Ernest Gruening: Journalist to U.S. senator

Tom Alton
The University of Montana

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ERNEST GRUENING:
JOURNALIST TO U.S. SENATOR

By
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B.A., University of Alaska, 1974

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Ernest Gruening, one of Alaska's first U.S. senators, began his career as a journalist in Boston, New York, and Maine. He demanded fairness and honesty in the press throughout his career. Gruening believed that a newspaper should be free to cover all the news, without obligation to owners, advertisers, political parties or special interests.

Editor & Publisher, in a 1930 profile, quoted Gruening as saying that a conflict exists between the profession of journalism and the newspaper business. He thought the two should be like hand and glove, but the demand for profit often resulted in a compromise of professional ideals.

This thesis studies Gruening's experience as a journalist and politician. From his first job as a reporter in 1911 to his death in 1974, he looked at issues and problems from a journalist's perspective. The thesis documents the way in which he fought for liberal causes as an editor, bureaucrat, governor of Alaska and U.S. senator. As an editor he fought against U.S. military presence in Latin America and against an electric utility conglomerate that threatened to gain a nationwide monopoly. He advocated world peace and supported President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. As a politician he battled for social reforms in Puerto Rico, fair taxation, and statehood for Alaska. He argued against American participation in the Vietnam War and in 1964 was one of two U.S. senators to vote against the Tonkin Gulf resolution, which gave President Lyndon Johnson power to escalate the war at his discretion.

Sources included the Gruening Collection in the University of Alaska-Fairbanks Archives, newspaper and magazine articles written by Gruening, and articles and editorials written about him.

As a journalist who fought tirelessly for his convictions, Gruening had loyal friends as well as strong enemies. This study represents both sides.
"He virtually yanked the territory out of a chronic lethargy."

Anchorage Times
June 27, 1974

"Ruled by shady men, a nation itself becomes shady."

H. L. Mencken
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INTRODUCTION

Idealism shaped Ernest Gruening's politics. He argued for 60 years that people did not have to accept injustice or poor government. The common man could improve his life by making government work for him. Gruening used the powers of a strong federal government and a free and independent press to work toward his idealistic goals.

Gruening lived a life of irony. Through his career he embodied the qualities that Americans have admired in their heroes. He often struggled alone against great odds and sacrificed his personal life for a cause that would help his community and America. But the battles he fought heroically often earned him instead the "Communist" or "anti-American" label. As a journalist he had loyal readers. As a politician he had strong support. But as a hero he was largely unnoticed.

He argued for liberal causes--world peace, fairness for consumers, civil rights and self-determination in government. He was a patriot and an idealist who loved his country and saw faults that he believed could be fixed to make it ever better. Government should take the lead in those repairs.

Conservative businessmen, politicians and publishers were patriots, too, but they generally supported the system as it stood. Changes should come slowly, they believed, and the private sector should take the initiative. Government should not interfere.

Gruening fought conservative traditions from 1914, when he began
writing editorials, to his death in 1974. His arguments were consistent, applying as well to U.S. martial law in Haiti in 1920 as they did to Vietnam in 1970. Events changed, but Gruening's dedication to liberal principles was constant. Those principles shaped his opinions and unified his life. While he may have lost arguments, he always realized that even a small compromise could damage those principles. Journalism and strong government were his weapons.

Gruening fought against many of the people Americans called "heroes." Often they were businessmen who got rich through corrupt and exploitative tactics or military leaders fighting unjust or immoral wars. Though he never was called a hero, Gruening battled heroically for his country.

Gruening's strongest characteristics were his sense of what was right and his determination to change conditions he saw as wrong. His life proves that liberals and protesters have effected great progress for America though the heroes of war and finance have portrayed them as un-American and barriers to development. Gruening believed that a constitutionally guaranteed free press was part of the system that kept a popular government running smoothly. The press could fulfill its duty of informing the public about the affairs of government only so long as First Amendment rights were protected.

Gruening's idealism led him into journalism after he had earned a medical degree from Harvard in 1912. He rejected a prosperous New York medical practice because he thought he could serve society better by reporting the events that affected people every day.

Writing for the Nation in 1920, Gruening argued against American
martial law in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. He contended that U.S. Marines occupied those countries to protect American financial interests. America should honor the principles of self-determination in government, morality in business and worldwide civil rights.

Gruening not only asked for justice and equality in government but also demanded fairness and honesty from himself and others in journalism. He fought against censorship and limitations on freedom of the press. He criticized newspapers that gave advertisers preferential treatment in news and editorial columns. He won a libel suit against William Randolph Hearst after Hearst had printed fake documents linking Gruening with international Communists. Gruening's first job as a reporter was with a Hearst newspaper, but he later denounced the publisher for promoting incomplete, biased reporting and wars with Spain, Mexico and Japan. Clearly, the press could be used for corrupt purposes as easily as it could be heroic.

Hearst's chain of newspapers represented a consolidation of ownership that Gruening considered detrimental to journalism. Hearst was a businessman who printed sensational papers solely for profit. Gruening contended that editors, not businessmen, should determine a paper's content based on sound reporting and news value.

Gruening fought a similar battle in Portland, Maine, where an electric utility conglomerate controlled a chain of newspapers. The papers' editorials supported utility pricing and expansion and their news stories were biased in favor of the owners. Gruening helped start in Portland an independent paper that reported the news fairly and presented editorials opposing the utilities.
Government played a clear role in Gruening's life. With the election of President Franklin Roosevelt in 1932, Gruening could pin a name--"New Deal"--to his political ideas. The New Deal was not a strict political system, but a series of government programs initiated by Roosevelt to get the country out of the Great Depression. It was based on the liberal idea that the economy had become too complex for local governments to handle. A strong federal government needed to control prices, wages, unemployment, development, banking and social welfare. Conservatives believed that government should not interfere in those areas.

Gruening left journalism in 1934 and began working for the Roosevelt administration as director of the interior department's Division of Territories and Island Possessions. He carried New Deal concepts to Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Hawaii and Alaska. He believed that conditions in America could improve and the people could look to the government to lead that recovery. Conservatives felt, however, that rugged individualism had made America strong and the system should be left alone to mend itself.

The secretary of the interior appointed Gruening governor of Alaska in 1939. When he began his job, he found a territory that had been exploited and neglected since the United States bought it from Russia in 1867. Mining interests and salmon packers extracted Alaska's resources while returning a pittance in taxes. Alaska's only voice in Washington, D.C., was a non-voting delegate to Congress. Gruening worked to raise ideals among Alaskans. He convinced many that their lives could be improved and government was the instrument
of progress. He worked for Alaska statehood because he said the federal government treated Alaska as if it were a colony and democracies had no right keeping colonies. Those ideals, along with the boom that accompanied World War II, brought much progress to Alaska.

Gruening continued his idealism after becoming a U.S. senator from Alaska. He was one of the first outspoken opponents of the war in Vietnam. Americans, he argued, did not have to accept the injustice of fighting an enemy that did not threaten their security. The Vietnamese, not Americans, should fight the war.

Gruening lost his battle against U.S. involvement in Vietnam. The war continued for nearly 10 years after his first Senate speech against it. Sen. J.W. Fulbright of Arkansas privately labeled Gruening a "crackpot"\(^1\) for opposing President Lyndon Johnson and the Vietnam War in 1964.

Gruening lost his Vietnam battle because he was fighting it at a time when his two weapons—journalism and strong federal government—were weak. New York Times writer Tom Wicker, in his 1975 book On Press, said that the "Eisenhower father image and the Kennedy charisma"\(^2\) led the public to revere the president and blindly trust the government. Journalists and government leaders generally followed that trust.

Wicker wrote that when presidents "donned the commander-in-chief's hat and American troops went to war, the American instinct

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 7.
was to rally round the White House."\(^3\)

Johnson took advantage of that trust. He distorted the facts about Vietnam and the press reported his distortions as truth. Newspapers and broadcast reports either failed to cover the war protesters or portrayed them as unruly subversives.

Gruening and Sen. Wayne Morse of Oregon were the only senators to speak openly against the war. Wicker quoted Fulbright as saying, "Hell, I'd like to be out there with Morse and Gruening. But I can't afford to have people think I'm a crackpot like that."\(^4\)

Public opinion about the war changed after the news media began to report it accurately. Television and newspaper stories from Southeast Asia showed the public and Congress that the president's decisions to escalate the war should not always have been followed blindly. Gruening and other protesters were viewed more favorably, and Sen. Fulbright forgot the "crackpot" image and became a leading opponent.

Though the news media helped change public opinion, the institution of journalism cannot be given credit for ending the war. The media reacted slowly in the early Johnson years and reflected the blind patriotism he used to escalate the war. Congressmen also reflected that faith. If more had joined Gruening and Morse opposing Johnson's policies, the war might have stopped early.

Opposition to Vietnam was building in 1968 when Gruening lost his re-election bid mainly because of his opinion of the war. He continued

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 6.

\(^4\)Ibid., p. 6.
to write and speak on the subject until President Richard Nixon withdrew troops in 1973.

American government has remained strong because liberal idealists have dared to oppose it. Policies—even ones contrary to democratic principles—often become entrenched because conservatives like the status quo. A democracy needs people like Gruening to remind the public that conditions can improve.

Gunboat diplomacy in Haiti, economic individualism before the depression, unfair practices among electric utilities, colonialism in Alaska and the Vietnam War were maintained by entrenched immoral or obsolete policies. Liberal protest was an important part of each of those issues.

This paper studies the events in Gruening's life that illustrate how idealism can effect positive, lasting change. It shows how freedom and strength in the press and democracy can be used for good as well as bad purposes. Give and take between liberals and conservatives has kept American democracy intact. When the political balance tips more to one side than the other, the opposition protests and the balance shifts toward the center. Cooperation among the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government has maintained that balance. The events discussed in this paper show how the press can add another system of checks and balances.

The differences between liberals and conservatives have often been defined by the power the two sides are willing to give to government and the press. This paper proves Gruening's belief that positive
liberal change can be achieved when honest idealists stretch those powers to constitutional limits.

Not every journalist or politician who labels himself a liberal or an idealist would agree with Gruening's opinions or his ways of accomplishing change. He was simply one editor and politician who saw the need for reform and believed that the Constitution guaranteed enough power to the press and representative government to effect those changes.
CHAPTER I
Beginning in Journalism

In 1929 Maine voters refused to allow hydroelectric power produced in the state to be sold outside its borders. This power-export fight--carried on while the rest of the nation debated prohibition--"was a grand old campaign," according to the New York Times, "water having succeeded rum as the prime question." But the outcome was as much a victory for fair and independent press coverage as it was a political triumph. Samuel Insull, a Chicago-based industrialist who controlled many utilities in the East, headed the power-export faction. Those who supported Insull argued that the Pine Tree State could develop hydroelectric power and sell it to Insull-owned utilities outside the state. Maine, they said, would benefit from the sale because it would allow lower utility rates, create jobs and make rural electrification more affordable.

In addition to his utilities, Insull held financial interests in Maine newspapers, banks and textile mills. To no one's surprise, his newspapers strongly favored power export. The only major paper in the state to oppose the export of power was an independent daily in the southern corner of Maine, the Portland Evening News. Ernest H. Gruening, the paper's liberal, progressive editor, saw the power-export question from the individual power consumer's viewpoint.

Gruening argued in editorials that the real beneficiaries of selling power would be the Insull interests. He pointed out that increasing layers of bureaucracy and new utility companies all under Insull's financial umbrella would consume any savings to the consumer.

The Insull forces attacked viciously. Newspapers favoring export labeled opponents "Bolsheviks" and charged that highly paid lawyers were directing this leftist campaign from out of state. Insull ordered the utilities, mills and banks under his control to refuse to advertise in the Portland Evening News. He directed officials of his banks to call the notes of any department store that bought advertising in Gruening's paper.

The power-export measure was defeated by 8,000 votes. A newspaper in Connecticut said that the outcome was perhaps the most amazing upset in Maine's political history. But the Providence (R.I.) News came closer to the point in a short editorial two days after the referendum:

The downfall of the power interests in Maine was especially pleasing in that it was accomplished in the face of outrageous attempts to influence newspaper opinion. The Portland Evening News was singled out for attack by the power people. The familiar intimidatory method of withdrawing advertising from that courageous paper was practiced extensively. But the News did not flinch, and now it has the satisfaction of knowing that the people of Maine are behind its . . . campaign.²

The power-export issue was just the kind of battle Ernest Gruening had been fighting for two decades. In 1911, after more than three years at Harvard Medical School, he gave up plans to become a

²Waterbury (Connecticut) Democrat, 10 September 1929, p. 4.
doctor. Concern for social and political problems attracted him to journalism. "The physician aims to cure the ailments of the human body," he wrote later. "The newspaper man to aid in curing diseases of the body-politic."³

He got a job in March, 1911, as a reporter for the Boston American. The 24-year-old Gruening, only a semester away from a medical degree, took the job for $15 a week. The American was owned by the Hearst Corporation, a chain of newspapers to which the term "yellow journalism" was applied. William Randolph Hearst's papers were known for attractive comics such as the Yellow Kid, many pictures and frequent reports on scandalous issues that other papers ignored. Gruening covered trials, fires, meetings and speeches.

Hearst's papers attempted to reach the masses, and they printed sensational stories about subjects the common man enjoyed. "Cocktails and Cigarettes!! Where??/In Exclusive Boston Women's Club/Chiltons Ask for Liquor License"⁴ was the headline over one of Gruening's stories in an extra edition of the American. A two-column photo of three high-society ladies appeared under the headline. Gruening's story said the club wanted the license only so it could make its male visitors feel at home. Gruening reported that there would not be a regular bar where "a member could stand up and have a drink man-

³ Harvard Medical School Class of 1911 Secretary's Report, undated, p. 39.

⁴ Boston American, clip from Gruening's scrapbook, date not available.
fashion—the drinks are to be served on trays by girl waitresses."\(^5\)

Smoking would be allowed only in a roof garden.

The *American* ran another story that quoted a Boston religious leader as calling the Chilton Club "the vestibule of hell."\(^6\)

By the end of 1911 Gruening had been assigned to a series of extended feature stories on towns surrounding Boston. He covered each community's industry, schools and politics. He also reported its civic and cultural aspects. The stories were given full-page layouts with about half the page filled with photos.

The young reporter's father, Dr. Emil Gruening, was a New York physician with a successful eye and ear practice. He hoped his son would return to medicine and join him in his office. Ernest did return to Harvard Medical School after a year with the *American*. He earned his medical degree in 1912, but already had decided to return to journalism.

The *Boston Evening Herald* hired him, then merged with the *Boston Traveler*. Gruening survived the staff cuts and went on to cover, among other things, the medical beat. He interviewed the deaf, blind and once-mute Helen Keller.

His interview revealed that Keller was a perceptive, thinking individual with a sparkling personality. She told Gruening that she was a Socialist and that only under that system could "Everyone obtain the ______________________

\(^5\) Ibid.

\(^6\) Ibid.
right to work and be happy." She sensed things by "vibrations through the air, and through the floor, from moving of feet or the scraping of chairs, and by the warmth which is present when there are people around."\(^7\)

Gruening began to work on the *Herald's* copy desk and to write editorials. One, "The Meanest Crime," assailed *New York Life* magazine for reporting that doctors frequently performed experimental surgery on patients. The magazine accused doctors of "surgical tricks" and "the injection of a fatal disease into a confiding patient."\(^9\)

Gruening called the accusations "cowardly insinuations" against an honorable profession: "There is no punishment for this meanest of journalistic crimes."\(^10\)

When the war in Europe began in 1914, he became the *Herald's* war editor and by that October was managing editor of the afternoon *Traveler*.

On the *Traveler* Gruening began to fight earnestly for fair and honest news reporting. As a civil-rights advocate, he believed in the obligation of the press to treat blacks fairly. He directed *Traveler* reporters to refer to a person's race only "when the story is manifestly incomplete and inaccurate if the color of the person is concealed."

\(^7\) Boston *Herald*, clip from Gruening's scrapbook, date not available.

\(^8\) Ibid.

\(^9\) Boston *Herald*, 14 March 1914, page not available.

\(^10\) Ibid.
He insisted that the word "Negro" be capitalized.\textsuperscript{11}

Gruening also changed the paper's policies of giving preferential treatment in its editorial columns to certain advertisers. He observed that theaters that advertised in the Traveler never received a bad review, and he argued that the public deserved truthful reporting and an accurate presentation of editorial opinion. The paper lost advertising for awhile, but Gruening's policy prevailed. Years later the editor wrote, "the advertiser in the newspaper is entitled to the space he pays for and nothing more."\textsuperscript{12}

Gruening left the Traveler in 1916 because of another ethical question. A Boston board of censors, headed by Mayor James Curley, had permitted the showing of a film on abortion, "Where Are My Children?" Since Curley had banned films and plays that were less objectionable than this, Gruening wondered why this one was passed by the censors.

A Traveler reporter learned that Curley had tried to convince censors in Pennsylvania to allow the film to be shown there. He also learned that Curley had a financial interest in the film. Gruening printed those facts on the front page and other Boston papers picked up the story. The report caused a stir because of political and financial dealings between Curley and some owners of the Traveler. Gruening was told to retract the story though Curley had admitted its truth. Gruening refused, but was overruled by a senior editor who

\textsuperscript{11}Ernest Gruening, memo to Traveler staff, Gruening's scrapbook, no date.

Gruening said was threatened by the owners. Adhering to his principle that a newspaper is an "instrument of public service; that it owes its readers a fair and impartial presentation of the news," Gruening resigned on the day the *Traveler* printed the retraction, which said the paper had no knowledge that the mayor had any financial interest in the film.

Gruening then joined the Boston *Journal*, which he described as "an honest and independent daily." But the *Journal* was on poor financial footing and its circulation was declining. He wrote editorials supporting the allied effort in World War I and women's suffrage. Gruening enjoyed the *Journal*'s fair and accurate reporting of all the news and thought it was the only Boston paper worthy of the public's trust.

The *Journal* was absorbed by Gruening's old employer, the *Herald-Traveler* group, in 1917. Not wishing to work for that corporation again, he returned to New York. He served short editorial assignments on the New York *Tribune* and *La Prensa*, a Spanish daily serving the New York area. Early in 1920 he eagerly accepted an offer to become managing editor of the *Nation*.

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CHAPTER II

Editing The Nation

By 1920 the Nation had established itself as an alternative to the traditional press. The liberal weekly magazine dug deeply into stories about international politics and economics. It covered stories that often were ignored by the daily papers. It stood for civil liberty and for the cause of labor.

The Nation had been founded in 1865 by Edwin Lawrence Godkin, a newspaper editor who was more interested in the editorial page than with the news. Godkin sold the publication to Henry Villard, who in 1917 turned it over to his son, Oswald Garrison Villard. Under the younger Villard the magazine took on its economically liberal stance. The Nation's mix of editorial courage, literature and the arts gave it a loyal readership among educated and professional people.

