

The Politics and Poetry of Advice and Consent: Congress Confronts the Roosevelt Administration during the State Department Confirmation Incident of 1944

NICHOLAS EVAN SARANTAKES

Assistant Professor of History

Texas A&M University, Commerce

An old saying claims that politics makes for strange bedfellows. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and for that matter most informed Americans, believed that when a slate of nominees for subcabinet positions in the State Department became front-page news on both coasts for two weeks. In an event that befuddled contemporary observers, the country watched a coalition of liberal New Deal senators lead a bipartisan effort to block Roosevelt's nominees, claiming they were too conservative, only to come within a vote of rejecting the most liberal of the group. However, there is nothing bizarre about this episode. Although individual senators had their own reasons to oppose particular nominees and used whatever rhetoric they believed necessary, the Senate as a whole used the confirmation of this group to inform the president that the legislative branch wanted and was going to have a voice in postwar U.S. foreign policy.

Previous writers on this period have failed to do this incident justice. In his memoirs, Tom Connally, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, makes no mention of the event. Archibald MacLeish, one of the nominees, misstates and misleads in a posthumously published oral history. Dean Acheson, MacLeish's best friend and fellow nominee, dismisses the confirmation crisis as both sadistic and silly.¹ Biographers and historians have treated this event lightly, if at all. Robert A. Divine covers this episode briefly without providing any interpretation. Scott Donaldson, MacLeish's biographer, believes conservative senators opposed the nominations because MacLeish was a liberal. Waldo Heinrichs, the biographer of Joseph Grew, another of the group, states that resistance in the Senate came from liberal senators opposed to the big business background of the proposed diplomats. Both Warren Kimball and Frederick W. Marks III give no coverage to this incident or the larger issue of executive-legislative relations in their studies of Rooseveltian foreign policy. In his study of New Deal diplomacy, Robert Dallek takes relations between Congress and Roosevelt into account but ignores this incident as well.²

The confirmation crisis started in 1943. In the early summer of that year, MacLeish began thinking about his work and career. America was a year and a half into the war, and MacLeish thought his work at the Library of Congress was not helping the war effort. Although he had garnered fame as a poet, winning the Pulitzer Prize, he was a lawyer and a U.S. Army combat veteran of the Second Battle of the Marne. MacLeish wanted to

make a more significant contribution to the war effort. He wrote President Roosevelt, telling him he wanted to leave the Library. He was willing to take another, more meaningful position in the government. His letter has not survived, but the president's response has, and from this letter it is possible to reconstruct the librarian's motivation. "I can well understand your feelings," Roosevelt wrote back, "and both of us can in our own right pray that the war will end soon."³

Roosevelt was receptive to finding MacLeish "war work." The writer was a loyal supporter and had played an important role in persuading Roosevelt to run for an unprecedented third term in 1940. The president could never have enough men like Archibald MacLeish in Washington. He told MacLeish he would "keep a weather eye open."⁴

This matter was not pressing for either man. MacLeish continued to serve at the Library of Congress for well over a year. Finally, he tired of waiting and resigned as Librarian of Congress on November 8, 1944.⁵

The president wanted to keep MacLeish around, and events were beginning to fall into place for him. On November 7, he won election for a fourth term. Two weeks later, Cordell Hull, the ailing secretary of state, resigned. Roosevelt used this resignation as an opportunity to reorganize the Department of State and give Archibald MacLeish a new job.

On November 27, Roosevelt called Undersecretary of State Edward R. Stettinius, Jr. to the White House and offered him Hull's old post. Roosevelt explained his offer to Stettinius. The president said he knew with Stettinius, unlike the other names he considered for the post, that there would be no question about who was in charge. Stettinius agreed and then learned how intent Roosevelt was on controlling foreign policy. The president told Stettinius that his new undersecretary of state was Joseph C. Grew, and his six new assistant secretaries were William L. Clayton, economic affairs; Nelson Rockefeller, Latin American affairs; Dean Acheson, international conferences and congressional relations; Julius Holmes, administration; James C. Dunn, political affairs; and Archibald MacLeish, public and cultural affairs. Stettinius was at Roosevelt's mercy, as his nomination was still not public; he had no other choice but to agree.⁶

Although the editors of Stettinius's diary believe the president merely approved Stettinius's choices, such is not the case. First, the selection of these men took place at the same meeting that Roosevelt offered the office to Stettinius. It is unlikely that Stettinius chose his subordinates before he had the position firmly in hand. Second, Roosevelt, not Stettinius, had been looking for a new position for MacLeish. Stettinius admitted as much at the time. He told Democratic Senators Joseph F. Guffey of Pennsylvania and James Murray of Montana that Roosevelt had made these appointments. He told MacLeish the same thing. According to MacLeish, "The telephone rang and it was Ed Stettinius, who didn't sound very happy and didn't sound very welcoming, but he said, 'Mr. Roosevelt wants you to be one of my assistant secretaries of state.' No great suggestions about when we would do what where, and he didn't even say, 'Do you accept!' That's the thing I remember."⁷

MacLeish accepted the offer because of his concerns about postwar U.S. foreign policy. In a letter to newspaper columnist Walter Lippmann, he expressed the opinion that the United States was making too many compromises without an overall plan. "I cannot help feeling that, in attempting to avoid the dangers which wrecked Wilson, we

are running to an opposite extreme which may prove to be even more dangerous.” In another letter to a friend, he declared that Roosevelt was responsible for this state of affairs:

One can have—and I have, as you have guessed—all manner of reservations about the warmth and fervor of the President’s commitments to a people’s peace—a peace between peoples. But whatever the reservations as to fervor and emphasis, no one can doubt that that is the *kind* of peace he proposes if he is given a chance.⁸

Stettinius was no idiot and had a reason for making his offer to MacLeish in such a graceless fashion. He hoped to tell Roosevelt that the candidates had declined and then make his own selections. Stettinius did not even bother to contact Acheson directly, sending Grew instead. “The offer carried with it the distinct impression that it was expected to be declined,” Acheson wrote years later.⁹ Unfortunately for Stettinius, all the president’s men accepted. When he heard that MacLeish had agreed, Roosevelt sent him a quick note. “I think it is thrilling that you are not leaving us. This ought to hold you.”¹⁰

Forcing MacLeish and the others on Stettinius was typical of Roosevelt’s administrative style. The president wanted to make U.S. foreign policy on his own, without being challenged from any quarter. Putting men into the State Department who owed Stettinius no loyalty guaranteed that the secretary of state would have little control over his own department. With the bureaucracy in the State Department divided, issues would reach Roosevelt unresolved. He would make the decisions.

