing the bandmaster's salary. Under the guiding hand of Kennon, the Lions made considerable strides.¹⁹

By election time in 1930, Kennon was ready to seek the office of District Attorney for the Twenty-sixth Judicial District. Governor Huey P. Long decided in 1930 to seek a seat in the United States Senate. The Plain

¹⁷Minden Signal Tribune, October 16, 1929.

¹⁸"Bring Quality to Life," The Lion, July/August, 1986, p. 27.

¹⁹Minden Herald, August 14, 1930.

Dealing Progress, a rural newspaper, carried a front page article on both men in its edition of Thursday, April 17, 1930. The paper stated that Long would oppose Senator Joseph E. Randsell, "provided he could complete his term as governor before taking the senate seat if elected."²⁰ Since Kennon was no longer in public office, he could devote much of his time to campaigning. Three days later, one of Kennon's hometown newspapers released the news of his candidacy and stated:

Mr. Kennon has been urged by his friends and supporters to offer for this office since his legal training, together with his record and experience in public office and community affairs, make him the most logical man in the District for the office of District Attorney.²¹

The Twenty-Sixth Judicial District, composed of Bossier and Webster Parishes, had been created in 1926. Prior to the creation of the district, the last regular election had been held in 1924. However, when the new district was created, a special election was held in 1926, and R. H. Lee was elected as District Attorney.²² Competing against Kennon for the District Attorney's office in 1930, was Arthur M. Wallace, an attorney from

²⁰Plain Dealing Progress, April 17, 1930; see also Joe Gray Taylor, Louisiana A Bicentennial History (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1976), pp. 163-164.

²¹Minden Signal Tribune, April 20, 1930.

²²Plain Dealing Progress, April 17, 1930.

Webster parish. His family was less affluent than Kennon's, whose father was an established businessman. At the age of sixteen, Wallace had assumed the responsibility of supporting his mother and sisters, while simultaneously educating himself. While Kennon had not served in the armed forces during World War I, Wallace was a war veteran. Both men practiced criminal law. Wallace's political advertisement stated that he would handle "the many duties of the office of [District Attorney] with a clean record, as to his personal conduct and official duty." Additionally, the ad stated; "His private life is an open book and his official record very gratifying."²³

Perhaps these statements were intended to compare Wallace favorably with Kennon. If they were, Kennon did not counter by attacking Wallace in his own political ad: Kennon's impressive accomplishments were listed instead--successful lawyer, mayor, Judge of Municipal Court, special attorney for Police Jury, and public speaker. The ad declared: Kennon

is a public-spirited citizen and now President of the Minden Lions Club. The civic service he has rendered, his experience and record as Attorney and Public Officer, all entitle him to promotion.²⁴

²³Political advertisement, located in Webster Parish Library, Minden, Louisiana.

²⁴Minden Herald, September 4, 1930.

It must be remembered that Kennon had groomed himself for the job over a number of years. A review of the newspapers suggests that the campaign for District Attorney was not a dirty one. To qualify as candidates for the primary election, both Kennon and Wallace had to meet requirements mandated by the Louisiana Constitution of 1921 and the State Central Committee of the Democratic party. Individuals desiring to become candidates had to be qualified voters and members of the Democrat party. Additionally, they had to declare, in writing, of their qualifications and their desire for the office, and submit a fee, which would be placed in the state treasury.²⁵ The Democratic Judicial Executive Committee of Bossier and Webster Parishes met in Minden and set forth a number of requirements for the upcoming election with which Kennon and other candidates had to comply:

- 1) In compliance with the primary election laws of the state, the Democratic primary election was to be held on Tuesday, September 9, 1930.
- 2) Each candidate had to file his papers with the chairman, M. H. Sandlin, of the committee before midnight, July 27, 1930.
- 3) Each candidate had to submit a deposit of \$25.00 to help with the expenses incurred by the committee.
- 4) If a second primary were held, the same clerks and commissioners who served in the earlier

²⁵Coleman Lindsay, Elections in Louisiana (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Department of Education, 1940), pp. 42-44.

election, would continue in the same capacity in October, 1930.

- 5) Only qualified, registered, white electors could vote in the election.²⁶

On September 9, 1930 voters in Webster and Bossier parishes cast their ballots. When the votes were tallied, Kennon had received 2,995 votes to Wallace's 1,825. Kennon was clearly the victor, carrying Bossier and Webster parishes by an almost two-to-one majority. The district contained thirty-five precincts, Webster with 16 precincts to Bossier's 19. Both men were from Webster parish but Kennon received about 64 percent of Webster's 2,715 votes. Even in Bossier parish Kennon received approximately 59 percent of the 2,102 votes cast for District Attorney.²⁷ Kennon had fewer votes than his opponent in only three precincts: Springhill in Webster parish registered 120 votes for Kennon and 124 votes for Wallace. Two Bossier precincts, Benton and Alden Branch, listed 144 and 51 votes, respectively for Wallace, as opposed to Kennon's 39 and 37 votes, respectively. The following table summarizes the votes received by both men in all thirty-five precincts.

²⁶Minden Herald, July 10, 1930.

²⁷Figures derived from official count as recorded in Minden Herald, September 18, 1930.

Table 1. Votes in Webster and Bossier Parishes

Webster Parish			Bossier Parish		
	Kennon	Wallace		Kennon	Wallace
Shongaloo	127	102	Atkins	20	24
Leton	42	14	Curtis	24	20
Evergreen	49	11	Taylorstown	59	24
Springhill	120	124	Benton	39	144
Sarepta	85	32	Bos. Cy. S.	240	100
Cotton Val.	172	49	Banceville	18	12
Hortman	4	3	Bos. Cy. N.	177	58
Doyline	107	21	Plain Dl. E.	124	81
McIntyre	47	16	Alden Br.	37	51
Courthouse	240	160	Plain Dl. W.	116	94
Yellow Pine	13	7	Carterville	70	69
Sibley	70	30	Mot	81	26
Hi School	312	189	Rocky Mt.	42	11
Fogle's G.	210	124	Leton	25	19
Heflin	78	45	Ivan	21	27
Dubberly	<u>72</u>	<u>40</u>	Belleview	21	38
Totals	1748	967	Haughton	106	51
			Koran	18	4
			Adner	<u>9</u>	<u>2</u>
			Totals	1247	855

Source: Compiled from figures listed in Minden Herald, September 18, 1930.

Even before assuming his official responsibilities, Kennon demonstrated that he could do something for his constituents, and for his own image at the same time. Webster Parish faced a drought in 1930 and many farmers were finding it difficult in the depression-ridden era to pay their taxes. An alert student of law, Kennon found a statute providing for the deferring of farmers' taxes in the event of catastrophe. The state legislature had mandated such action in Act 5 of the special session in 1927. Knowing what the legislation meant to the farmers,

Kennon sent a special telegram to Percy Saint, Attorney General of Louisiana:

. . . The Minden Lions Club in aiding drought-affected Webster Parish Farmers may secure postponement of their nineteen thirty taxes under the Act Numbered Five of the Special Session of the Legislature. . . .

Request ruling that property owners in drought-affected area may file affidavits and have nineteen thirty taxes postponed. . . .

Please wire opinion collect.

Robert F. Kennon
Pres. Minden Lions Club²⁸

Saint confirmed Kennon's request, whereupon Kennon next wrote to H. F. Heflin, President of the Webster Parish Police Jury, notifying him of the special legislation which allowed farmers to pay their taxes in ten installments with no penalties, except that of six-percent interest on deferred payments. After informing Heflin of the postponement, Kennon further stated:

I also call attention to Act Six of the same session authorizing the state board of liquidation to make loans to police juries in an amount not to exceed the deficiency in revenue resulting from postponement.

I am writing this letter because, as an incoming district attorney, I will be legal advisor for the Webster parish police jury, and I deem it expedient to begin at once with plans for handling affidavits of Webster land owners, and to arrange with the board

²⁸Minden Signal Tribune, September 24, 1930.

of liquidation for funds from other sources to replace this deficiency in revenue.²⁹

The fact that Kennon conferred with the Attorney General before writing the Police Jury may be seen as evidence of Kennon's political deftness. It may be said with reservations, that he was becoming a somewhat calculating politician, with an eye on his political destiny. He would do nothing to "upset the order of things at the top of the government." For, he would serve as District Attorney for ten years, winning unopposed, a second term in 1936.

Kennon came into office under the Louisiana Constitution of 1921, which stipulated that a district attorney's annual salary of \$2500 was to come from the state. Any additional salary, delineated by the Legislature, was to be paid by the parishes of the district.³⁰

As state's attorney in the criminal justice process, Kennon was in charge of all criminal prosecution

²⁹Shreveport Journal, September 25, 1930; for additional information see West's Louisiana Statutes Annotated: Revised Statutes, Sections 16:1 to 17:410, XIII (St. Paul, Minnesota: West Publishing Co., 1982), pp. 10, 11.

³⁰R. L. Carleton, Local Government and Administration in Louisiana (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1935), p. 140.

proceedings in his district.³¹ Over the ten-year period during which he served, Kennon prosecuted almost every possible offense--gambling, bank robbery, manslaughter, worthless checks, carnal knowledge, reckless driving, illegal liquor, pollution of water, refusal to pay rent, cruelty to animals, illegal public dance halls, and selling undersized fish. He even padlocked a gambling club in Bossier Parish in 1938. Most of the cases were routine. He worked within an adversary system, which holds "that out of a controlled battle or struggle, truth will be discovered."³² These "controlled battles" were conducted in continuous sessions for ten months of the year.

The Webster Parish Grand Jury investigated twenty-three cases in March, 1931. It was the responsibility of this body to screen cases for possible trial proceedings. Of the twenty-three cases presented by Kennon, the jury rendered thirteen true bills--agreeing that the accused

³¹For duties of prosecutor see the following books: Chambliss, Crime, p. 207; Inciardi, Criminal Justice, pp. 396-399; Miller, et al., Sentencing and the Correctional Process, p. 56; Senna and Siegel, Introduction to Criminal Justice, p. 232; Wayne R. LaFave, Arrest: The Decision to Take a Suspect Into Custody (no city listed: Little, Brown and Company, 1965), p. 57ff; Jerome Hall, Theft, Law and Society (2nd ed.; New York: The Bobbs Merrill Company, Inc., 1952), p. 144; Ronald Waldron, et al., The Criminal Justice System (2nd ed.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, (1979), pp. 31, 68ff, hereinafter cited as Waldron, The Criminal Justice System.

³²Waldron, The Criminal Justice System, p. 31.

should be tried--and ten no bills--deciding that the evidence warranted no need for a trial, and the accused released.³³ All types of criminals passed before Prosecutor Kennon. On one occasion, speaking of the approximately sixty-five cases on the court's docket, Kennon said, "Only one murder case was being reviewed and the general run of the cases are only of an average nature."³⁴ Only two weeks earlier, it was reported that fifty-four cases were on the docket.

Three of the notable cases which occurred during his two terms involved manslaughter, or the willful killing of one human by someone else. In one case Kennon prosecuted Jimmie Munson for allegedly killing Charlie Daniel. Munson, assisted by his lawyer, John T. Campbell, pled not guilty. Prosecutor Kennon presented his case to the jury, but Campbell refused to offer a statement. When all of the evidence had been presented, the jury retired to decide a verdict. Kennon's skill in presentation in this case failed him, for the verdict was not guilty.³⁵ A second manslaughter case involved Winston Blanton, who waived arraignment and offered a plea of not guilty. Set

³³Minden Herald, March 5, 1931.

³⁴Ibid., September 11, 1936.

³⁵State of Louisiana v. Jimmie Munson, 5900 (1932), court records stored in the office of the clerk of court, Minden, Louisiana.

for April 10, 1939, the case was argued and the jury retired to reach a verdict on April 12th. The verdict again, was not guilty. Kennon motioned for the jury to be polled, whereupon each jury member stated that the verdict was correct. This was another loss for Kennon.³⁶ The "Chicken Inn" murder case attracted media attention in 1936. Joe Armenia, a naturalized citizen and reputed gangster, was indicted for fatally shooting "Smokey Joe" Feducia and Frank Ferraro at "a Coushatta road resort at 3:30 a.m. Sunday, June 16, 1935."³⁷ According to Joe Spataro, who was to have served as the state's star witness, the killings resulted after an argument over money. Kennon alleged that Armenia "willfully and unlawfully kill [ed] and slay [slew] Joe Feducia and Frank Ferraro."³⁸ Represented by counsels A. M. Wallace and W. P. Hardeman, Armenia waived arraignment and pled guilty. Earlier in the preliminary hearing, several witnesses who had earlier refused to speak of the incident "broke their silence for the first time and told what remains as the only detailed account of the slaying,"

³⁶State of Louisiana v. Winston Blanton, 1257 (1939), court records stored in the office of the clerk of court, Benton, Louisiana.

³⁷Shreveport Times, March 14, 1936.

³⁸State of Louisiana v. Joe Armenia, 12087 (1936), court records stored in the office of the clerk of court, Benton, Louisiana, hereinafter cited as State of Louisiana v. Joe Armenia.

reported the Shreveport Times.³⁹ In many preliminary hearings, the prosecutor presents evidence and tries to persuade the court that there is cause for considering the accused guilty. Witnesses are examined and if the courts decide that a probable cause does exist, the prosecutor may then present the case to the grand jury. The Bossier parish grand jury gave a true bill against Joe Armenia. Judge J. Frank McInnis sentenced Armenia to serve not less than four years and not more than twelve years in the state penitentiary.⁴⁰

Kennon became District Attorney when the United States was suffering from the Great Depression. Historian Norman K. Risjord said of the Depression years,

Each year seemed worse than the last. In 1930 national income was \$68 billion, down from \$81 billion in 1929, and there were four million unemployed.⁴¹

Writing of the situation in Louisiana, Edwin Davis recounted: "The Depression years of the thirties were bleak ones for many Louisianians."⁴² Jobs were difficult

³⁹Shreveport Times, March 14, 1936.

⁴⁰State of Louisiana v. Joe Armenia.

⁴¹Norman Risjord, America, A History of the United States (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985), p. 714, Hereinafter Cited as Risjord, America.

⁴²Edwin A. Davis, Louisiana: The Pelican State (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), p. 320.

to find but many families planted gardens and raised chickens and cattle to survive. But not all Louisianians were industrious or possessed high moral character. Kennon found himself overwhelmed with cases involving individuals who, experiencing hard times, resorted to stealing food, writing worthless checks, engaging in "confidence games," or refusing to pay rent. John White, the share tenant of H. W. Smith, was prosecuted by Kennon for selling cotton belonging to Smith. White was convicted, but due to "good behavior" Kennon suspended the sentence.⁴³

In another case, Manuel Anderson was sentenced to serve thirty days for stealing two bushels of corn from Harry Gates. In the case of State of Louisiana vs. Irvin Wooten, Kennon prosecuted Wooten for defrauding Mrs. A. G. Strother of food and housing accommodations, which had been provided for three or four months. The prosecution presented evidence, but Wooten was discharged and his bond was cancelled.⁴⁴ Most of the individuals were not hard-core criminals, but simply victims of hard times.

⁴³State of Louisiana v. John White, 6406 (1936), court records stored in the office of the clerk of court, Minden, Louisiana.

⁴⁴State of Louisiana v. Manuel Anderson, 12179 (1936), court records stored in the office of the clerk of court, Minden, Louisiana; State of Louisiana v. Irvin Wooten, 6659 (1938), court records stored in the office of the clerk of court, Benton, Louisiana.

The year 1933 was a traumatic one for Minden. Not only was the city experiencing the throes of the Great Depression, but as John A. Agan in "Minden, Louisiana 1933," emphatically declared, in this year three catastrophic occurrences happened: "the northern part of town burned down, the middle part went broke, and the southern part blew away."⁴⁵ In 1933 when president Franklin D. Roosevelt proclaimed a national banking holiday, Mindenites were not overly concerned. The two Minden banks appeared to be stable, even though the Bank of Webster had failed in 1930, but had been reorganized. But to the dismay of many, the second banking facility, the Bank of Minden and Trust, Co., did not open on April 10, 1933. To make matters worse, the State Bank Examiner, J. S. Brock, directed the affairs of the bank.⁴⁶ Some of the city leaders accused the bank officers of malfeasance. At the same time that the bank was under reorganization, the Webster Parish Grand Jury requested an audit of the bank's books, and provided \$1000 to pay for the audit. In November, 1933, the auditors, L. D. Battle, Certified Public Accountant and John H. Davidson of Shreveport gave their final report. The Grand Jury indicted R. H. Miller,

⁴⁵John A. Agan, "Minden, Louisiana: 1933," North Louisiana Historical Journal, XV (Spring-Summer, 1984), 61, hereinafter cited as Agan, "Minden, Louisiana: 1933."

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 64.

former President; A. B. Hardeman, former Cashier; J. W. Miller, former Assistant Cashier; J. B. Snell, J. M. Phillips, and J. B. Sandefur, all former Directors. When District Judge J. G. McInnis quashed the indictments of the Grand Jury because of irregularities, Kennon said:

Since this is a case of wide interest and importance in the parish and since there is serious question as to legality of the present grand jury, resulting in the quashing of these indictments by the court, I expect to refer to the case completed and in full to the new Webster Grand Jury in Marcy [sic] (1934).⁴⁷

In March 1934, when the Grand Jury did convene, the momentum had waned. The bank had been reorganized with none of the indicted officers playing an active role. The bank case was not considered by the new grand jury, probably because Kennon knew by then, that no "true bill" would be returned. If the Grand Jury did not hear the case, it was only because Kennon chose not to present it.

Kennon's role as district attorney made him one of the most influential officials in the twenty-sixth judicial district. It may be stated that his influence probably was second only to the district judge, McInnis. Kennon was the "government lawyer" and the "enforcement authority" of his community.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Inciardi, Criminal Justice, P. 396.

It was also Kennon's duty to maintain the decorum of the office which had been intrusted to him by the public. At the same time that he had to show some compassion for the victims of the Depression, most of whom, were not hardened criminals, he had to attempt to indict and convict those who engaged in white-collar crimes. A case-in-point was the incident involving the malfeasance charge levelled against the bank officials. Societal pressure doubtless played a big role in Kennon's decision to prosecute some cases. But it may be assumed also that Kennon reached some discriminating decisions by himself. In addition, Kennon's mistakes would have been exposed by the local press. With his discretionary powers Kennon did opt on several occasions to enter a "nolle prosequi," or refusal to prosecute for whatever the cause. He exercised his prosecutorial discretions in a number of ways. His padlocking of gambling houses or clubs and the concern he showed over ecological imbalance are indications of his indefatigable efforts as a prosecuting attorney. His role in the adversary system of law was to see that truth was unveiled. His role was tantamount to that of a "criminal investigator and initiator of the criminal process."⁴⁹

Kennon's experience as district attorney would serve as a stepping stone for greater political advancement.

⁴⁹Waldron, The Criminal Justice System, p. 36.

When he later ran for the position of appellate court judge, voters remembered his solid service as district attorney. Kennon faced many perplexing problems, but he served with dignity. Apparently he was intuitive, perceptive, and was well-read in legal matters. In 1931 he was elected second vice-president of the Louisiana District Attorney's Association.⁵⁰ Meeting in conjunction with the Louisiana Bar Association in Baton Rouge, Kennon and the other district attorneys agreed to meet in July at Alexandria to discuss proposed criminal legislation which was to be presented to the legislature.⁵¹

But Kennon did not devote all of his time to work. He had an active social life. Kennon met the woman who would become his wife at a country club dance in 1930. In his own words, Kennon said of his wife's family:

They were probably the wealthiest people of the parish [Bossier]. They knew about everything that was going on in the parish . . . I didn't have any trouble getting elected district attorney in 1930.⁵²

Kennon's marriage to Eugenia Sentell was not a mere calculated alliance. Undoubtedly the two loved each other. Kennon did not marry a childhood sweetheart, or a

⁵⁰Minden Signal Tribune, May 20, 1931.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Lewis Morris's Interview of Robert Kennon, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, January 6, 1983. Oral History Department of the Archives and Record Service, Office of the Secretary of State; State of Louisiana, Baton Rouge, p. 20, hereinafter cited as Morris's Interview.

college girlfriend. In fact, he was married rather late, at almost age 29, to a member of a wealthy and prominent family from an adjoining parish in which Kennon was not well-known. He experienced no trouble getting elected district attorney. At any rate, having power and wealth on his side added to his status. Elaborating further, Kennon said:

Her [Eugenia Sentell's] father was one of the principal citizens in Bossier Parish, Louisiana. Bossier and Webster parishes made up my old district attorney district. Her father was an outstanding leader in all things in Bossier Parish. Her uncle was a leader [in] Caddo Parish, across the river from Bossier Parish. He was president of the police jury of Caddo Parish, and was quite well known in that. Her aunt had the same thing. . . just leading people in the parish. Her parents had just been leaders. . . .⁵³

Kennon's stress on "leaders" should not be taken lightly. Eugenia Sentell was born on December 27, 1908, to Annie Sherburne and Nathaniel William Sentell in Bossier Parish, where she was reared on a plantation--Collingsburg. Her mother was the second wife of Nathaniel. The first wife, Betty Sherburne, was a first cousin of Eugenia's mother. From both of these unions Eugenia had eleven siblings. She had fond memories of her idyllic childhood on the plantation:

. . . four poster beds, open fires, early morning coffee, roasted and ground especially for the household and served to her father in bed bright and early by Joe, one of the faithful servants of the home for years, casual Sunday afternoons with

⁵³Ibid., p. 55.

relatives and friends dropping in for fresh peach ice cream made on the big back screened porch with hand-turned freezer served with homemade cake with lemon and caramel filling.⁵⁴

Eugenia graduated from Louisiana Polytechnic Institute, in 1930, with a Bachelor of Science degree in Home Economics. Her college career was a busy one. She belonged to a number of organizations--Student Council, Morale Committee, Dramatic Club and Choirister, Musical Club, Glee Club, and Home Economics Club. During her sophomore year she was selected as the "Girl of the Limberlost," which meant that she was to represent a part of the school's yearbook, the Lagniappe. In her junior year the student body elected her the most popular girl on the campus. During her senior year she presented a vocal recital, served as president of the House Organization (a residential student concern), and of the Glee Club. She also held office in the Young Women's Christian Association and was a Kappa Delta.⁵⁵ Kennon so impressed Eugenia, that the first time she ever voted she did so for him in 1930, when he was a candidate for district attorney.) The wedding announcement, which appeared in the Shreveport Journal on June 6, 1931, described the bride-elect as having taught school during the last

⁵⁴"Mrs. Robert F. Kennon, First Lady of Louisiana," The Register, IV (May 10, 1952), p. 4.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 4, 5.

session. The announcement described Eugenia and Robert as a "prominent young couple," and said the wedding would "be a social event of widespread interest."⁵⁶ The wedding took place on June 30, 1931 at the Cottage Grove Presbyterian Church in Bossier Parish. Along with the two ministers, the Rev. Henry McGehee and the Rev. M. M. Miller, were a number of attendants for both the bride and groom. One of Eugenia's sisters served as matron of honor, while Kennon's oldest brother served as best man. Eugenia and her husband established residence in Minden. Their oldest son Robert, Jr. was born February 23, 1937. Charles Sentell, the second son, was born July 21, 1940, and Kenneth Wood, the youngest, on December 8, 1943.⁵⁷ The parents took an active role in the upbringing of their boys. Taking time out of his busy schedule, Kennon took the boys fishing and hunting. Years later, he said of his sons,

I always treated my boys . . . to give them everything that's good for 'em. I [gave] 'em their exercise. I [gave] 'em boats to go fishing in and airplanes to fly in.⁵⁸

⁵⁶Shreveport Journal, June 6, 1931; see also, "The Governor's Lady--Mrs. Robert Kennon," The Register, IV (February 23, 1952), 6.

⁵⁷Kennon Family Lineage, located in office of Michael Kennon, Minden, Louisiana.

⁵⁸Morris's Interview, p. 57.

Kennon also played an active role in his church. As a child he was brought up as a Methodist. His mother was a devoted church worker, one who attended Wednesday night prayer meetings. Yet, when Kennon married he became affiliated with the Presbyterian faith at his father's suggestion. Eugenia's family was also Presbyterian, so this insured no religious incompatibility. Why Floyd Kennon offered this advice to his son is unknown. Did he want to advance his son's prestige? or, did he feel that the Presbyterian church would provide more spiritual amenities?

For whatever reason, Kennon decided to cast his lot with the Presbyterians. He had addressed the Men's Club in 1929. At this meeting the pastor spoke of the Men's bible Class taught by Judge H. C. Drew, and thanked the men for their hearty participation. The Signal-Tribune said of the meeting, "Three new names were added to the roll of members."⁵⁹ It seemed as if the church was making new strides. When Kennon joined, he made a noticeable impact on the church's program. Not one to sit idle, he played an active role and by 1935, he had gained regional fame.

Nineteen thirty-five was a memorable year for Kennon, because he was elected president of the laymen's

⁵⁹Minden Signal Tribune, October 16, 1929.

organization of the Red River Presbytery. Journeying to Shreveport for the sixteenth annual convention, along with several others from his church, including Pastor W. Frank O'Kelley, Kennon met other Presbyterians from North Louisiana. The welcome address was given by the president of the organization, Dr. Frank Walker of Shreveport. Minden's young district attorney responded to the welcome. The city was well-represented, with Minden and Ruston both placing second for attendance.

The main address was delivered by the Rev. Thomas W. Currie of Austin, Texas. At the luncheon, Kennon and Emmett A. Shaw were the two main speakers.⁶⁰ The Minden delegation was indeed quite busy. Pastor O'Kelley spoke on home missions, as well as serving as chairman of the Resolutions Committee. When the officers were elected for the following year, Kennon was chosen president of the laymen's association.⁶¹ Kennon proved to be an able leader of the Presbyterian laymen of North Louisiana. When he and his family transferred to the First Presbyterian Church of Baton Rouge, years later, Kennon had attained the position of Chairman of the Board of Deacons at the Minden church.⁶² Kennon continued even

⁶⁰Shreveport Journal, February 25, 1935.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Minden, Louisiana, Minutes of Minden Presbyterian Church, September 7, 1952.

more to expand his circle of acquaintances. He worked actively in his fraternal order, Minden Masonic Lodge No. 51. This lodge had been established in 1845. It is easy for one to understand why Kennon was attracted to this organization. Doubtless, serving as extra incentive to Kennon's decision to join, was the fact that his father was secretary of the lodge. At the age of twenty-one, while still a student at Louisiana State University, Robert was initiated into the Minden lodge. While yet in school, he received Masonic degrees from the Baton Rouge lodge because "they did it [performed] for the Minden Lodge,"⁶³ said Kennon.

Apparently he worked his way up through the ranks, for in 1936 at the age of thirty-three, in the city of New Orleans, he was installed as "Most Worshipful Grand Mason" in Louisiana. He was one of the youngest men ever to receive this honor. A New Orleans newspaper, The New Orleans Morning Tribune, listed the officers who were installed by the Grand Lodge. Not only was Kennon installed, but his father Floyd was also installed as one of the worship grand stewards, and Archie T. Higgins of New Orleans, as right worship deputy grand master. Kennon had a large staff with which to work and to direct.⁶⁴

⁶³Morris's Interview, p. 17.

⁶⁴New Orleans Morning Tribune, February 7, 1936.

Meeting at the same time that Kennon's group, the "Louisiana Grand Lodge, Free and accepted Masons," met, another masonic unit, the "Knights Templar," also convened and elected officers. There were in excess of seven-hundred delegates attending the three-day session. Officers of the Grand Lodge were guests at a banquet given by the Concorde Chapter. Speaking of the influence that a Grand Master has, Kennon stated, "If you go into a Masonic meeting or a statewide Masonic meeting, you are recognized as a leader and are given a lot of consideration."⁶⁵

Somehow Kennon found time within his hectic schedule as a district attorney to carry out his responsibilities as the Most Worship Grand Master. But, he possessed the stamina needed. Definite advantages were his youthfulness and vigor. In April 1936, along with a part of his staff, including, Grand Junior Warden R. H. Brooks, Deputy Grand Master A. T. Higgins, and Grand Senior Warden Charles Ratcliff, Kennon was included in the one thousand masons from throughout Louisiana who visited the Alexander Masonic Children's Home.⁶⁶ In July, 1936, he and Higgins, who was also a justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court, conducted a ten-day trip through Louisiana. They were involved in Masonic activities in such cities as DeRidder,

⁶⁵Morris's Interview, p. 18.

⁶⁶Shreveport Times, April 18, 1936.

Leesville, Many, Lafayette, Cadesville, Natchitoches, Winnfield, New Orleans, and Hall Summit.⁶⁷ To the average person, such a trip would have been taxing, but the energetic Kennon thrived on it. Earlier in the same month, he was one of the speakers, along with other members of his staff, at a July 4th picnic at Camp Garrison on the Amite River. In attendance at this picnic, according to The Square and Compasses, were "Several hundred Masons with their families and friends from East Baton Rouge, Livingston, and Ascension parishes."⁶⁸ Official Masonic responsibilities compelled him to travel to New Orleans on six separate occasions from September through November, 1936. On this official visitation, he met and interacted with all the lodges in the First Masonic District, which was comprised of New Orleans, Algiers, and Gretna.⁶⁹

Certainly, one of the high points of his tenure as grand master of the Louisiana Masons, was his invitation to speak in Washington, D. C. at the National convention of grand masters. Because of his exemplary record in the work of masonry, he was duly honored at this convention.

⁶⁷Minden Herald, July 24, 1936.

⁶⁸The Square and Compass, XXXIV (July 1936), 6.

⁶⁹Ibid.

He was also invited to Boston, Massachusetts to present the keynote address for a statewide-meeting of masons.⁷⁰

Even when his position "Most Grand Worship Master" had expired, Kennon still continued to toil as a mason. When Louisiana Supreme Court Justice Archibald Higgins, who had been elevated to the position of Grand Master, presented an address in Shreveport, to the Master Masons of Northwest Louisiana, he was a guest in the Kennon home. Speaking in Shreveport on Friday night, April 9, 1937, the judge, at Kennon's request, met with Minden lawyers on Saturday morning in the Kennon home.⁷¹ The following year, Kennon delivered the keynote address at Shreveport's new masonic temple. Speaking to Masons from eighteen lodges, Kennon discussed the United States Constitution. The speech was broadcast on the radio.⁷² Keeping busy within his own local lodge, he served as president, continued to install officers and to help host a District Meeting.

Joining the Masonic order allowed Kennon to continue to gain influence, and most of all, to become known, not only by his fraternal brothers, but by their families and friends as well. It is obvious that Kennon was indeed

⁷⁰Shreveport Journal, April 10, 1940.

⁷¹Minden Signal Tribune and Springhill Journal, April 11, 1937.

⁷²Minden Herald, December 2, 1938.

making greater strides in his effort to achieve recognition in not only political but social sectors as well. When Justice Higgins died in 1945, Kennon was appointed to serve his unexpired term on the Louisiana Supreme Court.

Making speeches also continued to be a favorite pastime of District Attorney Kennon. He spoke in every parish of North Louisiana at college chapel assemblies, high school commencements, Rotary, Lions and Kiwanis luncheons, chamber of commerce meetings, and Ladies' Department Club meetings.⁷³ Some of the printed programs included in the Kennon Papers are the following:⁷⁴

- (1) April 27, 1934 - Meeting of the Louisiana Bar Association in Lake Charles. Kennon gave response on behalf of visiting delegates.
- (2) June 12, 1934 - Armageddon Club's 5th Anniversary Banquet. Kennon gave the address.
- (3) February 22, 1935 - 16th Annual Convention of the Laymen of Red River Presbytery. Kennon gave the response.
- (4) 1935 - Annual Convention of Louisiana State Branch National League of District Postmasters. Kennon was one of the speakers.
- (5) February 12, 1936 - Joint convention of the Laymen of Louisiana Presbytery and Red River Presbytery. Kennon responded to the welcome.
- (6) April 23, 1938 - Annual Banquet of Louisiana State Bar Association in Baton Rouge. Kennon was one of the speakers representing the Minden

⁷³Shreveport Journal, April 10, 1940.

⁷⁴Printed programs, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 9.

Bar. He and Justice Odom of the Louisiana Supreme Court were the main speakers.

- (7) May 26, 1939. Commencement Exercises at Ringgold High School. Kennon delivered address.

It has been said that Kennon was "able to call more people by name than any man in Louisiana."⁷⁵

As an officer of the Louisiana National Guard, Kennon continued to physically condition himself and to improve his abilities as a leader. Whether a natural disaster occurred, or whether a foreign enemy threatened to compromise America's national security, Kennon, a citizen - soldier, was ready to meet the challenge. The thirties witnessed a number of catastrophic events. Mindenites agonized over the Depression, natural disasters, and political upheavals in state government. These occurrences had an impact on Kennon's career as an officer of the National Guard. On Monday, May 1, 1933, in his hometown of Minden, a tornado roared through, killing over twenty and injuring more than one hundred. So severe was the storm that 310 businesses and homes were destroyed. John Agan in "Minden Louisiana: 1933," wrote, "A crew of 300 men worked for five days to just clear all of the streets. . . ."⁷⁶ The established procedure for dispatching the Guard, is for the state's governor to give

⁷⁵Shreveport Journal, April 10, 1940.

⁷⁶Agan, "Minden, Louisiana: 1933," p. 71.

the order. In Minden, the telegraph and telephone wires had been blown down, so Mayor Connell Fort ordered Kennon's company to assist.⁷⁷

Kennon and Company H were also ordered by Governor Oscar K. Allen to New Orleans during a political war between Senator Huey P. Long and New Orleans Mayor T. Semmes Wamsley. This incident was possibly the first political warfare on the state level that Kennon witnessed. At the behest of Governor O. K. Allen and Senator Long, a legislative committee had been named to investigate corruption in New Orleans. Long, Allen, the investigative committee, and uniformed troops "invaded" New Orleans. Not only did Long want New Orleans politically cleansed, he also wanted control of voter registration records, so that he could manipulate electors in favor of his own candidates. Allen called out the National Guard. Some of the troops seized the registration offices, while others placed machine guns in windows of a building near the city hall. Allan P. Sindler quotes Mayor Semmes Wamsley as saying,

I warn you, Huey Long, you cringing coward, that if a life is spent in the defense of this city and its right of self-government, you shall pay the penalty as other carpetbaggers have done before you.⁷⁸

⁷⁷Minden and Springhill Journal, July 4, 1976.

⁷⁸Allan P. Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana: State Politics, 1920-1952 (Reprinted ed.; Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1980), p. 91; see also Thomas Martin, Dynasty: The Longs of Louisiana (New York: G.P.

After the September primary, and Long's candidates for Congress, Public Service Commission and the state supreme court had won, Long dismissed the Guard. Kennon's Company H returned home. How Kennon really felt about being ordered to protect the Long-Allen regime is unknown. The sources do not state Kennon's political views during the 1930's. But, it is highly probable that he was an early opponent of Longism, considering his social status and conservative background and the area of Louisiana in which he was raised. When Kennon and his guardsmen were not answering calls of emergency in the thirties, they were involved in various training exercises which would provide them with technical know-how, as well as the ability to think and act quickly.

The United States was not involved in a declared war, but the government continued to remain, to a degree, in a state of preparedness. When Kennon's prized Company H went to Camp Beauregard, Louisiana, for a fifteen-day camp meet in July, 1930, they did so as part of a United States Army training exercise.⁷⁹ Some five months after the Camp Beauregard experience, Company H received another

Putnam's Sons, 1960), pp. 124-126.

⁷⁹Minden Herald, July 10, 1930.

commendation. The machine gun company received a free invitation to Shreveport's Strand Theatre.⁸⁰

During the latter part of June, 1930, Colonel Hollingsworth Barrett, commander of the Louisiana National Guard Regiment's 156th Infantry, accompanied by the commander of the second Battalion of the 156th Infantry, Major Oscar Schneidau, visited the armory in Minden and gave a short talk. Barrett also lauded Kennon's group for its membership election.⁸¹

On occasion, Kennon himself delivered speeches. In April 1937, following the annual inspection by Lieutenant Colonel Edward J. Oliver, Kennon's men gave two platoon demonstrations. Later, at a banquet held at the Imperial Hotel, he served as the toastmaster, while Oliver delivered the address.⁸² In a moment of levity, the largest and smallest members of the company, at 200 pounds and 127 pounds, respectively, were presented. Captain Kennon's company had an outstanding record in attendance, drill and the maintenance of their armory.

However, Kennon and his company needed additional "schooling in the art of warfare."⁸³ He and his men

⁸⁰Ibid., December 11, 1930.

⁸¹Ibid., June 26, 1930.

⁸²Minden Signal-Tribune and the Springhill Journal, April 11, 1937.

⁸³Minden Herald, December 1, 1939.

engaged in a number of training maneuvers in the thirties. While Kennon was prosecuting criminals, working as Lions Club and Masonic officials, and as a commander of a National Guard unit, a number of occurrences transpired which would lead Kennon to take an active part in a struggle to preserve democracy.

In September 1939, Hitler attacked and occupied two-thirds of Poland, leaving the remainder to the Soviet Union. In November of the same year, the headlines in the Minden Herald read, "National Guardsmen To Have Maneuvers." As captain, Kennon was in charge of the maneuvers, along with his staff of commissioned officers, First Lieutenant Arthur Life and Second Lieutenant Alton Hortman. According to the Herald, the "Local National Guard Doughboys" would "get a taste of what real army life is like."⁸⁴ Under an order from the War Department, the maneuvers were to last seven days. Company H was allowed to use weekends so more school boys and businessmen could participate. Numbering between seventy and seventy-five, the guardsmen had drilling and machine gun practice, seven hours a day. Captain Kennon and his men slept, ate and practiced in the armory for five days. One of these was allocated for both day and night maneuvers at the Federal Lake. Kennon had much planning to do, in order to prepare

⁸⁴Ibid., November 17, 1939.

his men for actual warfare. Everything from troop movement to purchasing food supplies; from local concerns to dismantling weapons are problems of any commanding officer; however, he delegates authority to others. Kennon, as commander, was no exception. From newspaper accounts, it seems as though Company H engaged in weekly winter maneuvers during the latter part of 1939. They encamped at the armory and at Federal Lake. On one occasion the men were recorded as having eaten \$200 worth of food. Kennon's mess sergeant, LeRoy Miller, declared emphatically that this was not an extraordinarily high amount, since on the average, only sixty-five cents was allotted for each man's food.⁸⁵ Along with drilling and dismantling weapons, Kennon provided for discussions of World War I experiences for his men. Kennon and his officers were praised for their meritorious services.

Historian Norman K. Risjord, writing of World War II, said, "the United States was not totally unprepared for war."⁸⁶ In 1940, Kennon speaking before the Minden Lions Club retorted that "the national preparedness program is moving along almost at a snail's pace."⁸⁷ He presented statistics to show the United States' unpreparedness.

⁸⁵Ibid., December 1, 1939.

⁸⁶Risjord, America, p. 759.

⁸⁷Minden Herald, August 2, 1940.

Speaking of the army's "meager" six hundred tanks, 42,000 rifles and 3,000 planes, he declared that the country needed "more planes, more tanks, more guns and more of every kind of military equipment."⁸⁸ Congress was debating the pros and cons of a peacetime draft. Kennon strongly endorsed the adoption of such a measure. In his speech Kennon attempted to convince the Lions of the need for the Burke-Wadsworth Bill, or the proposed Selective Training and Service Act. Appearing to be well informed on the subject, he commented on the role of the 7,000 draft officials who would prepare the registered men. A board of appeals would be established to hear those men who wanted to be exempted. The clerk's office was responsible for collating registration records to be dispatched to the War Department for filing. With the use of a complicated lottery system, men's names would be retrieved from the files of the War Department. Kennon further explained that the men required to register would do so at voting precincts. A National Guard captain himself and a married man, Kennon, told the Lions that unmarried men would be drafted first. Regular army salary of \$21 per month was the pay one could expect to

⁸⁸Ibid.

receive.⁸⁹ Kennon and the Minden Lions were in concurrence on the compulsory military bill. Lion J. E. Pitcher offered a resolution which requested senators and representatives to support the bill and any other features for the complete defense of the country. The resolution was telegraphed to Senators John H. Overton and Allen J. Ellender and Congressman Overton Brooks.⁹⁰

In 1940, Congress passed the Selective Training and Service Act, the nation's first peacetime draft. By December 1941, the army was 1,600,000 strong. When the opportunity presented itself, Kennon argued favorably for preparedness. He spoke on the air waves and made personal appearances.⁹¹ Kennon was a military man "at heart." He said, later, "I enjoyed the military a whole lot. I got with it heavily."⁹²

Kennon's National Guard unit, Company H, Second Battalion, along with other units of the 156th Infantry were converted into the 204th Coast Artillery (anti-aircraft company), First Battalion, on December 15, 1939,

⁸⁹Howard L. Hurwitz, An Encyclopedic Dictionary of American History (New York: Washington Square Press, 1974), p. 133; Shreveport Times, October 5, 1940; Minden Herald, August 2, 1940; Ruston Daily Leader, September 17, 1940.

⁹⁰Minden Herald, August 2, 1940.

⁹¹Ibid., May 2, 1941; see also Risjord, America, p. 760.

⁹²Morris's Interview, p. 21.

as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's national defense program. Company H received the designation of Battery E. Lieutenant Colonel James Fair Hardin of Shreveport, who had been Judge Advocate General of the National Guard since 1927, was commissioned Colonel on February 8, 1940, and served as the first commanding officer of the 204th Coast Artillery which had as its motto, "Preparez vous" (stand by).⁹³

Kennon was notified by Colonel Hardin that a promotion to major was forthcoming. Kennon was also informed that he was to serve as executive officer of the Second Battalion of the artillery which was comprised of units from Minden, Monroe, Ruston, and Natchitoches.⁹⁴ The Headquarters Battery, Second Battalion was formerly designated as "Service Company (less Staff Section and Band), 156th Infantry."⁹⁵ When Kennon was transferred from Battery E, Captain Arthur A. Life of Springhill, Louisiana, and a member of the unit, became the new commander. He had helped Kennon to organize Company H years earlier. Kennon received his promotion to major in

⁹³U. S. National Archives, "Insignia and Coats of Arms, 1870-1944," CABN-204-0.16.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ibid.

November, 1940, and shortly after that he was promoted to lieutenant colonel.⁹⁶

In the meantime, Kennon was "eyeing" another position. At the completion of a ten-year term as district attorney for the Twenty-Sixth Judicial District, Kennon decided to forego his remaining two years and to seek the position of judge on the Court of Appeal, Second Circuit.

⁹⁶Minden Herald, January 10, 1941.

CHAPTER IV
Soldier and Jurist

When Kennon announced his candidacy for the state court of appeals on April 10, 1940, an article in the Shreveport Journal, stated that

there are few who are not willing to concede in advance that Robert F. Kennon will be the next judge of the court of appeal and that he will go higher in his career on the bench and in public service.¹

As early as October 1939, while in Colfax, Louisiana, visiting friends, Kennon had stated that he would become a candidate for the appeals judgeship in the September 1940 primary, but that a formal announcement would appear at a later date.²

The Court of Appeal, Second Circuit, was one of three circuits covering twenty-eight parishes of North Louisiana. Each judge received a salary of \$8,000 per year and served a term of twelve years. The court had appellate jurisdiction over all workmen's compensation

¹Shreveport Journal, April 10, 1940.

²Newspaper clipping, no source listed, October 27, 1939, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 29, located in Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, hereinafter cited as Robert Floyd Kennon Papers with appropriate Box.

cases, and all personal injury suits for damages above \$100 with no limit on the amount of money involved. The court also heard civil cases where the amount involved was \$100 and not more than \$2,000 except in those exceptions prescribed by law. To become an appellate judge one had to be a citizen of the United States, a resident of the judicial district from which he was seeking election, and a lawyer who was knowledgeable in the law and who had practiced law in the state for at least six years.³

Kennon met all of these qualifications, as did his two opponents, Harmon C. Drew and E. L. Walker, both of whom were incumbent judges, Drew already on the Court of Appeal, and Walker a district judge. Drew, born in Minden in February 1889, was educated in the local public schools, and attended Louisiana State University, where he graduated in 1910 with a law degree. Drew had served as City Attorney for Minden, and later as District Judge. In 1930, he became a member of the Court of Appeal, Second Circuit.