As managing editor, Ernest Gruening immediately increased his interest in U.S. foreign relations. Liberals had become disillusioned with President Woodrow Wilson's policies in Europe by the last months of his administration. In the weeks just before Gruening joined the Nation, the magazine had attacked the Versailles Treaty, the instrument by which peace was restored to Europe after World War I. Editorials charged Wilson with committing crimes in the name of America through his secret diplomacy. The treaty, the Nation said, had imposed unreasonable burdens on Germany to satisfy French vengeance.
The magazine agreed that the treaty should punish those guilty of bringing war to Europe but said it should punish "to heal and reform, not to kill."\(^1\)

It said the World War would not end all wars, that the fighting solved nothing because autocracy was replacing democracy, and that the League of Nations encouraged imperialism by the great powers of Europe.\(^2\)

America was moving into an era of strong isolationist sentiment after World War I, and according to Wilson's plan it would have a minor role in the League--one vote to Britain's six. "The world wants a league of nations," the Nation said, "but a league of nations without the United States would be a farce."\(^3\)

The Nation asked, "Does any American in his senses, scanning the map of the world as it is today, seriously hope for peace in a League of Nations in which the peoples have no voice and in which Germany and Russia . . . have no share?"\(^4\)

The Versailles Treaty and Wilsonian diplomacy were major events for the daily papers as well, but the Nation offered a different perspective. Its readers wanted a liberal and intellectual interpretation of the facts they read in newspapers. The Nation did not report objectively, but it had built its reputation on fairness and accuracy.

\(^1\)"For Honor and for Peace," The Nation, 10 January 1920, p. 30.
\(^2\)Ibid.
\(^3\)Ibid.
\(^4\)Ibid.
Gruening reviewed Upton Sinclair's *The Brass Check: A Study of American Journalism* for the *Nation's* literary section two months after he had joined the staff. In it he revealed the reasons that the *Nation's* brand of journalism appealed to him. He denounced Sinclair's assertion that all newspapers have rules against uncomplimentary reporting about certain people. Gruening acknowledged that such "sacred cows" do exist but said most papers ignore them.

As a Socialist, Sinclair saw a class struggle within journalism. Newspapers were owned by capitalists and run for a profit while exploiting workers who were eager to bring stories of injustices perpetrated by capitalists.\(^5\)

Gruening agreed with Sinclair's opinion that the most successful daily papers would print the most news and report it impartially. He concluded with an argument for a financially independent press:

> The staggering cost of conducting newspapers makes for their control by great financial interests with special purposes to serve. On the other hand, an awakened public conscience and an increasingly widespread acquaintance with social and economic fundamentals will produce an evolution in the press world analogous to that which is altering the structure of human society. But before we can expect much progress in this direction, endowment on a large scale must be forthcoming to make possible a transfer of the ultimate control of the press to its editors--men of conscience and students of public affairs.

Gruening enjoyed the *Nation's* staff and its many contributors as much as he liked the magazine's style of journalism. In


\(^6\)Ibid.
his autobiography, *Many Battles*, he said, "It was more than a pleasant group, it was intellectually the fastest company of my experience."\(^7\)

Carl Van Doren was literary editor. The magazine held poetry contests and regularly published works by Robert Frost, Edwin Arlington Robinson and many others. Book reviews contributed by scholars and authors such as Charles Beard, Henry L. Mencken and W.E.B. DuBois covered history, politics and fiction. The *Nation's* critics also reviewed drama, music and art. Extended discussions of that period's important writers were included. Van Doren hailed the "tragic compassion" of Edith Wharton; he criticized the "sophomoric" characters in Booth Tarkington's novels; and he praised Theodore Dreiser's "cosmic philosophizing."

Contributors included Bertrand Russell on contemporary Russia, James Weldon Johnson on Haiti, historians Allan Nevins and Harold Laski, Heywood Broun, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Sials Bent. Mencken joined the regular staff, writing articles as well as book reviews.

Russell's two-part series on Russia was an attempt to promote understanding of the revolutionary Communist regime. He urged recognition of Russia and argued that it should be allowed to trade freely in the open market. But Russell said his trip to the Soviet Union changed his feelings about Communism. He went there believ-

ing that he was a Communist, but later denounced it as a "cult so firmly held that for its sake men are willing to inflict widespread misery."\(^8\)

A landmark case in the battle for freedom of the press occurred during Gruening's managing editorship of the *Nation*. In October 1917 the U.S. postmaster general revoked the Milwaukee Leader's second-class mailing privileges, and in March 1921 the U.S. Supreme Court upheld that decision. The postmaster general had determined, under the Espionage Act of 1917, that the Leader was printing non-mailable material. Without the second-class mailing rates, a paper could not operate competitively. The Milwaukee Leader had called the military draft unconstitutional and oppressive and had reported that soldiers in France were going insane.

The *Nation*, in an unsigned editorial, "The Supreme Court Strikes at the Press,"\(^9\) argued that the Espionage Act should not be in effect in peace time. It added that it was unfair for the postmaster general to revoke mailing privileges for an indefinite period because he expects the paper to continue to print undesirable material; this ruling gave the postmaster general the power to censor the press.

A related article in the same issue offered a similar perspective:

The correctness of this decision is far less important than its consequences. It is nowise limited to war cases, and enables the postmaster general to suppress any newspaper with a few articles which are unmailable on any

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\(^9\)*The Nation*, 28 March 1921, p. 422.
ground. Thus without any jury, without any court . . . he can punish by extinction any periodical which ventures to discuss problems of sex and family life which he considers obscene though many others think them valuable. . . . Such a law is utterly foreign to the tradition of English speaking freedom.

The Nation also used this opportunity to criticize daily newspapers in general and William Randolph Hearst in particular. It said many people had called for control of the press because it had been degraded by the Hearst style of journalism. It said the Hearst papers had provoked the Spanish-American War in 1898 and had encouraged hostilities with other countries. Hearst's New York Journal had sensationalized oppression of workers in Cuba by the Spanish government. It was thought by many that Journal editorials and drawings depicting Spaniards in Cuba as "terrible savages" had caused the United States to intervene.

The Nation asked why the Milwaukee Leader should suffer while this "journalistic pest" was given second-class mailing rates by the government he had pushed into war.

Gruening edited "These United States," a series of articles in which the Nation examined each state. William Allen White described religion and politics in Kansas, where "Puritan blood is the strongest current."11


Mencken called his home state of Maryland "safe, fat and unconcerned." He said it "bulges with normalcy" and was "the ideal toward which the rest of the republic is striving."

The tone of "These United States" varied with each writer. White and Mencken were journalists who wrote thorough, analytical, serious pieces. On the other hand, Sherwood Anderson's casual account of Ohio had the elements of a narrative short story:

As I figure it out, things are going just splendidly over in Ohio now. Why, nearly every town is a factory town now and some of them have got streets in them that would make New York or London or Chicago sit up and take notice. What I mean is, almost as many people to every square foot of ground and just as jammed up and dirty and smoky.

Other articles included Zona Gale on Wisconsin, Theodore Dreiser on Indiana, Sinclair Lewis on Minnesota, Willa Cather on Nebraska, and W.E.B. DuBois on Georgia.

Gruening wrote the section on New York City. He presented a grim view of a city that had forced nature to conform. "It has tunneled through rock, buried rods beneath the surface the rebelling springs and streams it could not annihilate . . . squeezing itself into endless rows of rectangles, as impersonal as pig iron."

He said the city was too large and formless for anyone to love. Few people remembered its heritage because nothing was permanent.

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13 Sherwood Anderson, "Ohio: I'll Say We've Done Well," The Nation, 9 August 1922, pp. 146-149.

Buildings were constructed and torn down in a lifetime. "In lower New York Washington walked, and Hamilton and Jefferson and Adams--here our nation struggled in its infancy--and not a trace remains."

But the city had its own "poignant beauty" and "spiritual quality." Gruening suggested that New York would answer whether man would use his powers for the good of mankind or "become increasingly the slave of his own machine, his own creation."^{15}

^{15} Ibid.
Immediately after joining the Nation, Gruening became concerned about America's military presence in the Caribbean. The Nation asserted in 1920 that Haiti and Santo Domingo had been conquered by the United States and were ruled militarily by it. Articles reported that U.S. marines had tortured and killed natives of those Latin American countries to protect U.S. interests in banking and sugar mills.

As much as the Nation deplored Wilsonian diplomacy in Europe, it charged that U.S. foreign policy was even more oppressive in the Caribbean. It said "United States thuggery" in Haiti and Santo Domingo was responsible for violating the same human rights that American soldiers had fought to preserve in Europe. "The Dominican," one article said, "has less independence and fewer rights than a Belgian under German occupation."\(^1\)

In 1920 the Nation reported that the issue in Santo Domingo began under President Theodore Roosevelt in 1905. The country's national debt had reached $40 million, and American banks made large loans to it. Revolutions threatened the government, which defaulted on some loans. Other American banks lent it more money. By 1915 the government was so shaky that the U.S. marines stepped in to protect American

\(^1\)"The Conquest of Santo Domingo," The Nation, 17 July 1920, p. 64.
investments. The U.S. government declared martial law in Santo Domingo the next year.

While the Nation acknowledged the need for some financial interference, it charged that there was no excuse for the "ruthless suppression of every institution of popular government and for the substitution of a military despotism."²

The Dominican was controlled by the U.S. navy and the marines, although the nation retained a popular leader. The American military took over the customs houses, a large source of income for Santo Domingo, and censored news until 1920. The Nation reported incidents of torture allegedly perpetrated by the American military against Dominicans.³

James Weldon Johnson's five-part series in the Nation, "Self-Determining Haiti," presented an overview of five years of American military dominance. He reported that the National City Bank of New York controlled the National Bank of Haiti, and that other investors were interested in growing cotton and sugar there. To protect those deals, Johnson said, the U.S. military intervened in 1915 and declared martial law, killing nearly 3,000 dissident Haitians in five years.⁴

The Nation called for immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Haiti, repair of damage to property, restoration of the Haitian govern-

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

ment, and reestablishment of a financial structure without interference by the national City Bank of New York. The magazine said that a bipartisan Congressional committee should investigate American involvement in Haiti and Santo Domingo. That involvement "[dissolved] the Haitian parliament at the point of American bayonets, forcing unwilling acceptance of an overbearing treaty . . . setting up an arbitrary government by military fiat, killing thousands of opponents of our regime."^5

By mid-1921 the U.S. Senate had begun to pay attention to criticism of American martial law in the Caribbean. The Nation had continued to advocate that a bipartisan Congressional committee study the situation. The Senate organized such a group under Sen. Medill McCormick of Illinois. The committee traveled to Haiti and Santo Domingo that November, and Ernest Gruening went along to report its findings for the Nation.

Gruening's first report, "The Senators Visit Haiti and Santo Domingo," appeared Jan. 4, 1922. He said the hearings left "a trail of hope, anticipation, doubt, and disappointment." Gruening reported that the hearings in Port au Prince started badly because the senators announced they would hear the case in only four days. Haitians immediately suspected another U.S. government whitewash because four days were regarded as inadequate to review the injustices of six years of occupation. But Haitian witnesses did testify to numerous abuses of their civil rights by the American military.

They said a state of fear existed among the people, and that many would not testify because of intimidation by American soldiers.

The committee then, according to Gruening's report, traveled to Santo Domingo, where it continued to hear testimony against the American occupation. Dominicans argued that the United States was in Santo Domingo "in violation of all international law and treaties." One Dominican told the committee that the United States was committing an act of war without declaration. And that act, he said, violated the constitutions of the United States and the Dominican Republic. Dominicans listed acts of torture by Marine Corps officers, and Gruening confirmed them through military headquarters sources.

"There is the charge, clear, categorical, complete," Gruening's story said. "It cannot, unfortunately, be successfully refuted."

The next issue of the Nation carried Gruening's interview in Santo Domingo with a Catholic archbishop, who said the American occupation was unjustified, adding that "it seems impossible that the same people who so generously poured out and shed the blood of the best of its manhood in defense of liberty should at the same time deprive a small liberty-loving people of that same liberty and independence."6

Gruening seemed skeptical that the committee's trip to the Caribbean would result in liberty for those two small countries. He said the senators all thought they got to the truth of the matter and promised justice, but they did not mention independence.

"Strange how difficult that one word is for many who represent the country that made it famous," he wrote. "It was the word and the one sentiment that the Dominicans desired to hear."^7

In another article, "Haiti and Santo Domingo Today," Gruening called the Haitian government a puppet of the American occupation. He explained the reason for military control in terms that went beyond the economic advantages for U.S. investors. He said that marine officers took the Caribbean for granted, as if it were a proving ground where action against Costa Ricans, Panamanians or Nicaraguans was commonplace: "Moreover, opportunities for the individual officer are obviously far greater under conditions of military rule than they would be at some dull post in the United States."^8

Gruening speculated that with more overseas action the marines could justify a large force and fast promotions. He denounced Senator McCormick for accepting the military view and recommending 20 more years of occupation in Haiti:

"Senator McCormick knows better. He is intelligent enough to know that what we did in Haiti in 1915 and in Santo Domingo in 1916 was dishonest, indecent and rotten."^9

He said that McCormick favored more loans to the Haitian government through American banks. The loans would be good for investors,

^7 Ernest Gruening, "The Senators Visit Haiti and Santo Domingo," The Nation, 4 January 1922, pp. 7-10.

^8 Ernest Gruening, "Haiti and Santo Domingo Today," The Nation, 8 February 1922, pp. 147-149.

^9 Ibid.
but once they were made the occupation would have to continue to protect American interests.

In July 1922 the Nation printed two unsigned editorials about the results of the Senate committee's investigation of Haiti and Santo Domingo. The first criticized the committee report, calling it "the expected whitewash with trimmings." The report had recommended continued occupation of Haiti, and the reason, according to the Nation, was to make Haiti safe for American investment. The report, which called much of the Haitian testimony unreliable, said Haitians favored American occupation. "If American rule is a love feast, why the need for martial law?" the Nation asked.

But it was a different story in Santo Domingo. American forces never gained strong control of the government there, as they had in Haiti. Resistance remained strong, and the United States decided to retreat. A Nation editorial, "Retreat from Santo Domingo," called for an admission of guilt by the United States and an offer to make amends.

The issue in Mexico was much the same as in Haiti and Santo Domingo, except that a popular revolution had installed a new government in 1920. President Alvaro Obregon was trying to enforce the new Mexican constitution and fulfill the promises of the revolution--

\[10\]"Senator McCormick Sees It Through," The Nation, 12 July 1922, p. 32.

\[11\]Ibid.

\[12\]"Retreat From Santo Domingo," The Nation, 26 July 1922, P. 85.
democracy, education, land for the peasants and the right of the workers to organize.

The Nation argued that the Obregon government should be recognized as a legitimate, constitutional administration. However, American investors were heavily involved in that country, too. The Nation charged that those capitalists who controlled millions of acres of oil-rich Mexican land preferred to keep the country in a state of bankruptcy and revolution. They did not want a strong central government to regulate their activities and make them pay taxes. American bankers, the Nation contended, wanted to see continued financial instability so they could lend large sums on their own terms. This was the "handful of American gentlemen" that blocked recognition of Obregon. ¹³

Gruening left as managing editor of the Nation and traveled to Mexico to view the situation first hand. With the Nov. 8, 1922, issue, Freda Kirchwey became managing editor and Gruening moved to associate editor. The Nation printed his reports from Mexico, and the first appeared the following May. The stories were analytical, interpretive and thorough. Gruening explained the situation in Mexico from a cultural and historical point of view.

He began by saying he had gone to Mexico believing in the need for recognition of the Obregon government by the United States. But four months there had changed his mind. He asserted that non-recognition was the best because it had instilled in Mexicans the belief

¹³"Recognize Obregon," The Nation, 1 June 1921, p. 780.
that they could survive alone—that they could live without help from a powerful nation. Gruening said Obregon had inherited a society in which illiteracy, poverty and corruption were commonplace. He believed, however, that Obregon had begun to build self-reliance where ignorance, corruption and militarism had stood for 400 years:

"With the non-interference of high-power 'development' there is emerging a different sense of values, a realization of the inherent . . . possibilities of Mexico itself."¹⁴

Gruening believed that Obregon was accomplishing the ideals of the revolution and that the coming generations would "recognize his administration as one of the notable constructive elements in the history of this hemisphere."¹⁵


¹⁵Ibid.
CHAPTER IV
A Book on Mexico, A Suit Against Hearst

Gruening returned to New York and continued to write articles about Mexico. His interest in that country's affairs widened, and on Oct. 10, 1923, he left the Nation to write a history of Mexico. Research for the book took him across the border several times, and Mexico and its Heritage was published in 1928.

The New Republic called the book "a treasure house of information" and "the most successful attempt toward explaining Mexico in print."

But the reviewer cited some shortcomings. He said that Gruening was not analytical enough in some parts and too biased in others. In his attempt to be objective in politics, he produced an account of varied opinions with no "consistency of style and interpretation."

The reviewer said Gruening revealed a bias against the Catholic Church in Mexico by interviewing only those priests who criticized the church. He also charged the author with making judgments "which he himself repudiates on the next page."

Gruening responded with a letter, which the New Republic printed Dec. 26, 1928. He said the reviewer did not understand that Catholicism in Mexico could not be compared to Catholicism in the United


2 Ibid.
States. He denied being one-sided in selecting material and said that if the reviewer knew of sources he overlooked, "let him produce the authorities and quote from them." ³

The Saturday Review did not see those problems with Gruening's book. It said the author "writes . . . with courage but not malice, without adherance to doctrinaire bias. . . . It requires judgment and courage to succeed in such a task." The reviewer criticized only the book's length, saying that some chapters could have been omitted. He considered Gruening's treatment of the Catholic Church true and impartial. ⁴

In 1924 Gruening served as director of publicity for Progressive Party presidential candidate Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin. LaFollette's running mate was Sen. Burton K. Wheeler of Montana.

Gruening's interest in Mexico resulted in two lawsuits, both initiated by him and both ending in his favor. One was against the Chicago Tribune in 1923. The other charged the powerful William Randolph Hearst with libel. Gruening summarized both cases in a letter to a friend in 1927:

"The Chicago Tribune had me involved in a Bolshevik conspiracy to turn over this entire hemisphere to Moscow through Mexico City. I think they really believed what they had printed." ⁵


Gruening told how two investigators from the Tribune followed him through Mexico as he conducted research for his articles and book. They planned, he said, to get copies of the credentials they thought he carried from the Third Communist Internationale. The Tribune said Gruening was a member of a conspiracy to turn over Mexico and the rest of the West to Communist Russia. Gruening sued, and the Tribune settled out of court for $15,000. He told his friend, "I am willing to be called a Bolshevik at any time for that amount."  

