June 2, 1952

Honorable Herbert H. Lehman
United States Senate
Washington, D. C.

Dear Senator Lehman:

Your letter of May 28 and Julius's of May 27 on the subject of Averell Harriman's candidacy arrived simultaneously. The situation in regard to the Alaska delegates to the National Democratic Convention is as follows:

When the Territorial convention took place last January it voted unanimously to endorse Truman and Barkley, although there was even at that time considerable Kefauver sentiment among the delegates.

Since President Truman has withdrawn his candidacy those elected at the Territorial convention as delegates to the National Convention have informally indicated their desire to support Estes Kefauver.

The Alaska delegation to the Democratic convention consists of progressive-minded Democrats, but as Alaskans cannot vote for President their great concern is for statehood. Estes Kefauver's position, as you know, has been outstanding. He not only sponsored along with others the statehood bill in the 81st Congress, but has been conspicuous as one of the three out of the twenty-six Southerners (along with Sparkman and Holland) who have been militant supporters of statehood for Alaska. When the question came up for a vote on February 27 Kefauver was campaigning in the mid-West and had a luncheon speaking engagement at Drake University, Iowa. He canceled his luncheon attendance, changed the hour of the talk from noon back to nine in the morning and flew back to Washington to vote.

Alaskans, particularly Alaska Democrats, are grateful for his courageous and forthright stand on this issue. Apart from that his record as a liberal, his vigorous position on
corruption has further strengthened his standing with Alaska Democrats. It seems almost certain that the Alaskan delegates will support him so long as he has a chance of being nominated. Of course, Harriman was not a candidate then.

Adlai Stevenson would likewise be extremely acceptable to the delegation, particularly in view of the fact that he is also a strong supporter of statehood and is a member of our nationwide statehood committee, which you, too, were good enough to join before you were elected to the Senate.

Averell Harriman on the other hand is one of the relatively few who declined the invitation to join the nationwide Alaska Statehood Committee. That does not mean that he is opposed to statehood for Alaska, but at least does indicate that he has not the interest and concern for this great cause which is Alaska's principal objective that have Kefauver and Stevenson, and which yourself so generously manifested even before you were elected to the Senate.

While there is no telling what may happen at national conventions, I think it might be helpful as far as the Alaska delegation is concerned if Averell Harriman were to make in one of his forthcoming pronouncements on national affairs a clear-cut statement in favor of the passage of the statehood bill at the earliest possible moment, and to pledge to support it vigorously should he become president. Granting full self-government to our only two incorporated territories is wholly consonant with the foreign policy which Averell Harriman has been so ably promoting.

I fully share your view that Averell Harriman is experienced and capable and that his position on issues, where known, is liberal. If elected I feel he will make a great president. Nevertheless, I must confess a great doubt whether a man relatively so unknown to the American people, despite his long and conspicuous public service, can secure the presidential nomination in the face of better known contenders, and be elected if so nominated.

However, I have such a high regard for your wishes and such respect for your views that I certainly desire to do what I can in the matter and will discuss with the Alaskan delegates Harriman as an alternative if Kefauver seems not to have a chance of success after the early balloting. But at present, it is only fair to say, that the decided preference of most of Alaska's six delegates would be for Kefauver or Stevenson.

Cordially yours,

Ernest Gruening

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