E. L. Walker, described as a "self-made man,"⁴ was born in Jackson Parish, and worked his way through

³Minden Herald, August 2, 1940; Ruston Daily Leader, September 9, 1940; R.L. Carleton, Local Government and Administration in Louisiana (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1935), pp. 119-120, hereinafter cited as Carleton, Local Government.

⁴Ruston Daily Leader, July 31, 1940.

college. In 1921, he was admitted to the Louisiana Bar and began a law practice in Jonesboro. He moved to Ruston, and in 1928, became the first judge on the Ruston city court. Two years later, Walker was elected judge of the Third Judicial District, and, in 1936, he was re-elected with no opponents. His hometown paper, the Ruston Daily Leader, said of him:

He has a sound legal education, a seasoned judicial experience, a discriminating mind, an understanding heart, and an abundance of common sense.⁵

Because all of the candidates were well qualified, the contest posed a difficult choice for voters within the parishes of the Second Circuit--Bossier, Webster, Claiborne, Bienville, Lincoln, Union, Jackson, Caldwell, Winn and Grant. To promote himself, Walker included in his announcement of candidacy a brief description of the court of appeal and the duties of its judge:

The Judge of the court of appeal whom you will elect this fall will be called upon to pass upon the correctness of the decisions rendered by all of the district judges. . . . We naturally think our highest, or appellate courts as . . . [including] men the equal or superior of our district judges in character, legal training, ability, and judicial experience and temperament. Therefore in making a decision as to your choice among the candidates for this office, this question will arise in your minds: Is the candidate under consideration qualified by character, legal training, ability, judicial experience and temperament to pass upon the

⁵Ibid.

correctness of and perhaps overrule the decisions of the district judges. . . .⁶

The statement appeared in Kennon's hometown newspaper. Reminding voters that Kennon had served as a district attorney but not as a judge, Drew stated that a district attorney prosecuted only criminal cases, while a judge of the circuit court tried only civil suits. One of Drew's political ads stated in capital letters, "THE COURT OF APPEALS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH APPEAL IN CRIMINAL CASES."⁷

Kennon campaigned aggressively and emphasized his many past accomplishments--freshman and alumni medals at Louisiana State University, other school activities and honors; public service as mayor, district attorney, and member of the Louisiana District Attorney's Association; community service in Mason and Lions Clubs; military service as a national guard officer; member of the Louisiana State Bar and American Bar Associations; vice president of Louisiana Municipal Association; and President of the Laymen's Association of Red River Presbytery. An announcement, presumably for the Bossier Tribune, listed the various offices held by Kennon, and stated that he was

a fearless crusader for equal rights and justice for all, wearing no mans [sic] collar and a member of no

⁶Minden Herald, August 2, 1940.

⁷Ruston Daily Leader, September 9, 1940.

political faction, [with] a knowledge of Louisiana law far superior to the average.⁸

Judge Walker appears to have been the weakest contender. He entered the race only after being encouraged to do so by friends who felt he should seek promotion to a higher court, and did not elaborate on his record as a district judge. Requesting votes from Lincoln Parish, Walker said simply, "you know what the service has been."⁹

Judge Drew's campaign was more spirited than either Kennon's or Walker's. As the incumbent, Drew summarized with gusto his many accomplishments on the bench. "The dean of the court in years of service," who promised, "justice to all and special favors to none," Drew was not shy about describing the woeful situation of the Court of Appeal when he became a member on January 1, 1930.¹⁰ He recalled the court's crowded docket, and how, at his request the Louisiana Supreme Court had assisted the lower court in expediting cases.¹¹ Drew pointed to the 3,000 decisions in which he had participated, writing the majority opinion in more than one-third of them. Having

⁸Papers: 1928-1948, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 9.

⁹Ruston Daily Leader, September 6, 1940.

¹⁰Ibid., August 7, 1940.

¹¹Author's interview with Retired City Judge Richard Harmon Drew, Minden, Louisiana, January 6, 1987.

served with nine different judges, Drew reminded voters that the state supreme court had overturned less than two percent of his decisions.¹² Finally, one of Drew's political ads stated,

It is not a safe policy to exchange a judge [Drew], who has been tried and found to be fair . . . for one [Walker] who has never been tried on the appellate bench, and it is very unwise to exchange him for one [Kennon] who has had no experience and training as a judge.¹³

Kennon stumped vigorously, delivering two speeches each in Bossier and Webster Parishes, and ten speeches in one day in Lincoln Parish. Believing that his regiment would possibly be called into active service in October or November 1940, and realizing that he would have to spend one year in uniform, Kennon hastened to notify voters that his election to the judgeship would not conflict with his military obligations. The term on the court would not begin until fifteen months later, January 1, 1942. His military duty would end before that date. He added that the constitution stipulated that no national guard officer was to lose his position as judge while on duty.¹⁴

When his opponents spoke of his lack of judicial training, Kennon countered by pointing out that both Drew

¹²Ruston Daily Leader, August 7, 1940.

¹³Ibid., September 9, 1940.

¹⁴Campaign Materials: Judge of Court of Appeals, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 9, hereinafter cited as Campaign Materials, Box 9.

and Walker, because of age and judicial service, would be eligible for retirement at the end of the forthcoming twelve-year term. Drew, if elected, could retire with a life pension of \$444.44 per month.¹⁵ It should be remembered that these were Depression years, and \$444.44 a month was indeed a "good" salary. Many persons worked for no more than \$1.50 to \$1.75 a week at the time, while many others remained unemployed. Kennon's point was not lost on these voters.

On September 10, 1940, about 35,000 district voters cast their ballots. The turn-out was small, since approximately 60,000 other eligible voters remained at home. Kennon received 14,682 votes to Drew's 9,470 and Walker's 7,398 from the district's 225 precincts. Kennon, with a 5,212 vote lead over his closest opponent, lacked only 3.5 percent of a clear majority. He received 46.5 percent of the votes, Drew 30 percent, and Walker 23.5 percent. The day after the election, Kennon released his own unofficial count which also placed him ahead of the other candidates. According to Kennon's figures, his greatest strength lay in Grant, Caldwell, Winn and Claiborne Parishes, where he received 66 percent, 59 percent, 58 percent, and 51.3 percent of all votes, respectively. Drew's strength centered in the two

¹⁵Ibid.

parishes of Webster (55 percent) and Bienville (41 Percent). Trailing in third place was Walker, who received 55 percent of the Lincoln Parish vote, and 46 percent of the votes cast in Bossier Parish. He also did well in Union and Jackson Parishes, amassing 40 percent in the former and 37.3 in the latter.

Kennon's figures also showed areas of weakness of the three candidates. Kennon's lowest percentages of votes were in the parishes of Bossier (24 percent), Lincoln (25 percent), and Webster (37 percent). Drew fared worst in the parishes of Union (18 percent), Jackson (18.4 percent), Lincoln (20 percent), and Winn (24 percent). Walker's worst parishes were Webster (8 percent), Grant (11 percent), Caldwell (12 percent), and Bienville (14 percent). Kennon trailed Drew in the parishes of Bossier and Webster, and Walker in Lincoln and Bossier Parishes.¹⁶

Kennon and Drew had to contend with each other in a run-off primary. At one point rumors circulated that the incumbent, Drew, was going to drop out of the race, but when asked by newsmen what his plans really were, Drew announced that he would enter the second primary.¹⁷ The Minden Herald of September 20, 1940, reported that Drew would speak on KWKH, a Shreveport radio station on

¹⁶Ibid., Minden Herald, September 13 and 20, 1940; Ruston Daily Leader, September 11, 1940.

¹⁷Minden Herald, September 13, 1940.

September 27, and included a statement from Drew's campaign headquarters:

If the voters of this district want to hear some rare news we invite them to listen in on this radio program. The light of truth will be turned on the slanderous whispering campaign which has been made against him. Deceit and hypocrisy will be exposed.¹⁸

The war of words was on, between two equally qualified candidates, and combatant Drew spoke more loudly. Kennon ignored personal attacks and permitted his record to speak for itself. One of his own campaign documents characterized Kennon as:

A man who has conducted a clean, aggressive campaign, clear of mud-slinging and falsehoods; a man who is running on his own merits and his own record as a citizen and official; conducting his campaign in keeping with the dignity and respect due the high office of Judge of the Court of Appeal; the candidate who lacked only 3-1/2% of a clear majority in the first primary;¹⁹ leading his nearest opponent by over 5,000 votes.

The election was indeed marred by "mudslinging" and character assassination. Drew accused Kennon of taking \$5,000 in "deduct money" from former Governor Richard Leche, an unsavory member of the Huey Long faction, who had served as governor from 1936 until 1939 when he resigned because of the "Louisiana Scandals and later served time in a federal prison." Leche did not initiate the "deduct" system, but expanded it. Under this system,

¹⁸Ibid., September 20, 1940.

¹⁹Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 9.

five percent of the salaries of state employees was taken or deducted from their paychecks, with the money earmarked for the administration's campaign fund.²⁰

Kennon did not deny accepting money from Leche, but according to Drew, he gave conflicting stories of how the money was used. Kennon insisted on one occasion that he had given the money to an orphanage south of Alexandria. On other occasions, Kennon claimed the money was given to an orphanage south of Lake Charles, and to the Shriners' Home in New Orleans. Drew accused Kennon of inconsistency and reminded voters again of Kennon's narrow training in criminal cases, while asserting that an appellate judge heard only civil cases. He derided Kennon for bragging about his offspring, stating that if having children qualified a man for office, then the father of the Dionne quintuplets would be president.²¹

²⁰John T. Baldwin, "Election Strategy and Tactics of Earl Kemp Long as Seen In His Gubernatorial Campaigns" (unpublished Master's thesis, Louisiana Tech University, 1973), p. 17; Bennett H. Wall, ed., Louisiana: A History (Arlington Heights, Illinois: The Forum Press, Inc., 1984), pp. 285, 286, 288; See also the following books for detailed accounts of Leche and the scandals: Stan Opatowsky, The Longs of Louisiana (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1960), p. 123; T. Harry Williams, Huey Long: A Biography (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), p. 567; Richard McCaughan, Socks on a Rooster: Louisiana's Earl Kemp Long (Baton Rouge: Claitor's Book Store, 1967), p. 62; Thomas Martin, Dynasty: The Longs of Louisiana (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1960), p. 62; Joe Gray Taylor, Louisiana, A Bicentennial History (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1976), p. 165.

²¹Ruston Daily Leader, October 12, 1940.

Kennon warned his constituents, "Don't be misled by desperate political propaganda."²² Continuing his political advertisement, Kennon declared,

. . . You may be assured that anything said [by me] will be in keeping with the respect due the high office of Judge of the Court of Appeal.²³

On October 14, 1940, one day before election, in a political advertisement entitled "Questions and Answers," Drew, in a last-ditch effort to smear Kennon, and to juxtapose his own accomplishments with Kennon's supposed failures, summarized charges and counter-charges hurled by the two candidates at each other. The information contained in the advertisement was a recapitulation of radio talks given by Drew on September 24 and Kennon on September 25, on Shreveport station KWKH. Kennon declared that he was qualified for the judgeship because of his meritorious service as district attorney and because he had been a bright student at Louisiana State University. He did not deny that Drew had been a capable judge, but stressed his own qualifications. Drew, on the other hand, emphasized the lack of support that Kennon had received in Minden in the first primary (528 votes to Drew's 882), and in Webster Parish overall (1,285 votes to Drew's 1,920). (Both candidates lived in Minden, Webster's Parish seat.)

²²Ibid., September 25, 1940.

²³Ibid.

Kennon had made ten speeches each in Bossier and Webster Parishes, while Drew had spent only one day in each parish and had made no speeches. Still, the majority of voters had cast ballots for him. Drew put forth three reasons for Kennon's loss in the two parishes:²⁴

1) Judge Drew complained that slot machines, gambling houses, and honky-tonks were allowed to operate in both parishes, and that the law was not enforced. On the same night in which Drew had given his radio speech, seventy-eight slot machine owners had been picked up in Bossier Parish. Such a large number at one time, probably showed that Kennon had not worked assiduously as he should have in closing down such places.

2) Drew reported that Kennon as district attorney "had prosecuted the poor and released the rich and had never convicted a white man for a capital offense or for a long prison term when his case was defended." Walker had earlier described the circuit court as being "the supreme court for the average citizen."²⁵

3) Drew also accused Kennon of being inconsistent, and unreliable in his political activities, and of being misleading. Kennon did not deny the charges, in his radio talk, so Drew concluded that the accusations were true.

²⁴Ibid., October 14, 1940.

²⁵Minden Herald, August 2, 1940.

Kennon's earlier announcements in newspapers cited his unrelenting war on gambling and how he had prosecuted cases.²⁶ Quite possibly, Kennon refused to answer Drew's specific charges because they were true in part, or because his campaign strategy did not include indulging in such petty accusations.

Drew continued his denunciations, attacking Kennon for reneging on his obligations to the police juries and school boards of the two parishes, but offering no explanation for Kennon's failures. Kennon continuously refused to deny Drew's allegations. The judge contended, additionally, that Kennon's statement on the retirement bill for judges was "false and incorrect," since the bill allowed retirement not only for old age, but for injury and ill-health as well.²⁷ Drew, placing his disclaimer on the pension, declared that he was never for the constitutional amendment providing for the pension.

During the campaign Kennon reminded the voters of his military obligations. Drew stated that the government had invested in Kennon's training and now when the government needed "every able-bodied man," that

MR. KENNON IS SEEKING AN OFFICE WHICH WILL ALLOW HIM
TO RESIGN, IF ELECTED, FROM HIS NATIONAL GUARD

²⁶Ibid., May 31, 1940.

²⁷Ruston Daily Leader, October 14, 1940.

CAPTAINCY AND BE FOREVER IMMUNE TO ANY FUTURE
MILITARY SERVICE.²⁸

Knowing that he was over-age, Drew told the voters that he could best serve his country by continuing to serve as Presiding Judge. Near the end of Drew's campaign statement, mention was made of Kennon's statement that he had not become involved in "whispering propaganda or slanderous statements." Drew charged that a great deal of dirty rumors had originated within the Kennon campaign organizations and warned voters "to be on the lookout for paid workers circulating salacious reports for Mr. Kennon."²⁹

Drew had trailed Kennon badly in the first primary. To recoup, he needed to attack Kennon aggressively to shake off Kennon votes. Kennon, the leader, on the other hand, had only to take the "high road" of serious and dignified language. It is almost always the second person in a runoff (in this case Drew) who must be noisy and nasty. Kennon did not level scathing attacks against Drew in his political advertisements. During the first primary campaign, he had described Drew and Walker in gracious terms, referring to both as "two such fine opponents."³⁰ Kennon did, however, state his belief that since Drew was

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Jonesboro, Jackson Independent, September 20, 1940.

some 5,000 votes behind him in the first primary, one in which an incumbent "usually polls his strength," that there would be little difference in the results of the second primary.³¹ Attempting to discover why he lost in his own home parish of Webster, and also in Bossier, Kennon concluded that it was because his opponents had influenced many voters while transporting them to the polls. Apparently deciding to fight fire with fire, Kennon wrote in a Minden newspaper, "If you would like to be driven to your voting precinct next Tuesday, Telephone 575."³² During the second primary campaign, Kennon utilized the media as well as personal appearances to attract voters.

In the four parishes where Walker had received most of his votes, Kennon received a majority of two to one over Drew in the runoff. Kennon's tenacity and imperturbability paid off, because when the results of the runoff were released, he had defeated Drew in nine out of ten judgeship districts. But Webster Parish continued to support its favorite son, Drew, giving him a narrow margin of 2,299 votes to Kennon's 2,035. Why Kennon fared much worse than Drew in their mutual home parish and in Bossier Parish is speculative. Drew would later accuse Kennon of

³¹Ruston Daily Leader, September 19, 1940.

³²Minden Herald, October 11, 1940; see also Ruston Daily Leader, September 9, 1940.

prosecuting the poor elements and supporting the more affluent. If this were true, maybe the average voters remembered and felt that Kennon would continue to maintain this precedent. In Bossier Parish, Kennon's father-in-law, N. W. Sentell, had died, and there is a strong possibility that Sentell's death, may have weakened Kennon's political base in that parish. Another point to be considered is the fact that Drew promised "justice to all and special favors to none." A summary of all twenty-three precincts in Webster Parish reveals where Drew and Kennon did best on their mutual home turf.

Table 2. Second Primary - October 1940

Precinct	Kennon	Drew
Shongaloo	121	126
Leton	42	38
Evergreen	26	51
Butt's Store	37	14
O. Shongaloo	31	29
Springhill	113	157
Sarepta	90	88
Cotton Valley	128	179
Springhill	109	134
Cullen	41	39
Hortman	39	22
Doyline	140	86
McIntyre	74	64
Court House	144	139
Yellow Pine	15	24
Sibley	77	90
Fire Station	187	235
Andress	181	219
Parish Barn	160	206
Armory	100	141
Community H.	32	24

Table 2 (continued)

Precinct	Kennon	Drew
Heflin	87	106
Dubberly	<u>61</u>	<u>88</u>
Total	2035	2299

Source: Compiled from figures listed in Minden Herald, October 18, 1940.

Elected by a majority of some 9,000 votes, the thirty-eight-year-old Kennon wrote a public letter to his supporters:

Your expression of confidence in nominating me judge is sincerely appreciated. I am grateful for the generous interest of my many friends and for the support of the majority of the people of the district. To you I give the credit for Tuesday's victory. I pledge my energy and effort to the faithful discharge of my duties as Judge of the Court of Appeal.³³

Kennon's term on the court was to begin fifteen months later, on January 1, 1942. He was first obligated to spend one year in training with the 204th Coast Artillery, with the training period ending before the court term began. However, when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, Kennon chose to serve his country as an officer in active duty with the United States Army. He could have been exempted from active service because of his age, marital status and

³³Ruston Daily Leader, October 19, 1940.

the judgeship he had won, but Kennon chose instead to remain on wartime active duty. It was mandatory for Kennon to take his oath of office as judge within thirty days after receiving his commission. He complied with the law, but he had not taken his seat on the bench when Drew's term expired at midnight on December 31, 1941. Under the Louisiana Constitution of 1921, Drew was allowed to remain in office until a successor was seated.³⁴ The Shreveport Journal asked Kennon about his plans, and received from Kennon the following answer:

I will remain on army duty at San Diego and not ask for leave of absence to assume my duties as judge of the court of appeal on January 5 or for some months to follow. My future plans are as uncertain as present world events. Regards to my friends in Louisiana.³⁵

If Kennon had been formally inducted on the court, and then had chosen to remain on active military service, the governor would have named a successor. Therefore, according to the Shreveport Journal, Kennon was "eligible to assume the judgeship when he is ready to do so."³⁶ Kennon was not "ready to do so" for a number of years, and the defeated Drew remained on the Court of Appeal until Kennon had finished his active military duty in 1945.

³⁴Shreveport Journal, December 29, 1941.

³⁵Ibid., January 1, 1942.

³⁶Ibid.

Kennon reported for military service on January 5, 1941. The next day, he, along with the 204th Coast Artillery, travelled to Camp Hulen, near Palacios, Texas.³⁷ Located some 320 miles from Minden, Camp Hulen served as a training center for thousands of soldiers and officers. In camp, five men had to share one tent, which was heated by gas. The Minden Herald reported that Minden's

gift to the staff of the 204th Coast Artillery (AA), Louisiana National Guard, is the former commanding officer of Battery E, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Floyd Kennon.³⁸

Kennon, with his staff, coordinated the activities of the first battalion of the 204th Coast Artillery (AA). Because the unit was an artillery battalion, Kennon's duties probably included distribution of ammunition, maintenance of weapons and vehicles, instruction in weapons operation, and how to utilize firepower to slow down enemy attacks.

To keep the home folks aware of life at Camp Hulen, Shreveport radio station KWKH sponsored a series of fifteen programs originating in the camp. As an extra feature, following each program, relatives of the participants at Camp Hulen were interviewed at the KWKH studios. A program on May 2, 1941, included Kennon,

³⁷Ibid., October 11, 1945.

³⁸Minden Herald, January 10, 1941.

Lieutenants E. W. Burquist and Allen R. McCoy; Captains Thomas B. Wilson and Hugh King; and Sergeant Joe Luckett. Kennon's brother Webb and others spoke from the station in Shreveport. The programs could be heard each Monday, Tuesday, and Friday night. Kennon's former unit, Battery E of Minden, was scheduled to be heard on May 19. The KWKH personnel were guests of the 204th Coast Artillery Regiment and were housed in the camp area.³⁹

On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Because Kennon chose to remain on active service, he received a leave of absence from the Court of Appeal. Soon afterward, he left for San Diego, California, to lead an anti-aircraft battalion. Kennon assumed he would be ordered to the South Pacific, but discovered instead that he would be stationed back in the South, at El Paso, Texas, where he served the next six months. Kennon next requested transfer to the army's highest level school for commissioned officers, the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Kennon completed the course of this "coveted spot" between July 14 and September 12, 1942, when he graduated with the Ninth General Class.⁴⁰ Lieutenant Colonel Ronald H. Darnell, Registrar of the United States Army Command and General

³⁹Ibid., May 2, 1941.

⁴⁰New Orleans Item, October 18, 1945.

Staff College, described the school's curriculum when Kennon was a student at Fort Leavenworth:

Graduates of the General Staff Classes received nine weeks of training in tactics and techniques of the Combined Arms and Services; functions and procedures of commanders and staffs of divisions, and practical work in the duties of the specific General Staff section indicated (G3, in this case). Graduates were also classified according to the type of organization in which they received specific instruction, and applicatory instruction in the organization training and operation of infantry, motorized, armored and cavalry divisions and of air forces, each separately and combined in task forces.⁴¹

Having completed the course of instruction at the army's top school for commissioned officers, Kennon was ordered to Bayonne, New Jersey, to help train soldiers enroute to Europe. From Bayonne he journeyed to Providence, Rhode Island, where in December 1942, he was assigned to the staff of the 13th Corps. (On December 7, the 13th Corps had been organized at Providence, Rhode Island, and ordered into active military service.⁴²) Kennon's next assignment was Fort Dix, New Jersey. Desiring to serve abroad, Kennon requested another transfer. In his own words, Kennon later recalled:

I worked with it [the 13th Corps] so hard (that) the Adjutant General was nice to me. And when we were ordered overseas they told him not to bring his anti-aircraft officer because the anti-aircraft officer would automatically be the senior

⁴¹Letter from Lieutenant Colonel Ronald Darnell to Doris D. Carter, October 16, 1986.

⁴²"The Governor's Lady--Mrs. Robert Kennon," The Register, IV (February 23, 1952), p. 3.

anti-aircraft officer in whatever troops the corps had overseas. He was nice enough to switch me to special services and I served as special services officer going overseas. . . . I went all around representing the general with the British.⁴³

This was neither combat duty nor "action," yet Kennon seems to have been happy with it. Did he really want to "see more action," or acquire a safe assignment in the rear area? After all, a dead soldier can have no later political career. Kennon went to England in July 1944 with the 13th Corps staff under the command of Lieutenant General Alvin C. Gillem, Jr. In the G-3 section, he was the second ranking officer.⁴⁴ The 13th Corps was subsequently incorporated into the Ninth Army, under the command of General William H. Simpson. (The Ninth Army had been organized at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, on April 15, 1944, and originally designated as Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Eighth Army. On May 22, 1944, the unit was redesignated as Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Ninth Army.) In England, Kennon was a special services officer who represented the commanding general at various times. Apparently Kennon

⁴³Lewis Morris's Interview of Robert Floyd Kennon, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, January 6, 1983. Oral History Department of the Archives and Record Service, Office of the Secretary of State, State of Louisiana, Baton Rouge, p. 22, hereinafter cited as Morris's Interview.

⁴⁴Ibid., New Orleans Times-Picayune, October 12, 1945; Baton Rouge State Times, May 12, 1952; Shreveport Journal, June 1, 1945.

did some sightseeing while there, for he said he visited Stonehenge "and all around that." Years later, he once accused the British of wanting the Americans to "do the hard fighting."⁴⁵

Headquarters, 13th Corps, arrived at Hoensbrook, Netherlands, on November 8, 1944, to begin a 180-day, three-hundred-mile march from Holland to the Elbe River in Germany. In the words of Lieutenant General Alvin Gillem,

Measured in history, 180 days is but a brief span, swift-spiced and of small account. Reckoned in hours of combat, of cold, rain, mud and sleepless darkness, 180 days can be a lifetime.⁴⁶

In Holland, Kennon's unit was housed in a convent, which had been the home of about thirty Dutch Catholic sisters. Reminiscing about his experiences, Kennon later remembered:

Well, I was with [the] Thirteenth Corps and when we landed we were in England. Then we went across that narrow place there into Europe . . . into Holland first. I remember the little Holland people. The Red Cross gave us little candy bars and so forth. The little Dutch people, as we were walking the street, would come up and say "chokeala, chokeala": They would want some chocolate, don't you know? We were friendly with the Dutch, of course.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Morris's Interview, p. 22.

⁴⁶Gardner A. Dean, et al., eds., One Hundred and Eighty Days (Hanover, Germany: Richard Petersen, 1945), unpaginated, hereinafter cited as Dean, Days.

⁴⁷Morris's Interview, p. 23.

While in Kirkrede, Holland, Kennon also met the Allied Supreme Commander, General Dwight Eisenhower, at a schoolhouse. Meeting with Corp commanders and their staffs, Eisenhower was accompanied by army group commander General Omar N. Bradley. Kennon recalled that he was introduced to, and chatted briefly with Eisenhower.⁴⁸

The 13th Corps, stationed near the Roer River and in the proximity of approximately 8300 German troops, worked with other American and British units to gain access to the Roer and its surrounding areas. By February 1945, this territory was under the control of the allies:

The Ninth Army crossed the River Roer today [February 23, 1945].

Following a thunderous, 45-minute saturation barrage by nearly 2,000 artillery pieces, the long-awaited attack shoved off at 0330. Assault boats carried the first waves of infantrymen across the surging river while vast concentrations of machine guns shot tracers at the Nazi front-line positions to cover their advances.⁴⁹

As the Ninth Army moved into Germany, they encountered little German resistance. Kennon had memories of the Germans, even of traveling through a Minden, Germany.⁵⁰ Recalling his duty in Germany, Kennon stated:

Why, the Germans were so nice when we took over Germany. Well, we put our headquarters not in tents or anything like that, but we would use a big warehouse for the corps headquarters. We even paid

⁴⁸Baton Rouge State Times, May 12, 1952.

⁴⁹Dean, Days, p. 13.

⁵⁰New Orleans Item, October 18, 1945.

rent to the German people. I lived in a nice German home . . . a nice bed and so forth when I was assistant corps chief in G3 and (I) had an eight-hour shift. G3 section has to be on duty all the time because you represent the generals on eight-hour shifts. So I carried a .45 caliber pistol but I walked through one of the main cities of Germany. . . . I walked through the town for three or four hundred yards from where I lived at eight o'clock at night or whenever time it was to switch⁵¹

Kennon was still a member of Lieutenant General Gillem's staff. As the Americans moved closer to the Elbe River, and V-E Day, Gillem and his entourage made official contact with westbound Russian forces and their commanders. General Eisenhower, in the meantime, "pledged to destroy every German west of the Rhine."⁵² A newspaper article in Kennon's papers is subtitled "Four German Cities Under Heavy Attack," and describes action by units of the Ninth Army, to which Kennon remained attached at the time.

Lieutenant General William H. Simpson's U.S. Ninth Army crashed into the Elbe River fortress of Magdeburg from three sides and surged through the flaming town toward the city's bridges.

The toll of Nazi prisoners was mounting hourly and headquarters announced that more than 750,000 had been taken this month. In the Ruhr, which has yielded 265,084 in 17 days, the Americans crashed into the streets of Dusseldorf in a final assault to eliminate the last vestige of enemy resistance in the pocket now shrunk to 120 square miles.⁵³

⁵¹Morris's Interview, pp. 22-23.

⁵²Shreveport Times, March 8, 1945.

⁵³Ibid., April 18, 1945.

Possibly Kennon himself took part in the roundups of demoralized Germans near the war's end. Germany formally surrendered on May 8, 1945.⁵⁴ An unnamed war correspondent contended that the 13th Corps had taken 3,591 items of American or enemy heavy equipment as it travelled from the Rhine to the Elbe. Another article asserted that ten thousand pairs of new German military shoes had been captured by the Americans.⁵⁵

Kennon never had a leave of absence in the wartime army. Granted a thirty-day leave after Germany capitulated, Kennon was directed to report to Army Ground Forces in England, but instead, he went to Paris. For his participation in the Rhineland action and in Central Europe, Kennon received commendation.⁵⁶ But Kennon apparently never personally experienced combat, nor did he command a field unit of any size, as during his peacetime years in the Louisiana National Guard. His entire overseas service was spent on staff assignments. Kennon seems to have requested release from service even before V-E Day, for in a letter dated April 27, 1945, Colonel Craig Alderman, wrote Major General J. Moore, Chief of Staff, Ninth Army, that General Gillem had approved the

⁵⁴John D. Hicks, et al., The American Nation (4th ed.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1963), p. 668.

⁵⁵Dean, Days, p. 39.

⁵⁶New Orleans Times-Picayune, October 12, 1945.

release of Kennon, and that Kennon, who had been on leave of absence from the Circuit Court, was "anxious to return." Alderman also added, "He [Kennon] is a superior officer."⁵⁷ Why Kennon was "anxious to return," was not included in the letter. He may have had a genuine desire to return to his seat on the circuit court.

While in Paris, Kennon met the famed author, Gertrude Stein, who invited him to her home for dinner. Kennon then invited Miss Stein out for dinner, and she accepted. Miss Stein presented Kennon with an autographed copy of one of her books. Kennon believed Miss Stein was "charming," and forwarded her book home.⁵⁸ He was discharged in June 1945. According to the Shreveport Journal,

Colonel Kennon returned by airplane from Germany, the entire trip requiring 24 hours. He arrived in Minden on Wednesday and immediately discarded his army uniform for civilian clothing and was in Shreveport Thursday arranging affairs at his judicial office.⁵⁹

However, Kennon served on the court of appeal for less than one month. The court recessed until October 1, after which Kennon sat for only two weeks before receiving an

⁵⁷Letter from Colonel Craig Alderman to Major General J.E. Moore, April 27, 1945, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 9.

⁵⁸New Orleans Item, October 18, 1945.

⁵⁹Shreveport Journal, June 1, 1945.

appointment to a vacancy on the state supreme court.⁶⁰

(When World War II in the Pacific ended in August 1945, Kennon was at home in Minden, where he spoke at a religious service at the Baptist Tabernacle.⁶¹)

During his brief tenure as an appeals judge, Kennon had several responsibilities. He had to decide if proper procedures had been carried out in the presentation of an appeal; review the trial transcript and other court records; and prepare a written opinion. Juries and witnesses play no roles in appeal. Judges decide appeals mainly on the basis of written briefs, prepared by counsel for both parties, and presenting differing interpretations of points of law or procedure. Cases which Kennon and other judges of the Second Circuit heard included disputes of oil and gas rights, child custody, employment, boundary disputes, and divorce.

Before the Court of Appeal recessed, Kennon participated in three typical cases involving slander, workmen's compensation and vehicular damages. In the case of Branch v. Duke, J. L. Duke was accused by Branch of slander and sued for \$500 damages. Duke asserted that he never accused Branch of stealing \$25. The trial judge decided in favor of the plaintiff, ordering the defendant

⁶⁰New Orleans, Item, October 18, 1945.

⁶¹Minden Herald, August 17, 1945.

to pay \$100, whereupon the defendant appealed. The plaintiff then in his answer to the appeal asked for an increase--\$500. After carefully studying the records, Kennon affirmed that the defendant did slander the plaintiff, and that the original award of \$100 was sufficient as prescribed by the district court.⁶² The plaintiff declared that his minor son, Malvin Bruce Lindsey, was permanently injured in an accident with a truck driven by J. L. White, an employee of J. B. Moore. The trial judge awarded damages to the plaintiff, and the defendants appealed, but Kennon affirmed the lower court decision and ordered Moore and the Maryland Casualty Company to pay court costs.⁶³ In Rubenstein v. American Fidelity & Casualty Insurance Co., Benjamin Rubenstein had sued the American Fidelity & Casualty Insurance Company for damages to his truck by another truck insured by the same company. The district court awarded Rubenstein \$268.10, the insurance company appealed, and Kennon ruled in favor of the plaintiff.⁶⁴

The court recessed in June until October 1, 1945. After serving for only two weeks, Kennon received a long

⁶²22 Southern Reporter, Second Series, 590-91 (St. Paul, West Publishing Co., 1945), hereinafter cited as Southern Reporter.

⁶³Ibid., pp. 689-692

⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 862-863.

distance telephone call from Associate Justice Wayne G. Rogers of the Louisiana Supreme Court, inviting Kennon to assume the seat of the late Associate Justice Archibald T. Higgins, whose term had fourteen months remaining. The Louisiana constitution at that time provided that when an unexpired term on the supreme court had less than two years to run, the court should fill its own vacancy, provided the proposed appointee resided in a district other than the one in which the vacancy had arisen. The Shreveport Times editorialized that the court could have selected someone from the First Judicial District in Southern Louisiana, but instead chose a North Louisianan.⁶⁵ Kennon was ecstatic over the appointment, stating,

I am happy of course over my selection. . . . I appreciate the opportunity to serve the people of the state. . . . Even though the court might have chosen a more experienced judge, as a judge of the court of appeal, I cannot question any decision of the state's highest tribunal.⁶⁶

The editor of the New Orleans Item noted of Kennon:

The selection of Robert F. Kennon, of Minden to fill the Higgins vacancy brings to Louisiana's Supreme Court the youngest member it has ever had, he being only 43. He was elected to his Court of Appeals in 1940, and volunteered for the Army soon after the war came to us late in 1941, acting as lieutenant colonel in combat service, on leave from his bench. Thus his judicial promotion is a long jump.

⁶⁵Shreveport Times, October 17, 1945.

⁶⁶Shreveport Journal, October 11, 1945.

Regardless of all that, and even in the absence of personal acquaintance with him, we think his advancement will give the High Court another member who will do it credit. For we are informed by persons who know him well, in whose judgement we have confidence, that he is a man of independent mind and pronounced moral courage where his convictions are involved. These are primary essentials in the character of a good judge.⁶⁷

Kennon took the oath of office and appeared "bright and early" to assume his duties. When he arrived at the "heavily draped and thickly carpeted sanctuary for the first time" at 6:00 a.m., the ice-man let him in. Kennon said "I'm from Minden, you know . . . in the country, we go to work early."⁶⁸ The six-foot tall Kennon was the youngest jurist sitting on the Louisiana Supreme Court. When he was appointed to Louisiana's highest tribunal on October 15, 1945, he joined six other jurists, Chief Justice Charles A. O'Neill, and Associate Justices Wayne G. Rogers, John B. Fournet, Amos Lee Ponder, Joe B. Hamiter, and Frank W. Hawthorne.

In 1945 the Louisiana Supreme Court performed six major functions: (1) supervision of all lower courts; (2) original jurisdiction in cases involving the removal of judges of courts of record; (3) original jurisdiction in disbarment suits; (4) appellate jurisdiction in civil cases involving at least two thousand dollars, with the

⁶⁷New Orleans Item, October 12, 1945.

⁶⁸Ibid., October 18, 1945.

exception of suits involving damages as the result of injury, and workmen's compensation; (5) appellate jurisdiction in all cases involving the constitutionality or legality of governmental taxes, fines, and tolls; and (6) appellate jurisdiction in criminal cases.⁶⁹ Kennon had a full docket of cases. One of his more memorable cases was State v. Calvin which had its origin in the St. John Parish District Court. Carey Lee Calvin had been given a seven-year sentence by Judge L. Robert Rivardo for allegedly biting and hitting Andrew DeCarlo. The female Calvin appealed and said no dangerous weapon had been used. After perusing the brief, Kennon decided that the case should be sent back to the lower court.⁷⁰ However, his opinion made the headlines in the New Orleans Times-Picayune, "Hands and Teeth Held Not Lethal." Kennon wrote:

We know of no authority of law, or decision of this court--nor has any been cited by the state--which classes one's bare hands or teeth as a dangerous weapon.

It is true that portions of the human anatomy may be dangerous and the bare hands of a merciless assailant may quite readily produce death, or great bodily harm, particularly if the victim be young or weak, but the fact remains that there must be proof of the use of some inanimate instrumentality before

⁶⁹R.L. Carleton, Local Government, pp. 118-199.

⁷⁰₂₂ Southern Reporter, Second Series, 467-469 (1946).

a defendant can be held guilty of assault "with a dangerous weapon."⁷¹

The case of Senate v. Jones involved Charley Jones, a fourth offender who was sentenced to life imprisonment in Pointe Coupee Parish for committing a burglary. Jones' attorney filed a motion to quash the bill of information which included accusations of Jones' prior felonies in another parish. In the opinion, Kennon annulled the sentence and directed the Superintendent of the State Penitentiary to deliver Jones to the Sheriff of Pointe Coupee Parish for trial before the district court. Kennon averred that the defendant's prior criminal record included in the information, had "the effect of immediately placing his character . . . before the jury."⁷² In the "dog-killing" case of State v. Moresi, Alfred Moresi's motion for the case to be quashed and dismissed was sustained. He declared that the dog was not on the assessment roll of Iberia Parish and that the dog had no tag or collar on at the time of the killing as required by law. The State appealed. But, Kennon affirmed the district court's decision, stating that it was not

ascertainable from a reading of the indictment whether the defendant committed a crime . . . or

⁷¹Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 11, 1945.

⁷²Southern Reporter, Second Series, 629 (1946).

whether he simply exercised the right granted to him as a citizen,
under the law.⁷³

Kennon disagreed with the ruling of a district court in the cast of Goode v. Hantz. This court, ruling in favor of Ira Goode whose automobile had been damaged by Rufus Hantz, decreed that the plaintiff should receive \$1189.10 for damages to his automobile and \$423.21 for loss of time on trying to repair the damaged vehicle and the securing of a substitute. Hantz appealed. Kennon and the other justices supported the plaintiff, but reduced the award to \$918.61. Kennon argued:

In view of the testimony as to the scarcity of automobile and motor parts, there can be no doubt but that the plaintiff did spend, necessarily, considerable time in attend . . . to the repair of the damaged machine and the securing of a suitable substitute.⁷⁴

Although kept busy deciding cases involved the secular interests of man, Kennon allotted time for his own spiritual needs. He maintained his commitment to the church as his career progressed. At the Assembly Men's Council of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, meeting in North Carolina on July 11, 1946, Kennon was elected president at the Council's organizational meeting. At the same meeting, Kennon also served on the Aims,

⁷³22 Southern Reporter, Second Series, 371 (1946).

⁷⁴Ibid., 605 (1946).

Objects, and Projects Committee and presented the recommendations of the committee to the Council.

Several months later, Kennon's Executive Committee and the Executive Committee of the Sunday School Superintendents' Council convened in New Orleans at the International House. Kennon presided at the afternoon meeting on November 22, 1946, which planned an assembly-wide Laymen's Convention for November 1949. A subcommittee assigned Kennon to write on the topic, "Christianity and Communism," for the 1947-48 Presbyterian Men's Yearbook, developing the thoughts: "Many forces make a bid," "Development of so-called Christian parties," "Place of the Christian Church," and "What is the significance to us?"⁷⁵ Because of an emergency operation, Kennon did not attend the 1947 Assembly Men's Council. However, as the immediate past president, Kennon remained on the Council's Executive Committee for 1947-1948.⁷⁶

Justice Kennon also became state chairman of National Brotherhood Week, February 17-24, 1946, at the invitation of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. Remembering the war-torn years, but omitting that

⁷⁵New Orleans, Louisiana, Minutes of Executive Committee of Assembly Men's Council, November 22, 23, 1946; Letter from William Bynum to Doris D. Carter, January 14, 1987.

⁷⁶Montreat, North Carolina, Minutes of Assembly Men's Council, July 17-18, 1947; Letter from William Bynum to Doris D. Carter, December 18, 1986.

people of different races also came together in America's war effort, Kennon stated in his acceptance:

In war our people have been drawn closer together. Catholics, Protestants and Jews, rich and poor, native and foreign-born. Our joint efforts have been blessed with victory. Many gave their lives for the American ideals of brotherhood.

We can be true to their memory and worthy of their supreme sacrifice by demonstrating to the world that Americans of all creeds and national backgrounds can live and work together in peace and harmony to further the common good and preserve intact our American liberties.

Also, in 1946, Kennon became Louisiana State Chairman of the Owen Roberts Committee on Universal Military Service. Addressing a luncheon of the Young Men's Business Club, at the Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans, Kennon lauded the necessity of compulsory military training and the importance of the charter of the United Nations. Speaking later to the luncheon meeting of the New Orleans Bar Association at the St. Charles Hotel, he addressed himself to the issues facing lawyers who had been released from military service.⁷⁸

On January 1, 1947, when Kennon concluded his service on the Louisiana Supreme Court, he returned to his former position on the Second Circuit, Court of Appeal.

⁷⁷New Orleans Times-Picayune, February 3, 1946.

⁷⁸Newspaper Clipping, no source or date listed, Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 13.

(J. F. McInnis had been appointed to substitute for Kennon on October 18, 1945.)

When Kennon returned to his post on the Second Circuit, he served almost five years and wrote opinions for over two dozen cases. His caseload ranged from such matters as workmen's compensation, automobile and marble fireplace sales, real estate transactions, and unpaid wages, to wrongful death. One of his first cases concerned a suit brought by Pearl C. Brown against Frances L. White, who had refused to pay back wages to Brown. The district court ruled in favor of White, granting her 5 percent interest. Kennon concurred with the district court.⁷⁹ In another case involving default on a bill--B. & B. System, Inc. v. Everett et al., a neon sign was sold by the plaintiff to the Everett Beauty Salon, operated by Charles F. Everett and his wife Neva. Before the debt was retired, the Everetts divorced, with Mrs. Everett becoming the operator of the beauty salon. She paid a portion of the bill for the sign and then terminated her payments. The City Court of Shreveport ruled that both defendants should pay the debt. Neva appealed. Kennon contended that since Neva had assumed the business after the

⁷⁹₂₉ Southern Reporter, Second Series, 193-195 (1947).

divorce, she "had a pecuniary and business motive in assuming responsibility for the debt."⁸⁰

The case Alexandria Marble & Granite Works v. Harding, involved the default of payment for the installation of a marble fireplace in Edwin Harding's home. The judgment of the district court was in favor of the plaintiff. The defendant claimed that the fireplace was improperly installed. Kennon, however, upon perusing the brief, concurred with the district judge, but reduced the amount of money that the plaintiff received. Mayes v. Black was another case dealing with the reneger of payment. A. L. Mayes sold a \$200 water pump to Luther Black. Apparently defective, "the pump never did operate successfully nor perform any service of value to the defendant." Receiving an adverse judgment, the defendant appealed. Writing a rather complex opinion, Kennon disagreed with the district court, and ruled in favor of the defendant.⁸¹

In the case of Lewis et al. v. Patterson et al., Kennon amended the judgment of the district court. In 1911, W. H. Harrison, Simon Sanders, Douglas Lewis and Lee Patterson acquired forty acres of land in Natchitoches Parish. They sold four of these acres to Green Cove

⁸⁰₃₄ Southern Reporter, Second Series, 523 (1948).

⁸¹₃₅ Southern Reporter, Second Series, 673-674; 150-151 (1948).

Church and three acres to the Natchitoches Parish School Board. Out of the remaining thirty-three acres, timber was sold for \$500, with the money being deposited in the bank in the name of Green Grove Club in 1946. The plaintiffs--W. H. Harrison, the sole survivor of the four vendees, and the heirs of the deceased, excepting the heirs of Lee Pattersons--requested from the court that the land should be sold, with the proceeds of the sale and all other money, to be divided among the plaintiffs. The defendants--heirs of Lee Patterson--objected, on the grounds that the land was purchased by approximately twenty-five persons

of the Green Grove community, who had organized themselves for the purpose of promoting community interest in the churches, public schools and other organizations.⁸²

Patterson's heirs contended that the land and the \$500 in the bank "belonged to the Green Grove community," and that since the Green Grove community had elected new trustees to supervise the lands and property, that these new trustees should "be recognized as the legal trustees to hold title to the property for the community."⁸³ The defendants asked that the suit be subsequently dismissed.