The lawsuit against Hearst was far more complex. Hearst held vast resources of mineral and timber property in Mexico--by Hearst's own estimation valued at $4 million. The investments were shaky because of the political turmoil in Central America. Under Plutarco Elias Calles, Obregón's successor, agrarian reforms were placing large tracts of land in the hands of the peasants, and Hearst had lost a few parcels. Hearst biographer W.A. Swanberg wrote that the Hearst papers had praised Calles in hopes that the Mexican president would be kind to Hearst. Meanwhile, Washington lobbyists representing American investors in Mexico were labeling Calles a Bolshevik and calling for armed intervention. "Hearst's own career demonstrated that at intervals he could be depended on to do something approaching lunacy," Swanberg wrote. "By 1927 he was overdue."  

Hearst learned of the existence of some documents, purported to be from the Mexican government, that revealed plots by Calles to

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6 Ibid.
wage war against the United States, to promote Communism and to bribe U.S. senators and news editors to aid in the plot. They were for sale, and Hearst bought them for $20,000 and printed them, with no attempt at verification, in his newspapers. The documents appeared in installments beginning Nov. 24, 1927. A month later he printed--without naming names--a document that accused four U.S. senators of taking more than $1.1 million to promote the Calles scheme.8

Gruening and Nation publisher Oswald Garrison Villard were charged in the printed documents with having taken money from Calles to spread propaganda. The papers asserted that Calles paid Gruening $10,000 in 1926 to help the Mexican president convert a group of striking English coal miners to Communism. Calling the allegation "an absolute and outrageous lie," Gruening sued. He told reporters that "such a letter could only have been conceived in the fantastic imagination of the forger and the yellow journalists working in unison."9

The U.S. Senate immediately began an investigation and called Hearst to testify. He admitted that he had not checked the authenticity of the documents or even consulted another source. He believed that no money actually had changed hands and said the reason he did not print the senators' names was out of fear of libel. The names were revealed during the hearings.

8Ibid., p. 397.
The documents had been forged by amateurs who made Spanish spelling and grammatical errors that no Mexican bureaucrat would have committed.

"To any informed person," Gruening wrote, "they are laughable." He settled out of court for $75,000.

Sen. George Norris of Nebraska, one of the four legislators accused of taking a bribe, wrote Hearst a letter, which the New York Times printed Dec. 20, 1927. He called Hearst "unfair and dishonest" and "entirely without honor."

He said that Hearst's motives were to promote war and revolution to protect his investments in Mexico: "In other words, for the sake of your financial investment, you were not only willing to ruin the reputation of honest and innocent men but you were willing to plunge our country into war with a friendly neighbor."

Norris concluded that "the Hearst system of newspapers, spreading like a venomous web to all parts of our country, constitutes the sewer system of American journalism."

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10 Letter to John Barry, 2 December 1927.
12 Ibid.
PORTLAND, Maine, in 1927 had three newspapers—the Evening Express, the Press-Herald and the Sunday Telegram. All three in that city of 52,000 were owned by Guy P. Gannett. C.H. Tobey, a publisher who had owned a number of New England papers, wanted to start in Portland an independent paper that would counter the trend toward consolidation of ownership. Tobey was with the Boston Herald, where Gruening had worked 13 years earlier, and he had followed the journalist's career. He knew of Gruening's liberal convictions and his editorial-writing skills. Gruening wrote that "Tobey's interest in the matter was per se a strong recommendation to me."¹

Tobey and a group of investors, including Maine Governor Ralph Brewster and his law partner, Phil Chapman, asked Gruening to edit the daily. The group was interested both in the profit potential of an independent paper and in the need for an opposing viewpoint. "They asked me to become editor under conditions that were eminently acceptable," Gruening said. "I could do nothing else but come."²

The first issue of the Portland Evening News was printed Oct. 3, 1927, and the editor saw "a long, hard fight ahead."³ The three

²Ibid.
³Ibid.
established papers were controlled by Samuel J. Insull, an electric-
utility financier from Chicago.

Portland was a conservative city, and Gruening wasted no time
raising controversial issues and taking liberal stands. When several
service clubs tried to prevent pacifist Lucia Ames Mead from speaking,
the News supported her views and her right to free speech. The
paper also argued successfully for retaining the primary election
system in Maine, while other papers opposed it.

At first the News was able to print only 16 pages, but it soon
acquired equipment to handle what Gruening called "the flood of
advertising."\textsuperscript{4} By April, 1928, circulation reached 20,000.

"If the tide of consolidation can be successfully bucked here,"
Gruening wrote, "there is no reason it cannot be in fifty other cities
the size of Portland, or larger."\textsuperscript{5}

Gruening's experience on the Nation is easily seen in the pages
of the Portland Evening News. He started a literary section and was
determined to make it the most distinguished literary page in New
England. Writing to a historian asking him to review a book for the
News, Gruening said:

I am trying to shake up this community a bit and get
them away from the conventional pap they have been get-
ing. I want very much to make them feel that they are
getting something worthwhile and have them drawn to our
book page and stimulate their desire for books.\textsuperscript{6}

\textsuperscript{4}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{5}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{6}Letter to William E. Woodward from Ernest Gruening, editor,
Gruening complained that Maine society was centered on service clubs such as Rotary and Kiwanis. Many people objected to the editor's liberalism and his association in 1924 with Robert LaFollette. "It's not that they're reactionary, but they have not had a chance to learn a lot of things that are happening in the world."\(^7\)

Gruening stressed progressive goals for Portland and its economy. He wrote that the way to become a metropolis was to think and act like one. He pushed for a "Greater Portland" that would annex the six surrounding communities into one city of 115,000. Greater Portland, he predicted, would command a powerful voice in New England and provide a better setting for industry.

Censorship confronted Gruening in Portland as it had in Boston. After arguing on behalf of Lucia Ames Mead, he confronted a sheriff who wanted to restrict certain films:

> Censorship is in accord neither with American tradition nor with the spirit of the age. It savors of past times and other lands where people were deliberately kept in the dark by autocracies, oligarchies and hierarchies. The danger of abuse of censorship is always far greater than the danger of abuse by pictures or print. . . . The best censor is, after all, the good taste and common sense of the citizenry.\(^8\)

The News then quoted the sheriff as claiming he had no argument with the press or free speech, only with objectionable films. But Gruening asked how a man could favor one form of censorship and disapprove another. He said all restrictions of free expression are wrong and the press guards against restriction on all levels.

\(^7\)Ibid.

The Portland Evening News reported exciting issues but offered an uninspired layout by modern standards. The front page was cluttered with column rules, tombstoned headlines and often up to 20 stories. Skyline and banner headlines appeared often on the same cover, with the skyline in italics. The story that went with the banner headline was the day's top story and usually ran in the two right-hand columns. But it often was hard to find the story that accompanied the skyline. It sometimes appeared in the upper left under the banner, but often was found in the middle of the page. Each headline deck was indented and subheads were two-, three- or four-deck pyramids. Important stories carried two or three subheads in bold type. Many times the cover had no photos, but when pictures were used, they often were crowded near the top. There was no apparent effort to balance photos across the page.

The News advertised that it had a "virile editorial page." Its design was more attractive than the front page. Column rules were used, but column width varied. The masthead appeared over Gruening's two-column-wide editorial opinions on the left side. A three-column cartoon, about six inches deep, occupied the top right corner. Other features, such as letters to the editor, guest editorials and "Daily Health Talk," appeared regularly. Gruening later gave the page more personal touches with book reviews of political importance and guest opinions. Editorials ran on page six behind sports for about the first two months of publication, then the editorials were moved to page four.
Design on other inside pages depended on advertising. Page two, a national politics section, featured more photos than page one did. The paper also had sections for finance, women and society, state news, radio, comics and theater and film reviews. Sports had two pages. International news got little coverage. The News subscribed to the United Press.
Gruening's effort to save the primary election system in Maine was the first battle in his five-year war against electric utilities. On the surface it was a political question; the main opponents of the primary system were the utilities. Water power, Maine's most important resource, had been in dispute since colonial days when lumber, grain and textile mills fought for the best sites. Hydroelectricity began to replace coal-fired steam in the early 1900s.

In 1909 the Maine Legislature passed the Fernald Law, which prohibited hydroelectricity producers from selling power outside the state. The law protected the state's resources and assured that industry and home consumers would not be deprived if profits from exported electricity were greater than those from power sold at home.

The law was unchallenged until 1926 when a group of investors, headed by Samuel Insull of Chicago, bought the Central Maine Power Co. Insull owned utilities in Vermont, New Hampshire and other states. With Central Maine, Insull also bought the loyalty of Walter S. Wyman and Guy P. Gannett of that utility. Gannett also owned four Maine newspapers. It was clear to Gruening that Insull wanted Maine's water power to supply electricity to his other New England utilities. To do that legally would have required repeal of the Fernald Law. Insull's quickest path to that goal would have been to subvert the electoral
process by abolishing the popular primary and packing the state
government with as many of his sympathizers as possible. The party
convention system of choosing candidates would have served his pur-
poses better than primary elections.

With four prominent newspapers--three in Portland and the
Waterville Sentinel--under his influence, Insull had an excellent chance
to sway public opinion. But Maine Governor Ralph Brewster and for-
mer Governor Percival Baxter opposed the repeal. They argued that
Insull would use it as a step toward legalizing power export and be-
yond that would lie his domination of the state's utilities and industry.
Baxter said after the vote that if the primary had been repealed,
"Maine would be governed by a group of men you could put within the
boundaries of this carpet."\(^1\)

The Portland Evening News reported that Insull had acquired
about 75 percent of Maine's public utilities and that those investments
were worth "somewhere between $60,000 and $75,000."\(^2\) It said Insull
had bought a radio station in Maine and had placed Walter Wyman at
its head.

Gruening said the party convention system was a step backward
from the primaries and would remove the people from the political
process.

\(^1\)Percival Baxter, unpublished report in Gruening's scrapbook, undated.

\(^2\)"Maine and the Power Issue," Portland Evening News, 23
November 1927, p. 6.
The voters rejected the proposal and the Portland Evening News took a share of the credit for the outcome though it had been in business less than a month. The Lewiston (Maine) Journal said the "defeat of the primary was accomplished by the Portland Evening News, and in record time--say less than two weeks. Often it takes only a word of authority to swing a state."\(^3\)

Gruening soon took up the cause of the textile industry in Maine. These mills had been closing in New England and building plants in the South. The industry claimed that low wages and longer working hours made places like North Carolina attractive to business. But Gruening said the power interests were causing the shift. He quoted an economist's belief that the cost of electricity was driving industry south. He said that nearby Canada was selling power cheaper than Maine's utilities could produce it.

"It's high time Maine understood how much it costs to produce electricity in Canada and how much it costs in Maine and why," he wrote. He suggested that Maine's power resources were being disguised so that people did not know how much it cost to produce or sell electricity.\(^4\)

In a letter to Villard of the Nation, Gruening called his attack on the utilities "a new departure in daily newspaper editorial writing." He said it was "the first time I know of in which a daily has directly

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\(^3\)Lewiston (Maine) Journal, clipping, date not available.

attacked the financial structure of the power companies--not abstractly
--but the very power companies that are operating in this community."\(^5\)

Samuel Insull and his brother Martin began to urge passage of a
law, the Smith-Carlton Act, that would cancel the Fernald Law and allow
power export. Smith-Carlton passed the state Legislature under a new
governor, William Gardiner, but a referendum was required before it
could be passed into law. The referendum was set for Sept. 9, 1929,
but the newspaper battles began a year before that.

Gruening maintained that the utilities wanted Maine's power so
they could control distributing companies in surrounding states.
Insull's goal, according to Gruening, was to build tier upon tier of
holding companies that would provide no services to the public, but
would trade stock and revenues among themselves while consumers
paid the bills.

The company producing electricity occupied the bottom of the
holding-company pyramid. Gruening contended that if that company
were not owned by a succession of other companies, it would show an
enormous profit that the public would not accept. So after paying
dividends to its shareholders, the producing company passed the
profits to a distributing company. That company paid its shareholders
and passed the remaining profits to yet another holding company,
which did the same. Gruening speculated that after the last holding
company received its share, there still existed "a residue for common
stock dividends for the true owners (who are not the public, but a

\(^5\)Letter to Oswald Garrison Villard from Ernest Gruening, editor,
few individuals). He said the stock dividends paid to as many as five holding companies plus bond interest, salaries and service charges produced utility rates that were far from fair.

Gruening reported in his column that the Central Maine Power Co. paid dividends of 19 and one-half percent on stock owned by the New England Public Service Co. The latter was a holding company that performed no service.

"It may be alleged by the power ownership that the holding company supplies advice, sage counsel, management, credit and whatnot. But the fact is that it is chiefly a device for skimming cream."7

He said the New England Public Service Co. was owned by the National Electric Power Co. to which it paid bond interest and stock dividends.

Again this National Electric Power Company performs no service. How could it be seriously alleged even were we to admit that the first holding company rendered some service in the matter of sound advice, sage counsel, management and credit to the producing company . . . that this advising, managing, sagely counselling and credit producing holding company is in tugn in need of advice, sage counsel, management and credit?8

And the top of this structure was the National Light and Power Co. owned by Middle West Utilities. The chief stockholders of Middle West were Samuel and Martin Insull of Chicago.


8Ibid.
Gruening maintained that if utilities were allowed to export Maine's power, transmission lines would be built at the consumers' expense. Maine residents would have higher rates and reduced services as wealthy customers in other areas demanded more power.

The issue became more intense as the Insull interests tried to suppress the Portland Evening News. According to Gruening, a free press had been virtually unknown in Portland, and the people had been told only what the papers considered good for them. Governor Brewster, a law partner of News part-owner Phil Chapman, had been maligned in the Insull-controlled Gannett papers for opposing power export. Gruening, however, referred to Brewster privately as "enlightened, honest, progressive and fearless, and the type of man Maine sorely needs."^9

Brewster lost the governorship in 1928 to William Gardiner, who had declared himself favorable to export. The Gannett papers called Brewster "Bolshevik" and "radical." In Brewster's words, "they devoted themselves to the attempt to destroy my influence and standing with a melevolence [sic] that has never been concealed."^10

Gannett's Portland Evening Express ran a series of profiles of Maine leaders who favored export. The Express drew a line between these solid, forward-looking citizens and radical obstructionists. Comparing one "successful business man" who favored export to one

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^10 Unpublished memorandum from Governor Ralph O. Brewster, date not available.
of the spokesmen in opposition, the Express asked "whose judgment is likely to be the better, Mr. Curtis or that of a paid radical and Communist?\(^{11}\)

Gannett's papers maintained that only surplus power would be exported and that export would provide low utility rates and taxes and would create jobs. The Portland Press-Herald charged that the campaign against Smith-Carlton was being conducted from outside the state by highly paid lawyers. The Press-Herald suggested that corporations and interest groups with political motives outside Maine were financing the campaign. The paper did not mention specific groups or motives.

Gruening challenged the Press-Herald to produce the name of any lawyer outside Maine who was paid to oppose Smith-Carlton. He offered the rival paper $75 if it could name any such lawyer, corporation or interest group.\(^{12}\) The Evening News never had to write the check.

The Gannett papers were not the only Maine papers to support Insull's efforts to legalize power export. The Bridgton News charged that a radical press was creating hostility against big business. It asked, [are we] "going to do our part in building up the industrial life of the state or hinder in every way possible an organization which

\(^{11}\) "One Side and the Other," Portland Evening Express, 7 September 1929, p. 4.

is exerting every effort to build up the dying industries and to attract new manufacturing?"\(^{13}\)

The *Express* tried to play down Samuel Insull's role in the power struggle, calling him "a man living in Chicago who chances to be interested in public utilities securities." It referred to Insull as "a perfectly innocent and ordinary business man."\(^{14}\)

One of Gruening's most convincing pieces of evidence against the "innocent and ordinary" Insull emerged more than a year before the referendum. He exposed a plot by utility owners to falsify a report on hydroelectric rates. Residence utility rates in Maine were 7.4 cents per kilowatt-hour in 1926. In neighboring Ontario, Canada, consumers paid 1.6 cents per kwh. E.A. Stewart of the University of Minnesota traveled to Ontario to study electric rates, and he returned with a report that justified the U.S. rates. Stewart reported that only a few farmers in Ontario had electricity, and only those in the richest part of the province, and Ontario farmers were forced to sign long-term and often burdensome contracts for power. He concluded that, all things considered, electricity was no more affordable in Ontario than it was in the United States.

Gannett's Portland *Press-Herald* highlighted Stewart's evidence and conclusions and said that "no miracle of cheap power is being offered in Ontario."\(^{15}\)

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\(^{13}\)Bridgton (Maine) *News*, 6 September 1929, p. 4.

\(^{14}\)Portland *Evening Express*, 13 September 1929, p. 4.

Four months later the Portland Evening News devoted a full page to the story and revealed its own findings. The page faced the editorial section and reprinted the Press-Herald's "Cheap Power" editorial with copies of checks issued to Professor Stewart by a Minnesota utility. U.S. utilities had paid Stewart nearly $400 to produce a report that favored their pricing policies. The Evening News also printed a letter from the chairman of Ontario's hydroelectric power commission: "Not only are the figures published in Stewart's report incorrect in many instances, but statements throughout the report are not in accordance with the facts."\(^\text{16}\)

The Washington (D.C.) Herald picked up the Stewart story and pointed out the five cent per kwh rate difference between Ontario and Maine. The Herald said, "The five cents per kilowatt-hour which the American consumer pays is the basis which supports the entire pyramid of watered stocks and holding companies within holding companies."\(^\text{17}\)

Gruening contended that the Stewart incident was another attempt by the power trust to sway public opinion and increase profits. "It shows where the Portland Press-Herald belongs in the scheme of Insullating the state of Maine against the truth, and it ought to show the people of Maine how everlastingly the power trust organs here would 'get away with it' were it not for the Portland Evening News."\(^\text{18}\)

\(^\text{16}\)Portland Evening News 17 June 1928, pp. 4-5.
\(^\text{17}\)Washington (D.C.) Herald, 4 June 1928, p. 2.
\(^\text{18}\)Portland Evening News, 17 June 1928, pp. 4-5.
As the referendum neared and Insull pulled advertising from the Evening News, the issue developed into a debate on the role of journalism in politics. George Norris, Gruening's ally in the lawsuit against Hearst, took the cause to the U.S. Senate. He lamented the nationwide trend toward consolidation of newspapers under the power trust. On the Senate floor he described the Portland Evening News as a paper "that cannot be bribed, that cannot be frightened but that has the courage upon all occasions to speak its mind, to speak the truth as it believes the truth to be."¹⁹

Norris declared that the power interests had tried to force the Portland Evening News out of business. Banks that Insull controlled through Wyman threatened to call the notes of department stores that advertised in the Evening News. And in Augusta, Maine's capital, the paper could not be sold in a hotel owned by the power conglomerate. Wyman asserted that he stopped the sale of the Evening News in the Augusta House not because of the power issue, but because the paper's politics "were directly against the industrial interests of the state, and I do not care to be party to the distribution of propaganda of that kind."²⁰

Norris also charged that the power trust was buying newspapers and boycotting those it could not buy:

> How long, oh, how long can this be kept up? How long is this struggling giant of human liberty going to

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²⁰ Letter to Jerome Davis from Walter Wyman, Portland, Maine, 23 March 1931.
remain asleep while the power trust and monopoly is binding his hands and his feet so that he will be helpless? How long are we going to permit inroads to be made upon a free press? . . . When our press is monopolized, when it is gathered up by special interests and used for private profit, then it will soon be that human liberty will be dissipated.21

Gannett's Portland Press-Herald said, however, that no interest group can really control a newspaper—that a paper's readers are the only controllers of content. "The newspaper which people support is always unbossed."