Congress, at least initially, seemed to pose no problem. Stettinius sailed through Senate confirmation with only one negative vote. Roosevelt no doubt expected the same results when he announced Grew as the new undersecretary and Clayton, Acheson, Rockefeller, and MacLeish as the new assistant secretaries on December 4.¹¹

Indeed, the early going in the confirmation process warranted such optimism. On December 5, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee met in an executive session to consider the nominations. These senators expressed no strong sentiment about the nominations either way, and they were more than willing to send the nominations straight to the Senate floor. Murray, the Democrat from Montana, opposed Clayton’s nomination. Republicans Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan and Wallace White of Maine, Democrat Bennett Champ Clark of Missouri, and Progressive Robert LaFollette, Jr. of Wisconsin were against MacLeish, but none of them felt strongly enough about the nominations to demand hearings or a formal vote. So with a speed not normally associated with Congress, the nominations went through the committee and were on the Senate floor for final confirmation only two days after Roosevelt’s announcement.¹² This group of selectees drew favorable editorial support from a diverse collection of newspapers such as the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Dallas Morning News*, the *Chicago Sun*, and the *Washington Evening Star*.¹³ This state of affairs quickly changed.

There were some who had strong feelings against these proposed diplomats. One was David Stern, the liberal editor of the *Philadelphia Record*. In a long editorial published on December 6, he blasted the nominees. “Liberals believe that President Roosevelt’s appointments to the State Department add up to a national calamity.” The editorial went on, explaining why the nominations were a disaster: “These State Department appoint-

ments give the big-money boys a try at shaping the economy of the entire post-war world.”

These men were both dangerous and incompetent. Clayton had “no diplomatic experience whatever.” Rockefeller was a hard worker, but “there are a dozen men in Washington better fitted and far more experienced.” Grew “advocated a policy of doing business with Emperor Hirohito after the war” because he had little imagination. MacLeish was a “genuine” liberal,

but he is totally lacking in experience with foreign affairs. His assignment as head of the Translation Division, Public Liaison, Office of Public Information and Cultural Cooperation will give him about as much chance to develop liberal policies as though he were head office boy.

The editorial closed with a warning, aimed at Guffey, the Democrat from Pennsylvania and a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. “Every staunch supporter of the New Deal will pray that this mistake be recognized in time to avert a repetition of the blunders which followed World War No. 1.”

Guffey was embarrassed. He had paid little attention to the nominations. He had voted for all the nominees, before leaving the committee meeting early. When Grew’s name came up first for confirmation, Guffey entered the editorial into the *Congressional Record*, saying the piece had raised some points that he had not considered, and he did not think he could vote for the nominations now.¹⁴

When Guffey entered the editorial into the *Record* he transformed the nominations into a challenge to liberal senators. The essay suddenly cast the nominations in a different light, and a flash flood of partisan rhetoric followed as senators responded. Kentucky Democrat A. B. “Happy” Chandler said, “I sometimes wonder who won the election, which we recently held. Instead of poor folks obtaining jobs, the Wall Street boys are obtaining jobs.”¹⁵ In an editorial, the editors of the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* later called these remarks “ridiculous and contemptible,” observing that Chandler’s comments “echoed the sentiments of the lunatic fringe of the New Deal crackpots and radicals.”¹⁶

Wyoming Democrat Joseph C. O’Mahoney stood up and changed the focus of the debate. After drawing attention to Clayton and his views on international cartels, he suggested that the Senate was moving too fast. “I cannot believe that the Foreign Relations Committee is going to ask the Senate to vote blindly about so important a matter,” he declared. “I certainly hope that there will be no action upon any of these nominees until the Foreign Relations committee can give us more information with respect to what their views are.”¹⁷ O’Mahoney’s speech and motion moved the Senate’s attention away from anti-big business rhetoric to an issue that cut across political divides—the prerogatives of the U.S. Senate.

Clark of Missouri, who had opposed MacLeish’s nomination in the committee, attempted to separate Grew’s name from the others. He said it was critical that the State Department have an undersecretary. O’Mahoney refused to consider separating Grew from the other nominees. Texas Democrat Tom Connally arrived and realized that the O’Mahoney motion had the potential to carry the day. Connally said sending the nominees back to the committee was a bad idea. “Aside from the membership of the commit-

tee, not three Senators will be present to hear all the information which the Senator from Wyoming is so anxious to secure at the present time." If O'Mahoney really wanted to get Clayton's views on cartels, Connally said, it was easy. "The Senator can call him on the telephone in about a minute, and he can say 'Yes' or 'No.'" ¹⁸

Connally exploded when Clark changed his mind and urged the Senate to send the entire slate back to the committee. "There are a considerable number of trash cans around the Capitol, where things can be put and where they will stay forever," the Texan declared. "The Committee on Foreign Relations is not such a receptacle. We try to do business." Recommitting the nominations to the committee would only delay matters. ¹⁹

Several other members of the Foreign Relations Committee began speaking out against holding hearings and defending the character of the nominees. O'Mahoney responded that the issue was not one of character, nor even politics, but one of the Senate and policy making. "We share a public responsibility in determining what the policy is to be," he said. After some further debate, the Senate voted 37 to 27 to send the nominations back for committee hearings. ²⁰

A few days later in New Orleans, the *Times-Picayune* printed an editorial cartoon, contending that the Senate's action was the reaction of concerned liberal senators to conservative influence on the president. The cartoon showed Roosevelt on a high-wire, leaning so far to his right that he was about to fall off. The tilt came about because the president was holding Stettinius, Clayton, Rockefeller, Grew, and their weighty "big business knowledge of world affairs" in his right hand, while only MacLeish and his little poems were in his left. Below the wire, New Deal senators gasped in shock. ²¹ While this view matched the rhetoric unleashed in the Senate chambers, it fails to explain why liberals opposed MacLeish's nomination or why conservatives voted with the New Dealers to send the nominations back to committee.