⁸²³⁴ Southern Reporter, Second Series, 646-647 (1948).

⁸³Ibid., 647.

A third opposition was filed by the new trustees--Ed Nolly, Coy Matthews, Richard Tobin, Jim Tobin, Isabell Patterson, Rachal Patterson, Levi Patterson, P. M. Turner, C. W. Walker, Bud Nolly, Otis Patterson, and John Jenkins. Their petition stated that the land had been purchased by the Green Grove Club as a community project. The club, organized by citizens and including a chairman and secretary, held meetings. Furthermore, Nolly and the others of his group, said that different persons had contributed \$4.17 each, for the purchase of the land. W. H. Harrison and the other plaintiffs were accused of fraudulently having the title to the land placed in the committee's name rather than in the club's name.⁸⁴ The district court, decreeing that the land and the \$500 were the property of both the plaintiffs and the defendants, ordered that the property be sold with the proceeds of the sale and that the \$500 be divided among the heirs and survivors. The defendants appealed, but Nolly and the other interveners did not. Kennon scrutinized the facts, and wrote that when lumber was sold to the Saline Lumber Company, and when the check was written to W. H. Harrison and A. L. Patterson, that the two men deposited the money to the credit of the Club. Kennon did not set aside the entire judgment of the district court. He only amended

⁸⁴Ibid.

the decision, refusing the plaintiffs' desire for the \$500, and stating:

And by striking therefrom the portion directing the Bank of Saline to pay over this \$500 on deposit in the name of the Green Grove Club to the Sheriff of Natchitoches Parish and directing his division of same, and, as amended, the judgment is hereby affirmed.⁸⁵

Kennon's tenure on the Louisiana Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal, Second Circuit, was filled with prodigious output. In assessing his performance, it may be firmly stated that Kennon executed considerable skill in writing judicial opinions, proving to be both creative and innovative. An article in the April 1987, Reader's Digest, stated that today, "judges no longer seem to have as much respect for precedent"⁸⁶ While on the bench, Kennon, however, avidly studied earlier opinions and incorporated some of their concepts into his own judicial opinions. Indeed, a Southern conservative of Kennon's generation could hardly have done otherwise.

While protected by the security of the bench, Kennon continued to subtly build a political base for himself. Always the speech-maker, Kennon found time to deliver several talks. He addressed the Minden Jaycees⁸⁷ and was

⁸⁵Ibid., 648.

⁸⁶John G. Kester, "Too Many Lawyers? " Reader's Digest, April 1987, p. 154.

⁸⁷Minden Herald, August 25, 1947.

included on the program of the Presbyterians' Atlanta, Georgia, convention in 1949. Five thousand Presbyterian men were expected to attend this meeting. Kennon was given the task of serving as moderator of a panel of nationally and internationally known personages. The Presbyterian Survey wrote of Kennon: "He is outstanding in civic endeavors in his own community and is recognized in the South as a leader of men."⁸⁸ After Kennon delivered an apparently impressive speech before a group of Rotarians, Matt Vernon, in his Daily Iberian, wrote of him:

Rotarians who heard Judge Robert Kennon make his talk yesterday noted his delightfully informal style of delivery, and wished that more speakers would get down off their high horse and talk "man to man" the way this fellow does. The Justice had a lot to say about Russia, and it made a lot of sense, but even more impressive was the display of intellectual acrobatics he tossed off so casually. It is easy to understand why he had risen so fast in his profession, for he has personal charm to a large degree as well as a keen mind.⁸⁹

When Kennon was discharged from active military service, he was still a lieutenant colonel (having not received a promotion during the entire war), but he continued to serve in the organized army reserve as a full colonel. On September 16, 1949, he was presented the "Award of the Third Army Certificate of Achievement," for

⁸⁸"5000 Men with One Accord," The Presbyterian Survey, XXXIX (September 1949), 426.

⁸⁹New Iberia Daily Iberian, October 24, 1946.

outstanding service. This award to Colonel Kennon was signed by Lieutenant General Gillem.⁹⁰

Kennon, however, yearned to become even more involved in public service, and had begun to focus his attention on the governor's office. Writing in the New Orleans States after Kennon had finally received the governorship in 1952, columnist Charles "Pie" Dufour declared that "Kennon first set his sights on the governor's mansion when he was a high school boy."⁹¹ Oliver P. Carriere, a college roommate of Kennon said Kennon told him while in college that he (Kennon) would "be governor of Louisiana some day."⁹² In 1948, Kennon set out to achieve this goal.

⁹⁰Copy of General Orders, number 281, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 9.

⁹¹New Orleans States, May 13, 1952.

⁹²Ibid.

CHAPTER V
The Disappointing Gubernatorial and
Senatorial Campaigns of 1948

Soon after he returned to the United States in 1945 from Europe, many of Kennon's friends began to arouse his ambitions by suggesting that he seek the governorship. The "raw-boned and rangy" Kennon, who reminded some people "of Abraham Lincoln in his personality and mannerisms,"¹ agreed to run for the state's highest office in 1948. In its March 27, 1947, edition, the New Orleans Item wrote that Kennon had declared himself a candidate on that date, and that he made the statement "unless there is a change in the present favorable developments I expect to enter the campaign when the appropriate time comes."² Some two months later on May 13, when "the appropriate time" came, Kennon made his formal announcement, stating that since his return from military service, he had been encouraged by friends to enter the gubernatorial campaign. According

¹Biographical Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 9, located in Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, hereinafter cited as Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, with appropriate Box.

²New Orleans Item, March 27, 1947.

to the New Orleans Item, a cross-section statewide survey had been conducted before the preliminary announcement. The results of this survey were favorable to Kennon, reflecting the interest of public officials, businessmen, and farmers.³ Was it possible that Louisiana's poorer segments were decreasing in the latter 1940's due to the prosperity and higher incomes Louisiana enjoyed during the post-World War II years? Did Kennon feel that he appealed to this group as well as to more affluent Louisianians? For years, Kennon had been expanding his circle of acquaintances. It is probable that he had been grooming himself for the governorship since entering public life, if not earlier. (During his college days at LSU Kennon had obtained leadership in a number of student positions.) An active rather than a passive person, Kennon was constantly on the move, working at the top or aspiring to the top--as mayor of Minden, vice president of the Louisiana Municipal Association, vice president of the Louisiana District Attorney's Association, vice president of the Junior Bar Association, President of his Lions Club and Laymen's Association (Presbyterian Church), and Most Worshipful Grand Mason (Louisiana). He had addressed numerous civic groups. Possibly Kennon thought that by 1947, his name had become "a household word," and that as

³Ibid., May 13, 1947.

an "independent" he could push former reform governors aside since he had no apparent attachment to any political machine.

Kennon's first aggressive campaign for governor occurred when Louisiana was experiencing bi-factionalism in one-party (Democrat) state politics, which was divided into two factions--the Longites, who espoused a free-wheeling "tax and spend" philosophy, and the more conservative anti-Longites, who promised not to eliminate the Long programs but to provide them more economically.

Louisiana bi-factionalism derived from Huey P. Long, a pivotal force in Louisiana politics who became governor in 1928. Long came from Winn Parish, a hotbed of Populist and Socialist radicalism in earlier years. He was Louisiana's first realistic and popular twentieth century governor. What Long promised the masses, he delivered--hospitals, free textbooks, bridges, better roads and schools and no poll taxes. But Long was also a near-dictator who virtually dominated the machinery of state government on all levels. His rubber-stamp legislature gave Long the power to appoint all nonelective municipal officers, such as police and fire chiefs, commissioners and department heads.⁴ Sheriffs were stripped of custody

⁴For observations of one of Long's contemporaries (and supporter, Harley B. Bozeman, historian and genealogist) see Harley B. Bozeman's Papers, Box 76 located in Prescott Memorial Library, Louisiana Tech University, Ruston, Louisiana; hereinafter cited as Harley

of ballot boxes, which was given to state election supervisors who were "Long Men."

Long constructed a strong organization in every parish to maintain his own control and eclipse his opponents. After he was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1930, Long continued to exercise power in Louisiana and influence in national politics. He felt that President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal" was not generous enough to various needy elements and, therefore, proposed a plan of his own known as "Share-Our-Wealth." Long backed such radical ideas as free college educations for the qualified, veterans' bonuses, old age pensions and guaranteed family incomes.

Huey P. Long was assassinated in 1935, and the five year period that followed his death was scandal-ridden in Louisiana. In 1936 Richard Leche, a New Orleans judge and Longite, was elected governor, with Earl Long, a younger brother of Huey's elected as his lieutenant governor. Three years after Leche's election, the New Orleans States uncovered criminal offenses involving Leche and other prominent Longites, several of whom eventually were imprisoned.

B. Bozeman Papers, with appropriate Box; Allan P. Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana: State Politics, 1920-1952 (Reprinted ed.; Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers 1980), pp. 68-116, hereinafter cited as Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana.

With much of the electorate ready for a change, anti-Longite forces rushed forward to promise reform in 1940. Their principal candidate was Sam Houston Jones, a Lake Charles attorney, who won the gubernatorial election that year.

Under Jones's administration, many of Huey Long's dictatorial laws were repealed and the legislature was no longer forced to act as the governor's rubber stamp.⁵ Jones raised appropriations for roads, schools and old-age pensions, and "permanently revised the concept of government from that of an avenue for personal gain to one of public service."⁶ In the gubernatorial election of 1944, voters once again showed their preference for another reform candidate, Jimmie Davis, a public service commissioner and professional singer.

Although Davis spent much of his time in Hollywood making movies, no new scandals emerged. Davis maintained balanced budgets, at one time (during the close of the 1946 legislative session) vetoing \$14,000,000 in appropriations in order to do so. But during his tenure, Davis also increased teachers' salaries, created a state employee retirement system, raised state legislators' and other state workers' salaries, provided more highway funds

⁵Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, p. 179.

⁶Ibid., p. 180.

for parishes, and continued the practice of giving exemptions from property taxes to new industries in the state. When Davis left office in 1948, the state had a surplus of almost fifty million dollars. Neither Sam Jones nor Jimmie Davis dismantled the programs of Huey P. Long, but did emphasize economy and opposed heavy government spending, although Davis, in fact, presided over the most generous spending spree in the history of Louisiana up to that time.⁷ Their policies inspired Earl Long to accuse both of "do-nothingism" in 1948.

The gubernatorial race of 1948 took place within the traditional division between Longites and anti-Longites, and focused on such issues as taxation, highways, public schools, school lunches, hospitals, veterans bonuses, and "good government" reforms. Kennon and former governor Sam Jones emerged as the principal anti-Long candidates, while former Governor Earl Long and James (Jimmie) Morrison carried the "tax and spend" appeal to Longite voters. Long and Jones had both served as governors of Louisiana, while neither Morrison nor Kennon had ever held statewide elected offices.

On October 8, 1947, Kennon officially opened his gubernatorial campaign in Minden. Speaking at the Webster Parish Fair, he promised to end "machine rule"--a

⁷Ibid., p. 193.

reference to the power in state government of the "Old Regular" Democratic organization of New Orleans--and to return state government to the people. As an "independent" candidate who pledged himself to economy, efficiency, and honesty, Kennon assured farmers that when he became governor, he would coordinate the efforts of the state university, state board of commerce and industry, agricultural extension department, state department of agriculture, and the governor's office, to sponsor cash crops for rural communities. (The per-capita income of Louisiana farmers was \$620 in 1947, while the non-farming segment's per capita income was \$1,226.) Kennon promised to create a balance between farming and industry by establishing processing plants in each parish. Wood processing plants, according to Kennon could be stimulated by a "comprehensive and state-wide reforestation program."⁸ A veteran himself seeking the support of other veterans, Kennon affirmed their right to the amenities of a good life--homes, good civilian jobs and good government.

Although a political unknown in 1947 within Louisiana generally, Kennon unified several newspaper editors who spoke favorably of him. The Delhi Dispatch editorialized that it was "still too early in the season to risk any

⁸Minden Herald, October 17, 1947.

predictions or [to] go overboard for any candidate." However, the editor declared Kennon appeared to be "the best material in sight."⁹ The Bunkie Record stated that Kennon would make "a fine and efficient leader."¹⁰ The Record also pointed out that Kennon had friends throughout Louisiana who would support him.

One of the state's largest newspapers, the New Orleans Times-Picayune, chose to ignore Kennon's candidacy in the early stages of the campaign. Kennon responded to this snub by saying,

There was an editorial in the Times-Picayune the other day which referred to three candidates in the race for governor, and they didn't mention our all-veteran ticket. If they don't know we are in the race, they will certainly know it after January 20.¹¹

He alluded to this paper and the New Orleans States, as "those Siamese twins of the newspaper business."¹² On January 11, 1948, however, the Times-Picayune finally recognized Kennon's candidacy.¹³

In addition to hostile editorials in reform newspapers, various individuals also voiced their opposition to Kennon's candidacy. Fred Barksdale, an

⁹Delhi Dispatch, April 2, 1947.

¹⁰Bunkie Record, April 4, 1947.

¹¹Minden Herald, December 12, 1947.

¹²Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 13.

¹³New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 11, 1948.

Alexandria merchant, accused Kennon of violating the code of ethics of the American Bar Association by not resigning from the Circuit Court to campaign. Kennon, charging that another gubernatorial candidate, Sam Jones, had written Barksdale's speech, said "Barksdale's no lawyer." "Nobody else would know how to write a speech like that."¹⁴ Additionally, Kennon accused his opponents of being "scared because they know we've got 'em whipped" all over the state.¹⁵

Charged by opponent Earl Long with being absent from his Circuit Court judgeship for nearly seven years, Kennon answered by itemizing his specific tasks during those years--military service and supreme court duty. Grady C. Durham, candidate for secretary of state on Sam Jones' ticket, stated that none of Jones' opponents had worn military uniforms. Kennon countered,

Sometimes the uniform I wore was nothing but old fatigues [combat uniform] but I don't think it is right for a man who knows I was in overseas service to say I never wore a uniform.¹⁶

On the other hand, Kennon attracted numerous supporters throughout the state, one of the more vocal of whom was A.P. Fryemire, candidate for the State Senate from the 12th and 13th Wards of New Orleans. Predicting

¹⁴Minden Herald, January 16, 1948.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., December 26, 1947.

that Kennon would receive a fifth of the total New Orleans vote, Fryemire asserted that gubernatorial candidates Jimmie Morrison and Sam Jones were "telling ghost stories that they don't even believe themselves." Jimmie Morrison was claiming 100,000 votes to be cast for him in New Orleans, and Jones, 75,000 for himself. Fryemire also informed his audiences that Kennon planned to eliminate many of the boards and bureaus in state government. He said that the previous year's general appropriation for the governor's office "came about because they have added so many boards and commissions and advisors to the governor."¹⁷ Condemning the Times-Picayune and New Orleans States for opposing Kennon, Fryemire concluded, "they [should] confine their activities to the election of a king for Mardi Gras and let the people elect a governor for Louisiana."¹⁸

Another Kennon supporter from New Orleans was Lee Grevemberg, who, at a political rally at the Jerusalem Temple in New Orleans, presented a skit, in which he utilized four hats for depicting the gubernatorial candidates. Congressman James A. Morrison was represented by a battered straw fishing hat containing playing cards and dice, and a postage-free congressional envelope. Earl

¹⁷Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 13.

¹⁸Ibid.

Long's battered hat contained throat gargle, and a list of promises. A silk hat represented Sam Jones, and contained a song book, empty money bags and news clippings. Kennon's army officer's cap contained nothing.¹⁹

Johnny Williams, a New Orleans attorney, announced for Kennon, contending that the state was "on the threshold of the greatest industrial development in its history." Williams felt that Kennon was the "best suited to guide it [the state] in the furtherance of this goal."²⁰

A. Wilmot Dalferes, City Judge of Lafayette, declared that out of the state's 900,000 qualified voters, 600,000 owed no allegiance to anyone, and that Kennon would receive enough of the unaligned votes to win. E. E. McKnight, a supporter from Franklinton, also believed that Kennon supporters were increasing.²¹ In North Louisiana, B.M. Dorrity, a Shreveport businessman, also endorsed Kennon, stating that he had selected the winner in every Louisiana gubernatorial since 1903, and that he had predicted incorrectly only once.²²

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Minden Herald, September 26, 1947.

²¹Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 13.

²²Ibid.

Heading an all-veteran ticket, Kennon was assured of securing veteran support. J.B. Anderson, president of the United Veterans of East Baton Rouge Parish, presented a resolution from his organization endorsing Kennon.²³

College veterans' leaders Edmond J. "Pudgy" Miranne of Loyola University and Michael Bagot of Tulane spoke in Kennon's behalf. Bagot told the audience,

Selecting a governor is like buying a suit of clothes, you want to get the best you can. In this case, all you have to spend is one vote: you can get the best governor for the same price you would get the worst governor. Get your money's worth; elect Bob Kennon.²⁴

The St. Helena Parish Veterans' Democratic Organization also endorsed Kennon.

Various towns organized Kennon Headquarters, and in New Orleans, a group of five hundred women workers, chaired by Miss Sue Smith, worked diligently for the Kennon cause. In Kennon's hometown, a Kennon for Governor Club was organized, with Floyd D. Culbertson, Jr. unanimously elected chairman. Twenty days before Christmas in 1947, the club offered \$275 in a contest for the three best entries in the parish. By completing the statement, "I want Bob Kennon for governor because _____," the best entry would win \$100; the

²³Minden Herald, August 22, 1947.

²⁴Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 13.

second-best, \$50, and the five third-best, \$25 awards, respectively.²⁵

Kennon's all-veteran slate included: Rufus W. Fontenot, secretary of state; David McNeill, attorney general; Allison R. Kolb, state auditor; and Jules H. Deshotels, Jr., lieutenant governor. Rufus W. Fontenot was born in Crowley, Louisiana. He was educated in the public schools of Acadia Parish, Crowley University School and at Louisiana State University. He had served as a clerk to the United States House of Representatives' Banking and Currency Committee. For three years he was Commissioner of Revenue for the state of Louisiana. During World War II, he served on the staff at Allied Supreme Headquarters in London, England.²⁶ Fontenot was upset at not being reinstated in his old job as state revenue commissioner after he was discharged from military service. He was also dismayed by alleged wasteful spending of the Jones and Davis administrations, and asked voters to support the Kennon ticket. He promised to assist Kennon in the elimination of wastefulness, and condemned the "deadheads" who were "receiving \$5000 and \$6000 a year" from the state.

²⁵Minden Herald, November 7, 1947, December 26, 1947.

²⁶Biographical Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 9.

As revenue director, Fontenot had issued liquor permits until the task was given to James I. Smith, executive counsel to then Governor Sam Jones. Fontenot did not forget this. He levelled charges at the Jones' administration throughout the campaign. Fontenot also accused Roland Cocreham, Collector of Internal Revenue under Governor Davis, of not collecting hundreds of thousands of dollars in taxes. Probably this charge was hurled because Cocreham was on leave, serving as Sam Jones' campaign manager. In addition, Fontenot listed names of those who were in supposed complicity with Cocreham--tax appeal board members Francis Whitehead, Jerome Hayes and J. L. Boudreaux.²⁷ Criticizing Sam Jones for claiming to have reorganized the state government "from 174 agencies into 20 departments," Fontenot declared that the boards, and independent agencies had actually mushroomed into over 150, according to The Book of States, a publication by the Council of State Governments. Fontenot said that in 1944, Jones had divided the Department of Conservation into three separate departments--conservation, wildlife and fisheries, and forestry.²⁸

²⁷Minden Herald, November 28, 1947, and December 5, 1947.

²⁸Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 13.

Speaking ironically of former Governor Jimmy Davis's band which performed with the Jones' ticket, Fontenot stated that when he returned from military service, he should have accepted

the opportunities of the GI bill of rights . . . [and attended] a music school . . . [to learn] how to play the guitar or fiddle and how to sing 'You Are My Sunshine' and then I would have done all right.

He said that Kennon was a "fine, unspoiled, uncontaminated young man."²⁹

David McNeill, the candidate for Attorney General was a graduate of Tulane University and Tulane Law School. He had served as Executive Assistant District Attorney and Assistant City Attorney for New Orleans. During World War II, he served four years in the U.S. Marines.³⁰

Although not as vocal as Fontenot, McNeill just as ardently supported Kennon, and depicted Kennon's campaign as "the spirit of independence."³¹ McNeill claimed that New Orleans Mayor, De Lesseps Morrison had refused him a leave of absence in order to campaign for state attorney general. One of McNeill's special concerns was home rule for Louisiana's parishes. He promised that after he was elected, the sheriff would be the "chief enforcement

²⁹Ibid.; Minden Herald, December 19, 1947.

³⁰Biographical Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 9.

³¹Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 13.

officer in the parishes." He also promised there would be no "Gestapo"³² or secret police group in the attorney general's office, and that, legislation would be forthcoming allowing cities and towns to change their charters to ensure greater administrative and financial independence to raise and allocate their own resources and to make other decisions locally, without having to receive the Legislature's permission.³³ McNeill described Kennon as independent, with "no ring around his neck,"³⁴ while Kennon said of McNeill,

He has the professional ability and the strength of character needed for the conduct of the Attorney General's office in true American fashion in an independent administration. . . .³⁵

Allison R. Kolb, running for State Auditor, was a professional auditor, and thus was the only candidate qualified for the position. He received his B.S. degree from Louisiana Tech, and the L.L.B. and M.S. degree from Louisiana State University. Kolb had served over there years in the Army during World War II. He taught accounting at LSU and had also practiced law.³⁶ Kolb

³²Ibid.

³³Minden Herald, October 3, 1947.

³⁴Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 13.

³⁵Minden Herald, October 3, 1947.

³⁶Biographical Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 9.

substantiated his candidacy by stressing that he was the only auditor in the race, asserting that the auditor was "the chief bookkeeper in the state," and that in a business which works with . . . [several million dollars] a year, "you need a competent, qualified bookkeeper." When you need a mechanic to fix your car," Kolb emphasized, "you don't hire a scrubwoman. So when you need a bookkeeper, why hire some one who is not qualified?" He promised to merge all state auditing agencies under one office to implement "the economy program of the Kennon ticket." The "overhead" saved, he assured voters, would be used for schools, hospitals, and roads. Speaking of the 300,000 veterans in the state, Kolb claimed that two-thirds or 200,000 were registered, and of that number fifty percent were married. Kolb concluded that fifty percent of the veterans were for Kennon's ticket and served as "a nucleus of 150,000 votes to start off with."³⁷

The fourth and last member of the Kennon ticket was Jules H. Deshotels, Jr., who campaigned for the office of Lieutenant Governor. Kennon included "Cajun" Deshotel on his ticket to attract South Louisiana voters, a tradition observed for decades in Louisiana by gubernatorial candidates from the northern part of the state. Deshotels

³⁷Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 13.

graduated from Southwestern Louisiana Institute and taught school ten years in Vermillion Parish. He had served twenty-two months as an Intelligence Officer for the 83rd Division in Europe during World War II.³⁸ Running for the state's number-two office which many viewed as a political graveyard, Deshotels did not make many campaign promises. He said he consented to seek the office "because Kennon assured him that he [Kennon] would not leave the state if elected."³⁹ When campaigning in South Louisiana, Deshotels spoke French, giving the qualifications of the other members of the ticket. He promised that Kennon would save the State's money, and put a stop to public funds "being wasted." Deshotels derided the band which travelled with the Jones ticket, stating:

We had the services of a band offered us, but when we found out what the gubernatorial candidates have to pay for their bands, we decided to try and get along without musical accompaniment.

He added, "you taxpayers are now paying out from \$50,000 to \$75,000 a year for a band. That band is now accompanying one of the candidates for governor."⁴⁰

Earl K. Long emerged as the most colorful candidate, accusing Jones and Governor Jimmy Davis of "do-

³⁸Biographical Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 9.

³⁹Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 13.

⁴⁰Quoted in Minden Herald, January 2, 1948.

nothingism." (His opponents, in turn, charged Long with "do-everythingism.") A younger brother of Huey P. Long, Earl, was born on August 26, 1895, in Winn Parish. He attended Louisiana Polytechnic Institute, Tulane and Loyola, but never obtained a degree from any of those institutions. His first attempt to receive public office had occurred in 1932, when he unsuccessfully ran on his own for lieutenant governor. In 1936, as the Longite candidate for the same office on Richard Leche's ticket, he won. As a result of the scandals in which Governor Leche was implicated, Long served as governor from 1939 to 1940 after Leche resigned. Long then campaigned for a term of his own in 1940, losing out to Sam Jones, whom Long derisively called "High Hat Sam, the High Society Kid, the High-Kickin, and High and Mighty Snide Sam."⁴¹

In the 1948 election, Earl Long's platform reflected parts of his late brother's "Share-Our-Wealth" program, which had sought to redistribute the nation's wealth in an effort to terminate poverty in the United States. Saying nothing about probable and necessary tax increases, Long promised to expand an already generous state welfare program. At a political rally in Maplewood, Long asserted that the state government collected almost \$200,000,000 a year in taxes, and that the people received few benefits

⁴¹For additional information see Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, pp. 140-153.

in return. He did not accuse the Jones administration of stealing, but did believe that the public was not receiving adequate services for its tax dollars.⁴² A complete list of Long's campaign promises included: \$50 per month old-age pensions; homestead tax-exemptions of \$5,000 of assessed value for all homeowners; improvement of all state institutions; trade schools for all parishes; bonuses for all World War II veterans; a minimum teacher's salary of \$2,400 annually; twelve-month salaries for school bus drivers; the completion of school-bus, mail route, and rural roads; enlargement of main state highways; enclosing of rights of way on certain roads where livestock roamed; improvement of the Port of New Orleans; free hot lunches for school children; and the end of restrictions on the export of natural gas out of Louisiana. Additionally, Long requested passage of a law to require governors to give personal financial statements before and after the term of office.

Sam Jones contended that if Long's program were enacted it would cost the state \$892,000,000 a year, causing taxes to be doubled. Long did not answer this charge.⁴³

⁴²Minden Herald, December 20, 1947.

⁴³Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, p. 200; and New Orleans Times-Picayune, November 6 & 7, 1947.

Among the low points of Long's campaign was an accusation of a Jones' supporter, Congressman James Domengeaux of the Third District, that Earl was guilty of tax evasion. Elmer Ireys, retired chief of the Intelligence Division, Bureau of Internal Revenue, also accused Long of receiving \$46,830 in deduct collections. Domengeaux declared in a congressional speech that Long owed in excess of \$100,000 to the federal government.⁴⁴ Domengeaux, however, had no concrete evidence to substantiate his claim. In an article in Coronet Magazine (January, 1948), Ireys--one of the investigators in the 1939 scandals--emphatically declared Long guilty of accepting deducts. Long admitted his guilt of taking deducts and promised to repay the money. These accusations prompted Jones to declare that Long was "UNFIT to be Governor."⁴⁵

Long's ticket included William Dodd, Wade O. Martin, Jr., Bolivar Kemp, Jr., and W. E. Anderson, campaigning for the offices of lieutenant governor, secretary of state, attorney general, and commissioner of agriculture, respectively. Russell Long's name was added, with the inscription, "Son of Huey P. Long,"⁴⁶ probably to add

⁴⁴Ruston Daily Leader, January 16, 1948.

⁴⁵Minden Herald, January 2, 1948.

⁴⁶Ibid., December 5, 1947.

credibility to the ticket. Earl also received the support of Russell's mother; William Feazel, wealthy oil and gas magnate; Ernest Clements, Conservation Commissioner under former Governor Leche; and Leander Perez, political boss of Plaquemines and St. Bernard Parishes. Speaking of Perez's endorsement, Long said, he "is a very forceful man, and it looks like his people appreciate what he does for them, and they always stay with him."⁴⁷

Congressman Otto Passman described Long as the leading gubernatorial candidate and the only one with an organization in all sixty-four parishes. Allan Sindler wrote that Long built up a "thorough grass-roots organization,"⁴⁸ by campaigning diligently. Long himself delighted his audiences by alluding to incumbent Governor Davis as "a liar and a thief and he's got DIABETES!" He said of Kennon, "Judge Kennon has perfectly good ears. He can stand in a courthouse in Opelousas and hear a dollar bill drop in Ville Platte."⁴⁹ (This was a sly reference to Kennon's visibly protruding ears.)

Sam Jones declared the major factor of the election to be "progress or poverty." Born in a two-room log cabin

⁴⁷Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, October 19, 1947.

⁴⁸Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, p. 201.

⁴⁹Quoted in Bennett H. Wall, ed., Louisiana: A History (Arlington Heights, Illinois: The Forum Press, Inc., 1984), p. 293.

in Beauregard Parish in 1898, Jones attended Louisiana State University and was admitted to the Louisiana Bar in 1922. He had practiced law before campaigning for governor in 1939-40 against Earl Long. Jones won, and proposed a reform program, which was partially supported by the legislature. He decreased the price of automobile license plates from \$15 to \$3; raised old-age pensions; raised appropriations for schools and the construction of roads; established a civil service system for both state and New Orleans employees; constructed four new hospitals and seventeen airports; reduced the 175 state boards and commissions to twenty departments; and repealed many of the dictatorial statutes of Huey P. Long. Lessening administrative expenses, Jones left the state in 1944 with a surplus of \$15,000,000.⁵⁰ Sindler described Jones as "The Liberator of Louisiana," and stated that Jones's administration had attempted, with some success, "to revamp the tone of anti-Longism from tax consciousness to one dedicated to enlarging the areas of self-help and opportunity for the bulk of citizens."⁵¹

⁵⁰Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, pp. 154-180; Ruston Daily Leader, October 27, 1947; Jerry P. Sanson, "Sam Jones, Jimmie Noe, and the Reform Alliance 1940-1942," Louisiana History, Summer 1986, Vol. XXVII, No. 3, pp. 239-248.

⁵¹Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, p. 180.

During the 1948 gubernatorial campaign Jones claimed that out of forty-five promises in the 1940 campaign, he had carried out forty-three during his previous administration. In the 1948 campaign he promised honest and efficient government; enhancement of wealth-producing activities in agriculture and industry; reforestation; drainage of five million acres of land; restoration of fish and wildlife; hefty appropriations for education; improvement of health programs--general and mental hospitals, cancer and tuberculosis campaigns, parish centers; adequate welfare assistance for the needy; improvements in highways and rural roads; assistance to veterans; vocational training; ownership of Tidelands; better recreational outlets; home rule; civil service improvement; assistance to juvenile delinquency program; and a female executive assistant. Jones declared that in 1943, he and others had traveled to Washington, D.C. and influenced bureaucrats to equalize freight rates so that the South's industries would be able to operate on a more equitable basis with industries in the North and East. With such success, he asserted that Louisiana could have a balanced economy with industrialization and agriculture.

Jones said that during the last eight years, the farming segment had made gains because the government provided experiment stations, improved pastures, engaged in reforestation projects, and established a soil

laboratory. Those farmers who had been displaced because of greater mechanization, were given jobs in the 700 new factories which had been established, according to Jones.⁵² To finance such a program, he apparently planned to use funds from the surplus in the state treasury.

On the Jones ticket were J. Emile Verret, a South Louisianian "Cajun," for lieutenant governor; Fred S. LeBlanc, attorney general; Grady C. Durham, secretary of state; Mrs. Ellen Bryan Moore, register of state lands, Shelby M. Jackson, superintendent of education; D. Ross Banister, state auditor; Dave L. Pearce, commission of agriculture; and A. P. Tugwell, state treasurer.⁵³

Jones had not only the covert endorsement of Governor Davis, but also Davis's "Sunshine Band" to entertain crowds at his political rallies. De Lesseps Morrison, Mayor of New Orleans, U.S. Senator John H. Overton, and all three daily New Orleans newspapers also backed Jones.

James (Jimmie) Morrison, who had campaigned for the governor's office in 1940 and 1944, was endorsed by the New Orleans "Choctaws," or Old Regulars.⁵⁴ Of upper-class

⁵²For additional pledges see Ruston Daily Leader, January 13, 1948, and New Orleans Times-Picayune, October 14, and November 5 & 9, 1947.

⁵³Ibid., January 5, 1948.

⁵⁴The Choctaw Club was organized in 1897 and was made up of professional politicians who endeavored to control city patronage. The Club, known as the "Ring," the "old regulars," and the "Choctaws," was a Democratic machine and wielded much influence on the state level as well as

origin, Morrison was born December 8, 1908, in Hammond, Louisiana. He attended Tulane University and later practiced law. He campaigned unsuccessfully for the Sixth District Congressional seat in 1938, but won the seat at last in 1942. He entered the gubernatorial race in 1940, as a minor candidate, but received much attention when he stumped the state with a monkey whom he called "Earl Long." Deriding former governors Leche and Earl Long, Morrison featured a "convict parade," with individuals representing Leche and others dressed in prison clothes.⁵⁵

In the 1948 election, Morrison charged that the New Orleans Times-Picayune was running the state. In one of his speeches at Maxwell, Morrison lashed out against Senator Overton, who responded angrily. Morrison contended "I will not dignify his [Overton's] charges in detail, but I deny each one of them as coming from a man whose mind is hypnotized by Sam Jones."⁵⁶

Morrison's platform was relatively short, but promised pensions of \$50 per month to individuals sixty years of age or older; bonuses for veterans of both World Wars I and II; additional charity hospitals; free

in the parish of Orleans. They were conservative and protected their vested interests. A dissident group of Choctaws was known as the "new regulars."

⁵⁵Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, pp. 143-144, 186.

⁵⁶Quoted in Minden Herald, December 26, 1947; See also Minden Herald, January 9, 1948.

ambulance and dental service; free school lunches; paving and black-topping of gravel roads, and graveling of parish dirt roads. His ticket included J. Y. Fontenot, lieutenant governor; Lucille Mae Grace; register of state Land office; John R. Jeter, secretary of state; L. B. Baynard, state auditor; A. P. Tugwell, state treasurer; K. K. Kennedy, attorney general; D. M. Riddle, commissioner of agriculture; and John E. Cox, superintendent of education. At the Morrison campaign rallies, entertainment was provided, including such musical groups as "The Slow Fiddler and His Dixieland Band" and "Curley Corbin and His Dude Cowboys."⁵⁷ One of Morrison's political advertisements stated that he was "supported by the old regulars of New Orleans, who will give the Jimmy Morrison Ticket 100,000 votes."⁵⁸

Kennon was adamantly opposed to the "Old Regulars"--called the "oldest of the state's 'parties' within the Democratic party,"⁵⁹ by Memphis, Tennessee's Commercial Appeal--and apparently to any political group or politician who supported his opponents. Kennon charged

⁵⁷Ruston Daily Leader, November 7, 1947; Minden Herald, January 9, 1948; New Orleans Times-Picayune, October 17, November 7, 9, and 12, 1947.

⁵⁸Minden Herald, January 9, 1948.

⁵⁹Memphis, Tennessee, Commercial Appeal, January 12, 1948.

all three rivals with being dominated by political machines.

Revealing a sense of humor, Kennon made several comments about his opponents. He said of Morrison:

If Jimmy Morrison were to be lost and anyone in this state found him they would look at the tag around his neck and send him back . . . to New Orleans.⁶⁰

Of Jones, he asserted:

If they happened to find Sam Jones, they would send him back to Cheppie Morrison, that's his boss in the city of New Orleans. . . .⁶¹

Humorously speaking of Long, Kennon declared, "Earl is promising to pave every pig trail in the state."⁶²

Kennon, accusing Overton of attempting to "dictate to the Louisiana electorate" his choice of Sam Jones, warned voters not to "go back into political slavery."⁶³ Even as Kennon castigated his opponents, they in turn criticized him. Kennon had supposedly sought "Old Regular" endorsement, but did not meet with the "Caucus" or the official membership. Instead he had meekly waited for the results of a meeting of the faction's leadership.

⁶⁰Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 13.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Minden Herald, September 12, 1947.

Apparently, he had waited for nothing.⁶⁴ One news writer, speculating on Kennon's possible feelings of rejection, had Kennon saying to himself:

Thank the powers, I [Kennon] am not the candidate of any machine. I am an independent. But, oh joy of joys! It is possible the Old Regular Machine will support [me]. . . .

This same writer stated,

Organized political support is an evil to be shunned by the righteous when somebody else has it, but when you have it yourself, then--like peace--it's wonderful.⁶⁵

Kennon denied ever seeking organized "Old Regular" support, but retorted that he had the endorsement of many of their members.

Kennon apparently underestimated Long and Morrison, stating on one occasion that the people of Louisiana did not "want either one of those fellows to be governor; they've [voters] already proved that twice by their votes."⁶⁶ As a campaign gimmick, Kennon distributed thimbles and toy shovels. The thimbles were symbolic of Kennon "sewing up" the election by hand and not by machine. The toy shovels symbolized the digging of a political grave for Sam Jones. Calling Jones a "wolf in a

⁶⁴Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 13.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid.

sheep's clothing,"⁶⁷ Kennon was particularly piqued with Governor Jimmie Davis, contending that the governor should not interfere in the campaign. Many people, according to Kennon, believed that Jones was the power behind the Davis administration. Kennon charged that Jones wanted a third consecutive term in office. Kennon challenged Jones to a debate in either of their hometowns of Minden or Lake Charles but Jones declined.⁶⁸ Referring to the extravagance of the past eight years, Kennon accused Jones and Davis of spending tax money unnecessarily on plans that had produced nothing. Speaking of the lack of adequate roads, Kennon claimed,

The only place you see those roads are on those charts he [Jones] hauls around the state with him. If they have built any roads they must have built them underground, because they certainly don't show up on top.⁶⁹

Citing a further case-in-point of wasteful spending, Kennon alluded to a \$25,000 study which had been done on traffic conditions in Shreveport. The results of the study provided no new revelations, but were contained in a "a pretty bound volume, in color,"⁷⁰ argued Kennon.

⁶⁷Quoted in Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, p. 201.

⁶⁸Minden Herald, December 5, 1947 and January 6, 1948.

⁶⁹Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 13.

⁷⁰Ibid.

Kennon observed that Davis's band was on the state payroll, when the money could be better used to blacktop roads. Charlie Mitchell, Davis's Executive Secretary, was "the musical secretary of Louisiana," and "a musical deadhead."⁷¹ Calling Louisiana's state government "one of the greatest governmental monstrosities in the nation,"⁷² Kennon stated that the Jones administration had received \$38,000,000 more in annual revenues than its predecessor, but that the state's indebtedness had increased to \$13,000,000.

Scathingly attacking Jones for pressuring state workers to support his ticket, Kennon maintained that it was

an open secret that many state department heads and high state employees have deserted their public duties to save their Precious Sammy from his desperate political plight.⁷³

He cited two public officials in particular--Roland Cocreham, revenue director, and James S. Reily, state purchasing agent--both, of whom Kennon felt, should be like Caesar's wife, "above suspicion." Kennon pledged to fire both of them the same day he assumed the governorship. Apparently Kennon as a gubernatorial

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid.

contender was becoming rougher and less genteel than the earlier "judicial" Kennon.

Espousing a conservative fiscal policy, the anti-Longite Kennon pledged honesty, efficiency and economy. Sociologist Perry Howard insists that while "reformers" in Louisiana were usually "obsessed with the form of government, stressing civil service and administrative efficiency," the Longites had been "rather successful in fighting the reformers by pushing their own kind of reform in the shape of 'benefits'." These benefits included, among others, school lunches, free school books, charity hospitals, and toll-free bridges.⁷⁴ Under the Longites, Louisiana had become a "welfare state" under the "tax and spend" policy of Huey, Earl and their associates. However, to pay for public services, the state government levied a plethora of taxes on oil, sulfur, natural gas, carbon black, personal and industrial property, beer, cigarettes, and gasoline. Longite candidates attracted voters by promising to expand the state's ever-increasing public service programs, but rarely discussed the necessity of having to increase taxes in order to pay for the services. Anti-Longites, aware of the strength and numbers of the lower/middle classes, ardently promised

⁷⁴Perry Howard, Political Tendencies in Louisiana (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), p. 386, hereinafter cited as Howard, Political Tendencies.

voters that the Longite programs would be retained, but promised to fund the services with lower expenditures and better management. Kennon advocated such a "reform" program in 1948.

If Kennon won the election, his administration would inherit a state-treasury surplus of about \$50,000,000, along with increasing state revenues. Kennon had some definite ideas of how he would allocate this surplus--to cover industrial tax exemptions; build roads; improve education and social welfare; assist farmers and workers; and conserve natural resources.⁷⁵ Depicting the state government as being as "full of red tape as a turkey is full of rice dressing," he promised that under his capable leadership, the state would be placed on a "biscuit and syrup basis," with some "sausage."⁷⁶ Taxes would be cut, but services would continue.

A newspaper advertisement by Mid-Continent Oil and Gas Association of Shreveport assured Louisiana voters that lower taxes meant lower living costs.⁷⁷ Kennon agreed, stating that Louisiana was collecting too much money, with twice as many taxes as the neighboring states. In fact, Louisiana's per capita annual tax load was about

⁷⁵Minden Herald, October 3, 1947.

⁷⁶Ibid., December 5, 1947.

⁷⁷Ruston Daily Leader, January 12, 1948.

\$50 compared to approximately \$25 in Arkansas, Texas and Mississippi. Kennon pledged to reduce taxes with his "common sense tax reduction program," primarily by reducing and abolishing unnecessary state bureaus and commissions.⁷⁸ The Bureau of Occupational Standards was one such state agency he would dissolve, allowing each professional group to maintain and pay for its own licensing board. The cost to government of the "useless bureaus" was \$2 per person per year, according to Kennon, and one-hundred percent more per person on the average than in Texas and Mississippi. Kennon also denounced the Davis administration for having a "cabinet" of more than twenty persons, asserting that the President of the United States did not have that number.⁷⁹

Kennon promised to repeal the state property tax, which provided about \$8,000,000 of Louisiana's annual revenue of \$115,000,000. Because parishes and municipalities would continue to collect property taxes, Kennon contended that sending parish money to Baton Rouge was "like a 100 pound piece of ice. You send it there and when the money comes back, it is a two-bit piece of

⁷⁸Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 13; Minden Herald, September 26, 1947 and November 10, 1947.

⁷⁹Minden Herald, December 5, 1947.

ice."⁸⁰ Speaking additionally on home rule, Kennon suggested that local police juries should be given the authority to control construction work within their parishes, and that colleges and smaller state schools should be granted the authority to allocate funds locally, instead of sending money to the state capital first, which then sent the funds back to the local institutions.

Another item on Kennon's priority list was decreasing taxes on industry while also eliminating industrial tax exemptions. He was keenly aware of the importance of continued industrialization to Louisiana's business economy. Since 1938, Louisiana had granted a ten-year exemption from property taxes to attract new industries to the state. World War II ushered in an industrial boom within Louisiana. State property tax exemptions for new businesses which had been terminated in 1941, were reinstated during Davis' administration in 1946. It was these industrial tax exemptions that Kennon pledged to end, because "the growing industrial capacity of Louisiana was bringing . . . an increasing labor vote which would show a political tendency more sympathetic to Longism."⁸¹ Since World War II, there had been a continued increase in the number of industrial plants along the Mississippi

⁸⁰Ibid., December 12, 1947.

⁸¹Howard, Political Tendencies, p. 264.

River area southeast of Baton Rouge.⁸² Longites provided increasing state services that the people appreciated, while Earl Long was a "favorite son" of the laborers. It is possible that Kennon may have wanted to minimize growing Longite political appeal in Louisiana's principal industrial sector, even if it meant discouraging the arrival in the state of some new industries.

Kennon admitted that Louisiana's relatively high property taxes on business and industry had initially justified the ten-year industrial tax exemption, but that the high taxes themselves were responsible for industries locating in other states. So long as high business and industrial taxes served as a deterrent to Louisiana's gaining new industries, Kennon favored both elimination of tax-exemptions and the lowering of taxes.⁸³

Kennon also desired to maximize land usage, whether in farming, cattle raising, or reforestation, in order to attract industry into the state to "process those products of our land into retail package goods."⁸⁴ He suggested placing small plants in rural areas to process directly the wood and food products from those same communities.

⁸²Ibid., p. 290.