The Press-Herald said the success of any paper depends on serving the public. "There is not one who is successful who would sacrifice the public's interest for anything the 'power trust' . . . could offer." The Press-Herald called the attempts by power companies to influence editorial policy "folly."

Editor & Publisher called the battle "the ugliest situation we have noted on the newspaper map of the United States in a long time."

The boycott against the Evening News continued. Gruening published the statement given to an Evening News advertising salesman by a representative of a Maine power company:

I am extremely sorry, but my orders are not to give the Portland Evening News a line of advertising. I got those orders from Mr. Gordon. Mr. Gordon gets his orders from Mr. Wyman. Mr. Wyman gets his orders from Mr. Insull. Go to Chicago.22


The power interests carried out their threats to call the notes of people who advertised in the Evening News. Gruening told the Federal Trade Commission that a publicity man for the Maine Central Railroad bought advertising for the railroad after he had been warned not to. The man owed money to the Fidelity Trust Company, of which Walter Wyman and Guy Gannett were officers. The man was able to pay off the notes after they were called, but he would not allow the Evening News to use his name or make the story public.

Portland merchants denied the boycott and Gruening was prevented from printing hard evidence because people involved feared reprisals. As the publicity man for Maine Central Railroad put it, Insull had "a long arm."

Gruening told Oswald Garrison Villard that he knew of merchants who wanted to advertise in the Evening News but didn't because they feared their notes would be called. Wyman maintained that if advertising was withheld, it was because store owners believed they could get more for their money in the Gannett papers.

The cost of the campaign became a major issue; each side accused the other of enormous expenses. The cost question led to a damaging admission by power advocate Walter Wyman. Six weeks before the referendum Gruening debated power export with Wyman, Insull's chief representative in Maine. Gruening charged that the cost of the export campaign came from consumers. He read testimony that Wyman had given before a Legislative hearing, where Wyman had said that lobbying expenses were considered an operating cost and were, thus, financed by consumers. Wyman argued that that testimony referred
only to lobbying the Legislature and had nothing to do with the referendum campaign. When Gruening asked where the Maine campaign funds originated, Wyman said, "it comes out of some money we made in Texas."

"This was a bombshell to the audience and a fatal admission," Gruening wrote. "It revealed to the people of Maine that a vast sum was being transferred elsewhere to capture a Maine election and indicated clearly the nationwide character of the Insull monopoly."

Wyman's slip also negated the argument that Insull wanted to develop hydroelectric power to benefit Maine's economy.

Estimates of the amount the export proponents spent on the campaign ranged from their account of $196,000 to Gruening's guess of nearly $1 million. Gruening contended that the $196,000 was only the amount legitimately accounted for in advertising, printing and paying speakers. It did not include money paid to workers and members of committees. Also, Gannett's newspaper empire benefited from the flood of advertising and the printing done at his job plants.

By Gruening's account, the anti-export faction spent $1,100 on its campaign.

It was clear after the defeat of Smith-Carlton that the organization working for power export had overstated its case. The Bridgton News, a supporter of Insull, said that "their efforts apparently added fire to the flame of suspicion which had been kindled by those opposed

\[23\] Letter to Governor Dan Moody from Ernest Gruening, editor, Portland Evening News, Portland, Maine, 4 October 1929.
to exportation and the great mass of voters were afraid that something sinister was threatening the state."

"The Battle of Portland," Silas Bent's account of the Portland Evening News' journalistic struggle, was printed in the New Republic March 20, 1929. Bent said newspaper consolidation was "one of the most disquieting facts about modern journalism." He concluded that the power-export advocates hurt their own cause with poor finesse. They fought so hard that people became curious about what the Evening News was printing.

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CHAPTER VII
Utilities, Hoover and the Great Depression

In two years of publication the Portland Evening News had established a respected editorial page as Gruening remained unswayed by special-interest groups. It could be argued that part-owners Chapman and Brewster started the paper to further their political convictions and that Gruening served that purpose. But the business end of the paper never interfered or attempted to affect editorial policy. Editorial opinions were the product of the editor's liberal convictions.

Gruening never allowed his name to be used to promote a group or cause though he may have supported it. He had written editorials protesting a federal bill that would have allowed the Navy Department to spend $1 billion in the following eight years. The Emergency Committee on the Big Navy Bill learned of Gruening's opinion and printed his name on its letterhead. Gruening protested:

> Despite the fact that I am heartily in sympathy with the purpose of this committee . . . an editor has no business to associate himself with committees which seek to achieve any particular object. He must save his influence to use through the columns of his newspaper. He weakens and destroys that influence as he ties himself up with various causes. Then he is committed and nothing he says thereafter has as much weight as if he were obviously free to make up his mind as the situation develops.

Gruening also refused to join other groups: the Northeast chapter of the League of Nations, The World Tomorrow—which advocated

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world peace and disarmament—the National Birth Control Committee
and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.
He had openly supported those groups.

By 1931, two years after the stock market crash, the nation's
economy had become the greatest issue in America. Gruening had
admired President Herbert Hoover politically since 1920, but had
become increasingly disappointed in the government's ability to deal
with the Great Depression. He wrote about a lack of leadership and
about uncertainty in high places about how to solve the crisis. He
saw three causes of the depression: an unwillingness to try new
things, the World War and the blind and false prosperity of the
1920s.

Gruening advocated a lenient tariff and a breakdown of the old
spirit of nationalism. He said that all nations were tied economically
and should trade freely on a world market.

Nationalism also contributed to Gruening's second cause of the
depression, the World War. Wars were the "culmination of cutthroat
commercial policies developed in times of peace." He said that war
was conceived in the false belief that prosperity for one nation always
meant poverty for another.2

The prosperity of the 1920s provided a false hope during the
depression that good times were just ahead. Gruening believed that
this hope caused the impression that changes should not be forced,
"that prosperity was an unending, enduring, constant and unshatter-

2"Examining the Depression," Portland Evening News, 1 June
1931, p. 4.
able American phenomenon, and that only a piker, a knocker and a grouch would dream of selling America short."³

Gruening said Americans no longer could survive on faith and that concrete plans should be instituted. He urged action by the federal government to replace Hoover's belief that business left alone would improve the economy. He called for increased taxes on business, unemployment compensation and more jobs. He said the American workers needed a chance to maintain their self respect "to validate traditional American hope and faith that ours is the land of opportunity."⁴

Gruening wrote frequently about world peace. He argued that war solved nothing and unsettled everything. He called World War I a "ghastly deception" and wrote that "the real enemy of all humanity is not any other nation, not any other people--composed of the fathers and mothers and sons and daughters of the same flesh and blood--but war itself."⁵

He pressed for isolationism, saying that the United States had no reason to get involved in the worldwide squabbles of the 30s.

"The crime can be surely stopped in but one way: by the deliberate refusal of all sane Americans to engage therein; in the determination of every being who calls himself civilized to set his face

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⁴Ibid.
like flint against another American participation in mass massacre."^6

The Portland Evening News continued its battle against the Insull conglomerate. Gruening said the "racket" continued to be the burden placed on the supply services, which generally were well run. The victim was the consumer "who pays his money to swell the stream of revenue, which, flowing on upward through tier after tier of holding companies, enables the insiders and manipulators to extract enormous profits."^7

Gruening's editorials increasingly showed a pattern of New Deal thought even before the term became known. President Hoover was reluctant to act against big business or institute federal reforms. He believed that local governments were responsible for the welfare of the people and that, left alone, the economy would recover from the Great Depression. He maintained that government controls on business and relief programs for the poor and unemployed would stifle individualism and the sense of achievement that had made America prosper.

Gruening, however, called for federal control over power trusts and other monopolies. He said the situation in Maine was part of a nationwide trend that could be stopped only by federal restrictions on the "entrenched monopoly." His proof was the set of facts surrounding the campaign money that came from Texas in 1929 to swing the election in Maine. He pointed out that that money had come from

^6"Preparing Against the Next War," Portland Evening News, 14 October 1931, p. 4.

consumers in Texas and that it was impossible for independent local utilities to guard against such skullduggery. Since holding companies were not considered utilities, they were not subject to regulation by state utility commissions. Federal regulation was necessary.\textsuperscript{8}

The Insull empire finally collapsed in 1932. The brothers repeatedly had transferred money from holding companies into their personal accounts. Also, to bolster profits, one holding company would lend large sums to another while the consumer paid the interest. And as profits rose, dividends to stockholders, principally the Insull's, increased.

As Gruening explained, the "utility financiers not only loaned securities and borrowed other securities, but they pledged these borrowed securities as collateral to their own loans; they also loaned these borrowed securities and presumably, the borrowers either pledged these twice borrowed securities or loaned them again to other needy companies, ad infinitum."\textsuperscript{9}

But the holding company system proved to be of limited capacity. Each holding company depended on surplus profits from the one below it. If there were suddenly no such profits and one of the companies failed, all those above it had to fail. The Insulls finally bled consumers to the point where revenue during the depression, when demand for commercial power decreased, could not keep up with the spiraling cost of payments to stockholders and investors. The pyramid tumbled

\textsuperscript{8}Ibid.

and the company at the top, the $2.5 billion Middle West Utilities Co., went into receivership.

Gruening praised Franklin Roosevelt's position against holding companies. Six weeks before the 1932 election, in which Roosevelt became president, Gruening said that FDR was "diametrically opposed" to President Hoover's attitude. Roosevelt called for "pitiless publicity" of all utility company operations. He demanded federal intervention in utility pricing policies and advertising campaigns.

"He has struck a tremendous blow for the forgotten man."10

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10 "He Didn't Crib His Speech," Portland Evening News, 23 September 1932, p. 4.
CHAPTER VIII
The Coming of the New Deal

In November 1932 Gruening accepted an offer to return to New York and again work for the Nation. With the power struggle behind him, having broken corrupt attempts to influence public opinion, he sought a broader platform. The Nation reached an audience that was larger in number and in depth of interest than the readership in Portland.

The Portland Evening News suffered after Gruening left, and it survived only five and one-half more years. He corresponded with a journalist in Portland, and the letters he received told a story of domination of editorial policy by the paper's business office.

"As long as your editorials held out," the friend wrote, "the paper was on the right track. Circulation boomed, and many Portlanders fairly shouted at the sight of editorials that showed some effort at directing public opinion and subsequent action."¹

Publisher Phil Chapman, who had given Gruening a free hand, began dictating a policy of offending no one. Profit became the paper's sole motive and it was suddenly "no more trustworthy than the Gannett-Wyman outfit."²

¹Letter to Ernest Gruening from Jim Abrahamson, reporter, Portland Evening News, Portland, Maine, 29 April 1933.
²Ibid.
In response, Gruening wrote a letter to the *Evening News* and it appeared on the editorial page April 25, 1934. He outlined the principles that, in his opinion, any successful newspaper or journalist had to follow. A newspaper had to be an "organ of public service," and it had to report, without fear or favor, the dealings of the public officials. The *Evening News*, Gruening said, was a young paper but already could boast that it had exposed a corrupt utility racket that had threatened Maine's economy. The paper had helped bring the scheme to national attention.

Gruening believed that a newspaper should stimulate civic pride and make the community it serves "a healthier, happier and more prosperous dwelling place."³

Writing again for the *Nation*, he carried those convictions to a national scale. He had contributed articles even while at work in Portland, and Villard often had sought his advice when hiring editors and writers. The *Nation* published "Haiti Marches Toward Freedom," an article in which Gruening continued his arguments against American intervention in Latin America. He asserted that 15 years of occupation in Haiti were more than enough. While the United States never had an excuse for intervention, the depression proved that this country was not capable of handling even its own affairs.⁴

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In "Hope For Porto Rico" he said it was heartening to see, rather than the brutal imperialism in Haiti and Santo Domingo, efforts by the United States to improve social conditions in an area where this country had a legal mandate.  

Gruening's name reappeared on the Nation's masthead Jan. 4, 1933. Oswald Garrison Villard, who had been with the magazine for 35 years, became a contributing editor, and a board of four editors assumed daily control--Gruening, Henry Hazlitt, Joseph Krutch and Freda Kirchwey. Kirchwey had replaced Gruening as managing editor 10 years before.

The Nation welcomed FDR's inauguration in 1933 and his promise of a "New Deal" for America. Gruening wrote that "in seeking to recover some measure of stability, the people . . . look as never before to the state . . . as an agency of economic resuscitation."

New York was ravaged by the depression. "Hoovervilles," soup lines and skilled workers begging for jobs were stark portraits of the prosperity that Hoover kept promising would come and for which he kept waiting. Roosevelt was determined to change things. He worked for laws that abolished prohibition and he pulled the nation together to solve the crisis rather than wait for a series of separate agencies to effect recovery.

But the Nation was not wholehearted in its support for Roosevelt. Norman Thomas wrote that the New Deal did not go far enough toward

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socialism, and the magazine called FDR's farm subsidy plan "indefensible." But it said the economic picture was generally "hopeful and refreshing" since Roosevelt began to "turn away from the economic nationalism of the Republican regime of the past twelve years."\(^6\)

Gruening expressed hope for Roosevelt's liberalism. In a review of a collection of the president's campaign speeches, he agreed with Roosevelt that freedom and opportunity were still valid goals for America, but a new approach to government was needed. That approach was the New Deal. While Gruening agreed with the New Deal, he charged that it would have to prove itself to the public within the following few months.

On Nov. 22, 1933, the Nation reported that Gruening had been appointed adviser to the American delegation to the Pan-American conference in Montevideo, Uruguay. The conference was to assess the relationship between the United States and Latin America. Secretary of State Cordell Hull was the chief U.S. delegate. As one of the country's leading liberal authorities on Latin America, Gruening was picked by Roosevelt to advise the state department and provide a balanced view. The Nation hoped the conference would produce "a constructive policy to preserve and strengthen peace and goodwill."\(^7\)

Six months after the conference Gruening wrote "At Last We're Getting Out of Haiti." Under Roosevelt's New Deal in inter-American affairs, the United States was leaving Haiti two years before expira-

\(^6\)The Nation, 19 April 1933, p. 429.

\(^7\)"What May Be Done At Montevideo," The Nation, 6 December 1933, p. 640.
tion of the treaty that legalized U.S. involvement. Gruening said that Roosevelt had begun his presidency convinced that martial law should remain in Haiti, but Secretary Hull had persuaded him to reverse that policy after the Montevideo conference. "Haiti will again be free, sovereign and independent as it was for 111 years before our intervention. Events have more than justified the Nation's attitude on the Haiti question."  

Gruening accepted an offer Feb. 17, 1934, to become editor of the New York Post. The New Republic called him "a vigorous and consistent critic of the sins of the commercial press," and said that as editor of the Post he would have "the best chance of his whole career to practise [sic] what he has been preaching . . . with the eyes of the country's leading journalists upon him."  

That hopeful beginning was short-lived, however, as Gruening clashed with Post publisher J. David Stern. The publisher, whose liberal reputation had attracted Gruening, killed stories criticizing a federal judge in Pennsylvania to whom he owed favors. Stern also would not allow Gruening to print editorials against a New York landlord who owned tenements that often caught fire, causing many deaths. Gruening learned that Stern was negotiating loans with the landlord for the Post.

"I felt that despite Stern's reputation as a liberal, which he had demonstrated conspicuously in various ways, our views on the conduct

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of a newspaper were not compatible. He shared that view and we agreed to part company."¹⁰

Stern announced Gruening's resignation April 7,¹¹ and that summer Gruening joined the Roosevelt administration. On August 16 he was made director of the Division of Territories and Island Possessions. The new office was part of the Department of the Interior and supervised U.S. relationships with Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

Gruening was a journalist during a period of readjustment of American traditions and re-evaluation of entrenched policies. Gunboat diplomacy in the Caribbean was supported by American conservatives. It was a vestige of 19th century manifest destiny—the idea that America was sanctioned by God to occupy the entire continent. By the early 1900s the concept was broadened to include South America, but it also had taken another name—imperialism. America veiled gunboat diplomacy in years of tradition.

Changes also took place in other parts of the world, and Americans realized that self-determination would have been a hollow promise if it did not include Latin America as well as Europe. It took a liberal press—determined to present the facts accurately and to interpret them fairly and fearlessly—to bring those changes before the public. The conservative press was as much a part of the prob-


lem as were the opponents of change. Hearst urged war in the Caribbean and promoted hatred of the "yellow peril" in Japan.

Tradition stood in the way of progress on the domestic front as well. Gruening's experience with the power interests in Maine is an example of a conservative press supporting economic oppression. In "The Battle of Portland" Silas Bent said "Ernest Gruening's distinguished record as a liberal of courage is incompatible with power-trust ideals." 12

Federal controls became necessary and it took a revolutionary New Deal to effect them. The Tennessee Valley Authority, a power project that became a showpiece of FDR's recovery plan, looked socialistic compared to the freedom that Insull enjoyed.

The press can influence public opinion either by corrupt methods and selfish purposes--as was Insull's aim in Portland--or by practicing sound, honest journalism. In Portland Gruening proved that even a conservative city will honor the opinions of a liberal editor if his cause is just, his opinions are strong and his paper is free.

CHAPTER IX
Alaska's Governor

Gruening's appointment as head of territories and island possessions brought favorable reactions. A San Juan newspaper, El Mondo, called it "the most important move in the development of Roosevelt's New Deal in Puerto Rico." The paper added that an editor of the Nation could find a post in no administration other than Roosevelt's.¹

The Nation called the appointment "one of the finest things Mr. Roosevelt has done" in Washington and "an act of grace." It took credit for demanding action that led to American withdrawal from Haiti.² The appointment did not require Congressional approval.

But the Anchorage (Alaska) Daily Times reserved its praise. The paper resented the territory's treatment as a stepchild of the federal government. It said Alaska was a "ward of the interior department" and Gruening, as a foe of imperialism, should "take the administration of the far-flung lands out of politics."³

The New York Times said in an Oct. 8, 1934, editorial that Gruening's appointment and the transfer of island possessions from the war department to the interior department were "liberalizing steps." One week later the Times printed a feature story about


²The Nation, 29 August 1934, p. 225.