MacLeish and Clayton believed the issue had nothing to do with political ideology. A Texas cotton broker before the war, Clayton believed senators from cotton-producing states were behind the effort, trying to win votes with harvesters of the plant back home. "Cotton has always been political dynamite—and I suppose always will be," he wrote to a friend back home in Texas. MacLeish had a different theory. In a letter to Stettinius, he declared that he had old enemies in the Senate, and they were using the hearings to get back at him. "The objectors are apparently the old Isolationist group whose real reason for objecting to me is, as you know, not at all the reason they give." ²²

A close examination of the tally, however, shows that there was no pattern to the vote. Liberals and conservatives, Republicans and Democrats, and isolationists and internationalists were on both sides. ²³ The motion passed because holding hearings when there had been none sounded reasonable. Most senators were not aware that their colleagues on the Foreign Relations Committee did not want to hold hearings. They cast their ballot for recommitment to assert legitimate Senate prerogatives.

Roosevelt showed little concern about these developments. He had Stettinius working as his troubleshooter throughout the crisis but communicated with him through intermediaries such as presidential confidantes Harry Hopkins, Jesse Jones, and his secretary. Jones and several of the nominees met with individual senators. Stettinius observed that these conferences were helping immensely. A stressed Rockefeller called, worried that some of the senators were going to use the hearing to attack

Eleanor Roosevelt. Stettinius calmly told him to get some rest. Attorney General Francis Biddle was much more disturbed. He called Stettinius and warned him that there were some documents on Clayton's export activity with Germany and Japan that made him look bad. Stettinius asked him if confirmation would be a problem. "Yes," Biddle replied.²⁴

Connally arranged to hold the hearings a week later on December 12. Before the hearings, Dean Acheson "flatly rejected" Stettinius's suggestion that he testify. Acheson said he was a current assistant secretary, had already been confirmed, and saw no reason to go through the process again.²⁵ Acheson's refusal to testify saved him much grief; his name was never mentioned during the struggle over these nominations.

Despite snow flurries and blowing winds outside, a "jam-packed" crowd numbering over five hundred watched when Connally gavelled the hearings to order in the Caucus Room of the Senate Office Building. The crowd reflected public interest in the hearings. In the week since the Senate had sent the nominations back to committee, *Nation* magazine had run a critical editorial, while seven stories and editorials had appeared in the *Washington Post*. Editorials holding firm in their support of the nominees, while divided on the wisdom of the hearings, appeared in a number of major regional papers, such as the *Atlanta Constitution*, the *Chattanooga News-Free Press*, the *Toledo Times*, and the *Baltimore Sun*. According to a *Newsweek* magazine reporter, "the spectators looked forward to fireworks on a grand scale."²⁶ Despite the buildup, the secretary of state was upbeat. The night before the hearings, Stettinius told his team: "I have full confidence that this is going to go smoothly and easily."²⁷

The hearings went largely the way Stettinius expected. He testified first and started with a statement of the five major objectives of U.S. foreign policy: first, help the armed services win the war as soon as possible; second, prevent Germany and Japan from being able to threaten world peace ever again; third, establish a United Nations organization that would maintain the peace with force, if necessary; fourth, promote U.S. trade; fifth and finally, promote democracy. Stettinius knew the nominations were sent back to committee because the Senate believed the administration was ignoring it, and he stated twice that Congress had helped establish these goals. He went on further, assuring the committee that the nominees were well-qualified individuals, who fully supported these objectives and would work to implement them.²⁸

This was Stettinius's first major statement since coming into office two weeks before, and it disarmed the senators. Grew, Rockefeller, Holmes, and Dunn testified afterward. Since all but Holmes read from prepared texts, observers saw their testimony as detailed supporting statements of official policy. The nominees were asked a few pro forma questions. Soon the crowd realized that there was going to be no major clash.²⁹

Then MacLeish testified, and everything changed. Laying in wait to question him was Senator Bennett Champ Clark of Missouri. In 1932, when he became a senator at age forty-two, many, including Judge Harry S Truman of Jackson County, Missouri thought he was on a path to the White House. A gifted public speaker, Clark was the son of the late-Champ Clark, the former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. A graduate of the University of Missouri and the law school at George Washington University, the younger Clark had served as the clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives, had been a twenty-eight-year-old lieutenant colonel in the army during the First World War, and had even developed a literary reputation with his one-volume biography of

John Quincy Adams. Twelve years later, he was an alcoholic ruin. Truman asked Clark to give the speech nominating him for vice president at the 1944 Democratic National Convention. The day of the speech Truman had to hunt Clark down, finding him drunk in a strange hotel room. Sobered up slightly, he gave a listless speech. Back in Missouri, his alcoholism and opposition to Roosevelt's foreign policy caught up with him when he failed to win reelection.³⁰

A onetime writer and a lame duck with a few weeks left in office, Clark had nothing to lose and let jealousy get the better of him. MacLeish took roughly ten minutes to read a statement defining the new position of assistant secretary of state for public and cultural affairs. He would direct State Department information policy in a manner to keep the people informed on their foreign policy. He would also be in charge of American public and cultural relations. When he finished, Clark pounced on him. He first went after MacLeish on an issue that rankled many senators—his outspokenness, many times in opposition to congressional actions. In 1941, MacLeish wrote a poem that blasted the Senate for its isolationist stand following the sinking of an American freighter, the *Bold Venture*.³¹ Was it part of his duties as librarian of Congress, the Missourian asked, to act as a propagandist in policy debates and criticize the policies of Congress and the State Department? No, MacLeish said, but he was exercising his rights as a private citizen.

Clark then turned to MacLeish's political ideology. Since he had criticized U.S. policy toward the Spanish Civil War, did he believe America should support Communism? No, it was never a Fascist-Communist war; it was a Fascist war against the Republican government of Spain. Then Clark directly asked MacLeish if he was a Communist. "I am very strongly against Communism," he replied. "I believe in a free society of free-men with free and equal opportunity."