⁸³Minden Herald, December 19, 1947; New Orleans Times-Picayune, November 13, 1947.

⁸⁴Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 13.

Aware of Louisiana's colonial economy, he stated that a "poor state" only produced raw materials. So he stressed the importance of exporting finished materials "abroad" in "retail packages." This would be achieved, according to Kennon, when small and big businesses were "properly balanced for an efficient economy."⁸⁵

Kennon elaborated that his farm program was "the key to a prosperous Louisiana." He promised that \$500,000 in taxes from the race tracks would be used to promote the growing of such cash crops as strawberries and sweet potatoes. He also embraced the notion of placing farmers under social security. He wanted the state to issue insurance enabling farmers to visit and pay physicians of their own choice. Speaking at the state's cattle breeding program, which was funded by \$250,000 in race track taxes from the New Orleans Fair Grounds, Kennon proposed to increase the amount to one-half million. (The city of New Orleans was then receiving \$500,000 from the race track tax; Kennon wanted to switch the amount of payment to each recipient, an idea that surely found no support among New Orleans voters.)

Kennon also supported the idea of upgrading cattle breeding facilities within the state and increasing the number of white-faced cattle. He believed that farmers

⁸⁵Ibid.

would reap more bountiful profits from sale of these cattle as opposed to "scrub cattle," or inferior stock, which many Louisiana cattlemen then raised. (The white-faced variety sold for twice as much as the "scrub cattle.") Pledging to "put every acre of ground in production,"⁸⁶ Kennon declared that land not used for trapping, grazing cattle and cultivating crops, would be used for the planting of trees. This full utilization of land would yield "maximum prosperity" for the state. Not forgetting the sportsmen, Kennon promised to work with the Sportsmen's League and other groups in protecting Louisiana's wildlife and fisheries. He also promised to create locally sponsored fish and game preserves in all parishes.

In an effort to attract laborers, Kennon said he intended "to be fair with labor." He declared, "At no time in the 20 years of my public career has my record toward labor been based on anything but fairness."⁸⁷ He told laborers that he favored the increased rates of payment to workmen in workmen's compensation cases.

The Louisiana Highway Department's alleged misuse of funds was an issue that caused Kennon great concern. Comparing the state's highway construction and maintenance

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Ibid.

program to those of Texas, Arkansas, and Mississippi, he asserted that Louisiana spent \$5,000,000 more a year than its neighboring states. (This was unlikely. Possibly Louisiana did spend more on roads than comparably sized Arkansas or Mississippi, but surely not more than Texas, the largest state in the area at that time.) Declaring that the state could build one-hundred miles of blacktop roads with the \$5,000,000, Kennon charged officials in Baton Rouge with gross waste--spending "more money in building up reports and fooling with red tape than they do on a comparative basis in Washington."⁸⁸ He contended that only "fractions" of roads had been constructed in the last eight years. The department had received \$275,000,000 during the last eight years, and Kennon charged that the money had been largely wasted.

In this connection, Kennon accused Harry B. Henderlite, former Chief Engineer of the highway department, of unethically conducting business with the firm of Harry W. Lochner and Company, of Chicago. While Chief engineer, Henderlite had negotiated with the Lochner firm for conducting city surveys. Afterwards, Henderlite resigned, and began working with Lochner as a consulting engineer. Kennon said that Henderlite had been guilty of conflicting interests by later sharing in profits with

⁸⁸Minden Herald, November 14, 1947; New Orleans Times-Picayune, November 14, 1947.

Lochner and other out-of-state engineers. (Lochner and Henderlite, for example, were to divide a \$95,000 state fee for surveying and planning the Pontchartrain expressway.) While Henderlite was yet with the highway department, he had awarded Lochner \$24,000 for an Alexandria survey and \$19,500 for a Shreveport survey. Another firm, Moses, Andrews and Clark, of New York, had been paid \$87,500 for a New Orleans survey. All of these projects and additional ones had cost the state more than \$250,000.

According to Kennon, there was not

a single plan or specification for the accomplishment of any improvement in the whole lot. That money was spent on dreams; the actual planning is yet to be done. . . .⁸⁹

Upon becoming governor, Kennon intended to break the contracts and initiate road building in all sixty-four parishes. Parish police juries would be authorized to blacktop thousands of miles of local roads in their own jurisdictions. Upon completion of the road construction, police juries would be authorized to bill the state for payment. Kennon said his proposal would eliminate waste, and "people would be assured roads without delay and the state would pay the bill."⁹⁰

⁸⁹Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 13.

⁹⁰Minden Herald, December 5, 1947.

In addition to the attraction of his all-veteran ticket, Kennon had a specific program of federal and state assistance aimed at Louisiana's 240,000 veterans. He would request federal funds for educational assistance to state veterans, and for "reasonable" payments or bonuses to veterans not receiving benefits under the G.I. Bill of Rights.⁹¹ The state would also do its share in providing for the "forgotten men." Kennon's platform included a housing program and a revolving fund to provide temporary assistance to veterans. Implementing Kennon's veterans' package would require a state constitutional amendment, which, in turn, would require voter approval in the 1948 November general election. Kennon warned veterans that the completion of this program would take time, but told voters that "no amount of money . . . would compensate what [veterans] did for us."⁹²

While promising several forms of financial assistance to needy veterans, Kennon did not offer bonuses or allotments to other needy sectors of society. He was particularly opposed to increasing old-age pensions, as Earl Long pledged to do. Warning that taxes would have to be doubled to pay for more generous pensions, Kennon

⁹¹Ibid., pp. 1, 10.

⁹²Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 13; See also New Orleans Times-Picayune, October 11, 1947.

vaguely asserted that he would formulate a "sensible program"⁹³ to take care of the aged, sick, incurables, and destitute. He did suggest, somewhat boldly, that if his plans for state development were followed, children in Louisiana could look forward to working thirty or forty years, with "enough money for their needs, thus eliminating the necessity for welfare payments just because they are old."⁹⁴ (With young males in mind, Kennon supported a state-operated boys' camp, proposing the conversion of a no-longer-needed army camp into a permanent youth facility. At the camp, boys would receive a formal education and engage in extracurricular activities.)

One of Louisiana's abundant resources, natural gas, was sparingly used for illumination in the 1800's, but the full potential of the resource was not then imagined. Not until the turn of the century would the natural gas industry develop and expand in Louisiana. Gas was found primarily in the northwestern and northeastern sections of the state; the refineries of Standard Oil Company and other companies were located in these areas to process and pipe gas into eastern states.

⁹³Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 13.

⁹⁴Ibid.

During the Jones' administration, the legislature prohibited the piping of gas into eastern states which had large amounts of coal. Gas owners, who would lose royalties, objected to this conservationist legislation.⁹⁵ In 1947, the anti-conservationists won; the office of executive director of natural gas conservation was eliminated, and the earlier legislation was repealed.⁹⁶ Kennon favored exporting Louisiana natural gas. He maintained,

we are all for conserving the state's resources. But we are not going to subscribe to a policy which will stop you from selling your gas to a man in El Dorado, Arkansas, or Kansas City or Timbucktoo, who is willing to pay for it.⁹⁷

Kennon and the members of his ticket campaigned actively. They stumped the state, delivering almost countless numbers of speeches together. The November 1, 1947, itinerary well illustrates the hectic pace of the Kennon group through four parishes:

Choudrant, LA.	8:30 a.m.
Simsboro, LA.	10:00 a.m.
Ruston, LA.	11:00 a.m.
Bernice, LA	1:30 p.m.
Farmerville, LA	2:30 p.m.
Bastrop, LA	4:00 p.m. ⁹⁸

⁹⁵Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, pp. 179, 195-196.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 13.

⁹⁸Ruston Daily Leader, October 31, 1947.

They spoke in various halls, and on radio stations to a wide range of audiences, including veterans, women's groups, farmers, laborers, and governmental workers. Kennon's supporters thought of different gimmicks to attract voters--writing contests, or auctioning off a washing machine. Claiming that his "promises" to the people were winning support for the ticket, Kennon predicted that he would get one-third of the 600,000 votes cast in the first primary on January 20, 1948. He stated that if the trend was maintained, there would be a possible landslide. At one point, he compared his campaign to a small snowball rolling down hill, becoming larger as it rolled. Approaching the end of campaigning, Kennon contended over the radio that the Times-Picayune was "editorially supporting one of our fast-declining opponents [Jones]." Continuing his speech, Kennon informed his listeners that the newspaper was aware of the Kennon ticket's growing strength, because the editor had written that independent voters were expecting a "statewide stampede for the Kennon ticket."⁹⁹ Just as his campaign had opened in Minden, it ended in Minden at the high school auditorium.

On January 12, 1948, Memphis, Tennessee's Commercial Appeal, included an article on the Louisiana gubernatorial

⁹⁹Minden Herald, January 16, 1948.

campaign, entitled "Colorful Campaign World in Louisiana." The writer stated that the candidates travelled "in sound-trucks from city to fishing villages [with] different types of audiences."¹⁰⁰

The election was a disappointing setback for Kennon. He placed third, receiving 127,569 votes. The two former governors, Long and Jones, received 267,253 and 147,329 votes, respectively. (Morrison came in last, with 101,754 votes.) Since no candidate received a majority of votes in the first Democratic primary, Long and Jones had to face each other in a second primary. (All other members of Kennon's ticket were also eliminated in the first primary.) Kennon's greatest strength lay in the parishes of Caddo (Shreveport) and Ouachita (Monroe), both in North Louisiana, and in the hills around his home parish of Webster. He also did well in the southern portions of the planter and bayou country, and in Baton Rouge and Lake Charles.¹⁰¹ All areas of the state in which Kennon had done well had traditionally supported anti-Long candidates. Out of 147,098 votes cast in New Orleans, Kennon received only 14,548, coming in fourth and last. Kennon remained neutral during the second primary

¹⁰⁰Memphis, Tennessee Commercial Appeal, January 12, 1948.

¹⁰¹Howard, Political Tendencies, p. 274.

campaign. On election day, Jones was badly defeated, while the entire Long ticket was elected by a landslide.

Kennon returned to his duties as a judge on the Court of Appeal, but not for long. United States Senator John H. Overton died in May 1948, and his unexpired term, which ended January 3, 1951, was to be filled on August 31, 1948, in a special Democratic primary. As early as June 16, Kennon informally announced that he would run for Overton's unexpired term. In July, he formally announced that he would initiate his campaign with a state-wide radio broadcast.

Russell Long and his uncle, Governor Earl K. Long had other plans. Earl appointed wealthy oilman William C. Feazel to serve temporarily in the senate until the under-aged Russell could qualify in time for the August primary. (Russell, the son of Earl's late brother, Huey, was born in Shreveport in 1918.) At the age of twelve, Russell had moved with his family to Baton Rouge, when Huey became governor. In 1930, when Huey became a United States senator, the family moved again, this time to New Orleans. Russell attended Louisiana State University, where he was elected president of the student body. After naval service during World War II, the young Long passed the bar exam and began to practice law.¹⁰² When Uncle Earl

¹⁰²Harley B. Bozeman's Papers, Box 1.

campaigned for the governorship in 1948, Russell and his mother endorsed Earl's candidacy. In 1948, Earl wanted Russell to seek the position that his father (and mother) had both held. (Huey's widow, Rose, served as interim U.S. Senator for a brief period following her husband's death.) Russell, receiving the added support of Lieutenant Governor William Dodd, campaigned on the grounds that he was the son of Huey, the nephew of Earl, and that Russell was responsible for the increase of old-age pensions. As his Uncle Earl's Executive Counsel, Russell had lobbied in the legislature for higher old-age pensions. Kennon bitterly denounced Russell, asserting that he doubted "if the people of Louisiana are going to surrender their democratic ideals and principles in favor of the establishment of a royal family dynasty."¹⁰³

Kennon further belittled Russell for never having held a public office, asserting that someone was needed in the senate who was "mature and experienced enough to take care of the situations created by these problems," (e.g. high cost of living, states' rights versus federal "usurpation" and the "Communist" menace).¹⁰⁴ Apparently forgetting his own young age when he had campaigned for

¹⁰³Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 9.

¹⁰⁴Minden Herald, August 20, 1948.

mayor of Minden, Kennon labelled Russell, merely "a young law school graduate."¹⁰⁵

Speaking of Feazel and Russell, Kennon stated, the Long administration gave "the senatorial appointment to their financial godfather," and "now they're to knight the royal nephew."¹⁰⁶ L. L. Greer, a fellow Mindenite speaking for Kennon, pointed out that Russell should seek a minor office, such as district attorney, and then work his way up the political ladder.¹⁰⁷ Kennon himself had done so.

Two of New Orleans' three dailies, which had opposed his earlier bid for the governorship (the Times-Picayune and the New Orleans Item) endorsed Kennon's senatorial candidacy in editorials.¹⁰⁸ Other former enemies, New Orleans' Mayor Morrison and his political machine, the Crescent City Democratic Association (CCDA) also urged Kennon's nomination. (Governor Long had earned the enmity of Morrison and the CCDA, when Long influenced the legislature to pass more than two hundred bills which, according to historian Edward F. Haas, "seriously undermined the political, financial and administrative

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., July 30, 1948.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, p. 214.

structure of New Orleans."¹⁰⁹ Kennon had offered moral support to Morrison during this crisis, inducing the grateful mayor to endorse Kennon's senatorial nomination in the August 31 primary.¹¹⁰)

Kennon pledged to champion the late Senator Overton's waterways and flood control programs. He promised also to expand soil conservation, forestry and drainage projects so that millions of acres of land would be serviceable. Remembering the outcome of the first gubernatorial primary in January 1948, when he did not fare well with organized labor, Kennon promised again to treat both capital and labor fairly, and to help eliminate needless red-tape and inefficiency in the veterans' housing program. (In August Kennon received a letter from a World War I veteran, requesting that he ask senators and congressmen about the status of World War I veterans' pensions.¹¹¹ Presumably, this was to be done after Kennon was elected.)

Kennon discussed the feasibility of granting income tax exemptions to veterans as they returned to civilian

¹⁰⁹Edward F. Haas, De Lesseps S. Morrison and the Image of Reform: New Orleans Politics, 1946-1961 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1974), pp. 124-125, hereinafter cited as Haas, Image of Reform.

¹¹⁰Edward F. Haas, "De Lesseps S. Morrison and the Governorship: A. Reassessment," Louisiana Studies, XV (Summer 1976), 183.

¹¹¹Unsigned letter to Robert F. Kennon, August 9, 1948, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 9.

life. He favored a pension plan underwritten by the federal and state governments which provided a pension to veterans of \$50 per month.

Kennon additionally pledged to secure federal support for rural electrification for American farm homes and federal aid for Louisiana school programs in rural and urban areas. Aware of the high cost of living, he pledged to take necessary action to curb ever-increasing inflation and to reduce federal government spending in needless agencies and bureaus. Stating that the United States' number-one problem was world peace, Kennon promoted the maintenance of superior American air, naval, and military establishments.¹¹² Focusing on the tidelands issue, Kennon promised to endorse legislation safeguarding Louisiana property rights (oil and natural gas) under coastal waters, or tidelands. (Prior to 1947, Louisiana had claimed all land, above and below water, from her shoreline to about ten and one-half miles out to sea. In 1947, when off-shore oil was discovered by the Kerr-McGee Oil Company, the federal government, claiming that the oil was below federal property, entered into a prolonged jurisdictional dispute with Louisiana and other coastal states.)

¹¹²New Orleans Times-Picayune, July 11, 1948.

Despite the fact that much of Kennon's platform was in support of increased federal aid to Louisiana, the conservative Southerner predictably attacked encroaching federal authority. Pledging to maintain Jeffersonian Democracy and states' rights, Kennon intended "to fight to restore those rights"¹¹³ which had been taken from the states. He also favored strengthening federal civil service laws and lower federal taxes.

On election day, August 31, 1948, 517,811 Louisiana voters went to the polls. For a while, Kennon remained ahead, but "Long came from behind to take the lead in the torrid fight."¹¹⁴ Traditionally, Longite strength centered in the state's rural areas, and Kennon did poorly in those areas, losing heavily even in his own rural home parish, receiving 2,990 votes to Long's 4,180. As shown in Table 4, however, of the votes cast in New Orleans, Kennon received 60 percent. David McGuire, Morrison's director of public relations, contended, "Kennon had truly won the contest, but that the Long Machine had stolen the victory in the rural parishes."¹¹⁵ Kennon received 253,668 votes statewide to Long's 264,143.¹¹⁶ By a

¹¹³Minden Herald, July 23, 1948.

¹¹⁴Ruston Daily Leader, September 1, 1948.

¹¹⁵Haas, Image of Reform, p. 134.

¹¹⁶Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, p. 215.

majority vote, Long carried forty-four parishes and won the election by 10,475 votes. Scott Wilson, a public relations expert and advisor to Morrison, asserted that 10,000 votes cast were "questionable."¹¹⁷ According to the New Orleans Item, even before all the returns had been counted Kennon had predicted that he would "be out front by about 10,000 votes."¹¹⁸ Of course he miscalculated. Thirty-four years later, Kennon speaking of the outcome of the election, recalled,

It was very obvious from the way the votes were compared . . . that they [sic] probably did change enough votes for him [R. Long] to be elected to the United States Senate. . . .

Furthermore, he contended, "I had no way of proving it. . . . So I didn't go to the United States Senate."¹¹⁹

Russell Long, however, was elated at the outcome:

I want to thank all my friends and supporters especially those good boys who laid down their cotton sacks, plows and hoes and went to the polls to elect Russell Long U.S. Senator. I never would have made it without a heavy country vote. But I am most

¹¹⁷Quoted in Haas, Image of Reform, p. 134.

¹¹⁸New Orleans Item, September 1, 1948.

¹¹⁹Lewis Morris's Interview of Robert Floyd Kennon, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, January 6, 1983. Oral History Department of the Archives and Record Service, Office of the Secretary of State, State of Louisiana, Baton Rouge, p. 26; for revealing data on how Perez seems to have "helped" Russell Long win, see Glen Jeannson, Leander Perez, Boss of the Delta (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), pp. 147-150.

thankful also for my faithful city workers who kept me from being badly snowed in the cities.¹²⁰

Kennon received more votes than Long in only eighteen consistently anti-Long parishes, where percentages of the vote for Kennon ranged from fifty to sixty-eight-- Ascension (54 percent), Caddo (66 percent), Calcasieu (53 percent), Claiborne (53 percent), DeSoto (52 percent), East Baton Rouge (68 percent), Iberia (51 percent), Jefferson (52 percent), Jefferson Davis (50 percent), Lafayette (51 percent), Lincoln (50 percent), Madison (56 percent), Morehouse (50 percent), Orleans (60 percent), Ouachita (56 percent), St. Mary (55 percent), Tensas (55 percent), and West Baton Rouge (56 percent).¹²¹

Although again defeated, Kennon's political career was not over, as his name became increasingly familiar to voters as a forceful and attractive anti-Longite. After the 1948 senatorial contest, Kennon returned for the fourth, and last time, to his position on the court of appeal. In 1952, with Longism again in disrepute, Kennon would at last win Louisiana's governorship.

¹²⁰Quoted in Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, p. 217.

¹²¹See Table 4.

Table 3. Candidates and Votes--First Primary,
Gubernatorial Election, 1948

Candidates	State	Percentage (State)	Parishes Majority	Carried by Plurality
Long	267,253	41.5	28	22
Jones	147,329	22.9	0	3
Kennon	127,569	19.8	0	2
Morrison	101,754	15.8	2	7
Total	643,905	100.0	30	34

Source: Allan P. Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, 203.

Table 4. Official Returns of the Louisiana Democratic
Primary Election Held August 31, 1948,
Senatorial Votes

Parishes	Robert F. Kennon	Russell B. Long
Arcadia	2,726	5,359
Allen	1,855	3,276
Ascension	2,863	2,402
Assumption	959	1,626
Avoyelles	2,475	6,200
Beauregard	1,654	2,717
Bienville	1,315	2,523
Bossier	2,389	2,680
Caddo	15,507	8,020
Caldwell	847	1,505
Calcasieu	7,964	7,148
Cameron	686	1,018
Catahoula	952	2,003
Claiborne	1,860	1,660
Concordia	924	1,028
DeSoto	1,636	1,519
East Baton Rouge	18,709	8,795
East Carroll	761	909
East Feliciana	876	810
Evangeline	2,673	6,425
Franklin	1,708	3,213
Grant	1,529	2,707
Iberia	4,047	3,943
IBerville	1,688	2,444
Jackson	1,178	2,236
Jefferson	8,564	7,928
Jefferson Davis	2,580	2,556
Lafayette	5,050	4,943
Lafourche	2,679	4,719
LaSalle	1,359	2,241
Lincoln	2,291	2,272
Livingston	2,136	3,612
Madison	1,108	885
Morehouse	1,955	1,954
Natchitoches	2,689	4,952
Orleans	78,071	52,329
Ouachita	8,411	6,695
Plaquemines	396	2,150
Pointe Coupee	1,145	1,725
Rapides	8,302	9,077
Red River	788	2,220
Richland	1,643	2,306
Sabine	1,170	3,554
St. Bernard	121	3,039
St. Charles	1,516	1,646

Table 4 (continued)

Parishes	Robert F. Kennon	Russell B. Long
St. Helena	606	1,118
St. James	1,009	1,995
St. John	808	1,667
St. Landry	6,547	7,600
St. Martin	1,507	2,968
St. Mary	3,066	2,488
St. Tammany	3,146	3,831
Tangipahoa	4,759	6,909
Tensas	741	604
Terrebonne	2,662	2,939
Union	1,643	2,643
Vermillion	3,077	5,838
Vernon	1,355	4,550
Washington	4,124	5,729
Webster	2,990	4,180
West Baton Rouge	931	740
West Carroll	999	2,104
West Feliciana	512	319
Winn	1,431	2,952
Totals	253,668	264,143

Source: Report of Secretary of State, Louisiana, 1948, 22, 24.

Table 5. Candidates and Votes--Democratic Senatorial Primary, 1948
(Short Term Senators)

Candidates	Orleans	Other	State	Percentage (State)	Parishes Majority	Carried by Plurality
Long	52,399	211,814	264,143	51.0	44	-
Kennon	78,071	175,597	253,668	49.0	20	-
Total	130,400	387,411	517,811	100.0	64	-

Source: Allan P. Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, 215.

CHAPTER VI
The Successful Gubernatorial
Campaign of 1952

On June 30, 1951, as the administration of Earl K. Long approached its end, Kennon again announced his candidacy for governor. The determined Kennon told one reporter, "I'm going to run if I only get two votes--mine and my wife's."¹ The forty-nine year old judge said he would campaign on a leave of absence from the bench without pay. In his announcement, Kennon declared that bureaucracy and taxes on both the state and federal level were causing a needless strain on the economy. As a result of increasing expenditures, private initiative and incentive were being weakened. Alluding to Governor Long, without naming him, Kennon stated that by May, 1952, Louisiana's governor would have personally dictated how more than one billion dollars would have been spent because of the "utter subservience of the majority of the

¹Edward G. Luck, "Meet the Governor of Louisiana." The Phi Gamma Delta, 75 (March, 1953), 339, hereinafter cited as Luck, "Meet the Governor."

legislators."² Kennon further observed that Louisiana's executive dictatorship had destroyed the balance between the legislature and executive branches, and he proposed that the imbalance could be rectified by constitutional amendments. Kennon assured voters that they themselves were capable of making the right decisions, since they had been wise enough to oppose several Long-supported proposed amendments in 1948. Kennon also promised to attract new businesses to Louisiana and to administer the state in a business-like manner. Near the end of his announcement, he promised that he would not indulge in smear attacks, and said that his own record was "an open book."³

Since 1948, Earl Long had maintained the Longite principle of "tax and spend." He persuaded a legislature filled with Longite numbers to increase sales, severance and "sin" taxes. The legislature even "taxed" illegal slot machines by requiring those who had them on their business premises to obtain a permit, for which a fee (a form of taxation) had to be paid. Long had made numerous campaign promises to the masses which he tried to actualize. With a treasury surplus of almost \$50,000,000 when he entered office, and with money from rising tax revenues, Long continued his program of expanding social

²Newspaper clipping, no source listed, June, 1951, in author's possession.

³Ibid.

welfare benefits. The state debt had increased from \$170 million under the Davis administration to \$336 million under Long.⁴ Long had raised old-age pensions to \$50 a month, provided hot lunches for school children, increased teachers' pay and provided for racial equalization of teachers' salaries, and granted veterans bonuses and homestead tax exemptions of \$5,000. The Long administration enlarged the state university system, constructed new roads and highways, and expanded the state's program of care for the mentally ill. But it was not the "programs of economic liberalism" that alienated many Louisianians, including some of Long's own followers.⁵ It was his bid for more personal power that caused Long to lose much respect and influence.

In the regular legislative session of 1948, Long had proposed constitutional amendments which would allow the governor to completely dominate the governing board of Louisiana State University, the Board of Liquidation of the State Debt, and the Orleans Parish Dock Board. Another proposal, aimed obviously at Kennon, would establish a state judiciary retirement system, requiring

⁴Perry Howard, Political Tendencies in Louisiana (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), p. 279, hereinafter cited as Howard, Political Tendencies.

⁵Allan P. Sindler, Huey P. Long's Louisiana: State Politics, 1920-1952 (Reprinted ed; Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1980), p. 233; hereinafter cited as Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana.

that state judges had to resign before campaigning for non-judicial offices.⁶ All of these "power grab" amendments were rejected by the voters in the November, 1948 election. Previously, in a September, 1948 special session, the legislature had repealed state civil service, although Long had promised during his campaign to retain state civil service. As Longite Representative Charles Anzalone of Tangipahoa Parish stated, "Let's feed the horse that brought in the feed and the fodder during the campaign."⁷ In addition, Long had persuaded the legislature to reduce the financial resources of the city of New Orleans and to curtail the powers of Mayor DeLesseps Morrison. (During the gubernatorial campaign of 1948, Morrison had endorsed Sam Jones, which Long had bitterly remembered. According to Edward F. Haas, both Morrison and Long were ambitious politicians and political rivals "who plied their trade with cunning expediency and recognized the political value of power and organization."⁸)

New Orleans, the state's largest city, nonetheless remained under constitutional subservience to the state

⁶Ibid., p. 211.

⁷Quoted in Ibid, p. 212.

⁸Edward F. Haas, DeLesseps S. Morrison and the Image of Reform: New Orleans Politics, 1946-1961 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), p. 122; hereinafter cited as Haas, Image of Reform.

legislature, and Long took advantage of this reality to impose legislative sanctions on both the city and its mayor.⁹ Morrison had further angered Long by supporting Kennon for the U. S. Senate in 1948, rather than Earl's nephew, Russell. Naturally, New Orleans voters resented Long's interference in their municipal affairs, for as Allan Sindler has contended,

decline of Earl Long's political stock was shown in January, 1950, when the voters of New Orleans returned Mayor Morrison and his ticket to office by large majorities.¹⁰

Long responded by returning control of the Police Department to Morrison, enacting a small measure of home rule for New Orleans, and providing additional city revenues from cigarette taxes and other funds.¹¹ In future elections Long knew he would need New Orleans' votes.

In 1950, after Russell Long won a full term as United States Senator, Governor Long requested the legislature to call a constitutional convention only for the purpose of amending the document to permit a governor to succeed himself. The revised document would not have to be

⁹Ibid., p. 125.

¹⁰Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, p. 225.

¹¹Ibid., p. 227 and Bennett H. Wall, ed., Louisiana: A History (Arlington Heights Illinois: The Forum Press, Inc., 1984), p. 295.

presented to the voters for approval.¹² This overt "powergrab" on the governor's part, polarized the Longite faction, with several leading Longites, including former U. S. Senator William Feazel, labor leader Lige Williams, current U. S. Senator Russell Long, and others, in opposition to what Governor Long had in mind. Finally, the governor yielded to public and editorial pressure and called a special session of the legislature. The one-day session convened on September 12, 1950, and the legislature rescinded the call for a constitutional convention. Almost two months later, in the November 7 general election, Long met defeat again when a \$140,000,000, road-bond issue was rejected by the voters.¹³

It was apparent that Earl Long's popularity had indeed waned as time neared for his departure from the governor's mansion. But, if Long himself had been repudiated, the liberal precepts of Longism were "to be retained but not expanded," as Allan Sindler stated.¹⁴ Sociologist Perry Howard also argued that

¹²For additional information on Long's proposals see William C. Havard, "The Abortive Louisiana Constitutional Convention of 1951," Journal of Politics, XIII (November, 1951), 708-710.

¹³Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, pp. 231-232; Howard, Political Tendencies, p. 279.

¹⁴Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, p. 234.

the Earl Long administration was going out of office, but benefits seemed to be here to stay, and the action of the candidates in 1952 indicated they considered themselves on uncertain ground on which they had to feel their way, to play safe and to be independent.¹⁵

Nine Democratic candidates vied for the governor's office in 1952. In addition to Kennon, were Carlos Spaht, T. Hale Boggs, William J. Dodd, Lucille May Grace, Dudley J. LeBlanc, James M. McLemore, Kermit Parker, and Cliff Liles. Sindler declared that the nine contenders "competed for governor on the basis of programs which were distinguished more by their similarities than their differences."¹⁶ Spaht was the Long administration candidate, while Dodd, Grace and LeBlanc were "dissident Longites." The "anti-Longites" were Boggs, McLemore and Kennon. Parker and Liles were the "two non-serious" candidates.¹⁷ The main issues of the campaign included municipal home rule (especially for New Orleans), salary increases for state employees, restoration of civil service, financial aid to municipalities, the independence of the legislature, control of tidelands oil, modernization of Angola State Penitentiary, taxation, welfare, and reorganization of the highway department.

¹⁵Howard, Political Tendencies, p. 280.

¹⁶Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, p. 234.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 234-235.

Kennon suffered a major set-back early in the campaign when Major DeLesseps S. Morrison refused to endorse him, and instead backed New Orleans Congressman Hale Boggs. Approximately one-fifth of Louisiana's voters lived in New Orleans, and Kennon probably hoped that Morrison would also get most of these voters to support him. Despite the fact that Morrison had backed Sam Jones in 1948, Kennon had aided Morrison during Long's "punitive" raids against New Orleans. When Kennon ran unsuccessfully for U. S. Senate later in 1948, Morrison and the Crescent City Democratic Association (CCDA) had supported him. The two men had worked in concert again in 1950 and waged war against Long's proposed constitutional convention. While Morrison may have felt morally obligated to assist Kennon again in 1952, the Mayor switched his support to Hale Boggs, because of the influence of his adviser David McGuire. Public relations man McGuire, a former Boggs' staff member, agitated for Boggs' candidacy even though Morrison stated, "Hale and Lindy knew of my moral situation."¹⁸

Boggs and Morrison had been law partners years earlier, while Boggs' wife, Lindy, was Morrison's cousin. The persistent McGuire reminded Morrison that Kennon had

¹⁸Quoted in Edward F. Haas, "DeLesseps S. Morrison and the Governorship: A Reassessment, "Louisiana Studies, XV (Summer, 1976), 185, hereinafter cited as Haas, "DeLesseps S. Morrison."

criticized Morrison during the 1948 gubernatorial campaign, calling him a "machine politician." McGuire also reminded the mayor that if Kennon were endorsed, Morrison's own CCDA would split in two camps, since many members felt "a strong personal and political affinity for Hale which they do not feel for Kennon."¹⁹ Morrison listened attentively to McGuire and ultimately followed his advice. On September 8, 1951, both the CCDA and Morrison endorsed Boggs. New Orleans' Safety Commissioner Bernard J. McCloskey, the only member of the CCDA to back Kennon, said Kennon had never vacillated in his fight for civil service, and other major issues.²⁰ Presumably, Kennon knew what Morrison would do, because on August 21, when State Representative Edwin F. Hunter, Jr. said he had reliable information that Morrison would endorse Boggs, Kennon agreed.²¹

Governor Long, who endorsed Carlos Spaht, did not make Kennon's task any easier, charging that Kennon lacked the courage to resign from his judicial post to campaign for the governorship because the appellate court provided power, security, and money. Long further accused Kennon of being "unscrupulous" and "a dangerous man to have in

¹⁹Quoted in Haas, Image of Reform, p. 151.

²⁰New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 30, 1951.

²¹Haas, "DeLesseps S. Morrison," p. 186; Shreveport Times, August 24, 1951.

any office."²² Kennon ignored these accusations. Kennon and his record "all-veteran" ticket of Elmer D. Conner for lieutenant governor, Fred S. LeBlanc for attorney-general, and Allison R. Kolb for auditor, began to travel across the state in their fight to win the election.

The Longite candidate, Carlos Spaht, was a district judge who did resign from his position to run for governor. Spaht had graduated second in his class from the Louisiana State University law school in 1931. In 1946, on the recommendation of more than two-hundred Baton Rouge lawyers, Spaht was appointed a district judge. (The Louisiana Supreme Court, later concurred in all of Spaht's decisions that came before them for review.) During World War II, Spaht had served with distinction as an army combat infantry officer. Spaht's ticket included John J. McKeithen for lieutenant governor, Joe A. Sims for attorney-general, and Mary Evelyn Dickerson for register of state land office. Spaht had not only received the endorsement of Governor Long, but, also that of the Regular Louisiana Democratic Organization.²³ Monroe Congressman Otto Passman described Spaht as an "outstanding citizen" and added that he could not

²²Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 10, located in Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, hereinafter cited Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, with appropriate Box.

²³Baton Rouge State Times, January 14, 1952.

understand why the major state newspapers "didn't endorse" Spaht.²⁴

As Long's hand-picked candidate, Spaht was pledged to continue Long's programs. During the campaign, however, Spaht was derisively called "Earl's boy."²⁵ While arguing that Louisiana needed no tax increases, Spaht also stressed that if present public services were to be continued, tax reductions could not occur until the state's financial structure had been overhauled. While Kennon endorsed appointment of "blue-ribbon" citizen boards to reduce the governor's control over spending, Spaht instead supported the creation of an advisory council to the governor, and described Kennon's plan as being "theoretical and expensive." "Who wants a highway department controlled by a bunch of bureaucrats, appointed for long terms of office, responsible to no elected official and therefore not responsible to the people?" asked Spaht rhetorically.²⁶ Spaht said if he were elected governor he would take full responsibility for agencies and departments which spent tax payers' money.

Spaht also promised to construct a causeway across Lake Pontchartrain, and a road around the lake. To

²⁴New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 18, 1951.

²⁵Quoted in Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, p. 234.

²⁶Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 10.

veterans, he promised a bonus (which would be paid for by a state beer tax fund), and homestead exemptions including not only World War II veterans, but veterans of the ongoing Korean conflict as well. Spaht also supported home-rule for each community, promised to solve the fresh-water shortage of the state's rice and cattle industries, and to encourage industries to establish in rural sections and small towns. He pledged to continue Long's programs of better roads, schools, and hospitals; higher old-age pensions; conservation of gas and oil; exemption of fishing boats and farm machinery from the gas tax; reforestation, and drainage. Finally, Spaht proposed to increase the salaries of teachers, school bus drivers and other school personnel.²⁷ Near the end of the first primary campaign, in an effort to attract more votes for Spaht, Governor Long promised a \$100-lump sum to the aged pensioners if Spaht were elected. According to Long, this bonus could be funded by a surplus in the state's welfare fund.²⁸ When one of Spaht's opponents, Dudley LeBlanc, said it was "political bribery," Long withdrew the promise.²⁹

²⁷New Orleans Times-Picayune, November 29, 1951, December 23, 29, 30, 31, 1951.

²⁸Baton Rouge State Times, January 7, 1952.

²⁹Quoted in Ibid.

Judge Spaht pledged to adhere to the recommendations of a citizens' committee appointed by Long to investigate the Angola State Penitentiary. (The year before, in 1951, convicts had slashed their heel tendons to protest prison brutality which prompted Long to appoint the citizens' committee.) Among the committee's recommendations was that a trained penologist should be appointed to reorganize the prison. Spaht agreed with their suggestions, as did the other gubernatorial candidates, even though Governor Long stated that it would take \$100,000,000 to implement all of the committee's recommendations, asking voters if they would be willing "to do away with the hot lunches in schools, the old age pensions and road building in order to rehabilitate the prisoners?"³⁰

Dissident Longite William J. Dodd, was Long's lieutenant governor, but had been snubbed by Long. Dodd stated, however, that Long would have supported him if Dodd had resigned as lieutenant governor and allowed Long to run on the ticket as lieutenant governor in the upcoming election. Dodd charged, "But I don't want to be governor or even dog catcher under those conditions."³¹ The atmosphere in the state capitol was heated between

³⁰Quoted in Ibid., January 2, 1952.

³¹New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 20, 1951.

Long and Dodd whose offices were less than one hundred feet apart. The two were reported to be conversing by letter.³²

Before entering politics Dodd had worked in a number of occupations--oil field and paper mill worker, boiler-maker and pipe fitter's helper, school teacher, coach, and principal. He received his law degree from Louisiana State University and had served as state representative from Allen Parish from 1940 to 1948, with time out for military service during World War II. His ticket included Leon Gary for Lieutenant governor and Henry C. Sevier for attorney general. Dodd pledged to reduce by two cents the nine-cent increase in the gasoline tax, which had been raised by Long. He also promised that any tax increases passed by the legislature would have to be approved by the voters. Dodd's remaining platform was a hodge-podge of promises aimed at every special interest in the state. He espoused an increase in old-age pensions to \$60, a one-dollar minimum wage for highway workers, free college educations for all, bonuses to Korean war veterans, reorganization of Angola by a trained penologist, minimum-salaries for school bus drivers, restoration of state civil service, appointment of businessmen to supervise state departments, cost-of-living increases for state

³²Ibid., December 2, 1951.

employees (which could be achieved by firing "deadheads"), placing more state jobs under civil service, and construction of new roads. He pledged to increase revenues given to municipalities, and stated that the money would provide salary raises for city employees as well as additional services.³³

Another dissident Longite was Lucille May Grace, who had resigned as the Register of the State Land Office, and who was the first female in Louisiana to run for the office of governor. She had worked in the State Land Office from 1917 until 1931 and had headed the office since the latter date. Miss Grace had severed ties with Long after he had proposed a constitutional convention. Supported and bankrolled by Leander Perez, conservative boss of Plaquemines and St. Bernard Parishes and an anti-Trumanite, Miss Grace also disapproved of President Harry Truman, whose administration sought to gain federal control of tidelands oil beyond the three-mile limit, a sore point to Perez, whose domain included an oil-rich coastal parish. Truman's position on civil rights and racial desegregation also angered white southern segregationists.³⁴ Miss Grace said she was the only

³³Ibid., December 6, 22, 30, 1951; Baton Rouge State Times, January 3, 1952.

³⁴President Truman's posture on Civil Rights was anathema to southerner segregationists. He proposed to Congress in 1948 that the Fair Employment Practices Commission should be made a permanent body. The FEPC was

gubernatorial candidate to fight "against the tidelands outrage," and claimed that females were "just naturally more politically honest than men."³⁵ She probably lost votes when she accused Hale Boggs of being ineligible to run for governor because he had not resigned as United State Representative, and that he had once belonged to the American Student Union, an allegedly subversive communist front organization. Boggs denied that he had ever joined the organization, nor did the State Democratic Central Committee accept Miss Grace's allegations. The Court of Appeals in Baton Rouge refused to hear a suit Miss Grace had initiated against Boggs, while the Louisiana Supreme Court refused to accept jurisdiction in the matter.³⁶

Campaigning with a slogan of "economy and efficiency," Miss Grace stated that teachers, other school personnel, and state workers should receive a 15 percent pay raise, and that the highway department should be re-

to guard against discriminatory practices in hiring employees. Truman also recommended that lynching should be made a federal crime, that the right to vote be protected, and discrimination in interstate transportation facilities be prohibited. As Commander-in-Chief, Truman also ordered racial desegregation of the armed forces in 1948. Truman's program provoked many southerners to form the Dixiecrat party in 1948.

³⁵Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 5, 22, 1951.

³⁶Baton Rouge State Times, January 16, 1952.

organized with a non-political supervisory board.³⁷ She felt there should be more highway construction and the beautification as outlined by the Louisiana Garden Federation. Miss Grace pledged to lower the taxes on cigarettes and beer and to reduce the tax on gasoline by two cents.³⁸ Old-age pensions, she said, should not be increased unless taxes were raised. Miss Grace also supported restoration of state civil service, implementation of local home-rule, and the appointment of a trained penologist for Angola.³⁹

Dudley J. LeBlanc was the third dissident Longite gubernatorial candidate. The wealthy, patent-medicine manufacturer campaigned mainly on past achievements. He had played an important role earlier as a legislator in behalf of old-age pensions, salary increases for teachers and school bus drivers, bonuses for veterans, and decreases in gas taxes for tractor and fishing boat operators.⁴⁰ State Senator LeBlanc, a graduate of Southwestern Louisiana Institute in Lafayette, had worked as a salesman, and served as a State Representative,

³⁷New Orleans Times Picayune, December 30, 1951.

³⁸Ibid., December 20, 23, 30, 1951.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., December 1, 3, 1951; See also Floyd Martin Clay, Coozan Dudley LeBlanc: From Huey Long to Hadacol (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing, 1987), pp. 41-188, hereinafter cited as Clay, LeBlanc.

member of the Public Service Commission, and President Pro Tempore of the State Senate. The cajun entrepreneur had spent millions of dollars promoting the sale of his patent medicine, Hadacol. During the campaign, LeBlanc sold his company to a group of Wall Street investors.

LeBlanc's greatest loss of 1951 was not the collapse of his Hadacol empire, according to his biographer Floyd Martin Clay, but "the collapse of his political dream."⁴¹ Since 1932, according to Clay, LeBlanc had "never stopped wanting to be governor," even though the governor's salary was only \$12,000 a year while LeBlanc, at his peak, made \$5 million a year.⁴² LeBlanc's insatiable thirst for the governorship kept him in the race even after his former company was charged by the Federal Trade Commission with engaging in malicious and false advertising. Some years later, LeBlanc retorted, "when Hadacol died, I was dead in politics. I stayed in the race for Governor but I didn't have a chance."⁴³

To LeBlanc, Louisiana's government was a big business which should be managed by a businessman. He promised to provide free college educations to children of the poor and to enlarge state schools to allow for the increased

⁴¹Clay, LeBlanc, p. 189.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Quoted in Ibid., p. 191.

enrollment. To the aged, LeBlanc pledged \$75 old-age pensions, and to World War I veterans, he promised bonuses.⁴⁴ He also pledged to attract new industries to Louisiana. LeBlanc described himself as the only "independent" candidate, because he had "no money interests, large corporations, or cliques of professional campaign financiers giving money" to his cause.⁴⁵ LeBlanc did attempt an alliance with Dodd, because as Clay put it, LeBlanc knew he had "no chance except through the amalgamation of his money and somebody's else prestige."⁴⁶ But the overture to Dodd fell through. Dodd, however, did at least consider accepting money from LeBlanc. Both men subsequently issued a statement denying that a political merger had occurred, but LeBlanc showed reporters \$250,000 in cash and told them he had an additional \$100,000 in his pocket to offer Dodd.⁴⁷

Congressman T. Hale Boggs was an anti-Longite with "two near-insurmountable handicaps for a gubernatorial candidate": he was a Catholic and a New Orleanian. But Boggs appeared, for a while, to be the strongest of the

⁴⁴Howard, Political Tendencies, p. 280; Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, p. 236.

⁴⁵Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 20, 1951.

⁴⁶Clay, LeBlanc, p. 191.

⁴⁷Ibid, pp. 192-195; See also Baton Rouge State Times, September 18, 1951.

anti-Long candidates. He had received a law degree from Tulane University and had served in the navy during World War II.⁴⁸ Congressman Boggs had been a member of the House Banking and Currency Committee, and was in 1952 a member of the Ways and Means Committee.

Boggs received the endorsement of his former law partner, Mayor Morrison, and the support of several large North Louisiana newspapers: the Shreveport Times, Monroe Morning World and Monroe News-Star. Boggs was also the candidate of United States Senator Russell Long, who had broken with his uncle when Earl became absorbed with extending his term as governor through a constitutional convention. Boggs' cause was damaged when the Democratic State Central Committee, under the leadership of Earl Long refused to clear him of the charges levelled against him by Miss Grace and Perez.⁴⁹ Along with her allegation that Boggs was "soft" on communism, Miss Grace also accused him of being a "Trumanite." The editor of the Shreveport Times emphatically stated on December 5, 1951, that all such accusations were "sheer myth resulting either from ignorance of Congressman Boggs' record or from pure

⁴⁸Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, p. 235.