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Gruening and his policies for territories and possessions. It said that territorial administration had been handled by many units of government and Gruening's office would at last create consistency.

Gruening said that welfare was the primary need in the territories. Puerto Rico was overpopulated and suffered from epidemics such as hookworm. It needed to develop industry and control the birth rate. After President Roosevelt described the situation there as "hopeless," Gruening gave it priority over the other three areas.

Alaska needed more people and Gruening revealed plans to open land and encourage farmers to move there. Hawaii needed improved Congressional representation, and the Virgin Islands would be made a "self-sustaining, self-reliant, economically stable . . . community" by rehabilitating industry and agriculture. The Virgin Islands had suffered economically when rum, its largest export, had been illegal in the United States.4

Gruening was head of the Puerto Rican Reconstruction Administration, a New Deal agency with a $40 million budget. PRRA concentrated on rural electrification, reforestation, slum clearance and housing. The projects created 60,000 jobs and stimulated a stagnant economy.

The New York Times also reported opposition to Gruening in Puerto Rico. It said the majority leader of the Puerto Rican Legislature accused Gruening of causing political disorder. The politician

called him a "colonial dictator" because he gave control of the PRRA to a liberal minority.

The conservative majority leader said Gruening ignored Roosevelt's promise that reconstruction would include Puerto Rican authorities as well as Washington bureaucrats. Conservatives called Gruening's New Deal policies for Puerto Rico "wildly radical, impractical and visionary schemes." Gruening accused the conservatives of "clandestine activities and sabotage."

Gruening later acknowledged that he did allow PRRA to be dominated by liberals, but, he said, "I was interested in their qualifications, not their political affiliations." He regretted that PRRA had become "a vehicle for partisan employment."

PRRA acquired farm land from absentee corporations and distributed it among the people. It supplied seeds, fertilizer and modern equipment to improve the coffee, tobacco and citrus crops. It built medical facilities and schools, planted trees and provided dental care.

But Gruening became increasingly unpopular in Puerto Rico. Conservatives saw PRRA as an agency of U.S. imperialism. He alienated the Catholic church by advocating birth control and distribution of contraceptives, and liberals as well as conservatives opposed his plan to teach English in the schools. La Linterna, a conservative


Puerto Rican newspaper wrote, "men like Gruening . . . ought to be behind bars in some penitentiary for the good and honor of humanity."\(^8\)

And Gruening continually was in conflict with Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes. Ickes was not only a liberal New Dealer, but also a bureaucrat who believed in the chain of command. He required that all appointments with the president that concerned the interior department be cleared through him, but Gruening often broke the rule. Ickes wrote that Gruening "seems to think that he is entirely independent of me. He constantly shortcuts me and only comes to me when he is in trouble."\(^9\)

The conflict with Ickes began when Roosevelt appointed Gruening head of PRRA. Ickes felt that since PRRA was an interior department agency, he should have chosen its head. Ickes threatened to launch a Congressional investigation into the conflicts in Puerto Rico, and he called Gruening's actions "insubordination."\(^10\) Ickes asked Gruening to resign from PRRA, which Gruening did, and the president accepted the resignation July 13, 1937. Roosevelt told Gruening that he allowed him to resign only because he knew that he would remain as director of Territories and Island Possessions and would watch closely the situation in Puerto Rico.

On June 4, 1939, Ickes wrote in his diary, "The president told me to offer Gruening the governorship of Alaska, and I shall take this up

\(^8\) Many Battles, p. 199.


\(^10\) The Secret Diary Of Harold L. Ickes, p. 150.
with him shortly."\textsuperscript{11} U.S. News & World Report, in a profile of Gruening 10 years later, interpreted the move as an attempt by Ickes to get Gruening out of Washington: "A falling out with Secretary Ickes developed and Mr. Gruening was exiled to the Siberia of the department, Alaska."\textsuperscript{12}

Ickes asked Alaska Governor John Troy for his resignation and he received it September 2. Ickes had traveled to Alaska in the summer of 1938 and he and Troy had discussed the territory's economic and social problems. Ickes told the governor that the people lacked leadership and that the territory needed industry and resource management. He urged increased taxes on the export of gold and other minerals. Troy opposed increased taxes on business in Alaska.

Troy's health was bad, and Ickes wrote after his trip that "he can barely walk."\textsuperscript{13} When the New York Times reported Troy's resignation and Gruening's appointment, it cited Troy's "prolonged ill health" as the only reason for the change. But the Anchorage Daily Times hinted in a September 5 editorial that Troy was replaced because of his disagreement with Ickes over the gold tax. The Daily Times supported Troy's resistance and hoped that Gruening would "[do] his duty for the benefit of Alaska, and not as the mere mouthpiece of Mr. Ickes and his gang."\textsuperscript{14}

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\item[11] Ibid., p. 641.
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The Daily Times said also that while Gruening was an outstanding man, many Alaskans would have made capable governors. Anthony J. Dimond, Alaska's non-voting delegate to Congress, expressed that opinion as well, and he urged Ickes to reconsider and appoint an Alaskan. During Gruening's Senate confirmation hearings, Sen. Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan said "the residents of Alaska are sufficiently civilized, and ought to be permitted to have one of their own residents as governor."¹⁵

The Daily Alaska Empire, a Juneau paper owned by Governor Troy, also objected to a non-Alaskan becoming governor.

Roosevelt knew about the opposition to Gruening but insisted that the territory's governor be a strong New Dealer who knew Washington politics. The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration--New Deal agencies that created jobs and built public facilities nationwide--constructed airfields, roads, parks and bridges in Alaska during the depression. New Deal agencies spent $17.5 million in Alaska through 1940. More than 200 families received farm land in the Matanuska Valley north of Anchorage under Roosevelt's plan to increase the territory's population. The president wanted to keep the New Deal active in Alaska.

Alaska historian Claus Naske wrote that "Gruening . . . came to Alaska determined to make something out of the territory, to demonstrate to the president his capabilities. . . . And with a man

of his talent, ability, determination and ego, it was a foregone conclusion that he would have a great impact on the territory."\textsuperscript{16}

Gruening immediately began to work to improve the economy by raising taxes. In his first annual report to Secretary Ickes, Gruening told of corporations that were exploiting Alaska's resources while paying no taxes. Alaska was controlled by individuals and organizations from outside the territory. These people stayed only long enough to exploit the gold, salmon or fur resources, and they left without compensating Alaska. The \textit{Daily Alaska Empire} quoted from Gruening's report: "Income is needed ... so that Alaska can move toward assuming its place as a self-sustaining, self-governing community by gradually shaping its own destiny."\textsuperscript{17}

The governor echoed that opinion in his address to the 1941 Territorial Legislature. Alaska's economy could not be secure if it relied only on mining, fishing and trapping. He encouraged Alaskans to develop tourism and a defense program. A national defense system in Alaska would increase population, construction, employment, communication and transportation. Tourism and defense would destroy Alaska's image as a place where people earned quick riches and left. They would establish a permanent economy. Gruening urged legislators to raise taxes to keep the wealth in Alaska rather than enriching absentee capitalists. He proposed a personal income tax, a corporate


\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Daily Alaska Empire}, 15 January 1941, p. 1.
income tax and a property tax. He also wanted the Legislature to appropriate money for National Guard armories.

Alaskan newspapers opposed the tax proposal. The Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, owned by conservative industrialist Austin Lathrop, said the taxes would hinder gold mining and gold was vital to national defense. It said that any legislation handicapping gold mining would "invite disaster not only to industry in Alaska but throughout America and lead to far-reaching chaotic conditions." 18

The canned-salmon industry also fought the tax increase, and the 60-day biannual Legislature adjourned without passing any of Gruening's measures. Newspapers across the territory printed his 10-page "Message to the People" in which he accused legislators of allowing lobbyists representing outside interests to dictate policy. Gold and salmon lobbyists sought to keep spending down to ensure that taxes would not be raised to pay for new programs. The armory measure, Gruening wrote, was defeated by "men whose one and only loyalty is to their absentee employers, whose patriotism is only to their pocketbook." 19.

The Legislature trimmed funds for education, needy mothers and crippled children. "The lobby was too busy with its slaughter to worry about innocent victims." 20

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19 Anchorage Daily Times, 16 April 1941, p. 8.
20 Ibid.
The Anchorage Daily Times said that no Alaska governor had ever received such a "stiff and sweeping rebuke." The Daily Times associated Gruening with the hated Ickes. "To us," it said, "it appears that the governor—a defeated appointee of the Ickes crowd—is making a plea to the people who refuse to accept his leadership." 21

The Daily Times agreed that a system of armories would have been a patriotic measure, but it opposed the local taxation to fund it. Gruening called that attitude "penny pinching" by a group that would not back its patriotism with money.

Gruening's "Message to the People" urged taxation to control absentee interests. Seattle salmon canneries owned fish traps in Alaska and operated them without tax liability. Resident fishermen suffered because the traps, at the mouths of spawning streams, depleted the resource.

Two newspapers, the Daily Alaska Empire and the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, were most vocal in supporting the outside interests. Lathrop's Daily News-Miner hired lobbyists to defeat tax reforms and did not even print Gruening's "Message to the People."

Gruening reiterated the need for tax reform in his address to the 1943 Legislature. He said that tens of millions of dollars were taken from Alaska in the previous two years and that none of that went into the territorial treasury because of antiquated tax laws. "The revenues that might have been secured would have more than

21 Anchorage Daily Times, 15 April 1941, p. 2.
solved all the territory's fiscal problems."

He urged taxes on agricultural and mining property. World War II had drawn many of the property owners away from Alaska and the land they owned could not be used or developed. A property tax would force owners to act.

Gruening opposed the sales tax because it unfairly burdened residents. His aim was to tax "those who came up here for a brief season each year merely to extract wealth from Alaska and take it outside with them." Seasonal workers spent little money in Alaska because employers largely supplied their needs. A sales tax would reach only residents, who were already struggling against the high cost of living.

The Anchorage Daily Times responded with an editorial by W.W. Stoll, manager of Alaska's second largest gold mine. Stoll contended that mining and fishing should not be hindered during the war. He said industry already was burdened with increased costs and the federal government should make up any deficit to Alaska.

But at least one Alaska newspaper, Jessen's Weekly, supported the governor's tax measures. The Fairbanks-based paper said after Gruening's 1943 address that "he refrained from saying 'I told you so.' " It said that the territory would not have had a money shortage if the governor's 1942 tax proposals had been adopted. It called

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22 Anchorage Daily Times, 1 February 1943, p. 3.
23 Ibid., p. 6.
for tax revision to stop the flow of money from Alaska and to provide revenue for the future. 25

Gruening's 1945 message to the Legislature echoed the same needs, but he said that increased taxes were even more urgent because 5,000 Alaskan soldiers would be returning after the war. He proposed rehabilitation programs for discharged servicemen and asked the Legislature to "build up an economy that will pave the way for returning war veterans." 26 He said the new tax system should finance increased health care, workmen's compensation, unemployment insurance, teachers' retirement and old-age assistance.

The Daily Alaska Empire remained unconvinced. In an editorial reprinted in the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, it argued that increased revenue from taxes was "a direct invitation to extravagance." It said taxing corporate income would discourage business and economic opportunity by "reducing the supply of capital for the development of Alaska's natural resources." 27

The Empire further criticized Gruening's tax proposals in a sarcastic editorial one month later:

It seems, according to the governor, that certain business interests in Alaska are actually making profits on their investments.

Now that is a serious thing. If it should get around that capital invested in Alaska is actually getting a return, things might even reach a point where more capital might be attracted to invest money in the territory. That would be terrible.


26 Anchorage Daily Times, 25 January 1945, p. 3.

We've heard that the canned-salmon industry is actually making a profit from operations in Alaska and then only paying about three-fourths of the taxes in Alaska. Shameful, isn't it? 28

The 1945 Legislature again defeated Gruening's tax proposals, and he attributed the defeat to the influence of the canned-salmon lobby. Gruening asserted in his autobiography that the industry bought all its insurance policies through a legislator's insurance business, sponsored vacations for other legislators, and made cash offers to oppose the fish-trap tax. Legislators Stanley McCutcheon and Warren Taylor told Gruening that they had been offered $25,000 between them to oppose the tax. 29

The 1945 Legislature also rejected the proposed benefits to returning war veterans, so the governor called for a special session in March 1946. That session approved bonuses and loans based on length of military service. It provided financing for homes, business and farms, and approved increased local taxes. By 1949 Gruening's social programs and broad tax base had been approved. The new taxes provided long-neglected funding for education, health, tourism, airports, housing and agriculture.

Sherwood Ross wrote in Gruening of Alaska that the 1949 Legislature passed

an income tax, a business license tax, a property tax to reach the properties outside of municipalities which had gone wholly untaxed, a permissive sales tax for municipali-

28 Daily Alaska Empire, 22 March 1945, p. 4.
29 Many Battles, p. 334.
ties and school districts, and the progressive fish-trap tax which had been defeated in 1945.

These victories strengthened the opposition to Gruening in the territory's newspapers. The papers that had argued against his tax measures began to campaign against his renomination and confirmation for governor. President Harry Truman nominated Gruening in 1948 for his third term as Alaska governor, but his confirmation hearings did not begin until April 1, 1949. He was confirmed on April 10 but not before opponents testified that he had "used dictatorial methods" to push his proposals through the Legislature and had harmed Alaska's development by arguing against absentee ownership.31

Opponents even cited the 1927 Hearst documents that accused Gruening of taking money from Mexico to help spread Communism.32 The Anchorage Daily Times reported that the governor's opposition was headed by Austin "Cap" Lathrop, whom it described as "Alaska publisher, theater owner, radio station operator and coal mine operator."33

Lathrop's Fairbanks Daily News Miner assailed Gruening for personally lobbying the Legislature on behalf of his proposals. It said the executive branch should remain separate from the legislative. "The governor's discussion of issues . . . should be confined to

32 Ibid., 4 April 1949, p. 1.
33 Ibid., 7 April 1949, p 6.
conferences in his office with his legislative leaders who visit him voluntarily."

The News-Miner asked for an end of the "turmoil and strife that marked the Gruening regime." It said "the Gruening brand of administration and leadership for another four years would constitute a grave disservice to this Territory and the rest of the nation."

Drew Pearson, whose syndicated column "Washington Merry-Go-Round" was carried by the News-Miner, commented that Lathrop dominated Gruening's confirmation hearings. Pearson, who called Gruening "the best governor in Alaska history," referred to Lathrop as "the man who pulls the wires." He said "Lathrop is griped because Gruening induced the Alaska Legislature to impose a local income tax for the first time in history." 

Pearson contended that Lathrop's secretary wrote the testimony for some of those who spoke against Gruening. He said 41 Alaskans had flown to Washington to speak in the governor's favor, but only six of them were allowed five minutes each to testify while Gruening's opponents "testified practically all day."

The News-Miner responded the next day by calling Pearson a "liar" and his coverage of the Alaska situation "superficial." It acknowledged that some testimony was "typed" by Lathrop's secretary

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37 Ibid.
but said that was no different from the president having his speeches written by lawyers, judges and playwrights.\footnote{Fairbanks \textit{Daily News-Miner}, 11 April 1949, p. 2.}

The \textit{News-Miner} disputed Pearson's report on the time allotted each side for testimony. It said nine people spoke for Gruening for unlimited time while seven opposed him for three and one-half hours. The paper defended Lathrop, saying he was the largest individual taxpayer living in Alaska and a "heavy supporter of local government."\footnote{Ibid.}

Had he been bred at Harvard and climbed on the public payroll at the earliest opportunity [like Gruening] or had he married wealth, as Pearson did, his views might be somewhat different.

However, in this system of ours, someone has to keep the Gruenings and the other payrollers in tax funds. That's an economic fact of life that all the legions of New Dealers haven't been able to work out--yet.
CHAPTER X
Alaska Statehood

Gruening began his third term determined to earn statehood for Alaska. Since 1939 he had argued that the federal government neglected Alaska and he often told interior department officials that federal policies hindered the territory's development. He said Alaskans could never be equal U.S. citizens until they could vote in presidential elections, elect their own governor and send two senators and one congressman to Washington. Gruening argued his case at governors' conferences and before Congressional hearings. *Time* magazine reported on May 5, 1947, that Gruening, in testimony at a Congressional hearing on statehood, had "campaigned vehemently for the abolition of his office."¹

Six weeks later, June 16, *Time* featured Gruening on its cover. "Chunky, jug-eared Dr. Ernest Gruening, 60, Alaska's New Dealish Territory Governor, has been an advocate of change and a figure of controversy,"² *Time* said.

The cover story explained Alaska's tradition of rule by absentee government and industry. It reported Gruening's fight for tax reform and the opposition he faced from industry and residents.

¹*Time* magazine, 5 May 1947, p. 10.
"Many an Alaskan who had . . . helped beat back the teeming wilderness rankled at advice--even good advice--from an outsider.''\textsuperscript{3}

The article concluded that Gruening's uncompromising attitude had earned him many friends as well as unnecessary enemies.

\textit{U.S. News & World Report} interviewed Gruening in its Nov. 18, 1949, issue. The governor argued that statehood was vital to national defense. He cited a buildup by the Soviets in Siberia in population, agriculture and weaponry. He said the Soviets did not recognize the sale of Alaska to the United States by the czarist government, and that Russian attack and occupation was a serious threat.

Alaska was a "stepchild in the national family."\textsuperscript{4} Gruening said. It would get adequate consideration only as a state with full representation in Washington.

He urged development in Alaska to match the Soviet buildup in Siberia.

We are trying to convince the rest of mankind that a free society such as ours is more productive of happiness and more enduring than the police state. And I know of no better way of demonstrating that than to build up such a society in those northern latitudes.\textsuperscript{5}

Statehood had long been a subject of comment in Alaska's newspapers. The \textit{Daily Alaska Empire} had opposed it on the ground that the small population could not support a state government. It said taxes would have to be increased tremendously to assume the services

\textsuperscript{3}Ibid.


\textsuperscript{5}Ibid.
then provided by the federal government. It said the people could not support a governor, secretary of state, court system and Legislature.

The Anchorage Daily Times and its publisher, Robert Atwood, supported statehood. It contended that Alaska could not prosper without sovereignty and a full voice in Washington.

"With two senators . . . we would have a real voice in the affairs of government. We would no longer be in the position of an outsider looking in. We would no longer depend on the tolerance of a government that regards us as a stepchild."

A statehood referendum was placed on the Alaska general election ballot in October 1946 and it passed by a three-to-two margin.