Unfazed, Clark turned next to his qualifications. He read an autobiographical sketch MacLeish wrote in 1935 for the book *Living Authors*. In this passage he stressed his family history, education, and literary achievements. Clark asked him what in this essay qualified him to be an assistant secretary of state. Documents in MacLeish's papers indicate this was an expected question. MacLeish said his five years of government service as librarian of Congress, director of the Office of Facts and Figures, and assistant director of the Office for War Information had prepared him. Then he took offense at Clark's suggestion that his essay had a sardonic tone.

"I take it you were being facetious when you said you went to Harvard to keep from going to work?" "One does not go to Harvard Law School not to work, sir."³²

With that exchange the show ended for the time being. Reporters wrote that Stettinius looked "amused" during the questioning. Will Clayton, a self-made millionaire through cotton trading, had just enough time to make his statement before the committee recessed for the day. He declared his opposition to cartels and his agreement with the liberal trade policies associated with Cordell Hull. He went on to say that he had ended contact with his company, Anderson and Clayton, when he entered government service in 1940, but he knew the firm had stopped selling cotton to Germany and Japan before U.S. belligerency.³³

The first day of the hearings had failed to live up to expectations. A reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* noted in a front-page story that "questions were few and far between." Chandler told the *Washington Post*, "If I had known we would get this kind of a hearing, I

wouldn't have voted to send the names back to committee."³⁴ The confidence Stettinius had shown was well-founded. "You handled yourself beautifully at this morning's Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearings," he wrote MacLeish. "I was proud of you." He wrote identical letters to other nominees.³⁵

When the committee reconvened the next day, the hearings went much differently. The anticipated "fireworks" finally arrived. The day started with the questioning of Clayton, although the process seemed more like an interrogation than a congressional confirmation hearing. Henrik Shipstead of Minnesota, a member of the Farmer-Laborite Party, queried him about immigration and loans to South America. LaFollette of Wisconsin followed. He asked a series of tough questions: Did he support repealing government subsidies for cotton? When exactly had his old firm stopped selling to Japan and Italy? Were any of the company's employees enemy nationals? What would he do when he had to make policy that would affect the price of his stocks?

Florida Democrat Claude Pepper asked a series of questions on employment and wages. Would he favor government aid to cotton farmers put out of business when subsidies were cut? Why did he oppose requiring foreign firms doing business with the U.S. government to pay their employees a minimum wage? In turn, did he oppose the *National Labor Relations Act of 1935* establishing a minimum wage?

A sharp exchange occurred between Clayton and Alabama Democrat William B. Bankhead on cotton policies. Clayton finally lost the composure he had maintained through the questioning. "I cannot see," he said, "that this has much to do with my duties as Assistant Secretary of State for foreign economic affairs." Southern senators ignored his protest and explored his views on cotton, before a sharp exchange between Clayton and Chandler of Kentucky took place on the activities of Clayton's old lawyer and his representation of a firm seeking exemption from the trading with the enemy act.

Two hours and forty minutes after it started, Clayton's questioning ended. In a letter to a friend, he called the experience "grueling." The topics explored ranged from Clayton's economic policies to his domestic views, and his political activity to the behavior of his associates. There had been an edge of hostility throughout the hearing. Newspaper columnist Frank R. Kent wrote that the senators treated Clayton like the Antichrist.³⁶

After an hour-long recess for lunch, the committee turned its attention to MacLeish. Clark had spent the past day examining his writings trying to find something to block his nomination. Forewarned, MacLeish returned from lunch "armed with a suitcase full of books" to defend himself and his prose. Clark started off reading a selection from "Preface to an American Manifesto," an essay that both praised President Roosevelt, liberalism, and Democrats, and criticized big business and American Communism:

The great American capitalist and his son and his daughter-in-law and banking system might well have been begotten explicitly for hatefulness. They have all the attributes of hatefulness: They are greedy; they are arrogant; they are gross; they lack honor; their existence insults the intelligent. It is a pleasure—almost a duty—to hate them.³⁷

"Do you mean that?" Clark asked. "Do you hate Will Clayton? Do you hate Ed Stettinius, or do you hate the President, or Mr. Grew?"

In a muddled presentation, MacLeish explained that this was an attack on the Communist “stock figure” of the American capitalist. He, of course, did not believe this interpretation. This clarification was inaccurate, but Clark ignored it in his own effort to distort the passage. The senator implied that MacLeish was at best un-American, and at worst a Communist. Had he not appeared at Communist rallies and been a member of fellow traveler organizations? Had he not written that “for more than a century the Supreme Court and the Congress of the United States have been to all intents and purposes crooked?” MacLeish’s temper flared at Clark’s attempts to twist the facts and put words in his mouth. “That is not stated, Senator,” he snapped back. He ended Clark’s attacks on his prose, declaring, “I believe in the democracy of this country with all my heart.”³⁸

Dueld to a draw on the prose, Clark turned to MacLeish’s poetry. He read a passage from the poem “The Lost Speakers” and asked MacLeish to explain his meaning. MacLeish said he was in the same spot as Browning when he was asked to explain his writing. Browning had said, “When I wrote that, God and I knew what it meant; but now God alone knows.” The audience laughed at this reply. According to a front-page story in the *Los Angeles Times*, the committee did not take this questioning seriously. Reflecting on the hearings years later, MacLeish agreed, “I don’t think from the way the committee acted that the suggestion that I was a Communist ever struck them as being in any way serious.” Senators Pepper and Chandler finally ended this nonsense, asking MacLeish about his combat experiences in World War I and his days on the Yale football team.³⁹

When he returned to the Library of Congress, MacLeish found David Chambers Means, chief of the Library’s manuscript division, waiting for him, holding a book. According to MacLeish, Means said, “I thought so, that son of a bitch, I thought so! He, too was an undergraduate poet! There’s his volume.”⁴⁰

“That,” MacLeish said, “was beautiful.” This incident took place no doubt, but it was most likely Clark’s *John Quincy Adams*, “*Old Man Eloquent*” (1932) that Means had found. Still, MacLeish had a point; Clark was jealous.⁴¹