⁴⁹Shreveport Times, December 9, 1951; New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 23, 1951; Howard, Political Tendencies, p. 282.

malicious slander."⁵⁰ The editor attempted to set the record straight by summarizing Boggs' record in the House in opposition to Truman's program for socialized medicine, seizure of the tidelands, and civil rights.⁵¹

Boggs had announced his candidacy for governor on June 16, 1951, and his ticket included C. E. Barham for lieutenant governor; Chester J. Coco for attorney general; Wade O. Martin, Jr. for secretary of state; A. P. Tugwell for state treasurer; Douglas Fowler for state auditor; Ellen Moore for register of state land office; and Shelby M. Jackson for superintendent of education.

In his "Louisiana First" program, Boggs, as did Dodd, put forth a platform containing "something for everyone." He pledged to establish a public school health program, and a cost-of-living increase for state employees, school bus drivers and teachers; to fight for restoration of state control of the tidelands, improve the old age pension program, expand use of voting machines, build more state highways and farm-to-market roads, appoint a trained penologist for Angola, restore a civil service, develop industry and agriculture, reallocate the tobacco tax to provide additional funds for towns and cities, combat juvenile delinquency, establish a non-political fish game

⁵⁰Shreveport Times, December 5, 1951.

⁵¹Ibid.

and wildlife commission, develop the state's natural resources, improve and modernize state hospitals, build a new Mississippi River bridge at New Orleans, abolish deducts and deadheads, and eliminate waste, inefficiency and duplication.⁵² Boggs urged voters not to dissipate their strength by casting votes for those candidates who had no chance of winning. Such voting, he suggested, only helped Spaht, Earl Long's candidate.

The most conservative anti-Long candidate was James M. McLemore, a wealthy businessman and cattle raiser from Alexandria who "appealed to prestige and power groups and the new middle class."⁵³ Without mentioning Spaht or Kennon, McLemore stated that an experienced businessman was better qualified to govern Louisiana "than any judge who has never been called upon to work more than one or two stenographers in his life."⁵⁴ McLemore's ticket included Lionel Ott for lieutenant governor and G. M. Bodenheimer for attorney general.

McLemore's candidacy was backed by the New Orleans Times-Picayune, the Lafayette Advertiser, the Winn Parish

⁵²Open Letter (to the Public), in Hale Boggs Papers, Box 1, located in Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana; New Orleans Times-Picayune, November 29, 1951, December 2, 22, 1951; Baton Rouge State Times, January 14, 1952.

⁵³Howard, Political Tendencies, p. 281.

⁵⁴Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, November 30, 1951.

Enterprise, and the Franklinton Era-Leader. An Advertiser editorial, entitled "A Fresh Start for Louisiana," stated that voters needed to place a person in the governor's seat who was "free of the scarred political factions."⁵⁵

An avowed foe of President Truman, McLemore promised voters that he would lead the Louisiana delegation to the national Democratic Convention in 1952 and work in concert with other Southern states' rights leaders to assure that Truman was not re-nominated for president.⁵⁶ On the state level, McLemore promised to reduce taxes, give teachers a cost-of-living wage increase, provide better marketing facilities for the state's strawberry crop, and attract new businesses to the state.⁵⁷ He also supported the idea of dividing each legislative session into two mini-sessions, one for the introduction and enactment of bills. The interval would be dedicated to a thorough examination of proposed legislation by legislators and newspaper editors, the latter of which would keep the public informed. McLemore called for the elimination of corruption and waste by professional politicians, and categorized voters as being of three types: (1) the indifferent voter, (2) the scared voter, and (3) the voter

⁵⁵Quoted in Ibid, December 2, 1951.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., December 20, 29, 1951.

who wanted good government for everyone and not political rule by the small number.⁵⁸

Kermit Parker was widely considered to be a non-serious contender. A New Orleans druggist, Parker was the first black since Reconstruction to campaign for the governor's office. When many of Louisiana's black organizations offered to support him, Parker refused their endorsements, choosing to run on his own. His campaign was low-key, Parker appearing only on a few televised forums and speaking before various clubs throughout the state. His platform was similar to those of other candidates.⁵⁹

Cliff Liles, another minor candidate, was the lone supporter of legalized gambling. Liles promised to reduce taxes, and declared that when he was elected, within ninety days after the first legislative session, old age pensions would be increased to \$100 a month, highway expansion would be instituted, and teachers' salaries would be increased from \$50 to \$100 a month.⁶⁰ Liles promised that heavy taxation on legalized gambling would provide the state \$400,000,000 a year.⁶¹ Louisianians

⁵⁸Ibid., December 21, 22, 28, 30, 1951.

⁵⁹Baton Rouge State Times, January 16, 1952.

⁶⁰New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 28, 1951.

⁶¹Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, p. 235.

would be busy, Liles believed, "making \$20 to \$50 a day taking care of the tourists."⁶²

The conservative Kennon charged that other candidates were stealing his platform. Rather than focus his attention on the policies of the Truman administration, Kennon pointed to problems within the state and promised to solve them. As other "reform" candidates had done, and would do, Kennon did not promise to eliminate the entire program of Longism, but instead to administer it in a more business-like and efficient manner.

Campaigning with a make-shift organization and with little financial and newspaper support, Kennon held that the state ranked thirty-ninth nationally in income and first in per capita taxes. He asserted that with all of its natural resources, Louisiana should be one of the more prosperous states in the country. But, because of corrupt leaders interested only in personal gain, the state was in deplorable condition for which Kennon placed the blame on a governmental system which allowed Governor Long alone to determine how the state's \$370,000,000 budget should be spent. Kennon believed that no governor "no matter how good his intentions are--can administer that amount of money without political patronage, waste and extravagance

⁶²Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 21, 1951.

creeping in."⁶³ Kennon also stated that he was the only candidate who supported reducing the power of the governor.

Kennon's platform had twelve major planks. He pledged to re-establish civil service, which would be protected in the constitution. He promised to repeal the two-cents additional gasoline tax enacted in 1948. (This reduction would save automobile owners an average of \$20 per year. When, in 1949, gasoline station operators prepared to drape their stations with black crepe paper to mourn Long's two cent increase, A. A. Fredericks, Executive Secretary to Long, replied that "selfish men [oil interests] have always opposed every move made to help the masses of our people."⁶⁴) Critical of the highway commission, Kennon proposed that the commission should be administered by a nonpartisan, nonpolitical board of citizens. He urged that voting machines should be placed in each of the state's precincts. He promised to continue welfare programs, with the elderly continuing to receive a \$50-a-month old-age pension. (Two-thirds of the welfare funds came from the federal government. To maintain the state's one-third share, Kennon pledged to retain the two cents sales tax.) Kennon assured voters he

⁶³Quoted in Ibid., December 3, 1951.

⁶⁴Quoted in Minden Herald, June 3, 1949.

possessed the "know-how" to attract industry to the state, and that he would encourage farming, fisheries, dairy and beef cattle-raising and the planting and fire protection of timber. As in 1948, Kennon proposed that all available rural land be used for dairying, beef-cattle raising, fur and fisheries, planting timber, farming, or some other useful purpose. He favored local home rule, and opposed the authority of the legislature to alter a city's form of government without the vote of its citizens.

Most notably, Kennon advocated the removal of mental hospitals, penal institutions, welfare agencies, and wildlife and fisheries agencies from "partisan politics." He suggested that non-political, "blue ribbon" boards administer the major areas of state spending. To improve public health, he proposed to utilize the excellent services of the state's medical profession to prevent and treat tuberculosis, cancer, and venereal and heart diseases. As for the state's prison at Angola, which he described as a "national scandal and the most shameful institution in the United States," Kennon agreed with his principal opponents that a trained penologist was needed.⁶⁵ He promised "to lift the 'iron curtain' [at Angola] and [to] see that it is lifted for good."⁶⁶ He

⁶⁵Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 30, 1951.

⁶⁶Quoted in New Orleans States, February 20, 1952.

also pledged to institute a modern parole system for prisoners.⁶⁷

In an open letter to the public, dated December 28, 1951, Kennon assured taxi cab drivers that he would request the legislature to reduce license tag fees to \$3.00.⁶⁸ While Kennon did not promise many reductions in taxation or state spending, he did pledge efficient administration.

Kennon conducted a "business-like" campaign, which according to Margaret Dixon, "was virtually free of mud-slinging."⁶⁹ When he was labeled as a member of the Ku Klux Klan, Kennon ignored the taunt, just as he ignored the challenge of his opponents for him to vacate his judicial seat. After the lights were suddenly turned off at a Kennon political rally on the steps of the State Capitol, Kennon told the crowd, "Earl Long may turn out the lights on me now, but there will be plenty of lights on in this capitol after January 15."⁷⁰ Kennon finished his rally using car lights, flashlights and candles. Wooden beams in the shape of a "V" for victory were

⁶⁷New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 3, 28, 1951; Baton Rouge State Times, January 3, 1952.

⁶⁸Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 9.

⁶⁹Baton Rouge Morning Advocate, May 13, 1952.

⁷⁰Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, January 10, 1952.

illuminated by railroad fuses. Governor Long described the episode as a "cheap, demagogic . . . promotion scheme," and asserted that in the future he would ask authorities to prohibit political meetings on the grounds of the Capitol.⁷¹ Spaht charged Kennon and his supporters, of political trickery, referring to "affidavits and positive proof" which proved that Kennon planned the incident.⁷²

Predicting victory, Kennon claimed he would receive approximately 200,000 votes in the first Democratic primary. Elaborating further, he stated that Spaht, coming in second, would get about 175,000 votes, and that Dodd, Boggs, McLemore and LeBlanc would run in third, fourth, fifth and sixth place positions, respectively.⁷³

The first Democratic Primary election was held on January 15, 1952, and 761,734 votes were cast for the nine gubernatorial candidates. Spaht placed first, receiving 173,987 votes. Kennon trailed behind in second place with 163,434 votes. Boggs, McLemore, Dodd, LeBlanc, Parker, Grace, and Liles received 142,542; 116,405; 90,925; 62,906; 5,470; 4,832; and 1,233 votes, respectively. (Since neither Kennon nor Spaht had received a majority of

⁷¹Quoted in Ibid.

⁷²Ibid., January 22, 1952.

⁷³Ibid., January 9, 1952.

votes cast in the first primary, they would face only each other in a second primary.) With nine gubernatorial candidates in the first primary race, the votes had been widely distributed. Only in the parishes of St. James, Allen, East Feliciana, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, and St. John the Baptist, did any of the candidates receive 50 percent or more of the votes. Of those parishes, Kennon received 54.6 percent in East Feliciana Parish, a traditionally anti-Longite parish. His lowest percentage was 3.5 percent in Allen Parish. In his home parish of Webster, Kennon received 47.3 percent of the votes cast. Spaht received a majority vote in only two parishes--St. Bernard (64 percent) and St. John the Baptist (55.1 percent). In forty parishes, all candidates received less than 35 percent of the votes.⁷⁴ Kennon had pluralities in sixteen parishes as compared to Spaht who had pluralities in only twenty parishes. Kennon and Spaht's combined vote of 337,421 was less than 50 percent of the total vote state-wide, Kennon receiving 21.5 percent of the votes cast, and Spaht, 22.8 percent.⁷⁵ Kennon's greatest strength lay in the anti-Longite northwestern parishes and

⁷⁴"Louisiana Voter Participation in the Democratic Primary Election, January 15, 1952," News Analysis, No. 6, Supplement, January 30, 1952, Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, Inc., hereinafter cited as PAR, News Analysis.

⁷⁵Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, p. 238.

Florida parishes, and in scattered areas of south Louisiana. Before the primary, Kennon claimed 30,000 New Orleans votes, but actually received 33,754. (Spaht received 42,723 votes in Orleans parish.⁷⁶) Spaht's greatest strength was in the south-central parishes, and in the northern uplands, both Longite areas.

All defeated gubernatorial candidates, plus Mayor Morrison, endorsed Kennon in the second primary, Russell Long remaining neutral. Several of the state's larger newspapers--the New Orleans Item and States, the Shreveport Journal and Times, and the Baton Rouge State Times, suggested that Spaht should concede the election and withdraw, saving the state the expense of having a runoff election. However, the New Orleans Times-Picayune requested that Spaht remain in the race, but urged voters to support Kennon.⁷⁷ Spaht, a determined contender, continued in the race.

Sporting a Boggs' campaign button and a McLemore "shovel" which had been pinned on him, Kennon asked all voters who had endorsed other candidates to cast their votes for him in the second primary on February 19th. Speaking in several northwestern Louisiana towns on January 19th, Kennon stated that he was "not looking for a

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 239; Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 9.

fight with anyone."⁷⁸ C. E. Barham, Boggs' running-mate for lieutenant governor, was added to Kennon's ticket to replace Conner who was defeated in the first primary. Other members of the ticket included Allison R. Kolb for state auditor; Ellen Moore for register of the state lands office; and Fred S. LeBlanc for attorney general.

Campaigning with vigor, Spaht condemned newspapers which supported his opponent, and accused Kennon of negotiating political deals with Morrison and the other candidates, and "receiving their price[s]."⁷⁹ Morrison was allegedly promised support for reelection and the passage of a constitutional amendment creating one assessor for all of Orleans Parish, to be named by Morrison. McLemore would receive an unnamed public office. Dodd was promised the presidency of Southeastern Louisiana College at Hammond, and Boggs was to be endorsed for reelection to Congress.⁸⁰ Spaht asserted that such varied supporters would give Kennon a "case of political indigestion."⁸¹ In a statewide broadcast, Spaht hurled a number of additional charges against Kennon: (1) the

⁷⁸Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 9.

⁷⁹Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, January 22, 1952.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ibid., January 29, 1952.

Minden judge was accused of accepting full pay as an appellate judge while he campaigned in 1948, for the U.S. Senate; (2) Kennon's proposed independent boards would "turn the state over to an entrenched bureaucracy beyond the reach of the voters",⁸² (3) Kennon had a secret plank in his platform which would increase some automobile licenses from \$3 to \$35; (4) Kennon campaigned against liberalized welfare benefits in 1948, but was presently advocating them; and (5) Kennon had a list of all state jobs, which he was promising "over and over."⁸³

Spaht continued to champion Long's automobile and gasoline taxation policy, declaring that the state's taxes were lower than those of eleven other southern states. He documented this statement by referring to statistics in a journal of highway research, The Public Road. He derided Kennon for promising to eliminate the two-cent gasoline tax, and for compensating the loss in revenues by firing supposed incompetents in the highway department. Spaht further revealed figures from a Louisiana highway department study showing that the two-cent tax produced \$10,269,000 which was increased to more than \$17 million with matching federal funds.⁸⁴ The entire cost of

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid.

operating the department was \$700,000. Therefore, according to Spaht, if Kennon fired the entire department, the state would gain only \$700,000 compared to the \$17 million it would lose by repealing the gasoline tax.⁸⁵ Spaht said that \$700,000 was not enough to build a good road of five miles.⁸⁶

Kennon characterized Louisiana as being famous for three things--black coffee, bad politics and Mardi Gras. Additionally, he contended that the Long administration had made the "name of Louisiana synonymous with corruption."⁸⁷ In answer to Spaht's accusations, Kennon scoffed at the charge of hiking the cost of automobile license plates, saying that such a change would require a constitutional amendment. In answer to the alleged political deals, he replied that the other candidates were supporting him "without commitments or any switching of jobs."⁸⁸ Kennon promised to liberalize old age pension guidelines so that recipients could acquire a small additional income "without lying about it."⁸⁹

⁸⁵Ibid., February 6, 1952.

⁸⁶Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 10.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Quoted in Ibid.

Kennon also cited figures from a study made by the American Automobile Association to prove that the two-cent gasoline reduction tax would provide the state with more money than the present nine-cent rate. He said that with the expected increase in vehicular use, the lower tax rate would give the state almost \$168,050,000 by the end of fiscal year 1955, compared to the nine-cent rate which brought in only \$155,110,650 during the previous four years. Funds derived from all sources for road allocations for the upcoming four years would total \$316,551,000. This money would provide \$35 million for parish roads and over \$200 million for state highways. Kennon reported that the remaining money would be used for overhead items.⁹⁰

Kennon pledged state workers who were formerly on civil service that their jobs would remain secure when he was elected, and that he would reinstate the civil service system through constitutional amendment, so that state employees would have job security in the future, as did federal rural letter carriers and railroad workers. Under revised civil service, the 30,000 state employees would not be compelled to contribute political "deducts."⁹¹

⁹⁰Baton Rouge State Times, February 9, 1952.

⁹¹Ibid., Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 10.

To reduce the excessive powers of the governor, Kennon proposed creating several non-political boards. Because Governor Long had controlled most of the state boards, he had been able to engage in wasteful and unchecked spending. Such waste could be prevented, according to Kennon, if boards with independent men could administer state funds. Kennon also knew that the governor was able to politically manage and maneuver the legislators by threatening to withhold state benefits from the legislators' constituencies.⁹²

Kennon urged his supporters to go to the polls and vote on February 19th:

It's [the election] just like a baseball game, when a player on your side hits a home run. That player won't get credit for that home run, and his team won't get credit for it, unless he runs around and touches all the bases. Well, that's just what the independent voters of this state had better do on February 19th--go to the polls and vote, just to be sure that we're not passing up second base.⁹³

On February 19th, Kennon received 482,302 votes or 61.4 percent of the total and Spaht, 302,743 or 38.6 percent. Fifty-three parishes gave Kennon a majority of the votes, as compared to Spaht, who carried only eleven parishes. Orleans parish gave Kennon 106,070 votes,

⁹²Campaign Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 10.

⁹³Quoted in Ibid.

approximately three times the number in the first primary.⁹⁴

The entire Kennon ticket won. On April 22nd, Kennon ran against Republican candidate Harrison G. Bagwell in the April 22nd, general election. (In reality, the Democratic nomination in Louisiana was tantamount to election until the two-party system revived in the state in the 1970s.) Of the 123,681 votes cast for governor, Kennon received 118,723.⁹⁵

Governor-elect Kennon was so eager to get on with the job that in April, 1952, he began mailing proposed bills of his administration program to Louisiana legislators. The Baton Rouge Morning Advocate declared that this was probably a history-making event, since capitol sources knew of no other governor-elect who had sent his program for advance criticism.⁹⁶ In the past, several lawmakers had expressed their discontent over the inadequate time allotted for studying administrative recommendations. Most of the proposals were to be introduced in the House, when the legislature convened on May 12th. Kennon's

⁹⁴Shreveport Times, February 22, 1952, Newark, New Jersey, Evening News, February 20, 1952, and Table 2.

⁹⁵Wade O. Martin, Secretary of State (compiler), State of Louisiana, Report of the Secretary of State, from January 1, 1951 to December 31, 1952, p. 8.

⁹⁶Baton Rouge Morning Advocate, April 28, 1952.

floor leaders promised they would rush the administration program through in ten days.⁹⁷

Table 6. Candidates and Votes--First Primary,
Gubernatorial Election, 1952

Candidates	State	Percentage (State)	Parishes Majority	Plurality
Spaht	173,987	22.8	2	20
Kennon	163,434	21.5	1	16
Boggs	142,542	18.7	1	2
McLemore	116,405	15.3	1	12
Dodd	90,925	11.9	1	2
LeBlanc	62,906	8.3	0	6
Other	11,535	1.5	0	0
Total	761,734	100.0	6	58

Source: Allan P. Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, 238.

Table 7. Candidates and Votes--Second Primary,
Gubernatorial Elections, 1952

Candidates	State	Percentage (State)	Parishes Majority
Kennon	482,302	61.4	53
Spaht	302,743	38.6	11
Total	785,045	100.00	64

Source: Allan P. Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, 239.

⁹⁷New Orleans Times-Picayune, May 1, 1952.

CHAPTER VII

Governor of Louisiana: 1952-54

In its June 2, 1952 issue, Life magazine included an article on Governor Kennon's inauguration celebration entitled, "Life Goes to a New Governor's First Party," and contained a pictorial representation of the lively festivities.¹ The inauguration, on May 13, was indeed lively, with ninety-one bands, forty floats, a grand ball in the coliseum, and fifteen luncheons. Members of Kennon's 1923 ROTC company feted the governor and his wife at the Heidelberg Hotel, where he was presented a set of luggage and Mrs. Kennon was given a bouquet of roses. (A near disaster was averted at the LSU Coliseum when gallons of DDT were sprayed to kill mosquitoes. The floor, constructed of asphalt, oyster shells and wax, with the added DDT and water, was in shambles. One hundred pounds of corn meal were scattered over the floor to soak up the spray, in time for the Grand March to occur.²)

¹"Life Goes to a New Governor's First Party," Life, June 2, 1952, pp. 116-118, 130.

²Ibid., p. 116; Baton Rouge State Times, May 14, 1952.

Kennon's eighty-year old father was also in attendance, and was quoted as saying "I'm coming back to visit Bob when it's a little quieter around here."³ Thousands jammed the streets. Two elderly women from New Orleans were apparently separated from their delegation, and one reported to the parade marshal, "This is the most confused mess I ever saw."⁴ Continuing, she added, "Nobody knows where we are supposed to go. But if they wanted us to vote, they'd have no trouble finding us."⁵

The forty-nine-year-old Kennon took his oath as Louisiana's fifty-first governor on the steps of the thirty-four-floor state capitol.⁶ Approximately fifteen thousand people listened to Kennon's thirty-minute inaugural address. The address was mainly a recapitulation of his campaign pledges and post-election speeches. Despite the fact that outgoing Governor Earl K. Long was absent from the proceedings, Kennon said that the "quarrels and bickering and personal differences of the primary campaign" were "past" and, he hoped "forgotten."⁷ Kennon did not reveal how he would enact his program, but

³Quoted in Shreveport Times, May 14, 1952.

⁴Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, May 14, 1952.

⁵Ibid.

⁶"Judge Robert F. Kennon Takes Office as Governor," Louisiana News Digest, June 1952, n.p.

⁷Shreveport Times, May 14, 1952.

he mentioned that copies of his proposed legislation had already been sent to legislators and to the press. According to Kennon, when the legislature adopted his program, the tax burden would be decreased, major state agencies would be removed from partisan political control, better budgetary practices would be utilized, civil service would be reinstated, and the executive, legislative and judicial branches would function more independently. He asked for the aid of citizens and stressed that the majority of elected officials and legislators had already indicated their desire to work with him.⁸

No doubt alluding to Long's policy of "tax and spend," Kennon suggested that the state should not become so complacent that it would easily accept the concept of "easy come, easy go."⁹ Kennon declared that it was the duty of each citizen to pay taxes and the duty of each official to see that taxes were used appropriately. This arrangement would allow citizens and officials to work in tandem with a budgetary program whereby any unspent funds would automatically return to the treasury to be used for later needs. Kennon told the inaugural crowd that "extravagance in government is second only to corruption

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

and a danger to our welfare."¹⁰ He pledged that selfish interests would receive no benefits under his administration.

Speaking of the state surplus, Kennon asserted that the funds were rapidly being depleted and that a "number of practical developments" could possibly eliminate the general fund surplus.¹¹ He summarized these developments as follows:¹²

1) Approximately \$3 million were needed to meet payments on veterans' bonus bonds. The bonds had been issued by the previous administration.

2) An additional \$1.5 million would be returned to villages, towns and cities of Louisiana for various uses.

3) Increased appropriations were needed for the new mental hospital at Mandeville and the new charity hospital at Shreveport.

4) \$3 million to \$4 million would be needed for the public school system, due to an anticipated increase in attendance, and for the automatic salary raises given to school teachers each year.

Kennon also warned that his tax reduction program, which he had promised in his campaign, would reduce the

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

state's revenues by about one million dollars per month. Too, he asserted that he would have to withdraw money from the general fund surplus to offset the loss of \$15,000,000 incurred from increased income tax exemptions and the two-cent gasoline tax reduction. After presenting these facts, Kennon concluded that the general fund did not have adequate funds to provide for those enumerated expenses along with on-going governmental expenditures. Therefore, he proposed that if "extensive capital improvements"¹³ requested by the state school board and other agencies were to be implemented, bonds would have to be issued. However, he stated that he had not proposed bond issues during his campaign and that he would not force such issues upon the legislature. The bonds would be retired from existing taxes, and there would be no need for additional taxes, according to Kennon.¹⁴

To those who were concerned about his plans for providing for the criminal, the aged, and the sick, Kennon promised to improve the "physical surroundings" of the state's "charitable and correctional institutions."¹⁵ Kennon said it was known that state institutions were overcrowded with inmates and were understaffed. The

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

conditions could be eliminated by administrative planning and removing unnecessary personnel. He declared:

It is my considered opinion that one of the unforgivable sins in government consists in entrusting the care of the sick in body or mind, the education of our youth and the custody of our offenders against the laws of society into the hands of those who are incompetent, brutal or disinterested.¹⁶

Kennon cited the state penitentiary at Angola as a case in-point of the problem. During his campaign he had suggested that a trained penologist was needed. (In 1951, convicts at Angola State Penitentiary had slashed heel tendons to protest prison brutality.) He intended to carry out his promise.

Kennon intimated that his administration would reorganize the state welfare department. He did not believe the government should "encourage slothfulness, idleness, [and] immorality." Instead, the government, he advanced, should carefully supervise the relief rolls and the handling of benefits.¹⁷ He suggested that the state government should develop an environment which would be conducive to all types of industry, trade, business and commerce. However, Kennon emphasized that the government should not grant special privilege if it maintained its

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

proper balance in the state's progressive industrial development.

Kennon added that one of the most important responsibilities of state government was highway construction and maintenance. He believed that Louisiana's highway system needed to be both improved and modernized. But he asserted that care and not speed was needed to insure that constructive planning and spending be executed. He said his administration would not tolerate substandard materials or inept service. Kennon hinted that he would carefully oversee the granting of multi-million dollar road construction contracts.

Governor Kennon promised that his administration would advance and protect the state's natural resources and raw materials. He pledged that funds allocated for the protection of wildlife would be protected from "partisan political waste."¹⁸

Kennon was an ardent exponent of Jeffersonian democracy and thus believed that government governed best when it governed least. With this principle in mind, Kennon pledged to give cities, towns, and other political subdivisions of the state, additional administrative independence and freedom. Kennon contended that, "Tyranny is no more endurable when it is exercised by one who bears

¹⁸Ibid.

the title of President in a democracy than when it is exercised by one who arrogates to himself the power of a dictator under a totalitarian regime." He assured Louisianians that the nationwide trend toward "complete executive authority," which could lead toward dictatorship would not be tolerated in the state.¹⁹

He spoke of his desire for a reconciliation of the agrarian and industrial interests. He felt that the two groups could work harmoniously and produce a prosperous people who would become strong enough in the future to withstand "designing politicians" who desired to "revive useless factional political quarrels."²⁰

In his concluding statements, Kennon challenged his audience to guard their strength against the common world enemy. In all likelihood, he was probably alluding to the Soviet Union, for he spoke of "strange doctrines mouthed by foreign agitators" and of "subversive activities of selfish interests which seek to destroy us from within."²¹ Kennon, the church leader, knew of his human frailties and, therefore, suggested, "we must recognize our dependence upon a Divine Providence, we must turn in

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

enduring faith to Almighty God as a partner in our every effort."²²

On the day before Kennon's inauguration, the sixteenth regular session of the Louisiana legislature convened. Representative Clarence C. Aycock, Jr., of St. Mary Parish, was elected speaker of the House, and Senator Robert A. Ainsworth, Jr., of New Orleans, was elected president pro-tempore of the Senate. About two-thirds of the seats in both houses were filled by new members. Long's "rubber-stamp" legislature had been replaced, insuring Kennon that his program would meet little legislative opposition. (Many of the legislators had campaigned as independent or as supporters of Kennon.) With this greater independence of the legislature from gubernatorial domination, the Kennonites probably felt that Kennon's desire for greater separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches would reach fruition. But a more independent legislature meant, too, that legislators were not at the "beck and call" of the governor. The solons would devote more time to studying the bills instead of voting for administration bills without scrutinizing the contents first.

Governor Kennon selected Senator Ainsworth of Orleans Parish and Representative James R. Eubank of Rapides

²²Ibid.

Parish as his senate and house floor leaders, respectively. Some other legislators who would handle administration bills for Kennon included Representatives Rolfe McCollister, Percy Roberts, Blanc Cox Burns, James Gardner, Horace Lynn Jones, Claude Kirkpatrick, Algie Brown, Shady Wall, and William Yarno. Administration leaders in its senate included Gore Davis, Laurance Eustis, James Sparks, and Charles E. Tooke, Jr.²³

As Louisiana's chief executive, Kennon received a salary of \$15 thousand per year and was responsible for an almost \$400 million dollar "enterprise," with over twenty-five thousand employees. In an attempt to launch what he called a civics book approach to government, Kennon worked assiduously to create a more ordered governmental community. He had promised reform in his campaign speeches, and he set out anew to fulfil those pledges.

As governor, Kennon was obliged to present a state budget, which had been prepared with the assistance of the budget office and could veto any item in an appropriation. Many of his initial reforms dealt with state finances. To reorganize the state's fiscal administration, Kennon's floor leaders and supporters introduced six administration

²³For a listing of legislators, see Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, Inc., Citizen's Guide to the 1952 Louisiana Legislature, No.2 (Baton Rouge: Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, Inc., May 14, 1952).

bills which sought to tighten budget controls. Kennon asserted that the passage of these bills would "save taxpayers money"²⁴ since budgetary controls would be incorporated. Four of these bills were directed toward the consolidation of the offices of the supervisor of public funds and the state auditor. House Bills 17 and 18 were introduced by Representatives Eubank, Bryan Lehmann, Jr., and Peter Murtes, who proposed the abolition of the office of the supervisor of public funds, with the state auditor's office assuming the duties. House Bill 20, introduced by the same representatives required the auditor to provide reports of all audits and investigations to the governor, to the office being investigated, and to public and press inspection. House Bill 198, introduced by Representatives Eubank, Jasper K. Smith and James Gardner, authorized the state auditor to refuse to accept department warrants drawn on the state treasury unless budget guidelines were followed. Also, the auditor's salary was increased from \$7,500 to \$10,000.²⁵

²⁴Baton Rouge State Times, May 23, 1952.

²⁵PAR Legislative Bulletin, "Summary of the Week," No. 2 (Baton Rouge: Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, Inc., May 24, 1952), pp. 5-6, hereinafter cited as PAR Legislative Bulletin, with appropriate number and date.

Kennon apparently believed that the consolidation of the duties of the auditor and supervisor of public funds would eliminate repetition and encourage smoother operations. The supervisor of public funds was a governor's appointee who performed past-auditing functions, while the auditor, a state-elected officer, approved expenditures and warrants.

An independent, elected auditor, it was believed by Kennonites, would be a more credible official and one who, as a qualified accountant, would be in a more favorable position (since he was independent of the governor) to give an abjected post-audit. Kennon, who had spoken against a rubber-stamp legislature, apparently felt that all public officials should be free to perform their duties without facing recriminations from the governor. Since the post-auditing would no longer be done by the governor's appointee, Kennon's influence in fiscal affairs would be lessened. From the outset, Kennon's consolidation bills faced opposition. Anti-administration legislators believed that since the legislature was responsible for the appropriation of public funds, the auditor should be appointed by the legislature and not elected.²⁶

²⁶Baton Rouge State Times, June 6, 1952.

A popularly elected auditor, opponents felt, could remain in office indefinitely by injudiciously using his auditing powers over local government officials. Whenever Kennon wanted a competent accountant for the job, the same opponents argued that an able administrator could perform just as well. Lieutenant Governor C. E. Barham, Senate presiding officer, publicly condemned the bills. He asserted that the consolidation "would be bad legislation,"²⁷ since the combining of the two offices would cost the taxpayers more than \$200,000 extra for the operating of the single office. Barham charged, "we cannot reduce taxes and in the same session of the legislature increase the appropriations and operating expenses of the various departments."²⁸

Kennon also fought for the reorganization of the Budget Office. House Bill 16 separated the Budget Office from the Division of Administration, and added the Budget Office to the Governor's Office. The governor would be designated as the ex-officio director of the budget, and the state auditor as the assistant director, who would help the governor to prepare the executive budget, advise legislative committees on budgetary affairs, prepare annual state budgets which reflected all revenue and

²⁷Quoted in Ibid., June 4, 1952.

²⁸Ibid.

appropriations acts, present quarterly budget sub-allocations to state agencies, and structure plans for the efficient operation of the departments. The governor was empowered to transfer his authority in budgeting matters to the auditor, commissioner of administration or any other persons he desired. Also included in this administration bill were the major responsibilities of the Division of Administration and the Budget Office. The Division of Administration was to purchase and control surplus property. All other responsibilities were allocated to the Budget Office or the assistant director of the budget or auditor.²⁹

One reason Kennon may have sought to enhance the importance of the state auditor was that the incumbent auditor was Allison Kolb, who had been elected on Kennon's ticket. In all probability, Kennon gave careful consideration to the reorganization. All fiscal functions--allotments, budgeting, and auditing--placed in one office would promote greater efficiency. With the auditor, a competent accountant and a member of the "Kennon team" as the assistant director, Kennon would have the expertise needed in budgetary and fiscal planning. If the reorganization bill passed, a pre-audit of all state funds would furnish Kennon with the information he needed

²⁹PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 2, May 24, 1952, p. 6.

to prepare for future budget needs, and, most of all, to control the spending of state funds.

A Kennon opponent, Representative Gilbert Faulk, said he "wondered if some of the bills would be giving one man too much power."³⁰ Other opponents argued against the reorganization of the Budget Office, contending that the governor was only the ex-officio officer, and that the auditor would actually do the work. They further added that, if the auditor and governor were to disagree, then the efficient operation of the Budget Office would be hampered, forcing the governor to assign someone else the task of advising him on budgetary matters, thereby, deviating from the original purpose of the reorganization.³¹ The opposition was also disturbed because the auditor under Kennon's plan was to pre- as well as post-audit. They considered this double responsibility inappropriate, because pre-auditing was usually an administrative responsibility while post-auditing, was a legislative function. The opposition wanted the two functions to remain within the two separate branches of government, so as to maintain a proper check-out-balance between the executive and the legislature. Also included in Kennon's fiscal administration

³⁰Baton Rouge State Times, May 30, 1952.

³¹PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 2, May 24, 1952, p. 7.

reorganization package was House Bill 19, which called for the creation of a Budget Appeals Commission, to consist of the governor, state treasurer, state auditor, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, and chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. The commission was to aid the governor in preparing the executive budget, adjudicate appeals from any disgruntled budget unit, and to inform both the auditor and the disaffected budget unit of their decision. Any changes in the quarterly allocation for budget units had to have the approval of the governor or the Budget Appeals Commission. The commission could be empowered to overrule the governor in any altercation with a department head on spending matters, thus decreasing the budgetary influence of the governor. But, with changes in the quarterly allotment approved only by him, Kennon believed he would be able to economize and save the state money. Stiff opposition arose over this bill also. Some considered that the governor should have more control over the budget, and that with the auditor having as much voice as the governor on the commission, that the auditor was too powerful.³² (The auditor would also be given the authority to administer oaths and to issue subpoenas for witnesses or documents.) Possibly, the opposition felt that with this increased authority, and with the

³²Ibid., p. 8.

methodical bookkeeping that would be employed, that local governmental offices would be subject to harassment. Auditor Kolb himself had mentioned that his office would assist the press or any taxpayer in locating information about "any agency in its handling or disbursing of state funds."³³

The legislature did not enact Kennon's administrative reform bills until much discussion and amending had taken place. Representative John Garrett, employing a delaying tactic, asserted that there was too much "confusion," and that legislators needed "more time to study the measures."³⁴ Floor leader Eubank and other Kennon supporters explained the changes and helped to push the bills to a favorable vote:³⁵

(1) Budgetary control revisions would not apply to the office of governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state and treasurer.

(2) Only the governor would be authorized to approve transfers of funds from one authorized purpose to another.

³³Quoted in Baton Rouge Morning Advocate, April 13, 1952.

³⁴New Orleans Times-Picayune, May 30, 1952.

³⁵Baton Rouge State Times, May 30, 1952, June 3 & 4, 1952.

(3) The governor would be authorized to appoint someone other than the auditor as the assistant budget director.

(4) Department heads were not to be held personally accountable for spending more than allocated.

(5) Most significantly, the Budget Appeals Commission membership was changed. The Senate president pro-tem and House speaker replaced the state treasurer and auditor.

(6) Department heads were required to make quarterly rather than annual requests for funds.

All of the bills passed both houses and were signed into law by Kennon.³⁶ Kennon's administration bills would make state financial records more accessible to new governors. But his fiscal administrative plans also placed checks on the governor, resulting in a limitation of executive fiscal authority. Kennon and his leaders had conducted extensive budgetary and fiscal studies of other states in an effort to ensure that the taxpayers' money was allocated in the most efficient and economical manner possible. Time management was another aspect of importance to Kennon. Whereas department heads had been submitting yearly work schedules, Kennon proposed that they do so on a quarterly basis.

³⁶PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 2, May 24, 1952, pp. 5-8, No. 4, June 7, 1952, p. 8, No. 8, July 3, 1952, p. 7.

During his campaign at an American Legion testimonial dinner, Kennon had pledged to cut taxes and to economize. Before some 625 persons in April, 1952, Kennon had said that his "major problem now was apportioning expenditures fairly."³⁷ Elaborating, he said that state agencies were attempting to get cost-of-living increases, while the state was facing "a decrease in revenue because of his plan to reduce the gasoline tax and increase income tax exemptions."³⁸ This decrease would amount to approximately \$12 million a year. But the annual loss was to be made up by natural increases in state revenues. Kennon also argued that he would save taxpayers over \$1 million a month, and that additional saving would occur from the "efficient, careful expenditure of the state's income."³⁹

At nine cents per gallon by 1952, Louisiana had the highest gasoline tax in the nation. The two-cent gasoline tax had been levied by the 1948 legislature and had yielded the state \$45.5 million since then. (The state had received \$10 million from the tax fiscal year 1950-1951 alone.⁴⁰) Kennon's gasoline tax reduction bill met

³⁷Baton Rouge State Times, April 18, 1952.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Quoted in Ibid., May 23, 1952.

⁴⁰PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 1, May 17, 1952, p. 2.

no opposition in the House, but had one opponent in the Senate, Senator Sylvan Friedman.⁴¹

Kennon labored untiringly to raise state income tax exemptions, even though the exemptions would cause a decrease in state revenues. House Bill 2 would increase state income tax exemptions from \$1,000 to \$2,500 for single persons, and from \$2,500 to \$5,000 for family heads or married persons. The minimum amount of income earned for which a state income tax had to be filed was also increased.⁴²

The state income tax along with the alcoholic beverage tax (but excluding the beer tax) and the public utilities tax were all dedicated to the Property Tax Relief Fund, which compensated parishes for revenues lost because of the homestead exemption's lowering of the property tax base.

The state received \$26.6 million in revenues for this fund, with most of the money, \$19.9 million, coming from income taxes. Of the \$26.6 million, \$13.5 million was allocated directly to the parishes, and \$474,000 was spent for the costs of tax collections. The remaining amount of

⁴¹New Orleans Times-Picayune, June 3, 1952.

⁴²Ibid., June 1, 1952, Baton Rouge State Times, May 22, 1952.

\$12.5 million was transferred to the General Fund.⁴³ A decrease in the amount of the income tax could, therefore, cause a decrease in the amount transferred from the Property Tax Relief Fund into the General Fund. (It should be remembered that Kennon had spoken of what would transpire if the General Fund Surplus was depleted. But, at the time, he had also mentioned the possibility of issuing state bonds.) Kennon and his advisers expected that the impact of lower income tax collections would be offset by the anticipated rising state revenues. Both the House and Senate voted to increase exemptions from the state income tax, with the same one dissenting vote, that of Senator Sylvan Friedman.⁴⁴

House Bill 3 would eliminate the requirement that a copy of one's federal income tax return be included with the state income tax return. This bill also became law with Kennon's signature.⁴⁵

Kennon had pledged to maintain the services of Earl Long's administration, but with the reduction of the

⁴³PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 1, May 17, 1952, p. 2.

⁴⁴Ibid., No. 2, May 24, 1952, p. 8, No. 5, June 14, 1952, p. 6; New Orleans Times-Picayune, June 3, 1952.

⁴⁵State of Louisiana, Acts Passed by the Legislature of the State of Louisiana at the Regular Session of 1952 (Baton Rouge, 1952), 5. Published legislative actions are hereinafter cited as Acts of Louisiana, with appropriate year indicated.

gasoline tax and the increased income tax exemptions, he had to make alterations in his own general appropriation bill to continue the services. His proposed state budget of more than \$655 million for 1952-54 was some \$22 million more than Long's 1950-52 budget.⁴⁶ The general appropriation bill was based on Kennon's executive budget, which provided for the operation of most state agencies and institutions. (The public welfare system and some state hospitals were excluded from his general appropriation bill but were included in other appropriation bills.) For fiscal year 1952-53, the executive budget totalled \$195,998,265.35, and for fiscal year 1953-54, \$196,472,831.42.

Kennon recommended decreases in appropriations for the Department of Highways; State Hospital Board; Office of Lieutenant Governor; Louisiana Merit System Council; and the Departments of Occupational Standards, Commerce and Industry, Veterans Affairs, Wild Life and Fisheries, and Civil Defense. His requests for increased appropriations were included in the general appropriation bill, as well as in other administration bills.

On May 21, 1952, the administration introduced a \$106 million welfare bill, increasing welfare expenditures by \$32 million for the following two years. With matching

⁴⁶Baton Rouge State Times, May 22, 1952.

federal funds of \$129 million, the welfare budget would reach an all-time high of \$235 million. The administration also asked for \$8 million in welfare funds to operate eight charity hospitals.⁴⁷ (At the time, state charity hospitals were financed from the state general fund.) The state's two-cent sales tax was dedicated to the welfare program, and according to Representative Eubank, the welfare revenues were \$500,000 a month ahead of payments and expenses. This excess, he declared, would provide an extra \$6 million a year. The approximate \$8 million appropriation for the hospital was for a two-year period. Eubank stressed that the welfare fund had a current surplus of \$27 million.⁴⁸

Allocating welfare funds to operate charity hospitals was a new departure, for during the two previous years, welfare funds had been used exclusively for public welfare. Kennon's proposed beneficiaries from the welfare funds included, Huey P. Long Charity at Pineville: \$1.5 million; Lallie Kemp Memorial at Independence: \$789,763; Ruston Tuberculosis: \$811,000; E.A. Conway Memorial at Monroe: \$1.4 million ; Jonesboro Charity: \$578,922; Lafayette Charity: \$1.9 million; Washington-St. Tammany

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid., June 9, 1952.

Charity at Bogalusa: \$578,922; and Greenwell Springs Tuberculosis: \$1.1 million.⁴⁹

The governor boosted appropriations to the State Department of Education from \$143,248,400 for years 1950-1952 to \$156,848,484 for fiscal years 1952-1954 providing an expected increase of some \$13,600,084. Another of his administration bills asked for \$5 million to be taken from the \$15 million surplus in the state general fund to give teachers an annual \$100 cost-of-living pay raise.⁵⁰

Kennon requested appropriations for twenty-four state vocational schools, eleven of which had been authorized by the 1950 legislature. The amounts ranged from \$264,000 for the Baton Rouge Trade School to \$11,500 for three of the eleven newer trade schools. The governor's total appropriation requests for 1952-54 amounted to more than \$655 million: a \$106 million state welfare appropriation; \$129 million federal matching funds; \$8 million for hospitals; \$15 million in estimated federal highway aid; \$5 million for teacher pay raises; and a \$392 million general appropriation bill funding all other state services.⁵¹ To justify his record-breaking budget, Kennon said the increases resulted from the Long administration's

⁴⁹Ibid., May 22, 1952.

⁵⁰Ibid.; PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 2, May 24, 1952, p. 3.