Bob Bartlett, Alaska's non-voting delegate to Congress, introduced a statehood bill on Jan. 3, 1947. The bill died, but it brought the issue before Congress and convinced the nation of Alaska's role in the Cold War.

The Alaska Statehood Committee, formed by the 1949 Territorial Legislature, began to publicize its cause nationwide. The committee's 11 members were appointed by Gruening and approved by the Legislature. Anchorage Daily Times publisher Robert Atwood was its chairman.

A statehood bill passed the U.S. House of Representatives in 1950 and hearings began immediately in the Senate. President Truman supported the bill and California Governor Earl Warren spoke in its favor. The canned-salmon industry sent lobbyists to stop statehood.

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\footnote{Anchorage Daily Times, 26 January 1945, p. 2.}
Its opposition, according to historian Naske, "was based on the knowledge that the new state would take control of the fisheries and immediately abolish the hated and deadly efficient fish traps."  

A June 30 editorial in the New York Times urged the Senate to pass statehood bills for Alaska and Hawaii. "It is inconsistent with democratic practice to deny citizens the right of self government," it said. The Times stressed Alaska's strategic importance and said the wishes of the people of the territory should be considered.

Senate opposition centered on Alaska's economy and on the fitness of Alaskans to serve in the Senate. Sen. John Stennis (D.-Miss.) said that senators from Alaska would represent people who were not attached geographically or culturally to the continental United States. Stennis said that if Alaska and Hawaii were states, four new U.S. senators would vote on "domestic affairs of the people of Michigan, for example. . . . With all candor and with all deference to their integrity, how can they know anything about the domestic affairs of the people of Michigan?"

Naske summed up Stennis' arguments: "Once Alaska was admitted it would lead to the admission of Hawaii as well. Then what would stop the admission of the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Guam and Okinawa?"  

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10 Naske, p. 103.
Stennis quoted from a *New York Times* article on Alaska that said "wintertime temperatures range down to 65 degrees below zero. Brief exposure can mean death." \(^{11}\)

Stennis added, "The lack of development of Alaska does not arise because of any lack of law or order, but the explanation is found in that short sentence... 'Brief exposure can mean death.'" \(^{12}\)

The bill died with the close of the 1950 session, but Bartlett kept the issue alive in the House until the Republican landslide in 1952 elected President Dwight D. Eisenhower and established a conservative majority of one in the Senate.

Gruening's term ended April 9, 1953, and the Eisenhower administration appointed in his place Frank Heintzeleman, a Republican who firmly opposed statehood.

The statehood battle in the Senate continued to be a political one. The Anchorage *Daily Times* reprinted a Boston *Traveler* editorial that said that Hawaii was a Republican-controlled territory, while Alaska was highly Democratic. Alaska as a state would strengthen Democrats and Hawaii would add to the Republican majority.

"It is safe to say that both territories would long since have been admitted to the Union if it had not been for this political chicken fight." \(^{13}\)

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\(^{12}\) Ibid.

\(^{13}\) Anchorage *Daily Times*, 28 March 1953, p. 6.
The day Gruening left office, the Anchorage *Daily Times*, the paper that 14 years earlier had called the governor a rejected Ickes bureaucrat, published a glowing editorial entitled "Alaska's Greatest Governor." Gruening's fight for statehood, which Robert Atwood supported, was the basis of the *Daily Times*'s change of opinion.

The editorial said that Gruening taught Alaskans that their lives did not have to be controlled by Washington bureaucrats and Seattle businessmen. He fought the special interests that tried to control Alaska government, and brought the territory to national attention.\textsuperscript{14}

Until he became governor, Alaskans looked blindly at their present shortcomings and inadequacies. They tolerated inadequacies, incompetence and often stupid fumbling in the administration of their affairs. They lived under a system where crumbs of attention from the federal government were accepted with humble gratitude; where powerful business interests in Seattle dictated to their territorial government what tax monies they could have and what appropriations they could make for new roads, new schools and all the other facilities needed so badly throughout Alaska.

Gruening changed all that... He told and retold the story of neglect that has marked American rule in Alaska ever since the purchase from Russia in 1867.\textsuperscript{15}

The editorial said that Gruening often risked his job by criticizing his superiors in Washington for their neglect of the territory.

[Gruening] placed his career in jeopardy when the needs of Alaska required it... He carried Alaska to the threshold of one consideration that overshadowed all others--statehood and the sovereign rule of its own destiny.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid.
Gruening retired to his Eagle River Landing home 25 miles north of Juneau and began writing a history of Alaska and magazine articles on statehood.

Statehood advocates had been encouraged when the Republican Party platform in 1952 endorsed statehood for Alaska and Hawaii. Moreover, Eisenhower had stated while campaigning in Denver on Sept. 17, 1952, that "quick admission of Alaska and Hawaii to statehood will show the world that America practices what it preaches." 17

But Ike's commitment to self-determination and anti-colonialism died quickly after his election. In his first State-of-Union address, Feb. 2, 1953, he promised action toward Hawaiian statehood but did not mention Alaska.

Gruening's first article on statehood appeared in Harper's magazine one month after he left office. He suggested that Eisenhower was eager to admit Hawaii because of its Republican tradition. The new state would elect two Republican senators and the president's party would strengthen its majority in Congress. Alaska, however, would elect Democrats. 18

Alaska also faced opposition from Southern Democrats like Stennis. Gruening charged that their stand was based on the fear that Alaska's senators would not share the Southern view on cloture, the procedural device by which filibuster was stopped. Southern Democrats feared


that without filibuster they would be unable to block civil rights legislation.

Gruening's article attempted to refute the three most prominent arguments against statehood--that its population was too small, that it was too far from Washington, and that its resources could not support a state.

He argued that Alaska's 1950 population of 128,000 was greater than the population of one-third of the states at the time of their admission. And five of those states had fewer people in relation to the national population than Alaska had in relation to the 1950 national total.19

The question of distance to Washington Gruening called "nonsense." Modern transportation made the nation's capital closer to Alaska than it was to Oregon when that territory earned statehood in 1859.

"Measured in . . . time required to journey between the proposed state and the national capital, Alaska (and Hawaii) are much nearer Washington today than were all the states at the time of their admission."20

Gruening termed the third argument--insufficient funds--"fanciful." While gold was declining, agriculture, fishing and timber were developing renewable resources. Oil, as well as minerals other than gold and copper, had scarcely been touched. He called the tax

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19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
structure "sufficiently comprehensive and flexible to come pretty close to sustaining the cost of statehood."  

Gruening's next article appeared in the Nation July 11, 1953. He pointed out that the federal government owned 93 percent of the land in Alaska. Many congressmen complained that the new state could not support itself on seven percent of the land and it would become a vassal of the Department of the Interior. Gruening said the statehood bill should include entitlement to 23 million acres for Alaska.

Federal land policies had not applied to Alaska until 1898 and homestead laws often did not work because Congress failed to appropriate funds for surveying. Alaskans had pleaded for changes to make federal land available, but Congress had not acted.

"Members of Congress opposed to statehood use the stick of their own—or their predecessors'—shortcomings to beat Alaska with."  

The canned-salmon industry was, according to Gruening, the "principal enemy of Alaskan statehood."  He said the Seattle-based industry believed that an Alaska state Legislature would ban fish traps. These efficient traps were opposed by fishermen and the general public. Traps had been outlawed in Washington, Oregon and British Columbia. Industry lobbyists worked in Juneau and Washington, D.C., to block

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21 Ibid.


23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.
statehood legislation. The industry also feared that statehood would mean increased taxes. The salmon pack was taxed on a per-case basis rather than on the value of the product. Alaska earned no more on the salmon catch in years when prices were high than it did in poor years.

Gruening's book The State of Alaska interpreted the territory's history as one of neglect by Congress. Since it was purchased from Russia in 1867, Alaska had been "the nation's ugly duckling." Gruening traced the struggle of Alaskans to govern themselves and the resistance of Congress to grant them that right. Congressmen were often pressured by West Coast salmon packers and Eastern businessmen with mining claims in Alaska.

Gruening's account of Alaska since 1867 was separated into "the era of total neglect, the era of mild but enlightened interest, the era of growing awareness," and "Alaska's pending problems."

He said the territory's population had grown in the 20th century and by 1954 it had proved it could govern itself, but "government by consent of the governed" still was not a reality. Under federal control, land laws were unworkable, justice and law enforcement were deficient, government dealings with Natives were ineffective, and the salmon resource was being destroyed.

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26Ibid., p. 319.
He concluded that "the state of Alaska would not be improved appreciably until the State of Alaska came into being." The reviewer suggested that statehood would be achieved easily if enough people read Gruening's book.

The cause of statehood was helped considerably when one of its chief opponents, the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, changed its opinion. Austin Lathrop sold the paper to C.W. Snedden, and on Feb. 27, 1954, the paper came out as a strong statehood advocate. A front-page editorial said Alaskans' status was "an insult to American citizens." It said that Alaska's transportation, law enforcement and judicial systems could not develop until people were represented by voting members of Congress.

Alaska has a great destiny. . . . We are going to be a prosperous, valued State of the Union someday, through the toil, foresight and fortitude of our citizens here in the North. But . . . we are not going to make substantial progress toward this destiny so long as we are "wards" of the federal government living under the supervision of a Congress that does not understand our problems or realize our possibilities.

We say turn Alaska loose from this deadly federal embrace. Give Americans in Alaska the full privileges of American citizenship. Turn Alaska's destiny over to Alaskans. . . . Alaskan citizens can meet the challenges of statehood and they are eager to do so.

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27Ibid., p. 492.


30Ibid.
Snedden was one of many urging a constitutional convention. The 1955 Territorial Legislature passed a bill providing for the election of delegates to a convention, and 55 people met that November at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks to write a statehood constitution. The convention was appropriated $300,000 for a 75-day session.

Gruening delivered the keynote address to open the convention. The Fairbanks Daily News-Miner reported that the former governor "condemned what he termed 'United States colonialism' in our nation's dealings with Alaska."  

Gruening said Alaskans suffered the same injustices the colonists revolted against in 1775. He charged that Alaskans were taxed without representation and forced into military service.

News-Miner editorials echoed his opinions and called for "full rights of American citizenship." The paper warned that if territorial status continued, Alaskans would be taxed at increasing rates but would receive no benefits from those taxes.

"Old Uncle Sam apparently is not above taking advantage of this desire of Alaskans to run their own show. He is perfectly willing to grant us some of the expenses that go with statehood--the financial obligations. But how about the full rights of citizenship?"  

32Ibid.
33Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, 10 November 1955, p. 4.
34Ibid.
Besides the constitution, the most important product of the convention was the Tennessee Plan to achieve statehood. Tennessee was the first of seven territories to gain statehood by electing the number of representatives it would be allowed as a state and sending them to Washington to push their cause.

The News-Miner immediately backed the plan. It said Congress would have to listen if Alaska sent two senators and one representative to Washington. Even if they were refused seats, the Tennessee Plan delegates would bring national attention.

"Adopting the Tennessee Plan would show Congress and the nation that Alaska is sincere and determined in its fight. . . . Only through a bold and aggressive move can Alaska achieve statehood in our time."³⁵

Three Democrats were elected to Alaska's Tennessee Plan delegation in the Oct. 9, 1956, general election. Ernest Gruening and William Egan were elected to the U.S. Senate and Ralph Rivers to the House of Representatives.³⁶

The Tennessee Plan Congressmen arrived in Washington for the opening of the 85th Congress in January, 1957. They were not officially recognized but immediately began to meet with House and Senate members to enlist support for statehood. Gruening talked with

³⁴Ibid.
³⁶Naske, An Interpretative History of Alaskan Statehood, p. 146.
newspapermen, and C.W. Snedden of the News-Miner gained the support of Henry Luce's Time and Life magazines.

The House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee recommended on June 25, 1957, that Alaska be admitted. By that July, House speaker Sam Rayburn of Texas endorsed statehood, and President Eisenhower gave it his approval in his budget message on Jan. 13, 1958.

The Tennessee Plan delegates continued to apply pressure, and on May 28, 1958, the House passed the statehood bill and sent it to the Senate. That body passed it June 30 on a 64-20 roll-call vote, and the following January 3 Alaska became the 49th state when President Eisenhower signed the proclamation.

The statehood battle had made Alaska a focus of national attention. The signing ceremony was in the White House cabinet room, where Gruening, Bob Bartlett, Ralph Rivers, Robert Atwood, Alaska Governor Mike Stepovich, and Secretary of the Interior Fred Seaton crowded behind the president. The Anchorage Times reported "a battery of movie and tv cameras whirred furiously recording the historic event. . . . A standing room only crowd of newsmen and White House aides spilled out of the cabinet room into the hallway."

"We think of Ernest Gruening, who made statehood the goal of his long incumbency as governor, of his writings and of his term as provisional senator under the Alaska-Tennessee Plan."

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The Anchorage Daily Times published an extra edition when news of the Senate vote came over the Associated Press wire. The banner headline, which declared simply "WE'RE IN," is a piece of statehood memorabilia.
CHAPTER XI

A Senate Campaign and the Tonkin Gulf

The Tennessee Plan delegates had to face re-election to keep their jobs after statehood. Gruening ran for the Senate against Republican Alaska Governor Mike Stepovich of Fairbanks. Stepovich received favorable publicity in Life magazine, and Time featured him on its cover. The cover story called him "a man of the people" with "open-faced friendliness."¹

The Fairbanks Daily News-Miner reprinted the story and praised its honesty and thoroughness. The News-Miner endorsed Stepovich in his race against Gruening. It covered Stepovich's speeches from every corner of the state, but neglected the Gruening campaign in its news columns. Its editorials blasted the Democrat, saying he was "in danger of self-inflation if he makes the mistake of reading the publicity about him."²

The paper charged that Gruening often challenged opponents to debates but never took part in an actual contest.

To all of Gruening's titles and honors can be added that of great orator. But the tragedy of it all is that none of the debates have ever come off. For one who loves to talk, therefore, Gruening is left in the sad position of being forced to talk to himself.³

² Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, 10 October 1958, p. 4.
³ Ibid.
The News-Miner attacked Gruening's claim to Alaska residency. It called him "nothing more than a carpetbagger from Washington" and said his home at Eagle River Landing north of Juneau was just a summer cabin.\(^4\)

"The good, gray Doctor Gruening," it said, "had a permanent home in Washington, D.C. It urged people to vote for Mike Stepovich, who earned his claim to be an Alaskan "rightfully and honestly."\(^5\)

News-Miner news stories on the Senatorial campaign were far from objective. The paper ran front-page pictures of a smiling, "optimistic" Stepovich. A headline near one picture said "Mike Levels Sights on/ Gruening; States Plans."\(^6\) The story quoted Stepovich as saying that a debate with Gruening would only help the Democrat gather an audience. He did not want to go that far to help his opponent. Stepovich urged voters to be sure the man they elected was "truly a representative of this state."\(^7\)

The News-Miner carried Drew Pearson's "Washington Merry-Go-Round" and was infuriated when the columnist endorsed Gruening and classed Mike Stepovich as one of the "Johnny-come-latelies" in the statehood battle.

Pearson said Stepovich was taking credit for statehood but Gruening was "the man who unobtrusively but consistently badgered


\(^5\)Ibid.


\(^7\)Ibid.
senators, buttonholed congressmen, maneuvered in the smoke-filled rooms. He more than anyone else is the father of the 49th state."  

The next day the \textit{News-Miner} called Pearson, who was syndicated in 600 papers nationwide, "the garbage man of the fourth estate." It asked how Fairbanks-born Stepovich could be considered a Johnny-come-lately to Alaska. It did not acknowledge that Stepovich had opposed statehood in the early 50s.

The \textit{News-Miner} said that though Gruening "threw himself heart and soul into the statehood battle," he was so intense that he often hurt his own cause. It said that fortunately Bob Bartlett was in Washington to help "patch up the damage Gruening did."  

One word in Mr. Pearson's column about Ernest Gruening sticks out like a sore thumb. The word says he worked 'unobtrusively' in Washington. It sticks out because it is so devastatingly inappropriate. If ever you see anybody being unobtrusive you won't have to ask his name to be sure it is not Ernest Gruening.

The \textit{News-Miner} said it was bothered by printing Pearson's "garbage" but said "for the time being we'll get a clothespin for our editorial nose."  

The clothespin stayed on only three weeks and the \textit{News-Miner} dropped the column. It contended that Pearson had been consistently

\begin{footnotes}
\item[10] Ibid.
\item[11] Ibid.
\item[12] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
inaccurate about Alaska, and it did not want to "distribute garbage with our newspaper." The paper said it was not dropping Pearson because he was liberal or anti-Republican, but "because he is so everlastingly careless with the facts."

While the News-Miner was correct in objecting to Pearson's description of Gruening as "unobtrusive," the major facts in the July 7 column were correct. Stepovich joined the statehood battle later than Gruening did, and he played a smaller role than the Tennessee Plan delegate.

Pearson sued the News-Miner and its publisher C.W. Snedden for $76,000. He said the attacks on him were "false, scandalous, defamatory and libelous." He charged that News-Miner editorials caused the public to believe his reporting on Alaska was inaccurate. The paper's comments meant that Pearson "produced journalistic trash, refuse and offal and that he himself in his professional status was comparable to a person who disposes trash."

Pearson said the News-Miner injured his reputation and deprived him of profits.

Pearson lost the case and appealed to the Alaska Supreme Court, which upheld the decision on the ground that privilege of fair comment

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14Ibid.
16Ibid.
applied to the "Washington Merry-Go-Round." Since the column pertained to public matters and Pearson offered it for public approval, statements made against it were not libelous unless they were made with actual malice. The Alaska Supreme Court applied the definition of malice that the U.S. Supreme Court would use in *New York Times* vs. Sullivan in 1964: Actual malice exists when a statement is made with knowledge that it is false or with reckless disregard of whether it is false or not.

The Alaska Supreme Court ruled that Pearson was not libeled even though the *News-Miner* implied that his column was literary garbage.

The *News-Miner* even attacked a grade-school newspaper for endorsing Gruening and urging its readers to vote Democratic. The *News-Miner* declared that partisan politics had no place in the schools.

In totalitarian countries the schools are used almost as educational prisons where captive audiences composed of youngsters are brain washed. . . . The issue is not a minor one--it is serious. What is at stake is a principle which is closely tied in with American freedoms.

Vice President Richard Nixon and Senator John Kennedy (D.-Mass.) campaigned in Alaska for their party's candidates. Nixon spoke in Juneau, Anchorage and Fairbanks and said Stepovich's "friendships combined with his vigorous, young approach to problems

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18 Ibid.

will make him one of the most effective members of the United States Senate."\(^{20}\)

Kennedy endorsed Gruening and Bob Bartlett in their campaigns for the Senate. He said both men were known and respected in Washington.