Observers believed MacLeish got the better of the exchange, but the admission that he found his own writing confusing opened him up to ridicule. Columnist Thomas L. Stokes wrote that “he handled himself most expertly, in fact he put the senators to shame. And he enjoyed it.” In Denver, poet Thomas Hornsby Ferril wrote an editorial for the *Rocky Mountain News*, saying when “Senators start gunning for the poets, it’s sour grapes.” Syndicated columnist Frank R. Kent said Clark had failed to show a valid reason for rejecting MacLeish. Former Undersecretary of State Sumner Wells defended MacLeish in a *Washington Post* editorial. “He will be an eloquent spokesman for the department,” Wells wrote. But newspapers also ran stories with headlines like: “Even MacLeish Admits His Poetry Vague.”⁴²

On December 14, the committee met for three hours to vote on the nominees. Before the committee voted on any of the nominations, Guffey, Pepper, LaFollette, and Murray offered a resolution, calling upon President Roosevelt to reconsider the entire slate, because the six did not “reflect the attitude and point of view of the Senate with respect to the foreign policy of the United States.” Politics is a rough game. Although these four were of the same political persuasion as MacLeish, they considered him a token appointment and were willing to toss him aside to let Roosevelt know the Senate wanted a greater say in foreign policy. This motion was quickly defeated.

Then the committee turned to approving the proposed statesmen. Grew passed, 15 to 4; Holmes, 15 to 4; Dunn, 13 to 5; Rockefeller, 12 to 7; and Clayton, 11 to 7. MacLeish had problems though. The first ballot cast was eight for, twelve against. The committee had rejected MacLeish. Pepper and Murray quickly changed their votes. If the nominations were going to go through, there was no reason for the lone liberal to be the sole rejection. This made the vote 10 to 10. Connally wanted all the nominations reported out positively and got the deadlocked committee to decide unanimously to report the other five to the Senate and wait on MacLeish until absent senators were contacted. After the meeting ended, Guffey decided to change his vote. The committee reconvened and the vote stood at 11 to 9. Then he changed his mind for some reason. Accounts vary. Either Connally insulted him, or Clark successfully challenged the legality of his switch. Regardless, the tally was 10 to 10 again. Finally, at 10:00 P.M., New York Democrat Robert F. Wagner phoned in his vote, 11-10. Still, Connally had to wait until midnight to see if Republican Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota might call in his vote, before the vote was official.⁴³

The committee's vote was column one, front-page news in the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *New York Times*. Because of the tight vote, a good amount of the publicity focused on MacLeish. The headlines of the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* specifically named MacLeish. Stettinius told Attorney General Francis Biddle that it was "important from the standpoint of the whole liberal movement to have MacLeish confirmed."⁴⁴

Commentators around the country tried to explain the back-and-forth committee vote. Journalists used the words *strange* and *unusual* repeatedly. Several blistering editorials in the *Washington Post* blasted the conduct of the Senate.

The capricious way in which certain members have shifted their votes and the frivolous, irrelevant character of some of the inquiries directed at the nominees in the course of the hearings betray an irresponsibility that provides critics of our law-making procedure with fresh ammunition for the assault.

Editorials appearing in the *Washington Times-Herald* and the *Washington Daily News* were equally critical. Marquis Childs, a columnist for the *Post*, was more direct: "All of us lost." Arthur Krock, the columnist for the *New York Times*, chose to focus on MacLeish. He explained that MacLeish had taken a beating mainly for his personality. He had made a number of enemies in Congress during his five years as head of the congressional library. Krock stated that MacLeish had a case of "divine afflatus," a case common to poets. This made him arrogant, impatient, and intolerant of others who dared to disagree with him. Krock said it was "poetic irony" that his liberal friends had served his foes during the hearings.⁴⁵

Archibald MacLeish was a thin skinned man, and this public trial infuriated him. "If you see Arthur Krock," he wrote Stettinius in a letter dripping in sarcasm, "I hope you will congratulate him for me on his attempt at assassination this morning. I think it is an adroit and wonderful job, for which he deserves high public acclaim." He also reacted bitterly to a balanced, objective *Time* magazine story about the hearings that focused on his exchange with Clark. In a letter to Time-Life publisher Henry Luce, he declared that

the story was “either the most naïve piece of journalism which ever appeared in *Time*, or one of the most vicious.”⁴⁶

Over time, MacLeish convinced himself and others that he had suffered unjustly at the hands of the committee. In a 1962 Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) television special with his friend and fellow poet Mark Van Doren, he contended that Clark tried to block his nomination because he was a poet. In a 1977 oral history interview he said he, not Clayton, had undergone the long and intense questioning. In this version of history Clark’s antics were just that, antics, but they had come without warning, and after he had answered legitimate questions from other senators.⁴⁷

The battle over the nominations went on after the hearings, however. Chandler, Murray, Pepper, Guffey, and LaFollette continued to work against the nominations. On December 15, Chandler took control of the Senate floor and refused to yield until the Senate voted on the appointment of former Connecticut Governor Robert A. Hurley and Lt. Col. Edward Heller to the War Surplus Property Board. Chandler’s insistence that the vote on these nominations come first effectively blocked any action on the State Department group. The Senate confirmed Hurley and Heller on December 16.⁴⁸

The administration had prepared for a Senate floor fight on the proposed diplomats. Stettinius and Roosevelt had decided to resubmit any name the Senate failed to confirm. MacLeish was not happy about this idea. Stettinius reassured him, maintaining the vote would “turn out just the way you and I want it to.”⁴⁹

The Senate began consideration of MacLeish and the other five on December 16. Pepper quickly introduced a resolution to postpone action on these nominations until January. He hoped Roosevelt would use this time to reconsider his nominations. The Senate tabled this motion.⁵⁰

After a break for Sunday observances, the Senate reconvened to consider the nominations. Connally introduced the nominations, saying the recent presidential election showed that the American people were behind Roosevelt and his foreign policy. He had a point; a recent Gallup poll revealed that Stettinius had a high popular approval rating.⁵¹ Connally then made two mistakes. First, he cast the issue as Senate meddling in foreign policy. “If Senators do not wish to interfere with our foreign relations, if they want to furnish America with the necessary strength and instrumentalities to maintain its foreign policies, I ask them to vote for the confirmation of these nominations.” This approach only encouraged further resistance. Then Connally implied that if the senators did choose to interfere and oppose these nominations, their action would border on treason. “Would not a vote against these nominees encourage the enemy to a more determined effort and a stiffer resistance?”⁵²

Pepper responded to this challenge immediately. “It is high time not only for the President of the United States . . . but for the Senate of the United States also, to declare what is the foreign policy of the United States,” he declared.