⁵¹Baton Rouge State Times, May 22, 1952.

establishment of additional hospitals and trade-schools in 1950, the increased costs of the state's educational system, and the increased appropriations to cities from the cigarette tax. Of the raise for teachers, Kennon categorically stated:

It is an undisputed fact that we will have to add hundreds of new public school teachers beginning in September. We had to increase the appropriation to take care of these new teachers who have never been included before. The increase to the public schools has been kept at a minimum and is not yet sufficient to give the teachers and bus drivers of this state an adequate cost-of-living increase in salary.⁵²

When questioned about the trade school in his home parish of Webster receiving the largest allocation of the operating funds for state trade schools, Kennon smiled and said, "I honestly wasn't consulted about that."⁵³

To Kennon's dismay, both the House and the Senate revised the appropriation bills and added amendments increasing the total amount by several million dollars. The Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, a private research agency, proposed a number of reasons why the legislature found it difficult to reduce spending:⁵⁴

⁵²Ibid., May 23, 1952.

⁵³Quoted in Ibid.

⁵⁴PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 8, July 3, 1952, p. 2.

(1) Legislators found it difficult to comprehend state finances, because their knowledge of actual revenues and surpluses was lacking;

(2) Legislators did not have sufficient information on major appropriations to make objective decisions on specific programs;

(3) Legislators "played politics" with the passage of appropriations. When an appropriation bill was passed for political reasons, usually other appropriation measures were evaluated in terms of the questionable appropriation bill that had already been passed;

(4) The passage of one type of appropriation bill, justified the passage of several others. (For example, if an appropriation were passed for one parish fair, usually appropriations for other parish fairs were also accepted);

(5) Previous legislatures established new institutions, for which the current legislature had to provide financial provisions;

(6) Political lobby groups with influence supported large appropriations, and while the smaller appropriations seemed minuscule, they really amounted to large amounts when combined; and

(7) "Log-rolling" occurred. Many legislators professed to want "economy," but also wanted their own pet projects funded. To get the appropriations for these projects, they had to support the pet projects of their

colleagues in the legislature. It is undeniable that Kennon faced these constraints as he attempted to economize by reducing taxes while at the same time, generating funds to maintain established services.

In the House, a barrage of opposition met Kennon's appropriation measures. Shelby M. Jackson, State Superintendent of Public Education, demanded \$6.9 million more to provide for 781 additional white and 613 black teachers. He asked for a total of \$123,926,332 for fiscal 1952-54. Jackson explained that during this fiscal period the state's school enrollment would increase 48,000. Douglas Manship, Director of State Civil Defense protested Kennon's reduction in his agency's appropriation from \$210,000 for fiscal year 1951-52, to \$125,000 for 1952-53.⁵⁵ Representatives J. Marshall Brown and Bryan J. Lehmann, Jr., complained that the \$11,500 pledged for each of the new trade schools was insufficient, and if not increased, should be deleted. Lehmann asserted, "You are spreading it so thin it is not going to do anything."⁵⁶ John S. Patton, Superintendent of the School for the Deaf, asked for a budget increase of \$66,000, since the school was not a participant in Louisiana's free lunch program. A.A. Fredericks, Commissioner of the State Department of

⁵⁵Baton Rouge State Times, June 9, 1952; see also PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 2, May 24, 1952, p. 3.

⁵⁶Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, June 9, 1952.

Welfare, criticizing Kennon for proposing that welfare funds be used for charity hospitals and teachers' pay raises, warned,

I fear that if the Legislature carries out its proposal to take welfare funds for other state departments, the payments now being made to welfare recipients will be reduced or policies considerably restricted.⁵⁷

In the meantime, Kennon's suggested 3-1/2 percent salary increase for teachers had been replaced by a compromise measure introduced by Representatives Lorris Wimberly and Horace Jones which meant a \$28 million increase in public school money for fiscal 1952-54. One-half of this amount was to be used for cost-of-living salary raises, and the remaining \$14 million was set aside for other educational needs. On the other hand, Claude Harrison, State Hospital Board Chairman, asked for a \$916,000 cut in budget allocations for six hospitals. (He had recently visited Jonesboro Charity Hospital, and found only six charity patients attended by eighteen employees.⁵⁸

After much debate, the House of Representatives added almost \$3 million to Kennon's appropriation bill. The amended version of the bill included an additional \$1 million a year for public school funds; \$431,000 a year for Grambling College and Southern University, the two

⁵⁷Quoted in Ibid., June 10, 1952.

⁵⁸Ibid.

state-supported black institutions of higher learning; and \$100,000 a year more for the East Louisiana State Hospital.⁵⁹ The disappointed Kennon exclaimed, "We have already raised education by some 18 percent over last year."⁶⁰ He further contended that the added appropriations would force the state to operate in debt. The House also voted to appropriate an additional \$400,000 for the operation of the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board.⁶¹ Kennon's protest was to no avail.

In the Senate, Senator Charles Tooke, chairman of the finance committee, said the members were "mostly adding" to Kennon's bill.⁶² Two college presidents--Luther Dyson (acting president) of Southeastern Louisiana College and Joel Fletcher of Southwestern Louisiana Institute--requested additional money for their institutions. When it was suggested in the Senate to appropriate \$600,000 to hire one hundred guards for Angola, Representative Wellborn Jack replied, "If we're going to spend money like this up there, let's just call it the University of Angola, put it under the State Department of Education and

⁵⁹Quoted in Ibid., June 18, 1952.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Quoted in Ibid., June 27, 1952.

be done with it."⁶³ Speaking for Kennon, Senator Eubank overcame Jack's opposition, and \$350,000 was appropriated. Kennon's original appropriation bill of \$392.5 million had been increased to \$399 million in the Senate. Other allocations already embodied in the bill included \$14 million for a cost-of-living raise for school employees, \$93 million to operate the welfare system, \$20 million in more than one hundred other appropriation bills, and \$200,000 to air-condition two floors of the state capitol building.⁶⁴ On July 7, 1952, at 2:40 p.m., Kennon approved the general appropriation bill, and House Bill No. 173 became Act 271.⁶⁵ After the passage of the appropriation and revenue acts, Kennon was required by law to prepare a complete state budget for the biennium, July 1, 1952, through June 30, 1954. Of the \$600 plus million that the state expected to spend, the following figures depict how the money was expected to be used:⁶⁶

Agriculture	\$ 4,837,501.00
Conservation of Natural Resources	9,559,229.00
Debt Service	37,121,333.00
Education	231,343,972.64
General Government	21,303,915.00
Health	7,047,474.00
Highways	58,578,073.84
Homestead Exemptions	33,000,000.00

⁶³Quoted in Ibid., July 1, 1952.

⁶⁴Ibid., July 3, 1952.

⁶⁵Acts of Louisiana (1952), 718.

⁶⁶Louisiana, Office of the Director of the Budget, Budget, 1952 to 1954, p. 7.

Protection to Persons and Property	5,497,254.00
Public Welfare	222,720,686.00
Hospitals and Mental Institutions	44,627,849.73
All other	13,359,012.00

Although Governor Kennon succeeded in reducing taxes, he managed also to maintain Longite services and to increase several key appropriations because the state was prosperous enough for revenues to expand beyond the reductions in taxation.

Many of the state's institutions were in dire need of additional money for expansion and improvements. Southern University with the second largest enrollment (over 4000 students) of any educational institution in the state, was painfully overcrowded, as were the mental hospital at Jackson and the state penitentiary.

The state library also needed a new building, while LSU and other institutions desired varying amounts for capital improvements. Kennon had promised earlier not to increase taxes, but he gave approval to a bond issue, provided, the legislature could finance the bond out of current revenues. When Representatives Rolfe McCollister and Percy Roberts introduced House Bill 937 proposing a \$30 million bond issue for a number of capital improvements at colleges, correctional institutions and mental hospitals, Kennon asserted, "I am willing to go along with a bond issue to finance needed improvements." But he hastened to add, "The state can't go out of

business and there won't be money to provide for the institutions without the bond issue."⁶⁷ To make authorization of the bonds more certain, McCollister and Roberts redrafted their measure, changing it to a bill--which required only a majority vote in each House--instead of a joint resolution proposal, which would require a two-thirds vote.⁶⁸ As a bill, the proposal would become law when the legislature approved it and the governor signed it. As a joint resolution (constitutional amendment), the proposal would also have to be approved by the electorate in the November primary. The bonds were to be funded from part of the 1.4 mill state property tax which had been levied for bond retirement.

The Kennon administration amended the bill by creating a Louisiana State Building Authority to handle the capital improvements. Composed of the governor, lieutenant governor, governor's executive counsel, speaker of the house, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee and the House Appropriation Committee, State Auditor and state treasurer, the authority was empowered "to construct, improve, remodel, furnish and equip educational,

⁶⁷Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, May 31, 1952.

⁶⁸Ibid., May 30, 1952.

charitable, correctional, and penal buildings and other structures and facilities of the state."⁶⁹

Louisiana's state debt as of June 30, 1951, was \$224,257,020. At the end of fiscal 1953, the state debt was over \$215 million, with Louisiana ranking as the tenth highest among all states in total debt.⁷⁰ The legislature could not authorize bonds which would put the state in debt, except for repelling an invasion or eliminating an insurrection. But, the legislature could direct a state agency to incur state debt. The Louisiana State Building Authority was a Kennon administration "creation," and was authorized by the legislature to issue the \$30 million bonds. The Kennon administration gave valid reasons for increasing the state debt:⁷¹

(1) Capital improvements were needed, and since there was insufficient recurring revenue to fund the improvements, a bond issue was required;

(2) Taxes would not be increased, because the surplus of the state property tax would finance the bonds;

(3) At the end of the 1952-54 biennium, the debt would be decreased approximately \$30.5 million;

⁶⁹Quoted in Ibid., June 1, 1952.

⁷⁰PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 1, May 15, 1954, p. 2. This total does not include authorized bonds.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 3.

(4) The 1.47-mill ad valorem tax would continue to be levied even if the state authorized no future bond issues. According to Kennon, "the bonds would not be direct obligations of the State of Louisiana but would be secured by taxes already in existence."⁷²

Lieutenant Governor Barham, who was showing himself not to be a Kennon "team member," opposed the bill and declared that it was nonsensical to "borrow with one hand and [to] voluntarily reduce taxes with the other."⁷³ Representative Matthew Hargrove contended that there was no way to insure that the Building Authority would carry out the desires of the legislature. Further, he asserted, "We've been knocking off money like a row of pins in this legislature, and here we go again."⁷⁴

In its June 28, 1952 issue, the Baton Rouge State-Times argued that the "state fund surplus [was] more than [the] proposed bond issue."⁷⁵ The newspaper alleged that official state records (which the paper refused to name) showed surpluses in the general fund and public welfare fund of approximately \$25.5 million and \$26.3 million, respectively. The State-Times contended that these

⁷²Baton Rouge State Times, June 20, 1952.

⁷³Quoted in Ibid., June 3, 1952; New Orleans Times-Picayune, June 3, 1952.

⁷⁴Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, June 23, 1952.

⁷⁵Ibid., June 28, 1952.

existing surpluses could fund the necessary capital projects without having to float a bond issue. There were many arguments against incurring further state debts. The amounts received from state taxes and other incoming revenues were high. Compared to other states, Louisiana's debt was mammoth. It seemed ridiculous to some, to reduce taxes and increase the debt in one stroke. They felt that those projects which would not be financed through the state surplus, could wait and be financed through future state surpluses. Further, the opposition felt that

tying up the undedicated yield of the 1.47-mill ad valorem tax merely [sic] adds [ed] to the inflexibility of the state's fiscal structure without considering the desirability of either eliminating the tax or using the revenue for other purposes.⁷⁶

But when all was said and done, the House passed Kennon's proposed bond bill, with sixty-six members in favor, twenty-nine against, and five in abstention.⁷⁷

By the time the bill reached the Senate, Kennon had met with his top legislative advisors and offered a \$9,750,000 substitute measure. It was known that twenty-four of the thirty-nine senators were opposed to the \$30 million bond issue. The administration amendment reduced the bond allocations to \$4 million for the Louisiana State

⁷⁶PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 5, June 14, 1952, p. 4.

⁷⁷Baton Rouge State Times, June 27, 1952.

Penitentiary at Angola; \$1,250,000 for the Central State Hospital; \$1,500,000 for the East Louisiana State Hospital; \$1,750,000 for Southern University; and \$1,250,000 for Grambling College.⁷⁸ The proposal remained in the form of a bill rather than a proposed constitutional amendment, which meant that the state debt would be increased without approval from the electorate.

In the Senate, administration floor leader Robert Ainsworth, Jr. led the Kennon forces. Fighting the bond issue, Senator Elmore Bonin said it was "a Kennon pressure bill, a mixture of stupidity, indecision and selfishness."⁷⁹ Senator B. B. Rayburn also criticized the bill because it did not have to be submitted to the electorate. The Senate voted thirty-one to six for the passage of the amended bill. So, House Bill 937 became Act 317 when it was approved by Kennon on July 8.

In an effort to reduce the state debt, Kennon's House floor leader Eubank introduced bills directing the state highway department to refund highway bonds totaling \$17,750,000. The sale of these bonds would enable the state to sell new bonds and to recall two bond issues which had been due January 1, 1952. It was estimated that the state could save an estimated \$500,000 with the

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Quoted in Ibid., July 3, 1952.

recall.⁸⁰ House Bill 640, which became Act 310 when Kennon approved it on July 8, authorized the Director of Highways to issue and sell \$14,800,000 refunding highway bonds. On June 13, Kennon announced that legislation was being drafted authorizing the highway department to borrow money for several construction projects. These projects included approaches to the proposed Mississippi River Bridge located at New Orleans, and later for a Shreveport bridge, approaches for the Lake Charles Bridge, and improvements along Highway 90. Kennon asserted that the highway department could issue bonds to raise the money. He also suggested that the projects could be financed out of extra revenue from the Dock Board 9/20th of a cent gas tax and from some matching federal funds. The amount of the access roads to the Mississippi was estimated to cost from \$15 million to \$30 million. The bridge at New Orleans was estimated to cost from \$40 million to \$60 million.⁸¹

The construction of a bridge at New Orleans and of the Jefferson-St. Tammany causeway proved to be controversial issues. Senator Laurance Eustis introduced a bill which granted all "unencumbered balances of the

⁸⁰Acts of Louisiana (1952), 833-38; PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 4, June 7, 1952, pp. 7, 8; Baton Rouge State Times, May 28, 1952.

⁸¹Baton Rouge State Times, June 13, 1952.

Highway 2 fund to the river bridge."⁸² The Senate refused to accept the bill until amendments were adopted which allocated \$200,000 yearly from the fund for a Little Woods-Slidell highway, and the requirement of public bond sales for the highway, which required that bonds for the New Orleans river bridge and the Jefferson-St. Tammany causeway be sold publicly, and which gave top priority to a road connecting Hammond to the St. Tammany terminus of the causeway. (The Highway 2 fund contained revenue from the sale of automobile licenses in the parishes of St. Tammany, St. John, St. Charles, Tangipahoa, Orleans, and Jefferson.) Kennon met with Jefferson and St. Tammany authorities and announced that they had concurred on the public sale of bonds.⁸³

The House approved the bill authorizing the creation of a bridge authority, a toll road, and public bidding and selling of the bonds. Another successful measure directed the highway department to negotiate contracts with the approval of the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads. A third bill was passed, which authorized the creation of a seven-member authority with the membership named by Kennon, DeLesseps S. Morrison, mayor of New Orleans, and the Jefferson Parish police jury. Probably relieved that the

⁸²New Orleans Times-Picayune, June 3, 1952.

⁸³Ibid.

controversial bills had been passed, Kennon stated that the members would make the authority, a "fine, responsible board, and we can turn the planning of the bridge for New Orleans over to them."⁸⁴

Another bond issue on which Kennon focused dealt with the creation of the Greater Baton Rouge Port Commission. The bill provided for a nine-man commission, appointed by the governor. The commission was empowered "to issue revenue bonds on future port revenue for financing its establishment and operation."⁸⁵ The original bill requested \$500,000 from the general fund to begin the project. Another one million was to come from the proposed \$30 million state-wide bond issue, which was eventually lowered to \$9,750,000. The legislation passed in the House and Senate. Kennon wanted to increase industrialization in the Baton Rouge area; his house floor leader contended that when the port was developed, there would "be more industry, more jobs and more taxes for the state."⁸⁶ Kennon signed the bill creating the public port district and commission. The measure was placed before the electorate in November of the same year as Amendment

⁸⁴Quoted in Ibid., June 12, 1952; The electorate had to ratify the proposed amendments, and gave its approval in the November 1952 primary elections. Amendments 10, 18, and 28 were approved.

⁸⁵Baton Rouge State Times, June 10, 1952.

⁸⁶Quoted in Ibid., June 19, 1952.

No. 3. With the approval of the electorate, the Baton Rouge Port Commission came into existence.⁸⁷

Kennon maintained his generally conservative posture in fiscal matters, but was wise enough to know that he could not decrease certain state services without losing his credibility as a governor committed to the welfare of all Louisiana's citizens. (Kennon anticipated that the state's on-going surpluses would continue to increase the general fund.) Having such conservative views did not endear Kennon to purist reform forces, but Kennon was not politically owned by any specific group or faction. It is true that his appropriation bills were higher than those of any previous administration, but Kennon knew how to plan judiciously for the floating of bonds to maintain or increase services. He did reduce taxes, while at the same time accumulating surpluses to finance the bonds he authorized. Only a prosperous economy would have enabled the Kennon administration to borrow so successfully.

Another facet of Kennon's "civics book" approach to state government focused on governmental reform. During his campaign, Kennon had pledged to reinstate classified state civil service on a constitutional basis. The 1921 state constitution provided for a state civil service

⁸⁷See Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, Inc., Voter's Guide to the Amendments, 1952, No. 3 (Baton Rouge: Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, Inc., October 1952), hereinafter cited as Voter's Guide.

system. It was not until 1934, however, that the state's first civil service system was instituted. The state civil service commission was authorized to select most municipal police and fire department heads, but it was not until 1940 that the Sam Jones administration authorized the first merit system for selecting state employees.

In 1940, the electorate ratified a constitutional amendment which established a classified merit system for state civil service and civil service for cities with populations of over 100,000 (meaning only New Orleans at that time). Unfortunately, the amendment allowed the legislature by a two-thirds vote of both houses to amend or repeal the act.

After Earl Long was elected governor in 1948, he persuaded the legislature in September to repeal the civil service law, establishing in its place a state merit system which covered only 3,500 employees--of federally supported state agencies. After the repeal, the Civil Service League, an organization supporting state civil service, campaigned for the restoration of civil service through a constitutional amendment which could not be repealed except by a vote of the people. When Kennon was asked to sign a civil service pledge, promising to support the league and other interested groups in their fight to restore state civil service, Kennon did so, and made the

reinstatement of state civil service one of the main issues of his gubernatorial campaign.⁸⁸

The administration's civil service bill was introduced in the upper house by Senator Ainsworth, who asked that a civil service system be provided in the constitution for all municipalities with a population of at least 250,000 and for the executive branch of the state government. Any other political sub-division of the state with a population between 50,000 and 250,000 could vote to become a part of the state civil service.⁸⁹ A state civil service commission would be composed of six members, one of the governor's own choice, and the remaining five from lists submitted by the presidents of Louisiana State University, Centenary College, Louisiana College, Loyola University of the South, and Tulane University. The bill also contained a "Hatch Act" which prohibited political activity by classified civil service employees.⁹⁰ Ainsworth's bill was to be submitted to the voters in the

⁸⁸State of Louisiana Annual Report of the State Civil Service Commission and the Director of Personnel, 1954-1956, p. 3; Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, Inc., Reforming Louisiana's State Civil Service (Baton Rouge: Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, Inc., 1981), p. 3; L. Vaughn Howard, Civil Service Development in Louisiana, Vol. III: Tulane Studies in Political Science (New Orleans: Tulane University, 1956), p. 134, hereinafter cited as Howard, Civil Service.

⁸⁹PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 2, May 24, 1952.

⁹⁰Ibid.

November general election. Because state civil service would not go back into effect until June 30, 1953, so many felt that Kennon would replace many Longite state workers in the meantime. To offset these rumors, Kennon said he anticipated "no big scale firing."⁹¹

In the Senate, Senator Harry Howard offered a resolution eliminating the Hatch act clause. Ainsworth attacked Howard's amendment by declaring that at least twenty-five senators had signed a pledge to support the bill with the Hatch act. Howard was so aggressive in attempting to secure his amendments, that Lieutenant Governor Barham threatened to have him forcibly removed by the Senate sergeant-at-arms. The Senate finally passed the bill, providing for a commission of five members rather than six, as originally proposed. All members would be appointed by the governor from lists supplied by specific college and university presidents. The amended bill passed by a vote of thirty-eight to zero. The lone senator not voting was Andrew Sevier of Madison parish, who, for some inexplicable reason was in his seat but did not cast a vote.⁹²

⁹¹Howard, Civil Service, p. 139.

⁹²New Orleans Times-Picayune, June 4, 1952; Baton Rouge State Times, June 5, 1952; PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 4, June 7, 1952, p. 8.

Kennon asked the House of Representatives to pass the bill without any amendments. In a prepared statement Kennon said, "I cannot change the fundamental principles embodied in Senate Bill No. 1, which I have referred to and which we solemnly pledge to the people." Elaborating further, he added that the bill provided "for restrictions on 'deducts' and campaign contributions from public employees [sic], and objectionable political activities of civil service employees [sic]."⁹³ Representative Albert B. Koorie offered an amendment which would allow those state employees who had worked for the state at least one year before January 1, 1952, to remain in the civil service system. Koorie justified his amendment on the ground that it would keep the Kennon administration from placing Kennon supporters on state jobs before the bill went into effect on June 30, 1953. Koorie's effort failed. The House passed the bill with one dissenting vote. Kennon approved Act 18 on June 18, 1952, and the voters gave their approval in the November general election.⁹⁴

Compared to many other state governors, the governor of Louisiana headed an extensive bureaucracy because Louisiana had a proliferation of executive agencies under

⁹³Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, June 12, 1952.

⁹⁴Ibid., June 16, 1952; Acts of Louisiana (1952), 62-86.

the governor's supervision. Several of these agencies, Kennon believed, were too closely tied to the governor. He, proposed, therefore, that \$200 million in annual state spending would be "removed from politics" if four large departments were to be administered by citizen boards.⁹⁵ Kennon announced that placing the Boards of the proposed new State Department of Institutions, Commission of Wild Life and Fisheries, and Departments of Public Highways and Welfare, in the constitution with the approval of the voters would decrease the power of the governor. This effort by Kennon to place limitations on executive power, especially where allocations of large amounts of state funds were concerned, created much controversy.

Most of Kennon's supporters also believed that the governor was indeed too powerful and that his authority to spend money needed to be checked. They contended that granting the four "citizen boards" constitutional status would increase legislative control over their spending. The opposition declared that the governor should be held ultimately accountable for all state spending. The four re-constituted agencies, they maintained, would be too independent of gubernatorial supervision.

Governor Kennon dismissed the warnings of his opponents, and requested that the legislature approve his

⁹⁵Baton Rouge Morning Advocate, April 28, 1952.

plans for creating the Constitutional Citizens Boards, also known as the "Blue Ribbon" Boards.⁹⁶ Some time later, Kennon said of the businessmen on the Boards, "Their job is to set policy; paid employes [sic] execute policy."⁹⁷ (According to political scientist Allan Sindler, however, Kennon devoted "inadequate attention" to the "administrative workability and political accountability" of the citizen boards.⁹⁸)

Initially Kennon proposed to have six-member boards, with the governor serving as the seventh member. At the beginning, new members would be appointed to staggered terms of one to six years; new members would serve thereafter for six years. The governor stressed that no member would be eligible for re-appointment after serving more than 50 percent of his term. After the first appointment, the governor would select new members from an eligibility list submitted by various statewide groups-- farm, labor, civic, business, and others. Kennon

⁹⁶For additional information on the Boards, see Thomas V. Garcia, "The 'Blue Ribbon' Boards--A Case Study of Bifactionalism in Louisiana Politics as Reflected in Voting Behavior on Constitutional Issues" (unpublished M.S. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1964), pp. 10-61.

⁹⁷Quoted in "A General and a Governor Pay Facts Forum Tribute," Facts Forum News, March 1953, p. 2.

⁹⁸Allan P. Sindler, Huey P. Long's Louisiana: State Politics, 1920-1952 (Reprinted ed., Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1980), p. 243; hereinafter cited as Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana.

suggested that each group which held statewide conventions should provide four names of persons who had shown their public spirit and patriotism. All of the names would be placed with the Secretary of State. When a vacancy occurred on a Board, that Board would choose seven names from the file and submit them to the governor, who would make the final decision. The Boards would become operational upon creation by the legislature and would continue without change under the constitution if the voters sanctioned the provisions.⁹⁹ Kennon revealed his plans prior to his inauguration, but emphasized that he was meeting with his legislative leaders to "reach final conclusions about these boards."¹⁰⁰

But by the time Kennon's board bills were actively introduced in the legislature, changes had been made. House Bills 5 and 6, introduced by Representatives Eubank and Smith, reorganized the Department of Highways and created an independent Board of Highways. House Bills 7 and 8 introduced by Eubank reorganized the Department of Public Welfare and created an independent Board of Public Welfare. House Bill 12, also introduced by Eubank, reorganized the Department of Wild Life and Fisheries, creating a Board of Wild Life and Fisheries. House Bills

⁹⁹Baton Rouge State Times, April 10, 1952.

¹⁰⁰Quoted in Ibid.

9 and 10, introduced by Eubank, created the Board of Institutions with authority over most of the correctional, penal, and charitable institutions of the state. Kennon now proposed that the three boards should consist of nine members, with the governor as an ex-officio member, and the other eight members appointed for staggered terms of eight years. (The nine members of the Wild Life and Fisheries Board would serve staggered terms of nine years.) The boards would be created by constitutional amendment and by legislative statute. Commissioners would be appointed by each board, and the boards would be required to hold open monthly meetings. Kennon's requirements for a State Boards Panel remained basically unaltered. This panel would be comprised of persons whose names were submitted by statewide civic, commercial, patriotic, and other organizations.

The arguments in favor of Kennon's concept were many. It was emphasized that the overlapping terms of the board members would prevent any future governor from controlling any board until he was near the end of his term, while yet allowing a continuity of administration. The administration of the departments by independent boards made the legislature less dependent on the governor for funding on "pet projects." Additionally, boards were comprised of citizens who received no compensation other than expenses.

The less reform-minded opposition contended that the boards were not accountable to the people, the governor, or the legislature. The opposition declared that the present governor was not required to select his original appointments from the State Boards Panel. Voicing their disapproval of names submitted by the panel, the opposition reasoned that the most competent citizen may not have been chosen as a nominee.

From the outset, Kennon assured the legislature that he was amenable to changes. The House amended the highway bill as follows: (1) the terms of board members were changed from eight years to six years; (2) police juries (or other governing authorities), rather than civic groups would comprise the State Boards Panel; (3) one of the eight members had to be appointed from each congressional district; and (4) ten names would be submitted by each police jury (or other governing authority).¹⁰¹ Governor Kennon said that he was "not disappointed" with the House amendments.¹⁰² In the Senate, the bill was passed unanimously with other amendments. Two of the board members would serve for four-year terms and the remaining would serve six-year staggered terms. And, one member

¹⁰¹Ibid., May 26 & 28, 1952; New Orleans Times-Picayune, May 27, 1952; PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 3, May 31, 1952; p. 8.

¹⁰²Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, May 28, 1952.

would be appointed from each congressional district. House Bills 5 and 6 were approved by Kennon on June 23 and became Acts 81 and 54, respectively.¹⁰³

Kennon's public welfare bills were also amended. Apparently, legislators were not pleased with the composition of Kennon's State Boards Panel, for the House provided that some non-profit organizations or interested citizens could submit five names to the panel. Also, the House members voted that the commissioner of the board would be chief administrator of the department, and the board would function as a policy-making body.¹⁰⁴ In the Senate, there was initial opposition to the proposed constitutional amendment incorporating the department into the constitution. But through the efforts of Senator Ainsworth, the measure was reconsidered and passed. The main amendments stipulated that the term of members would be six years, and that one member of the board would be appointed from each congressional district.¹⁰⁵

The legislative debate over the Wild Life and Fisheries bill was heated. Senator E. W. Gravolet suggested that six of the nine members of the board should come from the coastal parishes. Here, again, Kennon showed

¹⁰³PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 6, June 21, 1952, p. 6.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., No. 3, May 31, 1952, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., No. 5, June 14, 1952, p. 6.

a willingness to compromise, by considering an amendment that would allow commercial fishing interests to be represented on the board. The changes provided for a seven-member board, with three appointed from coastal parishes and three from the state, all to serve six-year staggered terms. The seventh member's term would be concurrent with the governor's term. The director of the department, appointed by the board, would name two assistants, one administering sports and game, and the other commercial trapping and fishing. The Senate concurred with the amendments and passed the bill by a vote of thirty-three to zero. House Bill 12 was approved by Governor Kennon on June 23, and became Act 57.¹⁰⁶

House Bill 9 and 10 were revised and became House Bills 525 and 526. The substitute bills were drafted by District Judge Frank Voelker of Lake Providence and Judge Chris Barnette of the Shreveport Juvenile Court, at the behest of Kennon. The revised bills stipulated that all boards and functions of the correctional, penal, and charitable state institutions would be merged and transferred to the State Board of Institutions; the State Board would have power to establish advisory committees for any of the institutions; and within its jurisdiction, the board could move inmates from one institution to

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 7.

another. The House passed the bills.¹⁰⁷ The Senate approved the bills which provided for a board composed of the governor and eight members who would serve staggered terms. House Bills 525 and 526 were approved by Kennon on June 19 and 26, respectively, and became Acts 48 and 156. All of the governor's "Blue-Ribbon" Boards were given constitutional sanction in the November 1952 general election.¹⁰⁸

Kennon had carried out his pledge of re-organizing the state's major administrative units. He was suspicious of the concentration of too much power in the hands of the governor. He believed that administrative authority should be diffused, and that key state agencies should have independent constitutional status. To assure acceptance of his overall plans, Kennon proved to be flexible, even when it meant losing the support of "good government" reformers who disagreed with his views.

The installation of voting machines in every Louisiana precinct was given high priority in Kennon's platform. Only in the large urban parishes of Calcasieu,

¹⁰⁷Ibid., No. 2, May 24, 1952, p. 8; Baton Rouge State Times, June 2, 1952.

¹⁰⁸Monthly Analysis of News on Louisiana Government, Louisiana Government in the News, "State News," No. 14 (Baton Rouge: Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, Inc., November 15, 1952), p. 1, hereinafter cited as Louisiana Government, with appropriate number and date.

Orleans, Caddo, East Baton Rouge, and Jefferson, were voting machines used. Other Louisiana voters still utilized paper ballots.¹⁰⁹

House Bill 4 provided that voting machines would be used in all elections in the state on and after July 28, 1954. In the fifty-four parishes with less than 50,000 people, written ballots or voting machines would be authorized in those elections which involved the imposition of special taxes or issuing bonds and incurring debt. The bill stipulated that each ward had to have at least one polling precinct and at least one voting machine. The voting machine would be paid for by the state. Kennon's supporters believed that the use of voting machines would allow more honesty in the reporting of election results. Voting machines would also provide quicker results in election returns. Some precincts had taken as much as a week to issue their returns. The fiscally conservative supporters contended that expenditures would be decreased for future elections. The opposition declared that voting machines were not needed in less densely populated areas, and that the machines would cost the state too much money.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹Baton Rouge State Times, May 26, 1952.

¹¹⁰PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 1, May 17, 1952, pp. 6 & 7.

In the House, representatives from rural parishes argued against the consolidation of their precincts. John E. Jumonville stressed that Iberville Parish had a ward with two precincts--one located in a general store and the other in the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital at Carville where patients with Hansen's disease were treated. He said voters would object to entering the hospital to cast their votes. The House, therefore, amended the bill to make any consolidations of precincts "permissive" instead of "mandatory."¹¹¹ Horace Jones voiced his discontent with the provision providing for state payment of machines. Some parishes, he contended, had already paid for their machines and had received only 50 percent of the cost from the state. He declared, "we in Calcasieu have paid \$75,000 already and it's nothing but right that we be reimbursed."¹¹² The House proposed that state refunds of parish expenditures would be considered in another measure. With the changes incorporated, the House voted unanimously to place voting machines in every precinct. The Senate concurred, and House Bill 4 was approved by the governor on June 11.¹¹³

¹¹¹Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, May 26, 1952.

¹¹²Quoted in Ibid.

¹¹³Ibid., June 4, 1952.

Under Act 6 of 1952, Louisiana became the first state to place voting machines in every precinct, making "the old hand ballot obsolete."¹¹⁴ Companion measures were the passage of laws providing for permanent registration in Orleans, Caddo, and East Baton Rouge Parishes, and the elimination of the custom of commissioners helping illiterate voters at voting machines or ballot boxes.¹¹⁵

In an effort to attract new industry to the state, Kennon proposed a bill which created a Louisiana program to balance agriculture with industry. The bill, with over forty sponsors, authorized parishes, wards, and municipalities to borrow money for the purpose of attracting industry. Funds from the sales of bonds would be used to obtain plant sites and buildings which would be leased, sold or otherwise used to industrial concerns.¹¹⁶ Since the bill was a constitutional proposal it was subject to voter approval in the November election.

The institution of a "Balance Agriculture with Industry" program had been a campaign promise of Kennon.

¹¹⁴Ibid., July 14, 1952.

¹¹⁵Ibid., May 24, 1952; July 7, 1952; Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, Inc., A PAR Report, Permanent Registration of Voters in Louisiana, No. 7 (Baton Rouge: Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, Inc., December 8, 1952), pp. 1-8.

¹¹⁶Baton Rouge State Times, May 24, 1952; PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 5, June 14, 1952, p. 5.

A Kennon spokesman said, "we [state government] won't draw a new Esso (Standard Oil) or Kaiser (aluminum) with this program." But, he added, "what we want is to attract small industries, hiring 200 to 300 workers, to build up the areas where such activity is needed."¹¹⁷ Apparently Kennon and his supporters believed that new industry would be attracted particularly to local communities, which would bring about the expected balance between agriculture and industry. They felt that revenues from the industry would pay for the principle and interest of the bonds. And since the local area owned the plant, the industry would not have to pay local property taxes--an added incentive for attracting new industry.

But there were dissenters from this policy, who argued that: (1) many other states with "BAWI" programs were finding it hard to sell bonds; (2) the program could lead to competition and duplication in local areas, causing waste; (3) instead of depending on local areas for buildings, private industry should furnish its own capital; and (4) the BAWI program could lead to publicly operated manufacturing plants.¹¹⁸ Kennon refused to give in. The bill did not call for additional taxes, and, supposedly, private industry was to pay off the bonds--as

¹¹⁷Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, May 24, 1952.

¹¹⁸PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 5, June 14, 1952, pp. 5-6.

rent. Both Houses passed the bill which became Act 426 when it was approved by Kennon on July 10. The voters approved the constitutional proposal in November.

Administration senate leader Ainsworth introduced another bill which required all Louisiana governmental agencies (except for the legislature) to open all meetings to the public. According to Representative Eubank, the bill was "in accord with the sound principles of Democratic government," and was supported by the Louisiana Press Association.¹¹⁹ By the 1950's, there was an expanding national conviction that citizens had a right to know how their money was used and how public policy was formed.¹²⁰ While Representative Ted Hickey announced that the bill was "one of the most constructive"¹²¹ to come before the legislature, Representative Koorie, who also approved of the bill's principles, said "the press has a moral obligation to afford an official ample opportunity to reply to criticism."¹²² The Senate voted twenty-seven to zero in favor, and the House approved the bill by a vote of fifty-four to seventeen. Signed by the governor

¹¹⁹Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, July 9, 1952.

¹²⁰PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 8, July 3, 1952, p. 6.

¹²¹Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, July 9, 1952.

¹²²Quoted in Ibid.

on July 10, Act 484 of 1952 became Louisiana's first "Open Meeting" law.

Kennon's forward-minded ideas could also be observed in his plans to provide research assistance for the legislature. At the time, twenty-eight states had legislative councils. Senate Bill 47, introduced by Senator Ainsworth, provided that a legislative council of eighteen members "would employ a full-time research and clerical staff under the direction of a professionally trained researcher."¹²³ Ainsworth emphasized that when the legislature had 1,600 bills to consider, that it "is impossible to study and learn what we should know about every bill."¹²⁴ A companion measure provided a \$60,000 appropriation to fund the Council during each biennium. Evidently the solons were pleased with the administration measures providing accessible research and bill-drafting assistance, because Ainsworth's bill passed the senate unanimously. Kennon approved Acts 51 and 553 on June 23 and July 10, respectively. The legislature now had paid research assistance, which allowed Kennon's dream of an independent legislature to become more of a reality.

Governor Kennon was also interested in home rule for Louisiana's larger municipalities. There were only three

¹²³Ibid., June 9, 1952.

¹²⁴Quoted in Ibid.

major cities in the state--New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Shreveport. Kennon believed that all municipalities should be permitted to draft their own charters, assuring them of less legislative interference and control.

Representative Percy Roberts introduced House Bills 225 and 226 which authorized the state legislature to develop a common system of rules so any Louisiana municipality could frame a home rule charter and have it approved by a majority vote of the local citizens. Accepted amendments to the charters of New Orleans, Baton Rouge and Shreveport could be submitted by the governing authority or by petition and ratification by a popular vote. Bill 226, which provided for the formulation, adoption and amendment of home rule charters, was offered as a constitutional measure.¹²⁵ Both Houses passed the bills and Kennon approved them on July 3 and 10, respectively as Acts 245 and 325.

Governor Kennon enacted most of his campaign pledges during the first legislative session of 1952, the anti-Long legislature having cooperated for the most part with Kennon's administration. But, Kennon had encountered opposition. Representative John Jumonville alluded to the Kennon administration as "the biggest dictatorship

¹²⁵Voter's Guide, pp. 23-25; PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 4, June 7, 1952, pp. 2-4; Acts of Louisiana (1952), 598-600; 852-853.

Louisiana has ever known."¹²⁶ Jumonville declared that administrative pressure had been placed on him, and that he was warned that his bills would not get through the Appropriations Committee if he did not cooperate. Presumably, Kennon chose to ignore this allegation. Senator Dayton McCann, warned the Senate, "Kennon is trying to make us look like a bunch of donkeys."¹²⁷ At a press conference, Kennon said, he "wasn't listening in. . . ." Furthermore, Kennon told the press, "I have complete confidence in the Senate without listening in on them."¹²⁸ The Baton Rouge State Times said of the legislature:

Compared with previous meetings, the 1952 session was relatively quiet, so far as bombast and vitriol were concerned. Most of the key compromises came after vigorous in-fighting at committee meetings which were well and often loudly attended.

Once out of the smoke and fire filled committee rooms and onto the floor, the governor's program seemed to roll along freely.¹²⁹

On July 9, Kennon addressed a joint session of the legislature. He praised the 1952 legislature for "lowering the tremendous tax load that the people of this

¹²⁶Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, June 24, 1952.

¹²⁷Quoted in Ibid., May 29, 1952.

¹²⁸Quoted in Ibid.

¹²⁹Ibid., July 10, 1952.

state have been carrying."¹³⁰ He said that he had signed the administration's general appropriation bill, which had been increased by both Houses, because he believed in the right of the legislature "to exercise independent judgment." Seeming to justify his statement, Kennon added, "every appropriation bill in my lifetime and yours has carried an increase over the bill for the preceding period."¹³¹ Kennon also named the citizens selected for his "Blue-Ribbon" Boards:¹³²

The Highway Department

- (1) Richard Freeman, New Orleans
- (2) Dick White, Gretna
- (3) Marvin Morris, Jr., Franklin
- (4) Sherwood Loe, Shreveport
- (5) Fred Preaus, Farmerville
- (6) Sam Short, Baton Rouge
- (7) Grant Hayes, Iota
- (8) Robert T. Tucker, Winnfield

The Welfare Department

- (1) James Fitzmorris, New Orleans
- (2) L.B. Williams, New Orleans
- (3) Gus Catsulis, New Iberia
- (4) W. Crawford Fullilove, Shreveport
- (5) Bobby Pappa, Ruston
- (6) Bernice Edwards, Ponchatoula
- (7) Barton Freeland, Crowley
- (8) James C. Bolton, Alexandria

¹³⁰Address of Kennon, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 10, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, hereinafter cited as Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, with appropriate Box.

¹³¹Ibid.

¹³²Ibid.

The Institutions Department

- (1) Claude Harrison, Monroe
- (2) Dr. W.E. Barker, Plaquemine
- (3) Dr. Edwin L. Zander, New Orleans
- (4) E.J. Marrick, New Roads
- (5) R.H. Crosby, Jr., DeRidder
- (6) Dr. George W. Wright, Monroe
- (7) Gordon Randolph, Colfax
- (8) William J. Willkomm, New Orleans

Kennon commented that legislation providing for civil service budgetary control measures, tax reduction, and citizen boards over major state spending departments, would "result in desirable POLITICAL STABILITY" for Louisiana. He said there had been "differences of opinion and criticism" but that the 1952 legislature was the first "in many years to institute a substantial reduction in taxes." Governor Kennon informed the group that he did not have time to elaborate on all their accomplishments, but he stated that the legislators had "accomplished much good" for the state.¹³³

Kennon and the legislature had worked well together. Before his inauguration, he sent copies of administrative bills he proposed to have introduced. Kennon was flexible, and he welcomed constructive criticism and amended many of his proposals. He kept most of his campaign and pre-election promises, knowing when and how to compromise. Too, Kennon selected floor leaders who were responsive to his needs. He was not "hoggish"; he

¹³³Ibid.

fought for diffusion of power, knowing that it would weaken his authority in large spending state governmental agencies.

Not a major part of his legislative program, but one issue to which Kennon directed his attention, was the problem of the state penitentiary at Angola. Angola received national condemnation in 1951 when thirty-seven inmates slashed their achilles heel tendons in protest against barbaric treatment. To compound the problem, John Lear and Edward W. Stagg in an article, "America's Worst Prison," in Collier's magazine said, "Horrificed investigations of the Louisiana State Penitentiary found gambling, sexual perversion, rule by buckshot, leather strap and rubber hose, [and] favors peddled for cash."¹³⁴ Stagg became one of thirty-two citizens appointed to a committee by Governor Earl Long to investigate the prison. According to the Baton Rouge Morning Advocate, "the investigation's most dramatic point" occurred when Mrs. Mary Daugherty, Angola's first female nurse, described the penitentiary as a "sewer of degradation" which was "still in the dark ages."¹³⁵ Mrs. Daugherty said she had seen almost seven thousand men released and that "not one of

¹³⁴Edward W. Stagg and John Lear, "America's Worst Prison," CXXX (November 22, 1952), 13.

¹³⁵Quoted in Baton Rouge Morning Advocate, March 11, 1952.

them was as qualified to enter society as he was the day he was admitted."¹³⁶ Historian Mark T. Carleton stated,

While the legislature of 1951 provided \$695,000 for construction and repairs at Angola, nothing was done to implement the fundamental reorientation of penal policy recommended by the governor's committee.¹³⁷

In his gubernatorial campaign, Kennon had promised to appoint a trained penologist to overhaul the state's penal system. On May 16, 1952, Kennon revealed that Reed Cozart, director of the United States Correctional Institute at Seagoville, Texas, was inspecting the penitentiary. After Cozart submitted a 12-point improvement program, he was appointed Superintendent of Angola. Cozart on "loan to Louisiana,"¹³⁸ named Sam Anderson, a twenty-two year veteran of federal prison service, as warden. Kennon persuaded the legislature to provide the funds necessary for penal reform. Cozart began to recruit a professional staff and urged construction of a new penitentiary, which cost \$8,237,000 and was dedicated on November 28, 1955. At the dedication, Kennon stated that the day represented to him "the achievement of one of my primary objectives as

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷Mark T. Carleton, Politics and Punishment: The History of the Louisiana State Penal System (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971, p. 157; see also this book for recommendations of the committee, pp. 155-156.

¹³⁸Baton Rouge State Times, June 11, 1952.

governor. . . . I am confident this dream has been shared by thousands of Louisiana's best people of like interest and like mind."¹³⁹ Kennon was the first Louisiana governor during the twentieth century to initiate major prison reforms.