One month before the election, the News-Miner ran a front-page story with a four-column photo of Stepovich's daughter's 10th birthday party.\(^{21}\)

The paper continued to accuse "Gruening and his henchmen" of mud slinging. "Little 71-year-old Ernest Gruening of all people has recklessly led his band of mud slingers into battle, perhaps without realizing that if his opponents were interested in the same tactics, the poor little fellow would undoubtedly be hopelessly buried in mud up to his eyebrows."\(^{22}\)

On election eve the News-Miner called Gruening "stormy" and "abrasive." It said "the spry old gentleman [was] not troubled by undue modesty."\(^{23}\)

When Gruening won by 2,581 votes, the News-Miner conceded that he "campaigned tirelessly, with the energy and enthusiasm of a man half his years."\(^{24}\) Alaska's first three U.S. congressmen and its

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\(^{22}\)Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, 6 November 1958, p. 4.


first elected governor were Democrats.

The Alaska statehood proclamation was signed at noon, Jan 3, 1959, because that was the precise starting and ending time for terms of U.S. congressmen. It meant that Alaska's senators began their terms at the same moment elected Democrats from other states began theirs, so no seniority was gained or lost.

Gruening and Senate colleague Bob Bartlett were sworn in January 7. Their terms were staggered to assure they would not leave office the same year. Each man drew a slip of paper from a box to determine the length of his term. The box held slips for two-, four- and six-year terms. Bartlett drew the two-year term, Gruening the four-year term, while the six-year term remained in the box. The two tossed a coin and Bartlett was designated "senior senator."

As U.S. senator, Gruening again became involved in foreign affairs, especially Latin American countries and the rights of those governments to rule themselves. He visited American Samoa, Guam and Mexico. In the Oct. 6, 1962, Nation, he warned against "exporting trouble" by sending arms to unstable Latin American governments. He said the $500 million in military aid in the preceding decade had caused greater instability. He cited a military coup in Peru where American-built tanks and soldiers trained by the U.S. Army helped overthrow the government.

Communist aggression in Latin America, Gruening believed, could not be turned back with the conventional arms the United States supplied those nations. U.S. weapons "were being used to maintain
dictatorships or to overthrow existing governments and replace them with military rule." 25

Further, he believed that Latin American countries were trying to keep pace with each other militarily while neglecting the social needs of the people. When Peru received U.S. arms, Ecuador protested until it got an equal share.

In these very same countries housing conditions for the vast majority of people are appalling; disease is rampant, illiteracy rates are shockingly high and hunger is a normal condition. Surely our American dollars can be better spent in Latin America than on arms. 26

A major earthquake hit Southcentral Alaska on Good Friday, March 27, 1964. Twelve people died in Anchorage and the towns of Valdez, Whittier and Seward were largely destroyed. A 17-foot tidal wave damaged coastal villages and ports as far south as California. Eighteen people in Kodiak died when a 45-foot tide struck the community.

The Seattle Post-Intelligencer covered the disaster extensively. The caption under one Associated Press photo of downtown Anchorage read, "Fissures, like mouths, gulp down stores, cars." 27

Gruening and Edward McDermott, director of the federal office of emergency planning, immediately flew to Anchorage on the presidential jet. McDermott estimated the damage at $500 million and Gruening went

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26 Ibid.

to work in Congress for funds. One source of funds, the Small Business Administration, offered loans to Alaska businesses at three percent interest, the maximum rate allowed.

Gruening protested that Alaskans should be charged the same rate that foreign governments pay for U.S. loans--three-quarters of one percent. Small Business Administration head Eugene Foley refused to lower the rate and Gruening called that refusal "a double standard--a discrimination against our citizens." 28

He pointed out that the United States gave Chile a $20 million grant and a $100 million loan after its earthquake. The United States charged only a service charge of three-quarters of one percent and deferred payment on the principal for ten years. 29

Gruening stated also that the United States had lent a total of about $1.75 billion to private industry in foreign countries worldwide. The interest on those loans was also three-quarters of one percent.

"We have made such loans to individuals and businesses that have suffered no disaster," he said. 30 The three-percent loans to Alaskans were "far less generous than those freely handed out abroad to enterprises which have suffered no disaster." 31

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31 Ibid.
To me this double standard, this discrimination against fellow Americans, this unfair treatment accorded these victims of an unprecedented disaster, is incomprehensible and disgraceful.  

At least two major newspapers, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer and the Wall Street Journal, supported Gruening. The Post-Intelligencer said the Small Business Administration should lower the interest rate to Alaskans to three-quarters of one percent.

"The federal government's action on Alaska's plight is both slow and piece-meal. Alaska is a special case, our youngest state and one with economic problems that predate the earthquake disaster."  

The Wall Street Journal suggested that Alaska would be better served in this case if it were a foreign country. It said the low U.S. rates to foreign countries were not even winning friendship around the world.  

Alaska might be better able to accept the situation if more aid were really used productively. Instead, in many cases, aid merely finances foreign government graft and mismanagement.

The Journal said Alaskans were familiar with disaster and that much of U.S. foreign aid also deserved to be called disastrous. The three-percent rate was not especially high, but Alaskans should not be required to pay more than foreign governments had to pay.

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32 Ibid., 11101.
35 Ibid.
Earthquake victims received aid from four federal agencies, but interest on Small Business Administration loans remained at three percent.

Gruening also protested aid to Southeast Asia. The United States was involved in Vietnam, although that action received little attention in the early 60s. As a pacifist, an advocate of self-determination and a critic of those who feared a world Communist takeover, Gruening became a vociferous opponent of American military entanglement in Vietnam. He and Senate Democratic colleague Wayne Morse of Oregon led the dissent against extensive foreign aid.

Both senators advocated international cooperation, U.S. News & World Report said, but opposed the "shocking waste" that President John F. Kennedy proposed. Much of Kennedy's foreign budget was intended for Vietnam.

On March 10, 1964, when President Lyndon Johnson was conducting a secret military buildup against North Vietnam, Gruening delivered a major speech in the Senate against the war. He stated that the war in Vietnam was not a U.S. war and should be fought by the Vietnamese. The United States had been in Vietnam since 1955 and Gruening said the country "should no longer permit the dead hand of past mistakes to guide the course of our future actions."  

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He charged that any American soldier killed there would not have died for his country, but "had been mistakenly sacrificed in behalf of an inherited folly."\textsuperscript{38}

Since President Johnson inherited the conflict, Gruening said, he should be free to end it without fear of losing face politically or diplomatically.

Concurring, Senator Morse said, "South Vietnam is beyond the perimeter of American defense. There is no justification for murdering a single American boy in South Vietnam, for the issue has now become one of murder."\textsuperscript{39}

Gruening's anti-war position received little attention in the media. While Secretary of Defense Dean Rusk's threats to the Viet Cong got front-page headlines, stories about Gruening's protest were buried.

"Rusk Warns Reds/ War in Vietnam/ May Be Widened" was the \textit{New York Times} headline over a story that quoted the secretary as saying "both in Laos and in Vietnam there is a simple prescription for peace--leave your neighbors alone."\textsuperscript{40} In the same issue of the \textit{Times}, Gruening's plea for peace got a six-inch summary on page five.

Events in the Gulf of Tonkin in Vietnam escalated the war in August 1964. Historian William Manchester called the incident on

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 4832.

August 4 "shadowy, imprecise, and, most disturbing, a consequence of deliberate American provocation."\(^41\)

Manchester wrote that Johnson was conducting clandestine missions against the North Vietnamese—missions that had begun in December 1963. The U.S destroyer Maddox entered the combat zone in the Tonkin Gulf Aug. 1, 1964. Its mission was to provoke the enemy into using its radar so the Maddox could then use its equipment to plot the radar installations. A battle ensued but reports did not reach the media for two days. The New York Times reported that North Vietnamese PT boats fired torpedoes at the Maddox 30 miles off North Vietnam in international waters.\(^42\) Information released by the Defense Department said the Maddox was on routine patrol and was hit by an unprovoked attack in international waters.

The U.S. destroyer C. Turner Joy joined the battle with jet fighters from two U.S. aircraft carriers. U.S. forces destroyed 35 Vietnamese boats and an oil depot.

President Johnson, on network television August 4, reported "renewed hostile actions against the United States ships on the high seas in the Gulf of Tonkin." He asked for a congressional resolution making it clear that the United States was determined to defend Southeast Asia.\(^43\)


The open-ended, six-paragraph resolution passed by the Senate August 7 declared simply

Whereas the United States is assisting the peoples of Southeast Asia to protect their freedom . . . the congress approves and supports the determination of the President . . . to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.\footnote{U.S. Congress, Senate, \textit{Congressional Record}, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., 1964, 110, pt. 14: \textit{18471.}}

The resolution was to remain in effect until the president determined that peace was assured.

Senators Gruening and Morse argued that the resolution, which the House passed unanimously, was an undated declaration of war. Both men opposed military action in Southeast Asia, and in debate on the Tonkin resolution they were the only senators to question the president's judgment.

Most congressmen accepted Johnson's version of the Tonkin incident unreservedly. They believed in the "domino theory"—if Vietnam fell to the Communists, other Southeast Asian countries, the Philippines and Australia would fall in succession.

"Southeast Asia is our first line of defense," Senator Frank Lausche (D.-Ohio) stated. "When an enemy attacks us there he is, in principle, attacking us on our native land."\footnote{Ibid., 18084.}

Senator Mike Mansfield (D.-Mont.) called the resolution "legitimate defense" and said the president "acted with a cool head and a steady hand in a most critical situation."\footnote{Ibid., 18399.}
But Gruening repeated his plea against intervention. He said the United States was alone in Southeast Asia; England, France and other Southeast Asia Treaty Organization allies had refused to participate. He believed American security was not endangered and that aid to Vietnam meant supporting "corrupt, unpopular puppet dictatorships which owe their temporary sojourn in power to our massive support." He urged a solution by negotiation.

Morse insisted that the resolution was too broad and would authorize war without specific dates, places or times. It would allow the president to carry on an undeclared war.

"I believe," Morse said, "that within the next century, future generations will look with dismay and great disappointment upon a Congress which is now about to make such a historic mistake." The Senate voted 88-2 for the resolution. Gruening and Morse recorded the only nays. President Johnson signed it the same day.

The media overwhelmingly favored Johnson's response in the Tonkin Gulf and the resolution giving him authority to fight the war as he saw fit. Senators arguing for the resolution cited editorials from leading newspapers nationwide. David Halberstam, in his history of 20th century American journalism, The Powers That Be, said the president was able to control the flow of information about Tonkin Gulf. No newspaper or network had correspondents in Vietnam and the White House was the only source of information. Further,

47 Ibid., 18413.

48 Ibid., 18470.
Halberstam wrote, "Americans had been trained . . . to trust their President, and the President, after all, had all the information."\(^{49}\)

Johnson took advantage of the journalists' desire to keep up with events and get the news out fast. When bombers were ordered to attack, there seemed to be no question that the president was right in using them.

"Bombers became their own rationale," Halberstam said. "Each bomb dropped became a rationale for the next one. Congress had been manipulated and . . . most of what the best of the nation's reporters wrote in the days after Tonkin was, in fact, lies and distortions."\(^{50}\)

He suggested that Johnson rushed the resolution through so an investigating committee would not have time to uncover the true story. Johnson clouded the issue by urging immediate action. Congress dealt with the issue "not at the level of common sense, but at a level of patriotism and emotion."\(^{51}\)

The media aided the sense of urgency. Television flashed the news immediately and newspapers tried to keep up. Editorial comment was more reaction than logic.

Gruening's journalistic instincts showed in his opposition. As an editorial writer, he had interpreted events and reached reasoned, logical conclusions based on investigation. Events surrounding Tonkin


\(^{50}\) Ibid., p. 618.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., p. 618.
Gulf occurred so quickly and the president urged such immediate action that reasonable conclusions were impossible. Gruening, 77 at the time of Tonkin, was a journalist before the electronic media speeded things up. Johnson used the modern media to manipulate public opinion and Congress reacted to the sense of urgency. Gruening and Morse would have preferred more time to call witnesses and investigate the incident, but other senators cited the flood of favorable editorial opinion. Given time for research, reporters would have uncovered the real facts of Tonkin Gulf and editors would have changed their opinions.

The full story of Tonkin was revealed when the New York Times published the Pentagon Papers beginning June 13, 1971. The 47-volume study was ordered by Johnson's secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, and covered 30 years of American involvement in Vietnam. The Pentagon Papers revealed that Johnson ordered the Tonkin Gulf resolution written before the incident even occurred.\textsuperscript{52} They also showed that Johnson escalated the war while telling the public it would not be "widened."\textsuperscript{53}

The Maddox had entered a combat zone inside an international boundary, conducted electronic surveillance and provoked hostilities. Johnson reversed those facts and used them to escalate the war.

\textsuperscript{52}Manchester, The Glory And The Dream, p. 1230.

\textsuperscript{53}New York Times, 13 June 1971, p. 36.
CHAPTER XII
Ending a Political Career

Gruening continued to speak against the American military presence in Vietnam, and by 1967 many of his Senate colleagues agreed that Johnson's policies were "folly." Democrat George McGovern of South Dakota became one of the most outspoken war critics in Congress. Senators Robert Kennedy, Frank Church and J.W. Fulbright joined him as the debate grew and Gen. William Westmoreland, commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, charged that war critics aided the enemy. Fulbright (D.-Ark.) had been Johnson's strongest supporter in the Senate and, as floor manager of the Tonkin Gulf resolution in 1964, had pushed the matter through after only eight hours of debate. But the New York Times reported on April 26, 1967, that Fulbright denounced Westmoreland's push for increased manpower and a military victory.

In 1968 Gruening co-authored Vietnam Folly. The authors traced the "mis-calculations" that had led to U.S. involvement. The war had been a civil war between North and South Vietnam and each president since Eisenhower had felt an obligation to support his predecessor's promise to stop Communism. The United States became the aggressor "who barged into a quarrel between Vietnamese."¹

The book was a huge collection of arguments against the war by politicians, educators and religious leaders. Each opinion was carefully documented. The book pointed out that the United States entered Vietnam without support from its Southeast Asia Treaty Organization allies or from anti-Communist Asian countries such as Japan, India or Iran. President Eisenhower's promise of aid to South Vietnam in 1954 was not a promise of military aid.

The book cited grave domestic consequences of the Vietnam war. The "credibility gap" between government and the people was widening and social programs were suffering. President Johnson lied about numbers of troops in Vietnam and he glossed over America's aggressive role. He had already decided to escalate the war before Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf resolution.

The authors said the United States should be dedicated to stopping rather than prolonging the war. It should end search-and-destroy missions, withdraw troops and help install a representative government in South Vietnam.

"The way to withdraw, as the United States professes it wants to, is to withdraw." 3

Let the United States stop raining death and destruction over the people in the countryside of North and South Vietnam.

Let the United States turn aside from its support of a cruel, corrupt military dictatorship in South Vietnam and embrace there instead a government that will recognize, support and defend the worth, the dignity and the funda-

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3 Ibid., p. 379.
mental freedom of each individual in South Vietnam.

The course the United States now pursues in Vietnam is fraught with the gravest dangers for all mankind. It is a collision course destined--unless changed--to bring about a world holocaust.

The New York Times said Vietnam Folly was not a scholarly work but an attack on the Johnson administration by two of the war's most outspoken opponents. The book contained no new information but was "a complete inventory of current arguments."\(^5\)

The Times said the book was "really a gigantic pamphlet." It was "obviously put together in great haste, poorly organized and contains many unnecessary repetitions."\(^6\)

The Nation gave Vietnam Folly a 100-word review in its "Book Marks" section. It called the book "a most persuasive argument that the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people cannot be won with bombs, grenades and napalm."\(^7\)

Gruening's second term expired in 1968 and Anchorage real estate developer and state legislator Mike Gravel challenged him in the Democratic primary. Gruening campaigned throughout the state, but the candidates raised little interest among voters. The Anchorage Daily Times called the race "less fiery than many in the past."\(^8\)

Gruening's age became an issue.

\(^4\)Ibid., p. 384.


\(^6\)Ibid.

\(^7\)Norman J. Gallo, The Nation, 6 May 1968, p. 613.

\(^8\)Anchorage Daily Times, 16 August 1968, p. 4.
The Daily Times, still published and edited by Robert Atwood, endorsed Republican Elmer Rasmuson in the primary. The paper said, however, that "it is hard not to support Gruening because he has earned the glory he has won in his 81 years." ⁹

Gruening and Atwood had struggled together against absentee control of Alaska and for statehood, but the paper said the state's business should now be handled by a younger man. "Too bad this respected man did not retire from public office voluntarily." ¹⁰

The Southeast Alaska Empire, formerly the Daily Alaska Empire, also expressed concern about the senator's age.

Gravel's campaign depended on a media blitz beginning 10 days before the primary. He produced a 30-minute film, "A Man For Alaska," that projected him as a young, dynamic legislator who would benefit the state. The $35,000 film was shown statewide in prime-time television spots. Bush pilots and boat captains carried the film and projectors to remote areas.

Gruening spent $175,000 on his campaign while Gravel spent $75,000, but the challenger's film swayed voters. Gruening's television spots were still pictures with messages read by an announcer.

Drew Pearson later exposed Gravel's film as "romantic fiction." The film told about Gravel carrying U.S. money to the French underground in World War II. But Pearson explained that Gravel would have been only 14 at the time the United States helped finance the

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⁹ Anchorage Daily Times, 16 August 1968, p. 4.
French underground. The film also pictured Gravel among unemployed workers while President Franklin Roosevelt spoke in the background. "This of course was at a time when Gravel was only four years old and could have had nothing to do with either Roosevelt or the Great Depression," Pearson wrote.  

Gruening conceded after he lost the primary that the film put Gravel over the top. He told reporters that the film "wowed all the newcomers and particularly all the ladies." Gravel said the senator's extreme position on Vietnam alienated him from Alaskan voters, but the Anchorage Daily Times said the main factor was Gruening's age. The senator simply "could not cope with the calendar."

The Fairbanks Daily News-Miner was not so charitable as the Anchorage Daily Times. Attacking Gruening as fiercely as it had in 1958, the paper questioned whether the senator was more loyal to Alaskans or to East Coast interests. It cited a group of Gruening supporters headed by historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. It wondered why the "junior senator from the smallest state population-wise in the nation is so important to all the outside interests."

The News-Miner was sarcastic about Gruening's age. It quoted Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas as calling Gruening "a very

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versatile, very brave, very deep man." The paper then ridiculed Douglas for marrying two women nearly 50 years younger than he. On that count, the News-Miner said, Douglas was "unquestionably a very versatile and brave man in his own right."

The News-Miner then questioned the propriety of Douglas' endorsement of Gruening:

Can it be that the country's most eminent jurists, tiring of twisting the Constitution of our country around to suit their whims, are also going to start dictating as to whom should be elected? Or is it that old, real old, friends stick together?