Nowhere in the Federal Constitution is the President of the United States given the power to determine the foreign policy of the United States of America. I know that there was never a better time when the Senate could pause and should pause and search its heart to come to some sort of definition upon our foreign policy, than when the State Department of the United States is presented to us for confirmation.

He also said the Senate should give Roosevelt a vote of confidence, letting him know the American people supported his foreign policy.⁵³

Maine Republican Owen Brewster asked Pepper an obvious question: How do you help the president by rejecting his nominees? Pepper, who honestly believed these men were not Roosevelt's choices, fumbled about for an answer. A free press would explain the Senate's actions to Roosevelt, and he would understand. "I cannot see how we can get anywhere by kicking around the men whom he has selected to assist him," Brewster replied. "That does not seem to me to be supporting the President."⁵⁴

The debate went on and on. Most senators made long, lengthy speeches about the nature of U.S. foreign policy, without mentioning any of the nominees. Connally commented on this fact, his frustration showing, "The matter before us is the confirmation or non-confirmation of Mr. Grew. During the debate today almost everything except Mr. Grew has been discussed."⁵⁵ He also entered into the record a *Washington Post* editorial calling the debate and the actions of Pepper and Guffey a "disguised filibuster."⁵⁶

Pepper was quite honest in his public statements about explaining his actions. Two days before he had told Stettinius he wanted to give Roosevelt an opportunity to select the men he really wanted. The secretary of state replied that the president, not he, had selected this group.⁵⁷ "I can't figure out why Claude has acted this way," Stettinius told Biddle that same day. "He and I have been intimate. We have had a very close arrangement and I can't understand it." That evening in an event so typical of Washington social life, Pepper and Clayton found themselves guests at the same dinner party. Wishing to avoid a confrontation, Evelyn MacLean, the hostess, separated the two and acted as an intermediary. Pepper said he had nothing personal against Clayton but was determined to protect Senate prerogatives in making foreign policy. He was not going to be "railroaded" at the end of the legislative session. This exchange left Clayton uncertain if he would ever get confirmed.⁵⁸

During the debate, which continued into the following day, senators made comments about MacLeish, revealing the personal nature of the opposition to his nomination. This was no surprise to the Roosevelt administration. Vandenberg of Michigan had warned Stettinius earlier that there were a number of people in the Senate who disliked the poet. Montana Democrat Burton K. Wheeler said, "Frankly . . . I do not like MacLeish. I think he is incompetent as a poet. I think he is incompetent as an executive." North Dakota Republican William Langer attacked MacLeish harshly, saying he was "headstrong, arrogant, and cruel." He was also "intolerant of contradiction and impatient of delay" and had "a naïve conceit that scorns the patient study and open-minded consideration of divergent points of view."⁵⁹

Before the Senate met again on the nineteenth, Roosevelt decided to make his move and end the gridlock. From Georgia, where he was vacationing, he sent Stettinius a telegram and told him to invoke his name. The language the president used in this message was vague and hazy, leaving Stettinius uncertain of what he should do. He sat down at his desk, picked up the telephone, and called the president. Failing to get through, he called Harry Hopkins. After some discussion, the two of them concluded that the president wanted Stettinius to write a message, sign Roosevelt's name, and give it to Connally to use with the difficult senators. Shortly after this conversation, the president's secretary returned Stettinius's call. She told him that Roosevelt wanted him to write a note,

using his name. The secretary of state sat down and composed the presidential message. In the statement, Stettinius declared Roosevelt's unconditional support for the group of nominees and said the president would resubmit in January any name the Senate failed to confirm. Stettinius sent the message to Connally as a telegram. After reading the note, Connally remarked that it would end the filibuster. Connally said Guffey "melted away" when he read the telegram. The note removed the rationale for resisting the nominations. There was no way to stop the names from going forward. The Senate could only delay the appointments. Still, Connally was taking no chances. His concern for Clayton, a fellow Texan, showed when he entered sixty letters and telegrams supporting his nomination into the *Congressional Record*.⁶⁰

The Senate approved every nomination. The roll calls of these confirmations reveal interesting facts. Pepper, Chandler, Guffey, and Murray voted no on all but MacLeish. Bennett Champ Clark was another senator voting for MacLeish. He "astonished the gallery" when he said he would support the poet-librarian. Still, MacLeish had the closest margin of approval, 43 to 25. Most voting against him were Republicans, but not all Republicans were against him. Nor was this vote a function of political ideology or foreign policy outlook. Conservatives and isolationists were on both sides of this vote. There was no pattern to the outcome. Most voting against MacLeish cast their ballots for personal reasons. Clayton's vote was another interesting case of rhetoric and reality being out of sync. Despite the liberal rhetoric, despite Clayton's conservative southern Democrat credentials, most of the opposition came from conservative southern senators rather than New Deal liberals. Most were from cotton-producing states and opposed his ideas on cotton subsidies.⁶¹

Although the actions of the Senate that December seemed "weird, strange, and unusual" to contemporary observers, close examination reveals that most of what happened did make sense. Although the rhetoric was highly partisan, politics had little to do with the matter. Conservatives and liberals, Republicans and Democrats, isolationists and internationalists, at one time or another joined against these nominations. The senators acted to protect the legitimate institutional prerogatives of the U.S. Senate. Motivation in particular cases varied, but as a whole the Senate let the president know that it intended to have a say in the making of U.S. foreign policy. The Senate had no intention of being left behind in the planning for the postwar world. So as 1944 turned into 1945, the Senate told the juggler he had another ball to handle—an assertive and aggressive legislature that would not be taken for granted.