Kennon was also concerned with reforming the State Police Department. Journalist John Wilds stated in 1980 that Kennon "is best remembered for the activities of his state police chief, Francis Grevenberg, who came close to driving the gamblers out of the state."¹⁴⁰ Even when he was District Attorney in the thirties, Kennon had not tolerated gamblers. But even though gambling remained illegal, Governor Earl Long had imposed taxes on certain types of gambling. Louisiana was in fact nationally notorious for its various gambling operations--slot machines, pinball machines, punchboards, card games, roulette, dice games, and bingo. In 1951, a United States Senate subcommittee, chaired by Tennessee's Estes Kefauver, revealed numerous violations of gambling and liquor laws in Louisiana. Organized crime continued to exist in the state. It was believed that underworld

¹³⁹Quoted in Ibid., November 28, 1955.

¹⁴⁰John Wilds, Thirty Years and Five Governors, That's PAR (Baton Rouge: Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, Inc., 1980), p. 3.

personalities Frank Castello and Carlos Marcello owned the Southport and Beverly clubs in Jefferson Parish.¹⁴¹

Kennon appointed Colonel Grevemberg as the new state police superintendent and described him as a "crack National Guard officer with administrative know-how."¹⁴² In Soldiers of the Law, Louisiana State Police, historian Roman Heleniak wrote: "Grevemberg's hostility to gambling was total. He did not confine the crackdown to the big, syndicate-owned casinos and slots; the State Police also moved against church bingo games."¹⁴³ The Catholic Archbishop, the Most Reverend Joseph F. Rummel, of New Orleans, "called for the discontinuance of games of chance to raise money."¹⁴⁴ In May 1952, Grevemberg announced that card games, dice games and roulette would not be tolerated, but that local officials could decide on the legality of slot machines and pinballs. In July 1953, however, Grevemberg warned owners of slot machines to remove them by September.

¹⁴¹Bennett H. Wall, ed., Louisiana: A History (Arlington Heights, Illinois: The Forum Press, Inc., 1984), p. 303.

¹⁴²Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, May 21, 1952.

¹⁴³Roman Heleniak, Soldiers of the Law, Louisiana State Police (Topeka, Kansas: Josten's Publications, 1980), p. 74.

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

But when state police raided the College Inn gambling casino at Laplace, seizing \$1,500, gambling equipment and arresting several men, some described Grevenberg's action as political revenge, since the Longite sheriff of the parish had supported Spaht for governor. The sheriff's chief deputy denied that Sheriff Percy Hebert had made the statement. At any rate, Grevenberg said Kennon did not know about that particular raid. Such raids certainly did not endear Kennon or Grevenberg to many local officials.

Even in Kennon's native North Louisiana, the sting of the State Police could be felt. In Bossier City, near Barksdale Air Force Base, three gambling spots were raided. Grevenberg, who flew in for the raid, again said Kennon had not known of the raid. The Baton Rouge State Times contended that the raids made history because it was believed North Louisiana had never been raided prior to this time.¹⁴⁵

Grevenberg personally directed several raids in New Orleans. (Historian Edward F. Haas declared that Kennon remembered how Mayor Morrison had turned a cold shoulder on him during the gubernatorial campaign. As a result, New Orleans houses of prostitution and gambling establishments were raided.) Grevenberg remained in his

¹⁴⁵Ibid.; New Orleans Times-Picayune, June 3, 1952; Baton Rouge, May 21, 27, 1952, June 6, 1952.

position until 1955, and continued his law enforcement program on gambling prohibition.¹⁴⁶ In all likelihood, Kennon meant for his superintendent of State Police to enforce law. But Grevenberg's aggressive actions caused Kennon political damage: "those who favored the all-out attack credited Grevenberg, and those who were unhappy blamed Kennon."¹⁴⁷

Kennon involved himself with many other functions in state and national government. As chairman of the Louisiana delegation to the 1952 Democratic National Convention, he played a prominent role in additionally splintering the state Democratic party. In each gubernatorial and presidential election year in Louisiana, committee members were chosen for the Democratic State Central Committee--the official governing authority of the party in Louisiana. Responsible for the selection of delegates to the national convention, the state central committee also decided if the national ticket should be accepted. Sociologist Perry Howard has said that, as a rule, "the state central committee tended to accept the

¹⁴⁶Edward F. Haas, DeLesseps S. Morrison and the Image of Reform: New Orleans Politics, 1946-1961 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), pp. 189-192.

¹⁴⁷Baton Rouge State Times, November 21, 1963.

lead of a new administration in Baton Rouge."¹⁴⁸ When Kennon won the election, Longites met defeat in the legislature and on the Democratic State Central Committee. Earl Long, who was national committeeman, was replaced by Frank Ellis.¹⁴⁹ The Kennon forces manipulated the selection process of national convention delegates to insure the Kennonites of a "majority, as six of the eight district committees chose delegates either positively blessed by Kennon or not opposed by him."¹⁵⁰ Allan Sindler stressed that the alignment of the delegates "shattered the factional tranquillity under Kennon."¹⁵¹ One group centered around Frank Ellis who worked with Senator Russell Long, a delegate-at-large, and the other group around Kennon and Leader Perez, ardent states' righters and anti-Trumanites.

In an April 1952 meeting the state central committee passed a resolution stipulating that the voters and the

¹⁴⁸Perry Howard, Political Tendencies in Louisiana (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), p. 305, hereinafter cited as Howard, Political Tendencies.

¹⁴⁹Louisiana Government, No. 8, March 24, 1952, p. 1.

¹⁵⁰Howard, Political Tendencies, p. 318; L. Vaughn and David R. Deener, Presidential Politics in Louisiana, Vol. I: Tulane Studies in Political Science (New Orleans: Tulane University, 1954), pp. 68-69, hereinafter cited as Deener, Presidential Politics.

¹⁵¹Allan P. Sindler, Huey P. Long's Louisiana: State Politics, 1920-1952 (Reprinted ed.; Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1980), p. 244, hereinafter cited as Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana.

Democratic party did not have to endorse or vote for the presidential and vice presidential nominees of the upcoming convention. Many were unaware that even though the Louisiana delegation was in support of the candidacy of Senator Richard B. Russell of Georgia as president, that Kennon and Perez were leaning toward General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Republican candidate. Kennon told reporters that "as a practical politician," he was opened to "what the Republicans had to offer in the way of a candidate." However, he added, "I can't love all of them at one time."¹⁵²

In July the Democratic National Convention convened in Chicago. According to Quick magazine, the South's principal objective of denying President Harry Truman renomination backfired when Truman decided not to run. The magazine said that about eight southern states were expected to give Russell a 208-vote minimum on the first ballot.¹⁵³ Little did the magazine know of what trouble lay ahead for Louisiana and some other southern states. Four young United States senators and representatives--labelled as the leaders of the "young Turks"--Congressman Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. of New York, Governor G. Mennen

¹⁵²Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, July 10, 1952; See also "Campaign Report 3: Does Dixie Know What It Wants," Quick, 6 (April 28, 1952), 13.

¹⁵³Quick, p. 14.

Williams and Senator Blair Moody of Michigan, and Senator Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota, offered the "Loyalty Oath."¹⁵⁴ This oath, directed at the South, required "that delegates pledge to do all they can [could] to get the convention's nominees on the ballot in their states as the rightful Democratic candidates."¹⁵⁵ The "Young Turks," described by Kennon as "youngsters, just a wee bit wild,"¹⁵⁶ wanted cohesion within the party and feared that some southern states were intending to place Eisenhower electors on the Democratic ballot. Older politicians feared that some Southern states would again stage a walkout as they had done in 1948, when they were displeased with President Truman's civil rights plank in the platform.¹⁵⁷ A States' Rights Democratic (Dixiecrat) party had been organized, with Governor J. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina campaigning for president. According to Perry Howard, in 1948, Louisiana voters had four options: (1) vote for Truman and Barkley; (2) vote Republican; (3) approve the Democratic rooster for States' Rights; and

¹⁵⁴Convention Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 10.

¹⁵⁵New Orleans State Times, July 22, 1952.

¹⁵⁶Convention Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 10.

¹⁵⁷"Nation Affairs," Time, July 28, 1952, p. 9.

(4) remain at home. Most had supported the States' Rights party.¹⁵⁸

Subsequently, the "Young Turks" of 1952 diluted the oath. The compromise loyalty oath given by Moody required that no delegate was to be seated

unless he shall give assurance to the Credentials Committee that he will exert every honorable means available to him . . . to provide that the nominees of the convention for President and Vice-President . . . appear on the election ballot under the heading . . . of the Democratic Party. . . .¹⁵⁹

Louisiana's twenty-four member uninstructed delegation was entitled to twenty votes, and had been authorized by the State Central Committee to leave the convention if an inadequate platform was adopted or an unsuitable candidate was nominated. Thus, the delegation could bolt the convention if it did not care for the platform or the nominee. In reaction to the compromise loyalty oath, the Louisiana delegates met in caucus and passed a resolution authorizing Kennon to refuse the loyalty demand. Additionally, the delegates decided not to stage a walkout even though they were irate over the situation. Former Governor Sam Jones exclaimed, "Let 'em

¹⁵⁸Howard, Political Tendencies, p. 307.

¹⁵⁹Quoted in John Robert Greene, The Crusade, The Presidential Election of 1952 (New York: University Press of America, Inc., 1985), p. 156, hereinafter cited as Greene, The Crusade.

put us out. We are not going out on our own."¹⁶⁰ Arch-conservative Leader Perez replied, "I would consider it an honor to be thrown out of this convention."¹⁶¹ Jesse Cutrer declared, "that there was 'substantial sentiment' for Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower among Louisiana voters which may crystallize if the delegation is ejected."¹⁶² Senator Allen J. Ellender, a Louisiana delegate-at-large, notified the delegates that he had conferred with Democratic National Chairman Frank E. McKinney and Parliamentarian Clarence Cannon and had been told that no legally sanctioned state delegation would be forced to leave the convention.

When Kennon heard of the compromise oath, he hastened to the convention arena and asked the delegates to wait until the next morning to study the consequences. He added that Moody's resolution was temporary and could be eliminated later. He followed through with the recommendations of the Louisiana delegation and sent the resolution to the Credential Committee along with a letter stating that Louisiana was not required to take the pledge.¹⁶³ During another caucus on the morning of July

¹⁶⁰Quoted in New Orleans States, July 22, 1952.

¹⁶¹Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, July 23, 1952.

¹⁶²Ibid.

¹⁶³Ibid., July 22, 1952.

24, the proceedings were somewhat rowdy. The Louisiana delegates quarreled loudly behind closed doors, some stalked out and returned, and Frank Ellis, Louisiana national committeeman, handed in his resignation only to have it returned. Senator Russell Long, "in a seething rage,"¹⁶⁴ declared that the delegation wanted to place Eisenhower on the Democratic ticket. Long said it was immoral and that the same thing had happened in 1948. In answer, delegates H. C. Sevier and C. C. Burleigh stressed that there was no such plan to "steal" votes.¹⁶⁵ At the end of the hour-long quarreling, Kennon announced to newsmen that Louisiana's position had not changed. The state would remain with Virginia and South Carolina in an adamant refusal to sign the oath. The Chicago Daily Tribune of July 24 wrote, "Rebels Refuse to 'Grovel' to North."¹⁶⁶

On the same day Convention Chairman Sam Rayburn reported that the three states would be asked to answer the roll-call of states for nominating speeches at the convention. To some, this seemed to mean that the states were back in good standing. Rayburn refused to discuss the situation further, only stating that if one objected

¹⁶⁴Ibid., July 24, 1952.

¹⁶⁵Quoted in Ibid.

¹⁶⁶Chicago, Illinois Daily Tribune, July 24, 1952.

to the states participating, he would execute a ruling at that particular time.

The Credentials Committee, however, had ruled against the seating of the Louisiana delegation. That night, during the nominating and seconding speeches, "one of the most bizarre episodes in the history of American convention politics"¹⁶⁷ occurred. Louisiana had not signed the oath, and was not officially on the permanent roll, but when the state was summoned on the roll call for presidential nominating speeches, Governor Kennon yielded to Virginia, whereupon Governor John S. Battle asked what was the status of the three states which had not signed the compromise oath. (Kennon, Battle and South Carolina Governor James F. Byrnes had met earlier.) Battle said that, according to his state's rules, the party's nominee had to be placed on the state ballot.¹⁶⁸ This apparently caused the convention then to vote on whether to seat the Virginia delegation.

Possibly, Kennon knew this would happen when he deferred to Virginia. Chairman Rayburn then ruled that the three states had not complied with the Moody Resolution and were not eligible to participate in the nominating process. It seemed as though he had departed

¹⁶⁷Greene, The Crusade, p. 160.

¹⁶⁸Howard, Political Tendencies, p. 320.

from his earlier stance. Was this action planned by Rayburn and others to hastily resolve a divisive issue?

After Rayburn's announcement, Senator Russell Long went to the rostrum and said he would accept the loyalty oath, and asserted, "I am willing to let my people [Louisiana's voters] decide, not some small group like these delegates."¹⁶⁹ This qualified Long as an individual delegate and he was, thus, able to cast all of Louisiana's votes to recognize Virginia. Long was supported by J. Loney Austin and Louis Roussel, other Louisiana delegates who also qualified. After Long's speech, Kennon gave the view of the majority, and declared that the state would not sign the oath, and waved his fist in protest. Kennon concluded his speech by saying, "Goodbye and God Bless You."¹⁷⁰ He did not leave the convention, but returned to his seat.

The credentials of Virginia were debated hours before the convention voted to accept the "recalcitrant delegates although they had not signed the required loyalty oath."¹⁷¹ By a voice vote, Louisiana and South Carolina were seated. Kennon also contended that the

¹⁶⁹Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, July 25, 1952.

¹⁷⁰Quoted in Ibid.

¹⁷¹New York Herald Tribune, July 25, 1952.

state's position was yet the same. But in an issued statement, he emphatically declared:

As true Democrats, we believe that the convention vote Thursday night to seat the delegation of Virginia, South Carolina and Louisiana was indeed an expression of true Democratic principles, and a victory for those who believe in the fundamental ideals of Jefferson, Jackson and Wilson.¹⁷²

Kennon cast the state's twenty votes for Russell on all three roll calls, but when the presidential and vice presidential nominations went to Governor Adlai Stevenson and Senator John Sparkman, the twenty votes were given to them because the convention voted to cast a unanimous ballot for Stevenson. After the convention, on August 20, the State Central Committee allowed the Stevenson-Sparkman electors to appear on the ballot under the rooster emblem, the traditional symbol of the Democratic party in Louisiana. However, the Committee did not further endorse the Democratic ticket, paving the way for Eisenhower supporters.

Kennon was also a member of the Platform Committee of the national convention. Apparently, he did not have much influence, because a Trumanite platform was adopted. Kennon supposedly sent a letter to the National Chairman informing him that if Louisiana could have voted on the

¹⁷²Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, July 26, 1952.

adoption of the platform, the state would have cast a negative vote.¹⁷³

The Democratic platform, twenty-nine pages in length, endorsed Truman's "Fair Deal" program and provided for federal aid, increased spending for welfare services, repeal of the "Cloture Rule" of the United States Senate, and civil rights. (The platform included nothing relative to the ownership of Tidelands oil lands, although Truman himself had taken an anti-states' rights position on the Tidelands issue. The Republican party's platform reflected the opposite view.) The Democratic civil rights plank endorsed federal legislation to insure equal employment opportunities, political equality, anti-poll tax and anti-lynching legislation, and pledged to "strengthen the administrative machinery for the protection of civil rights."¹⁷⁴

On September 6, 1952, Kennon announced his personal support for Republican candidate Eisenhower. To many, it was no surprise, for on several occasions Kennon had told the press of his interest in the Republican party's nominee. On August 14 he had said, "I concede the

¹⁷³Howard, Political Tendencies, pp. 320-321.

¹⁷⁴Quoted in Chicago, Illinois Daily Tribune, July 24, 1952.

possibility of Republicans carrying Louisiana."¹⁷⁵ On August 27 and 29, he had stated that Eisenhower had become "more palatable," and that "for all practical purposes, Louisiana is in a two-party status now. This will be shown in the November balloting."¹⁷⁶ When Democratic nominee Stevenson heard of the defection of Kennon and some other southern state governors, he labelled them "embittered apostates."¹⁷⁷

Kennon, the first disenchanted Democratic leader to bolt the party, asserted that "political weathervanes"¹⁷⁸ pointed to victory for Eisenhower in the state. Kennon's major reasons for opposing the Democratic nominee were: (1) Stevenson's support of the Federal Fair Employment Practices Act which prohibited discrimination against blacks; (2) Stevenson's support of Truman's anti-states' rights position on the tidelands oil lands issue; and (3) Stevenson's position favoring the repeal of the Cloture Rule limiting debate in the United States Senate which would end filibustering.¹⁷⁹ When Stevenson visited

¹⁷⁵Quoted Materials, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 10.

¹⁷⁶Quoted in Ibid.

¹⁷⁷Quoted in Ibid.

¹⁷⁸Knoxville, Tennessee Journal, September 7, 1952.

¹⁷⁹Ibid.; London, England Herald Telegraph, September 8, 1952.

New Orleans, Kennon was absent, but when Eisenhower visited the city on October 13, Kennon introduced him to the audience. Adlai Stevenson, however, received 53 percent of Louisiana's popular votes cast in the November election. Therefore, Louisiana's ten electoral votes were also cast in December for Stevenson. Kennon remained a Louisiana Democrat, but his forthright conservatism did little to endear him to the liberal faction of the state Democratic party.

After Eisenhower's victory in the electoral college in December, Kennon soon found himself re-immersed in state affairs. He discussed the possibility of calling a special legislative session in the middle of 1953 to provide for the necessities of state agencies and institutions. Funds were to come from anticipated surpluses in the general and public welfare funds. However, Kennon mentioned that the amount of money in the funds would determine whether he called the legislature into session. Funds were to be allocated for several different purposes: (1) rural roads; (2) an institutional bond issue of \$10 million; (3) additional money for the State Board of Health; (4) a state-wide stock law which would prohibit animals from roaming state highways; and (5) a soils laboratory at Louisiana State University.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰Louisiana Government, No. 19, April 15, 1953, p. 1.

At first Kennon changed his mind and said the probability of a special session had ended. But then on Sunday, July 5, 1953, Kennon announced that he was calling the legislature into special session "to underwrite a multimillion-dollar rural road program and to provide \$8,825,091 for 'emergency needs' of various state agencies."¹⁸¹ Telegrams were sent to the 139 members of the legislature informing them of the session which was to adjourn at midnight on July 17. Since Representative James Eubank had died in November 1952, Kennon's new House floor leader was Representative Kenneth H. Cagle of Calcasieu Parish. Senator Ainsworth continued as principal Senate floor leader.

Kennon's legislative program was introduced in eleven administration bills which he outlined before a joint session of the legislature on Monday night, July 6. He told the group that money received from the leasing of oil-rich lands during the past year, and needs of "the feeble-minded, the state school for the blind, the penitentiary, and some of the state hospitals," were the reasons why he called the legislature into special session. He also suggested that his legislative program was one which the legislators themselves had told him

¹⁸¹New Orleans Times-Picayune, July 6, 1953.

"from time to time" was needed.¹⁸² To offset any contention that the state would be financially hurt by the proposed appropriations, the governor asserted that Louisiana would "still be in excellent financial shape." He also stated, "at the same time, we will have made much needed progress in our program of improvements."¹⁸³

Apparently, the legislature concurred, for practically all of Kennon's program was enacted. House Bill 2 authorized the Louisiana Building Authority to transfer the remainder of a \$9,750,000 bond issue to the boards involved in the building programs. House Bill 3, which Kennon said was "one of the major items,"¹⁸⁴ proposed that the legislature dedicate three-eighths of the sales tax revenues to the construction and improvement of secondary and farm-to-market roads. Under House Bill 4 permission was requested to use voting machines before the mandated date of July 1954. In outlining House Bill 5 to the legislators, Kennon emphatically stated:

The state was fortunate during the past fiscal year in getting more revenue from mineral leases of state lands and water bottoms than was anticipated.

This extra money and virtually this alone, has increased the surplus in the state general fund. I feel it is safe to recommend using this extra income to meet emergency needs at several state institutions and for capital improvements that are

¹⁸²Ibid., July 7, 1952.

¹⁸³Ibid.

¹⁸⁴Quoted in Ibid.

both essential and sound investments for the state.¹⁸⁵

House Bill 5 provided for an appropriation of \$8,825,000 to various state agencies, \$4 million of which was earmarked for the state colony and training school at Pineville, the state penitentiary and other state institutions. House Bill 6 and 7 extended social security coverage to municipal workers, and directed all municipalities of 7,500 to 250,000 persons to put police pension systems under social security. Appropriations of \$409,800 to the Lafayette Charity Hospital and \$477,000 to the Lallie Kemp Charity Hospital were included in House Bill 8. House Bill 9 provided an appropriation of \$100,000 to the Greater Baton Rouge Port Commission for purchasing property. House Bill 10 gave \$250,000 to the State Board of Education for the hot lunch program. The last bill, House Bill 11, created another judgeship for the 18th Judicial District and an appropriation of \$12,500 to cover expenses.¹⁸⁶

Two of Kennon's bills failed to pass the House. House Bill 7 was indefinitely postponed and House Bill 8, receiving forty-four "yes" votes and twenty-nine "no" votes, needed fifty-one votes to pass. Of the other nine bills, the road bill received the largest number of

¹⁸⁵Quoted in Ibid.

¹⁸⁶Ibid., July 8, 1953.

negative votes. This bill was passed only after two amendments were attached. These amendments offered by Representative Lorris Wimberly--to which Kennon offered no opposition--gave legislators the authority to decide what roads in their districts and parishes were to be constructed out of the \$17 million fund, and provided for the distribution of money to parishes for secondary and farm-to-market roads. Conservative Representative Algie Brown of Caddo parish, offered, "I doubt if anybody here except Wimberly knows just how much money he will get under this amendment." Continuing, Brown said, "You are buying pig in a poke. If a parish doesn't have any roads now, it won't get any roads. It's the old story that 'them that has, gets.'"¹⁸⁷ Debate over House Bill 5, or the omnibus bill, took much time also. Attacks were directed against four or five of the twenty-six items included in the appropriation. In June 1952, Kennon had signed an executive order creating the Governor's Highway Safety Committee to orchestrate safety activities of various state departments to decrease traffic fatalities in the state. Kennon's proposed appropriation of \$50,000 in 1953 for this committee was initially cut to \$10,000, but the full amount was restored. Some other appropriations contested were \$50,000 for civil service, \$200,000

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., July 9, 1953.

for the State Board of Health and \$4 million for Angola and other institutions. Representative E.J. Grizzaffi led a group which wanted Angola deleted from the list. Brown offered an administration approved amendment which substituted the Board of Institutions instead of the governor, "as the authority to determine how the \$4 million is [was] to be allocated." Kennon's forces thwarted all other efforts to eliminate or dilute his bills.¹⁸⁸

The Senate killed the House amendment to the road bill, but added one of its own. The deadline for money to be allocated for secondary roads was changed from October 1, 1954 to July 15, 1954. George S. Covert, director of the State Department of Highways, argued that changing the deadline meant a reduction in the money appropriated for secondary roads--from \$17,200,000 to about \$15,500,000. The Senate also amended House Bill 5 by adding another item--which in effect, reinstated House Bill 9--and appropriating \$100,000 to the Greater Baton Rouge Port Authority "to pay for land."¹⁸⁹ All of the other Kennon bills were passed without amendments.

Kennon approved all nine bills on July 13, 1953. Of course, Kennon again had his critics. Senator Dayton C.

¹⁸⁸Ibid.

¹⁸⁹Quoted in Ibid., July 10, 1953.

McCann charged that the Kennon administration was one "filled with graft and corruption."¹⁹⁰ Kennon declined to answer the charge. Just as Lieutenant Governor Barham had hurled accusations against Kennon when the 1952 legislature met, he maintained the precedent. On the first day of the special session, the Senate unanimously passed a resolution for Barham to speak, "inasmuch as he has never addressed this august body."¹⁹¹ Speaking on July 8, Barham depicted Kennon's administration as being "extravagant and uneconomical."¹⁹² Kennon's "Blue Ribbon" Boards were described as "dilatory, burdensome, indecisive, and not responsible to the needs of the people."¹⁹³ Kennon's response to Barham's criticism was mild. The governor replied, "democracy works best when there is a full expression of opinion." Continuing in this vein, Kennon uncategorically declared,

I think the best answer to criticism from this or any other source is for the present administration to continue to render constructive service to the state, its institutions and its people.¹⁹⁴

Before the special session adjourned, concurrent resolutions were passed directing the state treasurer to

¹⁹⁰Quoted in Ibid., July 11, 1953.

¹⁹¹Quoted in Ibid., July 7, 1953.

¹⁹²Ibid., July 9, 1953.

¹⁹³Ibid.

¹⁹⁴Ibid.

set aside at least \$1 million for improvements at the Rockefeller Foundation Wild Life and Game Preserve, and improving the House appropriation and Senate finance committees' procedures for operating the state budget.

Kennon continued to show his conservatism in fiscal affairs. Money was gushing into the treasury, so he could indeed cautiously increase state spending without jeopardizing the state's financial posture. He showed his humanism in fighting for increases for the less fortunate-- feeble-minded and deaf--and for the farm communities. The amounts he requested may have been moderate, perhaps even deliberately planned, but Kennon believed in protecting and guarding the state's funds. He took seriously his job of "rendering constructive service to the state, its institutions and its people." The first half of Kennon's administration was fruitful. In excess of \$114,000,000 worth of new manufacturing plants were approved for receiving ten-year property tax exemptions, thus creating more than three thousand jobs. The Department of Commerce and Industry, the state's travel and industrial promotion agency, distributed information apprising investors throughout the United States of Louisiana's natural resources. The department also attracted tourists-- through various publications such as Collier's magazine-- who spent approximately \$200,000,000 in the state in 1952. In 1953, the state board of commerce and industry approved

the first request for a Balance Agriculture With Industry milk processing plant in Franklinton.¹⁹⁵

The Louisiana Legislative Council approved a highway survey to be done by the Automotive Safety Foundation. Costing about \$100,000 and taking about eighteen months to two years to complete, the study was to cover present highway conditions and future requirements. The Department of Highways engaged in road and bridge projects in all the parishes. Several highway and bridge jobs were carried on throughout the state. The New Orleans-Krotz Springs (Airline) Highway, the longest toll-free, four-lane, separated highway in the country, was contracted at \$4,404,000. Work on the Red River Bridge at Plain Dealing was contracted at \$1,400,000, and a contract for \$3,412,000 was signed for widening part of the Old Spanish Trail (Highway 90). The Department of Highways and Bridge Authority received the permit from the U.S. Corps of Engineers to construct a bridge across the Mississippi River at New Orleans.¹⁹⁶

On January 1, 1953, welfare rolls were open for public inspection, allowing taxpayers to know on whom their money was being spent. (Several welfare recipients asked that their names be eliminated from the rolls.)

¹⁹⁵Louisiana Government, No. 21, June 15, 1953, p. 7.

¹⁹⁶"Report to the People," in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 9.

With increased federal funds, welfare recipients who received old age pensions, and general and disability assistance were provided increases of \$2 per month. Construction programs were implemented at East Louisiana State Hospital at Jackson, the Central Louisiana Hospital at Pineville, the state penitentiary at Angola, and the State Colony and Training School at Pineville. For the "forgotten" or "hidden" children of Louisiana (mentally retarded), and the other less-privileged, Kennon showed particular concern for their housing needs.¹⁹⁷

Kennon was upset by the loss of more than 360,000 acres due to forest fires. Subsequently, the Louisiana Forestry Commission held a special training program for combating forest fires during the summer of 1953. Too, the governor issued a plea asking individuals to refrain from starting fires. During his gubernatorial campaign, Kennon had promised to aid farmers. The Louisiana Forestry Service, in an attempt to restore forested areas, offered six thousand farmers at \$2.50 each, a maximum of five thousand pine seedlings to plant in areas which were unfit for farming purposes. Kennon emphasized that he was "anxious that small farmers take advantage of

¹⁹⁷Ibid.

this program now."¹⁹⁸ To encourage young people to stay on farms, the state Department of Education underwrote 25 percent of loans for special projects of reputable farm youth organizations.

Kennon's most important achievement was the new civil service law. He said:

it was a big job to reestablish civil service in time to meet the deadline . . . [which included] the appointment of a commission, selection of a director and the detailed work of establishing classification and wage scales for employees.¹⁹⁹

The Kennon administration reestablished civil service and gave thousands of qualifying and competitive examinations.

The tidelands question tested Kennon's mettle during the first half of his administration. In 1950 the United States Supreme Court had ruled that the federal government had "paramount rights" to offshore oil lands within the historic boundary of Louisiana. This meant that the federal government received the royalties and revenue derived from minerals--oil, gas, and sulphur--found in the off-shore, submerged lands that lay within the three-mile coastal waterways. The federal government did not contest the area that lay between the low- and high-tide marks. Louisiana was permitted to keep oil rights under Breton

¹⁹⁸"Report to the People," in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Folder No. 10, located in Louisiana State Archives, Baton Rouge.

¹⁹⁹Ibid.

and Chandeleur Sounds and the area between the state's east coast and Chandeleur Island and some other coral reefs.

During 1952, the State Mineral Board granted 160 leases, and the state received bonuses of \$14,924,702. By March 15, 1953, there were sixty-three wells within the three-mile limit and 131 outside the limit. Kennon wanted state control of the tidelands out to the continental shelf, or twenty to thirty miles off-shore. This boundary, he contended, was the state's original or historic boundary. The federal government had stressed that the boundary lay three miles from the shore in the Gulf of Mexico.²⁰⁰ Kennon asserted that if an oil well were dug in the Gulf, Louisiana should own it. He stated:

The federal government owns no land--if it's not Louisiana territory, then it's the high seas--and under the freedom of the seas policy, any Tom, Dick, and Harry, the Venezuelans, the Guatemalans, or even the Russians could come into the area.²⁰¹

On January 16, 1953, President Truman issued an executive order setting aside the tidelands as a naval petroleum reserve. Kennon responded that an executive order could not negate the right of Congress to control the tidelands. On February 2, President Eisenhower failed to discuss the tidelands question in his State-of-the-

²⁰⁰Baton Rouge Morning Advocate, January 7, 1953.

²⁰¹Ibid.

Union message. However, he continued to maintain his states' rights stance on the issue. When the tidelands issue came before the 83rd Congress, Kennon was in Washington, in March 1953, urging legislation in favor of the states. He testified before the Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, and asked for state ownership of offshore land which extended to almost ten miles into the Gulf. For some reason, he abandoned his earlier claim of twenty to thirty miles. While in Washington, he also conferred with Eisenhower.²⁰²

Congress overruled the 1950 Supreme Court decision in 1953 and granted Louisiana all offshore lands stretching to three miles from the coast.²⁰³ The compromise coastline was accepted with some misgivings.

Also, during the first half of his administration, Kennon was accused of having apparently "cast his lot with the present Republican administration."²⁰⁴ Not only had he supported Eisenhower's candidacy, he also had endorsed open primary elections in Louisiana. At the time the state had closed primaries in which only registered members of a political party could vote or declare their candidacy. Therefore, only registered Democrats could

²⁰²"Nation Affairs," Newsweek, March 16, 1953, pp. 41-42.

²⁰³New York Wall Street Journal, November 15, 1955.

²⁰⁴Monroe Morning World, October 14, 1953.

participate in Democratic primaries. In open primaries, one's party affiliation was not a prerequisite for voting in a party primary. But, to declare candidacy, one had to be a member of the political party holding the primary.

It may be said with a strong degree of certainty that Kennon helped to advance the Republican party's cause in Louisiana. Near the end of 1953 the Republican party had executive committees in six parishes. The mayor and three aldermen of Oak Grove changed their party registration from Democrat to Republican, and according to the Monroe Morning World, there were "whispers of other 'defections.'"²⁰⁵ The newspaper lauded Kennon for being one of those "enlightened public officials in the South who put party behind principle and good government." However much Kennon was praised for placing "party behind principle," he did not "defect" from the Democratic party. Years later Kennon said in an interview:

I have never changed from Democratic registration. I believe in Democracy. I have never gotten out of the Democratic Party because I hope for the Democratic Party to change so it will be alright for me to be in it.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵Ibid.

²⁰⁶Lewis Morris's Interview of Robert Floyd Kennon, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, January 6, 1983. Oral History Department of the Archives and Record Service, Office of the Secretary of State, State of Louisiana, Baton Rouge, p. 43.

Kennon announced in 1953 that he would be willing to serve a shorter term, permitting the gubernatorial election to be held during the summer of 1955. He believed that would provide more time for the next governor to prepare in advance a legislative program before the legislature convened in May, 1956. Kennon may have offered this proposal because he said his administration had finished its program.²⁰⁷ Kennon's platform promises had in fact become actualized before his four-year term expired.

²⁰⁷New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 14, 1953.

CHAPTER VIII

Governor of Louisiana: 1954-56

The Louisiana legislature convened on May 10, 1954 for its regular biennial session. Since the principal ingredients of Governor Kennon's program had been enacted during 1952, the administration offered only a two-bill program and the necessary general appropriation bill to the legislature. Kennon declared that "very little legislation is being decided in this office."¹ During a press conference, Kennon said his administration had "no far reaching policy-making legislation,"² other than his proposed bond program which would provide money without raising taxes. The governor addressed a joint session of the lawmakers on Tuesday night, May 11th, in a forty-two minute speech which was broadcast on a statewide radio network and televised locally for the first time. Much of the address was a recapitulation of what had been accomplished during his first two years of office. Kennon

¹New Orleans Times-Picayune, June 16, 1954.

²Baton Rouge State-Times, May 13, 1954.

boasted, "Today in Louisiana we have the soundest basis in many years for confidence in responsible government."³

Directing his attention to the budget, Kennon noted that the general fund surplus was estimated at \$33,000,000, of which amount \$15,000,000 was set aside as a reserve in case anticipated revenues from various tax sources fell short. He indicated, nonetheless, that it would be difficult to provide for the increasing needs of the state's public programs. Seven million dollars had been appropriated two years before to police juries; the Board of Liquidation required \$9,000,000 for loans, festivals, direct student aid and other miscellaneous items.⁴ Informing the legislators that their appropriations totaled almost \$20,000,000, Kennon said that to take more from the general fund would endanger the state's school services or other important agencies. With the increasing growth in population, according to Kennon, the school system would need an additional \$8,000,000 the following year, and \$10,000,000 more the next year. He also mentioned that additional funds were needed for the operation of charity and mental hospitals, and other state

³Kennon's Address to the Legislature, May 11, 1954, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 10, located in Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, hereinafter cited as Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, with appropriate Box.

⁴Ibid

buildings.⁵ However, Kennon emphatically stated that in the budget, he had "endeavored to provide increases which our best fiscal judgment indicates as the minimum amounts necessary to maintain present levels of operation and to meet minimum requirements of the Civil Service pay plan."⁶

Turning to his two proposed bond issues, Kennon supported his \$50,000,000 highway issue, which had been introduced the day before, by saying "We've grown and our facilities and roads must grow with us." He asserted, "This is no different from a family buying a home on the installment plan. Our state's total debt will still be less than one year's income, which is a good yardstick to measure the reasonableness of public debt."⁷ Kennon did not provide details of the proposed institutional bond issue for state buildings. But, he did state that Louisianians would pay for the "genuinely worth-while benefits"⁸ as the benefits were used.

Kennon's highway bond proposal, House Bill 76, was introduced by Representatives Kenneth Cagle, Bryan Lehmann, and others. This measure proposed to sell \$50,000,000 in bonds to finance constructing,

⁵Ibid

⁶Ibid

⁷Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, May 12, 1954.

⁸Kennon's Address to the Legislature, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 10.

reconstructing, and improving state highways and bridges. The bond issue was to be redeemed by one cent of a two-cent gasoline tax which had been levied by the 1936 legislature. The highway bond issue declared the Department of Highways to be a corporate body, with authority from the Board of Highways to issue bonds. This meant that the bonds were not direct obligations of the state, but rather of the Department of Highways. Kennon's highway bond proposal was introduced as a proposed statute requiring only a legislative majority vote, without submission to the voters. The opposition wanted to introduce the measure as a proposed constitutional amendment which would require ratification by the voters. Lieutenant Governor C. E. Barham and former Governor Earl Long were critical of both bond issues. Barham contended that any bond issue should be approved by the voters. Further, he stated, the legislators needed to "think about the people who are getting gray hairs trying to pay taxes and make ends meet--some even have heart attacks."⁹ Long said the bond issue was indicative of the guilt that the Kennon administration felt in repealing the two-cent gasoline tax in 1952. The former governor said he, too, was against bond issues not submitted to the voters. However, unnamed administration spokesmen claimed that if

⁹Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, May 10, 1954.

the bond issues were passed as acts, approximately six months' time would be saved and the issues implemented.¹⁰

A companion bill, House Bill 77, introduced by Cagle, Lehmann and W.M. Dawkins provided that the Highway Department was to use \$15,000,000 a year for the next two years on rural and secondary or farm-to-market roads. Other objections in the House focused on the argument that major highway construction and planning should not be undertaken until the findings of a survey conducted by the Automotive Safety Association and a study by the LSU commerce division had been submitted. Other individuals questioned whether the highway department was a body politic. Administration leaders said they would attempt to get a Supreme Court ruling on the constitutionality of establishing the highway department as a body politic if the legislature passed the bond issue.¹¹

The highway bond issue finally passed by a vote of 64 to 31, after Representative Ford Stinson of Bossier City failed to amend the bill making it a constitutional amendment requiring ratification by the voters. The companion bill also passed.¹²

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., May 18, 1954.

¹²Ibid., May 21, 1954; New Orleans Times-Picayune, May 21, 1954.

In the Senate, administration floor leader Robert Ainsworth led the fight for the bill. Senator James D. Sparks of Monroe, preferring a constitutional amendment, stated that the senators were "forcing the people [Louisianians] to pay a \$19,000,000 penalty in interest payments."¹³ According to Sparks, a good road program in Louisiana could be achieved by constructing toll roads, finding a new source of money for highways, and providing a good engineering plan.¹⁴ Ainsworth responded by declaring that only a small percentage of voters had cast votes for constitutional amendment bond issues since 1940. He reminded the senators that they were the "chosen representatives of the people of Louisiana."¹⁵ The administration bill passed the Senate by a vote of 26 to 12, and the companion rural road bill passed unanimously.

Kennon pushed for legislative support of his administration bill by reiterating his promise that both bond issues could be utilized "without one increase in

¹³New Orleans Times-Picayune, May 28, 1954.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Quoted in Ibid.

taxes."¹⁶ On June 1, 1954, Kennon approved both bills and they became Acts 5 and 6.¹⁷

Kennon's fight for legislative approval of his institutional bond bill was less hectic. House Bill 213, provided for a \$39,950,000 bond issue to be used for capital outlay at colleges and institutions.¹⁸ The surplus of the 1.47 mill state property tax was dedicated as payment for the bonds. The Louisiana Building Authority, which had been created as a corporate body by the legislature in 1952, would issue the bonds. The administration's allocations of the proposed bond issue were: State Board of Education, \$11,700,000; Louisiana State University, \$5,600,000; Department of Institutions, \$13,113,000; and other buildings, repairs and equipment,

¹⁶Quoted in Ibid., May 20, 1954.

¹⁷State of Louisiana, Acts passed by the Legislature at the Regular Session of 1954 (Baton Rouge 1954), 8-12. Published legislative actions are hereinafter cited as Acts of Louisiana, with appropriate session and year indicated; The administration pushed the bond bill through the legislature to secure a state supreme court test. State Treasurer A.P. Tugwell and others filed a suit to test the constitutionality of the \$50,000,000 highway bond issue. On December 15, 1954 the East Baton Rouge district court ruled that the bonding of the gasoline tax was illegal. When the case was appealed to the state Supreme Court, this judicial body concurred with the ruling of the lower court, but declared that the highway department was a corporate body which could issue bonds. Kennon lost this battle, but the fight for financing of highway construction would continue to emerge in later legislative sessions.

¹⁸Baton Rouge State Times, May 12, 1954.

\$9,537,000.¹⁹ Kennon charged that if the bond issue were adopted, that "long-standing and often cruel injustices and deficiencies against the physically, mentally and morally handicapped . . ." ²⁰ would be eradicated.

In the House, two representatives, Gilbert Faulk and Shady Wall, objected on the ground that some colleges were allocated more than others. State Superintendent Shelby Jackson and S.S. Fredericks, a member of the State Board of Education, complained that the Board was not included in the decision making of the college figures.

Representative D. E. Becnel asserted that the "bond issue will saddle the people another thirty years with the property tax--it ought to go to the people for a vote."²¹

The House amended the bill by increasing the total to \$41,948,500: LSU to receive an additional \$628,500; Southern University, \$350,000; and New Orleans Charity Hospital, \$220,000. The House passed the bill by a vote of 61 to 31.

Dayton McCann, still a nuisance to Kennon's leaders in the Senate, attempted to change the bill into a

¹⁹ PAR Legislative Bulletin, "Summary of the Week," No. 1 (Baton Rouge: Public Affairs Research Corral of La., Inc., May 15, 1954), pp. 4-5, hereinafter cited as PAR Legislative Bulletin, with appropriate number and date.

²⁰ Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, May 12, 1954.

²¹ Quoted in Ibid., May 25, 1954.

constitutional amendment and to cut funds for Angola. His efforts were futile. The bill alluded to by Senator Ainsworth as "the greatest humanitarian program ever undertaken in the state of Louisiana,"²² was passed by a vote of 29 to 9. On June 9th, Kennon approved the bill and it became Act 13.

Apparently pleased with legislative approval, Kennon, a member of the Louisiana Building Authority, said he wanted to "get the show on the road."²³ Furthermore, he asserted that he wanted "to see plans and specifications ready by Jan. 1, and construction starting in the spring."²⁴ If Kennon's two-bond program of \$92,000,000 had been accepted fully, it would have been the state's largest building programs since the 1930's.

As chief executive of Louisiana, Kennon had to prepare the state's executive budget for biennium 1954-1956, just as he had done for 1952-1954. Kennon asserted that his budget, which would be balanced without a tax increase, had an estimated total of \$664,000,000 in revenues and receipts. From this amount he deducted \$43,000,000 which the state collected for parishes and municipalities and an additional \$22,000,000 "of excess of

²²Quoted in Ibid., June 3, 1954.

²³Quoted in Ibid., July 8, 1954.

²⁴Quoted in Ibid.

revenues in certain special funds which are not available for general use."²⁵ After these deductions, the state had approximately \$600,000,000 for state spending. In his budget message Kennon said of his budget:

[The budget] can be carried out within the framework of our present tax structure, unless our economy suffers a serious setback. As you know, this administration has reduced the tax burden on our people by approximately \$17,000,000 each year and I feel that our economy can stand no new taxes at this time. I therefore solicit your co-operation in holding appropriations within revenues estimated to be available during the biennium.²⁶

The governor's recommended appropriations included:

- (1) \$248,900,000 for education, an increase of 9.2 percent over the 1952-1954 budget. Comprising 41.5 percent of the proposed budget, the funds for education were considered in light of the need of increased funds for free school books, teachers salaries, employers' contributions to teachers' retirement system, and operational expenses of state colleges;
- (2) \$87.8 million for public welfare, an increase of 1.4 percent from the past biennium;
- (3) \$67,000,000 for highways (exclusive of debt service), a decrease of 0.5 from the last biennium;
- (4) \$57,900,000 for hospitals, mental, penal, and correctional institutions, an increase of 16.2 percent;
- (5) \$47,500,000 for homestead exemptions, an increase of 14.8 percent;
- (6)

²⁵New Orleans Times-Picayune, May 24, 1954.

²⁶Quoted in Ibid.

\$39,100,000 for debt service, a decrease of 13.8 percent; (7) \$22,200,000 for general government, an increase of 11.9 percent; and (8) \$29,900,000 for all other appropriations, an increase of 11.9 percent. Included in the budget were the estimated surpluses of \$61,900,000 in the general fund; \$35,000,000 in the public welfare fund; \$3,200,000 in the conservation fund; and \$9,200,000 for the Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge and Game Preserve.²⁷

Kennon's general appropriation bill did not include appropriations for debt service (excluding the highway debt), homestead exemptions, the increases in teachers' salaries, and other special appropriations--such as funds for fairs, festivals, state buildings and parks, dams, and others. These appropriations were funded separately by the legislature. The general appropriation bill, House Bill 663, introduced by Lehmann on May 23, 1954, requested an expenditure of \$515,700,000 for the biennium.