After Gravel beat Gruening by 2,000 votes in the primary, the News-Miner wished the senator well in his "enforced retirement." It said the public could not support the stand that the United States was the aggressor in Vietnam, adding:

"You don't tear at the unity of our country when it is engaged in a war, declared or not."

But the view from outside the state was far different. Newsweek magazine reported that many people saw Gruening as "youthfully in tune with the times," but said the image of Mike Gravel, who proclaimed he was "on the sunshine side of 40," was insurmountable.

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14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
The New York Times said the "loss of Mr. Alaska" marked "the end of an era in Alaskan history and politics." The Times gave Gruening the biggest share of the credit for statehood and said he brought to Alaska "all the fervor and energy that had marked an earlier career as a crusading journalist." The Times said that in the youth-oriented 60s it was "almost impossible for an 81-year-old veteran--even one as vibrant as the Senator--to beat a 38-year-old challenger." The Nation saw a paradox in Gruening's defeat. He fought for the same liberal causes the 60s youth movement proclaimed, but was defeated because of his age. The violent 1968 Democratic Party Convention in Chicago had just ended when the Nation wrote, "The youth of America (and the human spirit that might keep America young), which was battered and gassed through the streets of Chicago last week, also lost a battle in Alaska, where Sen. Ernest Gruening was defeated in the Democratic primaries." A group of students from Alaska Methodist University in Anchorage and the University of Alaska in Fairbanks mounted a write-in campaign for Gruening. The campaign, mainly instigated by people sympathetic with the senator's Vietnam position, drew some attention.

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20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 The Nation, 9 September 1968, p. 197.
in the media. The *Southeast Alaska Empire* commented that Gruening was "not only permitting but somewhat nudging the campaign." The paper said Gruening should accept the loss and bow out, but "vanity, apparently, is not only the name of woman."\(^{23}\)

Gruening announced at a September 24 news conference in Anchorage that he would put all his efforts into the write-in. He pledged to continue to work for world peace and an end to the Vietnam war. Gravel reacted "with sadness but with tolerance."\(^{24}\)

The write-in campaign was a desperate effort. National and state Democratic Party leaders urged Gruening to drop it, and even Senator Bob Bartlett--after an agonized decision--stayed with his party and backed Gravel. But the *Empire* tempered its criticism. The day after Gruening held a half-hour press conference on Juneau television, the *Empire* said it had forgotten that "a degree of vanity is frequently a handmaid of the great--think of Churchill and MacArthur."\(^{25}\)

It said the write-in should not be seen as a repudiation of party loyalty, but a "freedom which one might expect an exceptional individual to exercise."\(^{26}\)

Just before the general election the *Empire* threw its full support

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\(^{23}\) *Southeast Alaska Empire*, 18 September 1968, p. 2.

\(^{24}\) *Southeast Alaska Empire*, 25 September 1968, p. 3.

\(^{25}\) *Southeast Alaska Empire*, 30 September 1968, p. 2.

\(^{26}\) Ibid.
behind the "uphill and underdog fight." It urged democrats not to let party loyalty make them turn away the man many of them supported in the primary. Survival of the country and civilization should come before survival of the party. The Empire reconsidered its concern with Gruening's age, saying "it is not how many miles you've traveled, but where."  

The seniority, the prestige, the entire compliment that Gruening brings to Alaska should not be casually or callously withdrawn. In an election year so rampant with evidences of misguided conservatism, it is all the more crucial to elect an independent mind who can articulate the true liberalism, the freedom and dignity of the individual human being. . . . 

We have cried of the dilemma of being forced to choose between the lesser of two evils; we now have a third choice which lifts us from our plight: Senator Ernest Gruening.  

Alaskan voters elected Gravel. Gruening finished a distant third.

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28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
CHAPTER XIII
Gruening's Last Years: A Plea for Peace

Gruening returned to Washington, finished his Senate term and began to divide his time between Juneau and the nation's capital. He told reporters he had made a commitment to write an autobiography, and he expressed interest in returning to journalism. His name reappeared on the Nation's masthead Jan. 13, 1968, as editorial associate. He concentrated on Vietnam and the military draft. On February 10 he wrote that with no end to the war in sight it was imperative to pass a law prohibiting the government from sending draftees to South-east Asia without their consent. He said young men were forced to either fight an immoral war and kill people against whom they had no grievance or resist the draft and risk imprisonment: "No one should be subjected to such a dilemma."¹

In March Gruening reviewed Eric Goldman's book, The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson. He agreed with Goldman's theory that Johnson's "war policy nullified his great domestic achievements."² Goldman portrayed Johnson as a tyrant who withheld truth and could not stand criticism.

Gruening gave President Richard Nixon 13 weeks in office before he blasted his Vietnam policy. He said the draft and the killing had

continued under his administration and a new approach was needed. Nixon inherited the war and could withdraw honorably as Johnson could have in 1964.

"Let me urge that any way out would be more honorable than to continue the needless slaughter."\(^3\)

Gruening asked what the United States had to gain in Vietnam and if it was worth the cost in lives. He said U.S. presence aided Communism. Americans were being killed while neither Red China nor Russia sent a single soldier. If the United States withdrew, the Vietnamese would fight Chinese aggression as they had fought aggression from Japan, France and the United States.\(^4\)

Besides these articles on Vietnam in the early 70s, Gruening wrote his autobiography, *Many Battles*, published in 1973. Tom Brown of the *New Republic* quoted this from the book: "I believed that the greatest battles are often fought by men who are defeated time and again, and keep on fighting. Should not a worthy cause be fought for regardless of ultimate victory or defeat?"\(^5\)

Brown, who wrote the review in the midst of Watergate, said the ability of government to continue depended on whether the nation could "produce men of Gruening's tenacity and vision."\(^6\)


\(^4\)Ibid.


\(^6\)Ibid.
The Nation said Many Battles, while not a great autobiography, revealed a "good man who improved his times and his country." It said that for new journalists who act "as if they invented crusading reporting and dedicated writing, Gruening's stories . . . are a helpful reminder of the muckraking years." On Gruening's 87th birthday, Feb. 6, 1974, George McGovern escorted him onto the Senate floor and commented for the record on Gruening's continued pleas for world peace. Senators Mark Hatfield of Oregon and Frank Church of Idaho later joined McGovern in nominating Gruening for the Nobel Peace Prize, an award the Nation said he deserved but did not win.

Alaskan newspapers were filled with tributes to Gruening after he died June 26, 1974. The most honest comments described him as abrupt, combative and egotistical as well as dedicated and fearless. Anchorage Daily Times publisher Robert Atwood said, "sometimes we threw rocks at each other, but we always called our shots precisely and understood the point of disagreement."

A short biography in the Daily Times pointed out that Gruening had loyal friends and strong enemies.

"His friends called him courageous and a man of vision while his enemies called him a cantankerous, self-seeking so-and-so."

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8 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
But papers statewide credited him with raising ideals among Alaskans and carrying statehood from beginning to end. "He virtually yanked the territory out of a chronic lethargy," one editorial said.11

Gruening had campaigned strenuously for George McGovern's presidential bid in 1972. He outlined the corruption in the Nixon administration in the postscript to Many Battles, applying an H.L. Mencken quote: "Ruled by shady men, a nation itself becomes shady."12 He believed the Watergate break-in and the subsequent coverup were wholly orchestrated by Nixon and that he should be impeached for unconstitutional actions.

Tom Brown, in his review of Many Battles for the New Republic, said he had interviewed Gruening in Washington, D.C., in July 1973. He reported that the senator was still depressed about McGovern's defeat the previous November and quoted Gruening as calling Nixon "the worst scoundrel we've ever had in the White House." Brown said Gruening then questioned whether representative government could still work in the United States.

July 1973 was also the month Gruening wrote the postscript to Many Battles. There he offered a solution to the question Brown left unanswered. He wrote that Americans had made mistakes before and elected corrupt or incompetent leaders. But democracy and the elec-

toral system had prevailed and the nation was revived by strong leaders.

"Who will contend that the majority who in 1920 elected Warren G. Harding were right? . . . It took the people twelve years to wake up and give themselves a 'New Deal,' having suffered severely in the meantime."\(^{13}\)

He promised to devote the rest of his life to "exposing . . . sinister subversion, to alerting my fellow countrymen, and to trying to help restore the America that has been and has served us so well."\(^{14}\)

For more than 50 years Gruening turned to the \textit{Nation} to renew old battles or begin new ones. The liberal journal that was the forum for his crusading exposures of corruption and injustice wrote the best possible summary of his life: "No one had a more acute sense of when the slightest compromise on an issue of principle could be fatal."\(^{15}\)

Freda Krichwey, associated with the \textit{Nation} for 37 years beginning in 1918 and its editor and publisher from 1945 to 1955, described the strength of Gruening's lifelong convictions. In the \textit{Nation}'s 100th anniversary issue, Sept. 20, 1965, she told of being struck by a "here-is-where-I-came-in" sensation while listening to Gruening debate

\[^{13}\text{Ernest Gruening, \textit{Many Battles}, p. 535.}\]
\[^{14}\text{Ibid., p. 542.}\]
\[^{15}\text{The \textit{Nation}, 20 July 1974, pp. 36-38.}\]
the Vietnam War with William Bundy of the State Department in New York a few weeks earlier.

Sitting in the wings behind the platform and listening to the arguments for and against U.S. intervention, occupation and the rest, I was suddenly jerked back to those early twenties when Gruening was denouncing in the pages of the Nation the same--exactly the same--acts; only then it was Haiti and Santo Domingo with Vietnam still safely under the rule of France. But, of course, I said to myself, it is Haiti and Santo Domingo now, too, and the issues are the same and the Marines are there today as they were in 1920.

It was an experience of sharp, retrospective anguish to realize that this was where Ernest Gruening also had come in, and had done as much as one editor with one liberal weekly could do to end the state of big-power domination in the island. Gruening considered his role as a journalist to be as important to the public good as any of the jobs he filled in his 60-year career. George McGovern said Gruening "brought great compassion and personal commitment and a healthy sense of moral outrage to the problems that faced our country."17

His journalistic skills served him for life. He vented his "moral outrage" in newspapers, magazines and books. The publications he worked for benefited as much as the public. After the Portland Evening News was discontinued in 1938, the Bangor (Maine) News printed "Cause and Effect" in its editorial column:

The decline of the Evening News began on the day that Ernest Gruening left it. He was the heart and soul of it. They never got another Gruening. So now they have a corpse. Thus again, for the thousandth time, is demonstrated the fact that a stream can rise no higher than its source,

and that, by the same token, no newspaper can be better than the men who make it.\(^{18}\)

Gruening believed in a newspaper's responsibility to make the community it serves a better place in which to live.\(^{19}\) He felt the same responsibility as a bureaucrat and politician. In his first meeting with Roosevelt after becoming director of the Division of Territories and Island Possessions, he told the president that the new office was similar to Britain's colonial minister and that a democracy had no right keeping colonies. Statehood for Alaska was part of a 20-year struggle to end colonialism in America.

Statehood was accomplished through a curious mix of political philosophies. At first Gruening's intellectual liberalism was rejected in the staunchly conservative territory, and the New Deal often clashed with Alaskans' individualism. But that individualism tended more toward libertarian freedoms than toward conservative Republican thought. People realized, eventually, that they were working for the same goal as Gruening regardless of political nametags. The press brought publicity and public sympathy to the statehood cause.

Journalism was Gruening's backstop. It was an outlet for his energy, flamboyance and ego, and it often helped him change public opinion. He believed that a strong America and equal rights for all citizens could best be gained by exposing evil and corruption. If


\(^{19}\) Letter to C.C. Nicolet, from Ernest Gruening, Director, Division of Territories and Island Possessions. Washington, D.C., 22 April 1934.
the government itself was wrong, the corruption should be revealed rather than hidden and left to change by itself.

Gruening worked for the rights of people to live peacefully and govern themselves in a free society. Many conservatives saw those goals, too, but Gruening used a constitutionally guaranteed free press and a strong representative federal government to earn them. The two worked hand in hand, and it was not unpatriotic to expose wrongdoing and expect immediate change.

Gruening lived most of his life with the "Communist" tag, and cries of "America: love it or leave it" were rampant during the 60s. He dissented because he loved America and knew that change could bring peace, freedom and popular government.
CHAPTER XIV
Gruening's Personal Life

Energy and dedication to a cause are two characteristics mentioned by nearly everyone who has written about Ernest Gruening. Friends and adversaries said that he tended to be pushy and barge into situations with little tact or regard for the consequences. Bob Bartlett, Gruening's Senate colleague from Alaska, complained privately that Gruening, the junior senator, always treated him like an aide and took more than his share of the credit for legislation that benefited Alaska.¹

Gruening's work was clearly the most important part of his life. Personal tragedies affected him, but he always plunged deeper into his work to relieve his depression. Two of his three children died young. Ernest Jr., who was born Oct. 20, 1915, died of an infection in 1931 while Gruening was working for the Portland Evening News. The death shocked Gruening, his wife, Dorothy, and his two remaining sons, Huntington and Peter. Gruening turned to his work as an outlet. "I was grateful," he wrote, "for the continuing pressures and demands of my work on the News."²

Peter, the youngest, was born in 1926 and committed suicide in Australia in 1955. He had led an active life, traveling with his father

around Alaska and later working for the United Press in Korea, Midway, Hawaii, Indonesia and Australia. Gruening, who had left his governor's office two years before the suicide, was working for Alaska statehood and dividing his time between Juneau and Washington, D.C.

"The battle for Alaska statehood in the second half of the 1950s was a blessing to me personally," he wrote. "It helped to take my mind off Peter's tragedy."3

Gruening and Dorothy Smith were married Nov. 19, 1914. The Gruening's were an active family, but Ernest traveled frequently and his personal life often suffered because of his career. Alaska historian Claus Naske wrote, in a biography of Bob Bartlett, about one incident that shows how important Gruening considered his work and his re-election to the Senate in 1968.

Mary Lee Council, who had retired from Bartlett's staff in 1966, advised Gruening against seeking another term. His wife, Dorothy, was crippled by arthritis and confined to a wheelchair. A move to a sunny and warm climate would have helped her. Council, who had known the Gruening's for years, recalled that she told him, "Ernest, you're an absolute ass to run, you know Dorothy is so sick. Why don't you think of her for a change? Think of your family for a change." She observed further that "he doesn't think of people. He's a strange man. He's got these great visions, these great liberal ideas, and yet his relationship with people is terrible." Gruening officially announced in the fall of 1967 that he would seek another term. His schedule for a two-week Alaska trip, Bartlett observed, "would put a less vigorous man in the hospital. It makes me tired just to look at it."

Gruening was active and vigorous his entire life. His interests outside journalism and politics included astronomy, chess, tennis,

3 Ernest Gruening, Many Battles, p. 402.
hiking, bridge and swimming. He loved to travel and, as director of the Division of Territories and Island Possessions, was determined to see as much of the area under his direction as possible. He traveled frequently to Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. His scrapbooks in the University of Alaska-Fairbanks Archives are filled with pictures of him swimming and hiking while traveling on interior department business. One picture in his autobiography shows Gruening smiling and waving as he rode up the side of a mountain in a copper-mine ore bucket during a 1938 trip to Alaska.\(^5\)

He continued to travel extensively in Alaska after becoming governor in 1939.

Gruening's active life and love of travel began in childhood. He grew up in New York City and his family spoke English and German interchangeably. He learned French while attending school in Paris and later learned Spanish. Latin was required for entrance into Harvard.

Emil and Phebe, Gruening's parents, taught their children to pursue worldly goals. Ernest and his four sisters studied in Europe and learned history, music and classical literature. The family traveled to Europe in the summers of 1894, 1898, 1900 and 1904.

Gruening's worldly character often hurt his image in Alaska, where frontier individualism was more accepted than sophistication or intellect. His association with national social and political leaders and his interest in international affairs added to his image as a

\(^{5}\)Ernest Gruening, Many Battles, p. 246.
"carpetbagger." Conservative Alaskan politicians and editors made certain that image never died.

As his age became an increasing factor in his political campaigns, Gruening worked to convince the public that he was physically and intellectually young. Sherwood Ross wrote a glowing, one-sided biography that Gruening distributed as campaign literature in 1968. Ross wrote that "Ernest and Dorothy Gruening are inveterate swimmers and miss no opportunity to test the waters of even the coldest and most unfriendly shores." He told of how they often swam in the ocean near their Eagle River Landing home north of Juneau.6

Ross quoted Sen. Frank Moss of Utah as saying that he "froze stiff" while swimming with Gruening.7 During a trip to Finland Gruening urged Moss to dive into the ocean with him after a sauna. "My breath was taken away," Moss said, "and I could hardly make it back to shore." He said Gruening "paddled happily around saying, 'come on in, it's delightful, this is wonderful.' "8

The Nation wrote in 1968 that "it is characteristic of many great men that they stay young for their entire lives." The story said that a few weeks before, Gruening "took time out from a barnstorming trip through the Eskimo villages of Northern Alaska to swim in the icy Arctic Ocean."9

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7Ibid.
8Ibid.
9The Nation, 9 September 1968, p. 197.
Ross wrote that Gruening could not sleep in a room with a closed window. On one trip to Barrow, Alaska, Gruening broke out the double pane of glass in a hotel window that was sealed to keep out the cold. Gruening "cheerfully paid for its repair in his hotel bill the next day."  

A Washington, D.C., correspondent for the Anchorage Daily News wrote that even in 1974, when Gruening knew he was dying of cancer, "he would not accept a sentence of inactivity. To him that was worse than a sentence of death."  

In 1978 Gruening's grandson Clark wrote an article for the Alaska Advocate, a now-defunct weekly newspaper published in Anchorage, about how his grandfather taught him about the stars and constellations. "Some 22 years ago," he said, "my grandfather ('Pop,' as the family called him) planted the seed of fascination for star gazing in me one Indian summer night at his Eagle River cabin near the northern terminus of the only road out of Juneau."  

Gruening told about how his grandfather learned about the stars and planets from his piano teacher as a boy in New York and it developed into a lifelong hobby. Gruening played tennis until late in his life. Edwin Webking, who wrote a doctorate dissertation about Gruening's 1968 write-in

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campaign, reported that Gruening, while in his 50s, won second place in the Alaska state singles championships. Webking did not report the year of the tournament, but said that the winner, "who was less than half as old as Gruening, was hard pressed to beat the governor in the finals."^13


Ernest's grandson Clark is a lawyer who has served in the Alaska Senate and now works in state government in Juneau. Clark Gruening defeated Mike Gravel for the Democratic nomination to the U.S. Senate in 1980, but lost in the general election to Republican Frank Murkowski of Fairbanks. Gravel had served in the U.S. Senate since 1969, after he defeated Ernest Gruening for the Democratic nomination and beat Republican Elmer Rasmuson and write-in candidate Ernest Gruening in the general election.

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