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Notes

1. Tom Connally as told to Alfred Steinberg, *My Name Is Tom Connally* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1954); Bernard A. Drabek and Helen E. Ellis, eds., *Archibald MacLeish: Reflections* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), pp. 160-62; Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: Norton, 1969), p. 90.

2. Scott Donaldson, *Archibald MacLeish: An American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), p. 379; Robert A. Divine, *Second Chance: The Triumph of Internationalism in America during World War II* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), p. 254; Waldo Heinrichs, *American Ambassador: Joseph C. Grew and the Development of the United States Diplomatic Tradition* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1966), p. 371; Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Warren Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); Fredrick W. Marks III, *Wind over Sand: The Diplomacy of Franklin Roosevelt* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988).
3. Roosevelt to MacLeish, June 9, 1943, Roosevelt Folder, box 19, Correspondence File, Papers of Archibald MacLeish, Library of Congress (hereafter referred to as LC); MacLeish's vague memories also support this interpretation. Drabek and Ellis, *Reflections*, p. 160.
4. Kenneth S. Davis, *FDR: Into the Storm, 1937-1940—A History* (New York: Random House, 1993), p. 586; Roosevelt to MacLeish, June 9, 1943, Roosevelt Folder, box 19, Correspondence File, MacLeish Papers, LC.
5. MacLeish to Roosevelt, November 8, 1944, in R. H. Winnick, ed., *Letters of Archibald MacLeish, 1907 to 1982* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), pp. 324-25.
6. Thomas M. Campbell and George C. Herring, eds., *The Diaries of Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., 1943-1946* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1971), pp. 184-85.
7. *Ibid.*; December 15, 1944 entry in John Morton Blum, ed., *The Price of Vision: The Diary of Henry A. Wallace, 1942-1946* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), p. 404. Drabek and Ellis, *Reflections*, p. 160.
8. MacLeish to Lippmann, August 21, 1944, Lippman Folder, box 14, Correspondence File, MacLeish Papers, LC; emphasis in the original. MacLeish to Allen Grover, November 3, 1944, in Winnick, *Letters*, pp. 323-24.
9. Acheson, *Present*, p. 90.
10. Roosevelt to MacLeish, December 1, 1944, Roosevelt Folder, box 19, Correspondence File, MacLeish Papers, LC.
11. Department of State, *Bulletin*, vol. 11, December 10, 1944, p. 685. The nominations of Dunn and Holmes were delayed for four days, until Congress approved two new positions for the State Department.
12. *Congressional Record*, 78th Cong., 2d sess., 90, pt. 7:8901-2, 8634.
13. The *Christian Science Monitor*, December 5, 1944, p. 8; the *Dallas News*, December 6, 1944, p. 10; *Chicago Sun*, December 5, 1944, p. 20; and the *Washington Star*, December 5, 1944, p. 9. Also see the editorials from the *Syracuse Post Standard*, December 5, 1944, p. 12; *Newark Star-Ledger*, December 5, 1944, p. 14; *Hartford Courant*, December 5, 1944, p. 10.
14. *Philadelphia Record*, December 6, 1944, in *Congressional Record*, pp. 8900-8902.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 8901.
16. *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, December 8, 1944, p. 22.
17. *Congressional Record*, p. 8902.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 8901-5.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 8905-6.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 8906-8.
21. The *Times-Picayune* cartoon is printed in Campbell and Herring, *Diaries*, p. 195.
22. Clayton to Peyton, January 9, 1945, folder 4; Clayton to Crow, December 16, 1944, folder 1, box 30, Papers of William Clayton, Harry S. Truman Library (hereafter referred to as HSTL); MacLeish to Stettinius, December 9, 1944, Stettinius Folder, Box 21, Correspondence File, MacLeish Papers, LC.
23. Democrats Edwin Johnson of Colorado and Richard Russell of Georgia, and Republican Robert Taft of Ohio were conservatives voting yes. Yet, other conservatives voted no. They included Republican Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan, and Democrats Millard Tydings of Maryland and Peter Gerry of Rhode Island. There was a similar divide among liberals and moderates of both parties. Republican George Aiken of Vermont joined Democrats Joseph Guffey of Pennsylvania and Burton Wheeler of Montana in voting yes. On the other hand, Republican Arthur Capper of Kansas and Democrat Tom Connally of Texas voted no. *Congressional Record*, p. 8908.
24. Calendar Notes, December 9, 1944, sec. 1 folder; Calendar Notes, December 13, 14, 1944, sec. 2 folder, box 224, Papers of Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., University of Virginia (hereafter referred to as UVA).
25. Acheson, *Present*, p. 90.