The House of Representatives hiked the general appropriations bill to \$530,000,000. Of the nearly \$14,000,000 increase, \$12,100,000 went to education. State Superintendent of Education Shelby Jackson requested an increase from \$44.40 to \$48 per educable student. Trade schools received an increase of \$717,458; LSU received \$1,348,442, along with a 60 percent restoration of an

²⁷Ibid; PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 3, May 29, 1954, p. 3.

almost \$2,000,000 cut in its operating budget; and state college funds were increased about \$1,600,000.²⁸ Other amendments to the bill provided for a 5 percent deduction of allocations if the revenues fell short and prohibited the utilization of welfare surpluses for any other use but welfare.²⁹ Senate finance chairman Charles Tooke, Jr., declared that new taxes would be levied in 1956, but his warnings went unheeded, as the House passed the amended general appropriation bill by a vote of 83 to 2.³⁰

The Senate accepted the increase voted by the House, and added almost \$1,000,000 more to the general appropriations bill, increasing the total to \$533,000,000. Southern University, receiving the largest increase, was allocated \$230,000 to equip and furnish new buildings. The State Department of Institutions was granted an additional \$100,000 to establish alcoholic treatment programs at charity hospitals; the Office of Civil Defense received \$100,000; Northeast Louisiana State College received \$80,000; the Louisiana Commission on Alcoholism was allocated \$10,000; and the Rapides Parish water district was funded \$70,000 to meet interest on the bonds.

²⁸In addition school teachers were provided about \$16 million in a pay raise. The funds were taken from the proceeds of the sales tax.

²⁹Baton Rouge State Times, June 7, 1954.

³⁰Ibid., June 8, 1954.

The longest and the most heated argument occurred over the allocation to alcoholic treatment centers. Senator Guy Gardiner of Crowley contended that a ten-man committee of medical experts had studied the problems of alcoholics and recommended the figure.

Senator Ainsworth supported Gardiner's assertions and said that he had been told that the state had between 70,000 and 80,000 problem drinkers of whom about 20 percent were alcoholics.³¹ The Senate rushed the general appropriations bill through in less than three hours. According to the Baton Rouge State Times, "Except for one or two red lights on a few budgets, senators seemed in a green light mood as item after item received unanimous passage."³² Most veteran legislators declared that the bill received the "fastest action"³³ within their memory. The Senate approved the general appropriations bill by a vote of 35 to 0.

Kennon approved the general appropriation bill, but made several cuts in special appropriation bills. He had stated several times that there would be less money for special appropriations after the general appropriations bill. During the legislative session, 253 separate

³¹Ibid., June 29, 1954; New Orleans Times-Picayune, June 29, 1954.

³²Baton Rouge State Times, June 29, 1954.

³³Ibid.

appropriation bills were introduced amounting to \$738,200,000 for fiscal 1954-1956. The legislature cut this amount by \$147,800,000 or 20 percent, but raised the general appropriations bill by \$16,500,000 or 3.2 percent. Therefore Kennon vetoed twenty-three special appropriation bills and reduced proposed appropriations by \$5,400,000. Included in Kennon's vetoes were bills authorizing (1) an appropriation of \$150,000 from the Rockefeller Fund surplus for a health center in Acadia Parish; (2) an additional judge each for the 10th and 23rd Judicial Districts; (3) an appropriation of \$35,000 to the State Board of Education for Sullivan Memorial Trade School; (4) an appropriation of \$55,000 for repairs on buildings and streets at Louisiana Polytechnic Institute; and (5) an appropriation of \$17,500 a year to LSU for research in soil and water management.³⁴ The 143 special appropriations acts amounted to \$52,900,000. Appropriations for the 1954-1956 biennium were increased by \$57,300,000 over the appropriations of the 1952 and 1953 regular and special sessions respectively.³⁵

The \$585,100,000 appropriated by the legislature represented a little over 50 percent of the amount the

³⁴New Orleans Times-Picayune, July 10, 1954.

³⁵PAR Legislative Bulletin, "Summary of the Week," No. 9 (Baton Rouge: Public Affairs Research Council of La., Inc., August 6, 1954), p. 3.

state spent during the 1954-1956 biennium. The State Budget Office gave a total figure of \$835,100,000 for state revenues. Federal grants amounted to \$169,176,026; severance taxes, \$135,168,000; Louisiana sales tax, \$126,000,000; gasoline tax, \$89,000,000; mineral leases and royalties, \$77,730,000; tobacco tax, \$39,000,000; beverage taxes, \$38,130,000; income tax, \$34,000,000; ad valorem tax, \$30,850,000; gas gathering tax, \$21,000,000; vehicle licenses and fees, \$16,448,000; insurance licenses and fees, \$10,194,000; and all others, \$49,610,995.³⁶

After the passage of the two-bond proposals and the general appropriation bill, Kennon did not involve himself directly in other legislative matters. Even when Senator W. M. Rainach of Summerfield introduced the "Right-to-Work" bill providing that a person could not be denied employment if he were not a member of a labor union, Kennon signed the bill, declaring that he had spent considerable time studying it. He stated emphatically that he had "followed with a great deal of interest the presentation of views in both [the] Senate and House." Furthermore, the governor said that the legislators had given "a complete hearing, and necessary time and attention to become informed on the merits of the

³⁶Louisiana, Office of the Director of the Budget, State Budget, 1954-1956, p. 7.

measure."³⁷ However, Kennon tried not to antagonize labor union leaders. He said he believed every American had a right to organize and bargain collectively and that he would sign a bill guaranteeing the right of not joining a union. Before signing the bill, Kennon met with E. H. Williams, president of the State Federation of Labor (AFL) and other union leaders. Apparently the meeting went without incident, for following Kennon's signing of the bill, Williams issued a statement saying the United Labor Organizations--a joint labor group organized to fight the bill--would accept the law which was termed to be "class legislation of punitive and restrictive design."³⁸

For years cattle, pigs, horses and goats had been allowed to roam Louisiana highways, risking the lives of motorists. Two stock law bills introduced by Representatives Perry Roberts and Cecil Blair proposed to ban stock from major highways with a daily vehicle count of 1000 or more, and to provide \$400,000 over a two-year period to help build fences if the local areas matched funds.³⁹

³⁷Quoted in New Orleans Time-Picayune, July 2, 1954.

³⁸Quoted in Ibid., July 3, 1954.

³⁹Baton Rouge State Times, June 23, 1954.

At one point, Kennon said he was "friendly"⁴⁰ to both the Roberts stock law measure and the Blair fencing proposal, but asserted that he had not pledged to sign either measure. The governor contended that he wanted to "do what is best for everyone concerned, but I believe in leaving policy-making decisions up to an independent Legislature."⁴¹ However, Kennon signed the two-point program and Louisiana had its first livestock fencing law.

Even when the United States Supreme Court ordered public school desegregation in 1954 in the landmark case, Brown V. Board of Education of Topeka, Kennon did not seem to be too perturbed. On May 17, 1954, the nation's highest court ruled unanimously that racial segregation of children in public schools deprived black children of the equal protection of the laws. Louisiana was one of seventeen states and the District of Columbia (with 70 percent of the nation's black population of 10,522,495) which operated a dual or segregated school system.⁴²

⁴⁰Quoted in Ibid.

⁴¹Quoted in Ibid.

⁴²Ibid., May 17, 1954; see also Edward Pinney and Robert Friedman, Political Leadership and the School Desegregation Crisis in Louisiana (New York: Eagleton Institute Cases in Practical Politics, No. 31, 1963).

As early as April 21, 1953, Kennon said Louisiana was "meeting in advance"⁴³ the school segregation problem. He contended that the state educational system was aware of the need for additional facilities for black students, and that steps--which he did not outline--had been taken to equalize black school facilities. The governor also insisted that, "We [Louisiana] have gone further than any other state concerned, so any decision by the United States Supreme Court will not pose a critical problem."⁴⁴ On March 15, 1954, he spoke at the 17th annual convention of the Louisiana School Board Association and said he did not "want anyone from a town on the Potomac [Washington, D. C.] telling us how to handle our children."⁴⁵ After the court decision, Kennon suggested that the legislature should start investigating immediately the effects of the Brown decision. On May 19th, the governor met with legislative and educational leaders in the governor's mansion.⁴⁶ Supposedly the closed mansion conference was

⁴³Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, April 22, 1953.

⁴⁴Quoted in Ibid.

⁴⁵Quoted in papers on Kennon, in Louisiana Department, Louisiana State Library, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

⁴⁶It is believed that the meeting was attended by the following: Lt. Gov. C. E. "Cap" Barham, Shelby M. Jackson, state superintendent of education; George T. Madison, Bastrop, member of the state education board; Leander Perez, district attorney for St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes; Rep. E. W. Gravolet, Jr., Plaquemines parish; A. P. Tugwell, state treasurer; Wade

called after Representative E. W. Gravolet introduced a resolution suggesting that the legislature seek ways to bypass the Supreme Court's orders. Gravolet and Leander Perez, the District Attorney of Plaquemines and St. Bernard Parishes, drafted the resolution which declared that the decision would "only result in racial turmoil, strife, and confusion. . . ." ⁴⁷ At Kennon's mansion meeting the language of the resolution was changed to a milder form, asserting that the legislature would "address itself to provide ways and means whereby our existing social order shall be preserved in our institutions and ways of life. . . ." ⁴⁸

Also coming about as a result of Kennon's mansion meeting was another resolution providing for a ten-member legislative committee to be appointed to draft legislation

O. Martin, Jr., secretary of state; Fred LeBlanc, state attorney general; Allison R. Kolb, state auditor; Rep. C. C. Aycock, St. Mary parish, speaker of the House of Representatives; Rep. Bryan J. Lehmann, St. Charles parish, chairman of the House appropriations committee; Rep. Theodore M. Hickey, leader of the Orleans delegation in the House; Rep. Joseph S. Casey, New Orleans; Rep. W. J. Cleveland, Acadia; Rep. Lloyd G. Teekel, Rapides parish; Rep. Kenneth H. Cagle, Calcasieu parish, administration floor leader in the House; Rep. Lorris M. Wimberly, Bienville Parish; Sen. W. M. Rainach, Summerfield; Rep. J. Thomas Jewell, Pointe Coupee parish, and Claude Harrison, Monroe, former chairman of the state board of institutions.

⁴⁷Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, May 19, 1954.

⁴⁸Quoted in PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 5, June 12, 1954, p. 5.

to continue segregation. The only opponent to the resolution was Senator Smith Guthrie who stated, "We already have too much unstudy, study committees."⁴⁹ The committee, chaired by Senator W. M. Rainach, was mandated to investigate school board records and to look into all facets of segregation in the state in order to seek the best approach for maintaining segregation. The approach Kennon preferred was that of providing state financial aid for school boards to construct new schools if the need arose.⁵⁰

After much study, the joint legislative committee drafted three bills mandating Louisiana to use its inherent police power to assure the continuation of segregation in public schools. Rainach said that a vote against the bills was an open invitation to integrate the schools. The three bills provided (1) for racial segregation of schools, excluding private and parochial, under the police power of the state, and for the legislature to submit proposed constitutional amendments relative to education at special elections; (2) that the State Board of Education should not approve any public school which was not segregated or that no state university or college was to accept a certificate of

⁴⁹Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, June 10, 1954.

⁵⁰Ibid., June 12, 1954.

graduation from any integrated public school. (Any school violating the law would not receive free books, funds for school lunches and other school supplies. Any party guilty of violating the act was subject to a \$500 fine or ninety days in jail); and (3) that parish school superintendents assign students to public schools.⁵¹

Kennon signed the bills and they became Acts 752, 555 and 556. But, in the meantime, he was busy meeting with other Southern governors in an attempt to bypass the Brown decision. All of their efforts were futile. At a June 10th conference of Southern governors which convened at Richmond, Virginia, Kennon proposed a closed session. Acting Governor Charles Johns of Florida objected to the proposal. Kennon's motion included a statement that Carter Lowance, executive assistant to Governor Thomas B. Stanley of Virginia (chairman of the conference), inform the press on what had transpired.⁵² The Baton Rouge State Times of June 11th wrote of the meeting, "Governors Fail to Map Action on Segregation."⁵³ Probably, Governor Stanley summed up the failure best when he told newsmen "that the problems are ones requiring the decision of individual states and that a meeting of this kind can only

⁵¹Ibid., July 6, 1954; New Orleans Times-Picayune, July 7, 1954.

⁵²Baton Rouge State Times, June 10, 1954.

⁵³Ibid., June 11, 1954.

be helpful in the exchange of information."⁵⁴ Although the Brown decision was rendered in 1954, specific suits to integrate schools in Louisiana were not introduced locally until 1956 (by which time Earl Long was again governor), and these suits were not decided until 1960, when Jimmie Davis was governor. Kennon never really had to deal with the reality of court-imposed desegregation. Later governors did.

Before the legislature adjourned on July 9th, the solons set an historic precedent by accepting Senator Ainsworth's constitutional proposal of maintaining the 60-day sessions in even years and adding 30-day sessions in odd years limited to fiscal matters only, with no new taxes or tax increases. (However, a three-fourths vote of the legislature could permit other issues to be discussed.) Also included was the stipulation that the governor give at least five days advance notice in writing prior to convening a special session. The proposal was later approved by the voters. Of the 816 bills passed by the legislature, Kennon signed 733 and vetoed 44.⁵⁵ Senator Ainsworth declared that Kennon's \$92,000,000 bond

⁵⁴Quoted in Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid., July 10, 1954; New Orleans Times Picayune, July 10, 1954; PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 2, May 22, 1954, pp. 6-8.

program was the "outstanding accomplishment"⁵⁶ of the session. Apparently disagreeing with Kennon's view that the legislature was independent, an administration critic, Senator B. B. Rayburn, replied, "This has been far away from being an independent legislature. I have seen the votes on several controversial measures change overnight." Rayburn said Kennon was "a genius" and "one of the keenest political maneuverers I've ever known."⁵⁷ Alluding to Kennon's effectiveness, former Governor Earl Long said he had "never seen a governor" who had "been cussed so much by the people and legislators and yet [who] is able to come here and get everything he wants."⁵⁸

Kennon kept his promise of not increasing taxes, despite the fact that record-high state spending was authorized. But if Kennon was not a "tax-and-spend" governor, he was a "borrow-and-spend governor," as much of his program was financed by bond issues. Kennon's signing of the "Right-To-Work" bill did not endear him to labor leaders, but he did meet with them prior to signing the law, perhaps reducing the animosity between his office and organized labor. Kennon always attempted to find a compromise amidst extreme points of view.

⁵⁶Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, July 3, 1954.

⁵⁷Quoted in Ibid.

⁵⁸Quoted in Ibid., June 5, 1954.

Kennon could boast of a number of successes during his first thirty-two months in office. He pointed out that more than 31,000 applications had been processed for several hundred different positions within the state Civil Service. The Department established programs to improve personnel management and conducted studies on how to equalize state pay with private industrial salaries. Over \$418,000,000 in new industry was registered by the Department of Commerce and Industry. Louisiana college graduates were remaining in the state, and out-of-state trained graduates were moving to Louisiana to work in Louisiana industries. Of the \$27,638,466.44 allocated to the Department of Institutions for construction projects, only \$400,000 was not under contract. A program of treatment for alcoholics had been inaugurated by the Huey P. Long Charity Hospital and one was to soon open at the Lafayette Charity Hospital. The rehabilitation and treatment programs for prisoners at Angola were constantly improving. A reformatory for younger prisoners and first offenders located in the area of Dequincy was on the drawing board.⁵⁹

A Public Affairs Research Council special report, "20 Years of Louisiana Politics 1950-1970," described the Kennon years as "the heyday of large bonuses received by

⁵⁹Ibid., January 4, 1955.

the state for leasing its oil-rich lands. Money poured into the treasury at a reckless pace and was spent even more recklessly."⁶⁰ Furthermore, the report declared that "State spending rose rapidly but surpluses still built up in the state treasury, and 'emergency' special sessions were called to spend these surpluses for pet projects."⁶¹

Louisiana's highway needs continued to plague Kennon. After an East Baton Rouge Parish District Court ruled his highway bond program unconstitutional, Kennon devised another plan to secure the funds on a cash basis rather than through a bond issue.⁶² Continued road improvement funds constituted an emergency, for in December, 1954, Kennon summoned the legislators to a special session to address highway needs. Giving credence to Kennon's action were the findings of the Automotive Safety Foundation. This agency reported that more than 50 percent of the

⁶⁰PAR Analysis, "20 Years of Louisiana Politics 1950-1970," No. 168 (Baton Rouge: Public Affairs Research Council of La., Inc., October, 1970), p. 6, hereinafter cited as "20 years of Louisiana Politics."

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Kennon did not wait for the decision of the Supreme Court. Too, the highway board agreed not to issue any of the bonds if the state's highest court upheld the bond issue until after the Budgetary session of May 1955.

state's roads and streets were deficient and would need \$2.6 billion of work over a fifteen-year period.⁶³

On January 3, 1955, the special session of the Louisiana Legislature convened, and Kennon addressed the joint session that night. He informed the solons that they were meeting as a result of the "fortunate fiscal developments during the last six months of 1954."⁶⁴ Kennon said that with unexpected funds from state tideland leaseings coming to Louisiana under the Eisenhower Submerged Lands Act of 1953 (in excess of \$40,000,000 with another \$10,000,000 anticipated before June 30, 1955), the \$50,000,000 highway program could be financed on a cash basis. He suggested that it was not wise to wait until the budgetary session of May, because "the contracts could not be let until June or July and much of the spring and summer outdoor construction season would be lost."⁶⁵ If the legislators appropriated the money, the contracts would be authorized at the January meeting of the highway board and work begun before the May session convened.

⁶³New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 3, 1955; Monthly Analysis of News on Louisiana Government, Louisiana Government in the News, "State News," No. 38 (Baton Rouge: Public Affairs Research Council of La., Inc., January 15, 1955, p. 2, hereinafter cited as Louisiana Government, with appropriate number and date.

⁶⁴Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, January 4, 1955.

⁶⁵Ibid.

Kennon promised that the roads would aid agriculture and new industries in smaller communities.

Kennon's legislative program was offered in three bills by Representatives John B. Cook and Cagle. Cook's House Bills 1 and 2 provided a \$30,000,000 appropriation from the current general fund surplus for highway construction and maintenance, and a \$125,000 appropriation for expenses of the session. Cagle's House Bill 3 proposed a \$20,000,000 appropriation from the general fund surplus of fiscal 1955-1956 for highway construction and maintenance.⁶⁶

Among opponents of the administration, Representative Edward Dubuisson felt that the money should be used for schools instead of highways. He warned that a "raid on the treasury" during the special session would settle major issues and leave them with "nothing to do but twiddle [their] thumbs"⁶⁷ in May. House Bills 2 and 3 passed 93 to 2 and 78 to 164, respectively, in the House.⁶⁸

Objections to the highway bills were also raised in the Senate. Senator Dayton McCann warned that if a Depression occurred, state colleges possibly would be

⁶⁶New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 4, 1955.

⁶⁷Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, January 5, 1955.

⁶⁸Ibid., New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 6, 1955.

unable to meet honor obligations on revenue bonds which had been authorized by the state education board. The bonds were paid from college revenues. Senator Clyde Caillouet replied that roads were of vital importance and cited the case of five children who were killed when a school bus was involved in a wreck on a narrow highway.⁶⁹ With so little opposition, the bills passed 35 to 0, and 33 to 2, respectively, in the Senate.⁷⁰ Kennon said in a press conference that the \$50,000,000 program was interim until a more long-range plan could be presented at the budgetary session.

On January 8th, the same day that Kennon signed the \$50,000,000 program into law, a sixteen-man joint legislative committee, headed by Senator James Sparks, was appointed to draft legislation for a long-range highway plan to be presented at the May budgetary session.⁷¹ "Backed by Governor Kennon,"⁷² the committee was expected to utilize the survey of the Automotive Safety Foundation, which delineated how the state could reclassify its highways and roads and begin a fifteen-year construction project at a cost of \$2.6 billion.

⁶⁹New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 7, 1955.

⁷⁰Ibid., January 8, 1955.

⁷¹Ibid., January 8, 1955.

⁷²Ibid.

When the legislative session ended, Senator Gove Davis predicted another special session for March. Kennon, laughing, said, "They haven't told me that one." He declared that he knew of "no plans"⁷³ for such a session.

The legislature did not convene again until May 9th; prior to that date, Kennon said he would not recommend any general changes in appropriations of the 1954 legislative session. Even before Kennon addressed the solons, the joint legislative highway committee and the joint legislative segregation committees prepared legislation. The highway committee asked for \$15,000,000 to begin the long-range highway program.⁷⁴ The segregation committee requested an appropriation of \$33,000,000 to initiate its staggering \$225,000,000 school construction program. The committee also proposed a constitutional amendment which would allocate most state mineral revenues to public education, highways and retirement of existing bonded indebtedness. The state education board asked for about \$15,000,000 a year for a newly approved, five-year construction program for trade schools, special schools, and state colleges that would cost \$80 million. The Louisiana Municipal Association requested funds from

⁷³Quoted in Ibid., January 14, 1955.

⁷⁴Ibid., May 8, 1955.

tidelands money for city and parish public work projects. Included in other appropriation requests were about \$2,000,000 to the department of public works for levee and drainage work, and \$2,000,000 for agricultural needs.⁷⁵

Speaking before a joint session of the Senate and House, Kennon said that the "urgent needs" of schools and colleges, institutions, public works and highways would "more than absorb the surplus monies now available, and [that] consideration of new fields into which oil revenues may fill legitimate state needs will rest largely with the 1956 and subsequent Louisiana Legislatures."⁷⁶ Kennon meant that he was not amenable to constitutional amendments providing for dedication of mineral revenues to long-range school building and highway programs as requested by the two joint legislative committees. In light of the state's wealth in regard to natural resources, Kennon stated that "God has been generous in His gifts to us, and for our natural advantages and special blessings of Providence we must be always humbly grateful."⁷⁷

Kennon cited specific problems which he wanted the lawmakers to address. He asked for additional funds for

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Quoted in Ibid., May 12, 1955.

⁷⁷Address of Kennon, in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 10.

building purposes at universities and state colleges; additional money for capital improvements for institutions, specifying that a \$1,500,000 appropriation was needed to complete the first-offender institution at DeQuincy; special attention to the bills proposed by the joint highway committee, and the removal of operating funds for hospitals from the sales tax fund to the general fund. This was to be done since the teacher salary raises given in 1954 had reduced the sales tax fund, placing the welfare program in a precarious position if an emergency occurred. Kennon also wanted increased appropriations for an expanding public works department.⁷⁸

Since many legislators wanted to introduce non-fiscal bills, screening committees were set up in both houses to ascertain what bills were actually fiscal according to the guidelines of the constitutional amendment authorizing the budgetary session. All bills determined as non-fiscal required a vote of 76 in the House and 30 in the Senate before being introduced. Of the 321 bills introduced 298 were declared fiscal.⁷⁹

House Bill 294 requested an appropriation of \$15,935,000 for capital outlay in construction and improvements at educational, charitable, correctional and

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 2, May 20, 1955, p.1.

penal institutions. Included in the appropriation was \$1,500,000 to be used for the correctional institute at DeQuincy; \$500,000 for the state hospital at Pineville, \$1,000,000 for Southwestern Louisiana Institute; \$1,000,000 for Louisiana State University; and \$400,000 for the Louisiana State School for the Deaf.⁸⁰ The House and the Senate approved the bill, but Kennon vetoed the \$1,000,000 allocation for Northwestern State College and another \$1,000,000 for Southeastern Louisiana College, since they had "not been faced with student body increases as [had] the other colleges and universities."⁸¹

Possibly, he felt that the two institutions could operate with their present funds and the allocations received in Act 63, which appropriated \$163,361.50 and \$101,491.50, to Northwestern and Southeastern, respectively, for operational expenses. Of all the appropriations enacted, education received almost half. Public elementary and secondary schools received \$3,062,973; universities and colleges were funded at \$16,246,665, special schools for the deaf, blind, and spastic were allocated \$1,900,359; trade schools received \$500,000 and an educational and recreational center. Future Farmers of America students

⁸⁰Acts of Louisiana, Regular Session (1955), 222-226.

⁸¹Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, June 10, 1955.

and the legislators' student aid fund were allocated \$853,200.⁸²

Another appropriation vetoed by Kennon was the \$6 per capita in surplus oil revenues for city and parish public works projects. The Louisiana Municipal Association sponsored the bill even though the governor told Armand Viator, president of the association, that the bill would not be signed. Viator declared that Kennon "gave me a flat 'no'."⁸³

From the outset, Kennon advised Senator Willie Rainach's joint segregation committee that he was opposed to the \$33,000,000 requested for school construction. Kennon said the committee's plan was "too expensive"⁸⁴ and instead offered a substitute \$8,000,000 bill for school construction. The governor also opposed a compromise bill and said the committee did not realize that:

it would have the effect of stopping local school constructions. It would be a little shot in the arm that would make them feel good artificially and

⁸²PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 3, June 17, 1955, p. 4.

⁸³Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, June 7, 1955. It should be noted that the legislature requested over \$100,000,000 when the state had only about \$50,000,000 to spend. Governor Kennon was left with the responsibility of attempting to balance the budget. He therefore vetoed those items that he considered to be of less importance.

⁸⁴Ibid., May 20, 1955.

temporarily. As soon as the effects wore off, they would realize it wasn't doing them any real good.⁸⁵

Instead Kennon offered an administration measure, House Bill 188, which provided for matching funds on a 50-to-50 basis for school districts which had bonded up to 20 percent of their assessed valuation. However, this bill "died on the calendar following legislative approval of HB194."⁸⁶ House Bill 194, introduced by Ford Stinson and others, requested an appropriation for \$8,500,000 for fiscal 1954-1955 and \$25,000,000 for fiscal 1955-1956 for state grants to local schools.⁸⁷ Rainach said the \$8,000,000 offered by Kennon would provide only "token assistance."⁸⁸ Of the \$33,000,000 requested by Rainach's group, State Superintendent of Education Shelby Jackson contended that the amount was only one-third of what was really needed for school construction.⁸⁹ After the bill's passage in both houses, Kennon vetoed House Bill 194, giving his reasons in a seven-page typewritten statement. He stated that education had already received "the largest

⁸⁵Quoted in Ibid., May 21, 1955.

⁸⁶PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 3, June 17, 1955, p. 5.

⁸⁷New Orleans Times-Picayune, May 17, 1955.

⁸⁸Quoted in Ibid., May 20, 1955.

⁸⁹Ibid.

share"⁹⁰ of the appropriations made at the budgetary session. Kennon declared that there was "a serious question as to whether the state [would] have the money, without excessive new state taxes, to meet local construction needs." He said that "any emergencies" could be met by local school boards through the authority given by other legislation at the budgetary session.⁹¹ Here again, Kennon had used his power to cut appropriations, knowing that available revenues were limited. However, the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, Incorporated, insisted in its Bulletin of June 17, 1955, that "[the] undermining of legislative responsibility is highlighted . . . by the virtually absolute veto power of the governor."⁹² All appropriation bills had to be on the governor's desk five days before the legislature adjourned. The governor then had ten days to sign or to veto bills. So, the governor signed or vetoed bills after the legislature adjourned, giving the legislators no "opportunity to review and possibly override the governor's veto."⁹³

⁹⁰Quoted in Ibid., June 11, 1955.

⁹¹Baton Rouge State Times, June 10, 1955.

⁹²PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 3, June 17, 1955, p. 1.

⁹³Ibid.

Kennon accepted most of the joint highway committee's legislative program which was included in eight bills passed by the legislature. Four bills dealt with financing the program. House Bill 226 established the long-range highway program with a \$15,000,000 general fund appropriation for fiscal 1956. House Bill 307 dedicated \$15,000,000 a year to highways from leasing and royalty funds. House Bill 306 created a Long Range Highway Fund to include surpluses of highway-user taxes and the \$15,000,000 allocated in House Bill 307. House Bill 305 provided a formula for distributing state aid to parishes to bring parish roads up to the standards of the Automotive Safety Foundation's survey. One bill set up a reclassification of the state highway systems into three classes--Class A, the primary system; Class B, the secondary system; and Class C, the farm-to-market system.⁹⁴ All three classes of state highways were to be hard surfaced. The last three bills made administrative and procedural changes. House Bill 309 authorized the Department of Highways to survey private property. House Bill 308 provided that state, parish and municipal highway authorities construct and regulate controlled-access facilities and secure property for these purposes. House Bill 310 provided that bids for highway contracts would

⁹⁴New Orleans Times-Picayune, May 18, 1955.

have to "be accompanied by certified checks or bid bonds of from four to six percent of the Highway Department engineers' cost estimate."⁹⁵ The long range program covered a ten-year period and was to be financed over a 20 year period, with construction averaging about \$88,600,000 a year. Future administrations would obviously be involved in the completion of the program.⁹⁶

Administration floor leader Cagle expressed Kennon's appreciation to the legislature for having established the highway committee "which had done an exceptional job."⁹⁷ With the exception of House Bill 310, which he vetoed, Kennon approved the committee's entire highway program. Possibly, the governor felt that the current practice of providing certified checks of less than five percent of the amount of the bid was satisfactory.⁹⁸

Kennon was also successful in shifting the financing of ten state hospitals from the welfare fund to the general fund as a result of the passage of Acts 8 and 9. Act 8 (HB19) appropriated \$2,679,710 out of the general

⁹⁵PAR Legislative Bulletin, No. 3, June 17, 1955, p. 3.

⁹⁶New Orleans Times-Picayune, May 18, 1955.

⁹⁷Ibid., May 19, 1955.

⁹⁸Act 141 (HB 306) and Act 142 (HB307) were proposed constitutional amendments, thus not requiring Governor Kennon's signature. These acts were approved by the voters at the April, 1956 general election; See also Baton Rouge State Times, May 24, 27, 30, 1955.

fund to the Confederate Memorial Medical Center for fiscal 1955-1956. Act 9 (HB20) appropriated \$5,796,293 out of the general fund to different budget units of the state under the Department of Institutions. Kennon approved both acts on June 9, 1955.⁹⁹

Not a part of Kennon's initial legislative program, but of subsequent interest to Kennon and reform legislators was the perceived need for a constitutional amendment requiring approval of two-thirds of the legislature to pass any new or increased taxes. With Earl Long likely to become governor again in 1956, reform forces saw this procedural change as a means of preventing Long from increasing taxes. Act 140 (HB 272) was ratified by the voters on April 17, 1956 with 104,283 votes for and 103,516 votes against.¹⁰⁰

Kennon did not forget the public works departments, for he approved an appropriation of \$2,000,000 for the construction of dams, for drainage and for irrigation work.¹⁰¹

Kennon was proud of the Budgetary Session. In various reports to the people, the governor extolled several of the accomplishments. No doubt, his views

⁹⁹Acts of Louisiana, Regular Session (1955), 8-12.

¹⁰⁰Acts of Louisiana, Amendments to the Constitution (1956), 8-9.

¹⁰¹New Orleans Times-Picayune, June 11, 1955.

caused him to be seen "as a bland and boring fiscal conservative."¹⁰² Too, he had a strong propensity for ignoring his supporters. Such behavior does not make one a popular figure or a successful politician. The state continued to move forward during the second half of his administration. Contracts with industries continued to be negotiated as a part of the "Balance Agriculture With Industry" program. To improve Louisiana's traffic flow, the department of highways adopted reflectorized, red stop signs for all state highways.¹⁰³ New state agencies were created in 1954. The Louisiana Expressway Authority was authorized to construct and maintain most toll road projects. The Commission on Federal Grants was to oversee all federal grants to local governments. The Louisiana Motor Vehicle Commission was authorized to handle annual licensing of motor vehicle dealers, manufacturers, and salesmen, after January 1, 1955. The State Board of Examiners for Sanitaricians was to license sanitaricians and to give trainer permits after January 15, 1955.¹⁰⁴ In 1955, Louisiana had more hardwood sawtimber than any other state. The Louisiana Forestry Commission was allocated extra funds to provide fire protection facilities for the

¹⁰²Shreveport Journal, January 14, 1988.

¹⁰³Louisiana Government, No. 28, January 15, 1954, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., No. 34, September 15, 1954, p. 1.

hardwood timber area of the Northeast Louisiana Delta region. As a result, much hardwood land was protected from fire.

In October, 1955, ground-breaking ceremonies were held in DeQuincy for the new first-offenders institution.¹⁰⁵ The youth were to receive training in sheet metal work, carpentry, plumbing, automotive repair and painting, and electrical work. Kennon declared that when the institution was finished, Louisiana could

expect to be a leader among the states in giving lawabiding [sic] citizens maximum protection, [while] at the same time assuring offenders of humane constructive punishment and rehabilitation,¹⁰⁶

Fort Polk was reactivated in 1955, thereby providing new jobs for about 2000 civilian employees--along with a total of about 100,000 army personnel.¹⁰⁷

The second half of Governor Kennon's administration proved to be as productive and efficient as the first half. He continued to maintain his conservative stance in fiscal matters. It is true that his appropriation bills were higher, but Kennon was politically astute enough to know that any governor who decreased state services would be considered as callous and not concerned with the

¹⁰⁵"Report to the People," in Robert Floyd Kennon Papers, Box 9.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

less-fortunate. Too, no doubt, Kennon knew that with the state's rich oil leases, and steadily increasing revenues, that the state could easily maintain its social services by continued borrowing so long as Louisiana's private sector prospered.

Governor Kennon showed decisive leadership in placing concern for the public's welfare and interest above self-serving politics. Even when derided by his critics, Kennon chose to ignore their taunts and to maintain his professional ethics. He knew how to exercise flexibility when needed. When shown a better proposal or plan, Kennon was willing to concede and to re-design his own plans.

CHAPTER IX

Conclusion

Politics did not occupy all of Governor Kennon's time. As a church leader, he continued to speak before religious groups. In May 1952, he spoke at the commencement exercises of Baton Rouge's St. Joseph Academy, where he told the graduates, "Many of you graduates have four years of college ahead of you. I'm like a graduate, too, and with four years of pretty hard college ahead of me."¹ At the end of his four-year term as governor, Kennon had accomplished much. What he promised in his campaign pledges, he generally delivered.

Earlier in this study, the question was posed--"What sort of man, then, is this . . . Executive of Louisiana?" Kennon was a composite of all of his experiences--those that he had prior to, and during his tenure as governor. His road to the governorship may be traced back to the early training received from his parents, where his formally educated mother instilled in him the importance of a sound education, and his entrepreneur father, the value of hard work and making profits. As a boy scout and

¹Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, May 28, 1952.

later, as an eagle scout, he learned how to lead effectively and how to cope with life's obstacles. From his well-structured educational environment, he developed good communication and computational skills, as well as a strong character.

In college and in law school, Kennon continued to mature in a positive manner. His academic excellence, involvement in extracurricular activities and his varsity status in football and tennis, all reflected the leadership abilities of the young Kennon. His ambition and aggressiveness paved the way for him to become a municipal reformer. In defeating the incumbent Mayor of Minden, Kennon became one of the country's youngest mayors at age twenty-three. Despite his relative youth, the young mayor made his mark. Not well-versed in the political game, the progressive-minded Kennon modernized Minden by supporting institutional progress and municipal efficiency.

Kennon also practiced as a criminal lawyer, preparing to become District Attorney for the Twenty-Sixth Judicial District. In this post during the Depression years, he served with dignity. His perception and intuition paved the way for his election in 1931 as second vice-president of the Louisiana District Attorney's Association. As district attorney, young Kennon maintained the decorum of the office which had been entrusted to him by the public.

The civic-minded Kennon joined the Minden Lions Club in 1926 and became president in 1930. His hometown and the surrounding areas became better places because of Kennon's projects. At the same time, his reputation as a leader was enhanced. His actions as the "Most Worshipful Grand Mason" in Louisiana were carried out with gusto, and provided Kennon with additional influence in and out of the state. His record as a Mason was exemplary. Kennon also played an active role in the Presbyterian church, eventually becoming president of the layman's organization of the Red River Presbytery.

The versatile Kennon, an officer of the Louisiana National Guard, attended both reserve camps and the United States Army Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia. During World War II, he attended and graduated from the army's highest level school for commissioned officers, the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. A staff officer in Europe, he then returned home where he served as a judge on the state Court of Appeal, Second Circuit and on the Louisiana Supreme Court, where he finished the term of the late Associate Justice Archibald T. Higgins. Kennon was known for his competency and past personal and professional integrity.

However, Kennon continued to yearn to attain his early dream of becoming governor of Louisiana. All of the aforementioned experiences were milestones on his road to

the governor's mansion. Kennon thought that 1948 was the year to run for the coveted spot. In a race of four major candidates, Kennon placed a disappointing third. Undaunted, Kennon, next sought a seat in the United States Senate, but lost again, receiving 49 percent of the total votes cast.

It may be said that Kennon had become a calculating politician, who was in control of his political destiny, since he knew what the voters were looking for. In his disdain for the traditional party politics as controlled by the Longites, he felt that Louisianians were ready for a change. For Kennon, the days of "tax and spend" were over. Using a grassroots approach, with no major political or newspaper support, Kennon was a shrewd campaigner who knew how to appeal to all segments of society. He had a brilliantly orchestrated campaign, which was almost devoid of mud-slinging. Emerging from this spirited 1952 campaign, Kennon was victorious, replacing the Long machine.

The conservative reformer Kennon carried out his campaign pledges. In a January 10, 1956, letter addressed to "Friends," Kennon pointed out:

Civil Service is a constitutional reality. Voting machines are in every precinct. More roads are completed and more industry has come in than under any other administration.

Angola is now a model prison compared to the national disgrace it was three years ago. Mental patients are out of four story fire traps and new

cottages have been built for over six hundred mentally retarded children.

Old age payments have been increased twice and a third raise is in immediate prospect. Our school teachers are the best paid in the South. New and adequate buildings are going up on every College Campus and in the schools for the boys and girls who are blind and deaf.

The laws are being impartially administered and enforced. Our taxes have been reduced and Louisiana has gained new respect in the eyes of the nation.²

Kennon was instrumental in the creation of a legislative council for research, bill drafting, and bill analysis. He instituted a system of independent citizen boards to control and supervise the spending of the state in: (1) Wild Life and Fisheries; (2) Department of Public Welfare; (3) Department of State Highways; and (4) all of the state's health and correctional institutions.

However, these boards did not work too well. Kennon appointed Francis Grevenberg as chief officer of the State Police Department and, thereby, implemented a statewide closing of organized gambling and slot machine operations. Grevenberg's activities were highly controversial and politically damaging to Kennon.

Thirty thousand permanent new jobs were created during his administration because of the new industries and capital attracted to the state. Kennon signed the controversial "Right-to-Work" bill assuring more

²Copy of letter located in Vertical File of Louisiana State Library, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

independence to laborers. It was repealed in 1956. In a state with rising revenues, due in large part to the state's rich oil leaseings, his administration was responsible for the passage of the two-thirds vote of the legislature to raise taxes. Upon leaving office Kennon left the largest treasury surplus in the state's history--\$61,627,763.36. He did so with a reduction of the tax rates--reduction of two-cents on every gallon of gasoline and the increase in the income tax exemption--and with an increase in tax collection.³ But, however exemplary his gubernatorial record was, Kennon had his critics. After Kennon's death, the Shreveport Times editorialized that Kennon was "no bright and shining personality," but that he "left a reform mark." The newspaper declared that "Kennon won big because people were disgusted with Long excesses; he took a friendly, reform-minded Legislature to Baton Rouge with him. He was popular." But Kennon "stepped on big toes with his right-to-work law . . . and 'blue ribbon' citizen boards."⁴ When he left office, his popularity had waned, with "much of his work soon to be buried by [the] resurgent populism" of Earl Long.⁵ He retired to the private practice of law in Baton Rouge.

³Shreveport Times, October 20, 1963.

⁴Ibid., January 14, 1988.

⁵Ibid.

Kennon asked the two ranking 1956 LSU law school graduates--John S. White, Jr. and James H. Odom, both of Baton Rouge--to become members of his law firm.⁶ Kennon ran unsuccessfully for the governor's office in 1963. Continuing to practice law in Baton Rouge, he became interested in maintaining his physical fitness. In an age of health awareness, he became a jogger. At age seventy-five, his weight of 155 pounds was the same as it had been when he had been in college some fifty-five years earlier.⁷ Still a supportive family man, he and his wife Eugenia, enjoyed their three children--Robert, Jr., a Baton Rouge attorney; Charles, a Baton Rouge orthopedic surgeon; and Ken, a former member of the Louisiana Public Service Commission--and five grandchildren. In failing health over a number of years, Kennon, the state's oldest former governor, succumbed on January 11, 1988, at St. James Place, a Baton Rouge retirement home. Perhaps what Charles M. Hargroder (who served as Kennon's executive assistant for three and one-half years) wrote, best summed up the man from Minden who traveled on the long road to the governor's mansion. Writing of the news stories covering Kennon's death, Hargroder declared:

They [news stories] neglected much of the man himself, his compassion, his modesty, his many untold

⁶Baton Rouge Morning Advocate, May 3, 1956.

⁷New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 12, 1988.

acts for others. He was a religious man, a kind and indulgent father, a loving and proud husband.

His voice was a trademark, a baritone that inspired confidence, that rose and fell to emphasize a point, to underscore humor.

He was a persuasive man, with an individual or a crowd. He could sway an individual by the pressure of his hand on the back as he argued his position in that soft, breaking voice he had.⁸

Committed to the cause of reform, Kennon's administration was "dedicated to eradicating . . . political and criminal corruption,"⁹ and "proved to be largely free of graft and corruption."¹⁰ Many of his reform programs, including budget reorganization and less power for the governor, were repealed under Governor Earl Long. But, some reforms are still in effect, such as voting machines for every precinct as well as the state civil service system. Robert Floyd Kennon was a "quiet, conservative" reformer who toppled a "populist dynasty" [Longite] and who "beat the odds and won."¹¹ He was a "maverick to the end," but "he left office, however, with an impressive record of political reform and fiscal

⁸Ibid., January 19, 1988.

⁹Quoted in Shreveport Times, January 14, 1988.

¹⁰Bennett H. Wall, ed., Louisiana: A History (Arlington Heights, Illinois: The Forum Press, Inc., 1984), p. 303, hereinafter cited as Wall, Louisiana.

¹¹Shreveport Times, January 14, 1988.

responsibility."¹² Kennon left his mark in Louisiana history, for he proved to be an indomitable personality in Louisiana politics.

¹²Wall, Louisiana, p. 303.

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Vita

Doris Dorcas Carter was born in Homer, Louisiana, on December 10, 1945. She received her elementary and secondary education in Minden, Louisiana, graduating from Webster High School in 1964. In May, 1969, she graduated from Grambling College at Grambling, Louisiana, and in May, 1971, she received the Master of Arts degree from Louisiana Tech University at Ruston, Louisiana. Currently, she is assistant professor of history at Grambling State University and a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Louisiana State University.

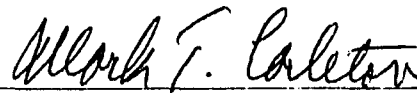
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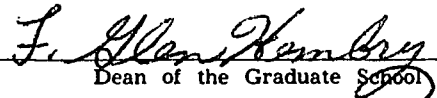
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Major Field: History

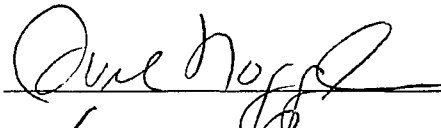
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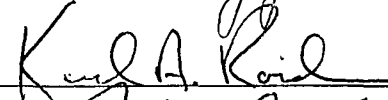
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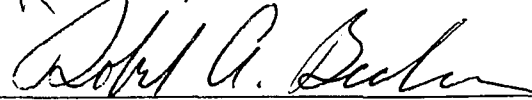

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Dean of the Graduate School

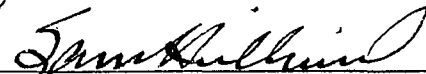
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