26. *Nation*, December 9, 1944, pp. 703-4; *Washington Post*, December 7, 1944, p. 1; *Washington Post*, December 8, 1944, p. 8; *Washington Post*, December 9, 1944, p. 10; *Washington Post*, December 11, 1944, p. 13; *Washington Post*, December 12, 1944, p. 1; *Washington Post*, December 13, 1944, p. 1; *Atlanta Constitution*, December 8, 1944, p. 14; *Chattanooga News-Free Press*, December 11, 1944, p. 15; *Toledo Times*, December 11, 1944; and *Baltimore Sun*, December 8, 1944, p. 16; *Newsweek*, December 25, 1944, p. 27.
27. Campbell and Herring, *Diaries*, p. 194.
28. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Nominations, Department of State, Hearings 78th Cong., 2d sess., On nominations of Joseph C. Grew to be Undersecretary of State, Nelson A. Rockefeller to be Assistant Secretary of State, Archibald MacLeish to be Assistant Secretary of State, Julius C. Holmes to be Assistant Secretary of State, James C. Dunn to be Assistant Secretary of State, Dec. 12 & 13, 1944* (Washington, DC, 1944), pp. 1-5.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-29; *Newsweek*, December 25, 1944, p. 28.
30. Since no work on Clark exists, this portrait is drawn from David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), pp. 123-24, 247, 254, 317-18; the biography is Bennett Champ Clark, *John Quincy Adams, "Old Man Eloquent"* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1932).
31. Donaldson, *MacLeish*, p. 340.
32. "Some American Author-Diplomats," December 14, 1944, State Department Folder, box 53, State Department File, MacLeish Papers, LC; *Nominations, Department of State*, pp. 29-35.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-38; *Newsweek*, December 25, 1944, p. 28.
34. *Los Angeles Times*, December 13, 1944, p. 1; *Washington Post*, December 13, 1944, p. 1.
35. Stettinius to MacLeish, December 12, 1944, Stettinius Folder, box 21, Correspondence File, MacLeish Papers, LC; Stettinius to Clayton, December 12, 1944, William Clayton Folder, box 681; Stettinius to Grew, December 12, 1944, Joseph Grew Folder, box 693, Stettinius Papers, UVA.
36. *Nominations, Department of State*, pp. 35-78; Clayton to Williams, December 13, 1944, folder 6, box 31, Clayton Papers, HSTL; *Los Angeles Times*, December 15, 1944, p. 4.
37. *Los Angeles Times*, December 14, 1944, p. 1; Donaldson, *MacLeish*, pp. 220-46; Archibald MacLeish, "Preface to an American Manifesto," in *A Time to Speak* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1941), p. 17; *Nominations, Department of State*, p. 79.
38. *Nominations, Department of State*, pp. 79-83.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85; *Time*, December 25, 1944, p. 17; Clark quoted from Archibald MacLeish, "The Lost Speakers," in *Public Speech* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1936). It is easier to find this poem and the ten other *Public Speech* poems in Archibald MacLeish, *Collected Poems, 1917-1982* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985); *Los Angeles Times*, December 14, 1944, p. 1; Drabeck and Ellis, *Reflections*, p. 162.
40. Drabeck and Ellis, *Reflections*, p. 161.
41. The Adams biography is the only book under Clark's name in the Library of Congress. Given that fifty years have passed since this incident took place, it is possible that the Library has lost the book. Such a development, however, is unlikely. Like most oral histories, MacLeish's account is full of minor factual errors. He most probably incorrectly remembered the book as a work of poetry, rather than a biography. Drabeck and Ellis, *Reflections*, p. 161.
42. *Los Angeles Times*, 17, 1944, p. 1; *Los Angeles Times*, December 15, 1944, p. 4; *Los Angeles Times*, December 14, 1944, p. 2; the *Rocky Mountain News* editorial in *Congressional Record*, p. 9658; *Washington Post*, December 13, 1944, p. 10; *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, December 14, 1944 in Archibald MacLeish Folder, Biography Section, Los Angeles *Herald-Examiner* newsclipping file, Regional Cultural Historical Collection, University of Southern California (USC).
43. *New York Times*, December 15, 1944, p. 1; *Time*, December 25, 1944, p. 17; *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, December 15, 1944, in Archibald MacLeish Folder, Biography Section, Los Angeles *Herald-Examiner* newsclipping file, Regional Cultural Historical Collection.
44. *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, December 15, 1944, in Archibald MacLeish Folder, Biography Section, Los Angeles *Herald-Examiner* newsclipping file, Regional Cultural Historical Collection (USC); *New York Times*, December 15, 1944, p. 1; *Washington Post*, December 15, 1944, p. 1; *Los Angeles Times*, December 15, 1944, p. 1; Campbell and Herring, *Diaries*, p. 198.
45. *Washington Post*, December 16, 1944, p. 8; *Washington Post*, December 20, 1944, p. 15; *Washington Times-Herald*, December 14, 1945, p. 5; *Washington Daily News*, December 13, 1945, p. 8; *New York Times*, December 15, 1944, p. 18.

46. MacLeish to Stettinius, December 15, 1944, Stettinius Folder, box 21; MacLeish to Luce, January 22, 1945, Luce Folder, box 14, Correspondence File, MacLeish Papers, LC.
47. Warren V. Bush, ed., *The Dialogues of Archibald MacLeish and Mark Van Doren* (New York: Dutton, 1964), p. 34; Drabeck and Ellis, *Reflections*, pp. 161-62.
48. *New York Times*, December 16, 1944, p. 32; *New York Times*, December 17, 1944, p. 32; *Los Angeles Times*, December 16, 1944, p. 4; *Los Angeles Times*, December 17, 1944, p. 9.
49. Campbell and Herring, *Diaries*, p. 199; MacLeish to Stettinius, December 12, 1944, Stettinius Folder, Department of State File, box 53, MacLeish Papers, LC.
50. *New York Times*, December 17, 1944, p. 32.
51. The results of a Gallup poll on Stettinius's approval rating can be found in the *Los Angeles Times*, December 16, 1944, p. 4.
52. *Congressional Record*, pp. 9636-37.
53. *Ibid.*, pp. 9639-44.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 9644.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 9652.
56. *Washington Post*, December 18, 1944, in *Congressional Record*, pp. 9650, 9652.
57. December 15, 1944 entry in Blum, *The Price of Vision*, p. 404.
58. Memorandum of Conversation December 15, 1944, sec. 2 Folder; Summaries of Telephone Conversations, December 18, 1944, sec. 3 Folder, box 236, Stettinius Papers, UVA; Clayton to Maud, December 19, 1944, folder 1, box 30; Clayton to Castle, December 20, 1944; Clayton to Dulles, December 19, 1944, folder 6, box 31, Clayton Papers, HSTL.
59. Calender Notes, December 4, 5, 1944, sec. 1 Folder, box 224, Stettinius Papers, UVA; *Congressional Record*, pp. 9647, 9706.
60. Calender Notes, December 18, 1944, sec. 3 Folder, box 224, Stettinius Papers, UVA; *Congressional Record*, pp. 9681-82, 9733-36; although MacLeish was in some ways more controversial than Clayton, there is no correspondence about him in Connally's papers. Nomination File, box 515, Papers of Tom Connally, LC; *New York Times*, December 20, 1944, p. 1; *Los Angeles Times*, December 20, 1944, p. 1.
61. *Congressional Record*, pp. 9716-43; *New York Times*, December 20, 1944, p. 1.