

McCarthy Era Politics:



The Ordeal of Senator Lester Hunt

The fear of communism constituted one of the most explosive elements in American life and politics in the first two decades following World War II.

By Rick Ewig

The anti-communist hysteria reached its peak in the early 1950s, the so-called “McCarthy Era.” Although Senator Joseph R. McCarthy became a *symbol* during these years of America’s fight against “godless communism,” in *reality* it was a much broader phenomenon. Wide segments of American society—entertainment, business, labor and education—were caught up in the anti-communist ferment. Democrat Harry S. Truman, with his 1947 loyalty review program and his red-baiting of Progressive Party candidate Henry Wallace in the 1948



Sen. McCarthy arrives at a Milwaukee dinner in his honor, Dec. 11, 1951. A few days before McCarthy began his virulent anti-communist campaign, Congressman Richard Nixon of California spoke at Lincoln Day Dinners in Cheyenne and Laramie and warned that "one of the major problems facing this country today—Communists high in the government of this country."

presidential election, added a distinctly bipartisan flavor to the anti-communist attack—a fact until recently overlooked by historians.¹

Because of the celebrated congressional investigations of the period and McCarthy's own presence in the United States Senate, few institutions in American government touched by the communist controversy have received more scholarly attention than the senate in the early 1950s. Clearly at times the "politics of fear" virtually paralyzed both parties in the upper house, and—given the nearly even division among Democrat and Republican members—party strategists sometimes yielded to the temptation to use the communist issue (or related symbolic questions) to win marginal seats. A few senators—William Benton, Ralph Flanders, Margaret Chase Smith and others—spoke out forcefully against "McCarthyistic" tactics, but until 1954, they were largely unsuccessful. Wyoming's Lester C. Hunt's more modest role in the controversy has largely

been ignored by academics, a somewhat unusual fact in view of rumors linking the senator's suicide to "McCarthyistic" tactics by his opponents.²

Lester C. Hunt, born in 1892 and raised in a poor Illinois family, put himself through St. Louis University school of dentistry by working as a switchman on a railroad. Graduating in 1917, he opened a practice in Lander, Wyoming, having first become familiar with the town by pitching for its semi-pro baseball team between spring and fall semesters and working as a bartender in the evenings. Hunt continued his dental career until the 1930s when politics became a full-time occupation. Fremont County voters elected him to the state legislature as a Democrat in 1932, and in 1934 he won his first of two terms as Wyoming's Secretary of State. First elected governor in 1942, he served six years in the state house resigning midway through his second term after a successful race for the United States Senate.

Coming from a sparsely-populated conservative Western state, Hunt's main preoccupation was constituent service, but he was not adverse to taking liberal stands if principles about which he felt strongly were involved. In his 1948 senate campaign, Hunt advocated a national health program in which the federal government would help finance medical research and education and assist in the building of hospitals. He also supported a reduction of taxes by giving proportionately greater relief to the millions of low income families and repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act which had "encouraged litigation in labor disputes and disappointed the established American policy of collective bargaining."³ While in the senate, Hunt co-signed a letter addressed to President Truman calling for worldwide communication and disarmament.⁴ Senator Hunt and the views he held can be classified as those of a moderate liberal.

Serving on the Armed Services Committee, on the District of Columbia Committee, briefly on the Rules and Administration Committee until he became a member of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce and on the Kefauver Crime Investigation Committee, through which he became a minor national figure, Hunt maintained his political independence. He supported Eisenhower's foreign policy, and when offered a position on the Democratic Steering Committee of the Senate, he refused, saying he wished to be free of any obligations so he could act independently on all senate matters. Hunt "was willing to forego the policy of his party whenever he felt it came in conflict with the best interests of the people he had been chosen to serve."⁵

As Sen. Hunt entered office, a growing preoccupation with domestic communism was beginning to take shape in Washington. The House Un-American Activities Committee searched for communist influence in government and entertainment; the Hiss Case attracted popular attention; and the Soviet Union's detonation of its first atomic bomb set off widespread fear of foreign espionage. Hunt shared the broader concern with communism,⁶ but he did not approve of the methods employed in fighting the "red menace" by such men as McCarthy. According to Lester Hunt, Jr.,

... one of the things that was important to him about McCarthy, not so much the whole red thing, [that] my father was not particularly worried about. He was afraid of communists, too, so it didn't worry him that McCarthy was out to get the reds if there were any, as much as it did the way he went about it, and the use he made of his senate position [which] my father really resented.⁷

Hunt did not believe the office of United States Senator should be degraded in the anti-communist crusade.

Sen. Hunt had a strong personal dislike for McCarthy. He saw the junior senator from Wisconsin as "an opportunist, and liar, and drunk . . . We used to sit on our front porch and could see McCarthy guzzling away with his girlfriend in the back yard. To my father that was just awful, that kind of behavior. It demeaned the

senate, demeaned the position, made people think poorly of politicians." On one occasion, a plane carrying both Hunt and McCarthy was forced down in Pittsburgh, compelling the two senators to share a hotel room for the night. According to his son, ". . . Hunt was in . . . fits. You [would have] thought he had just been with a murderer or a Nazi. He felt unclean about having associated with that person. He really had a strong distaste for him personally."⁸

Apparently, Sen. Hunt first confronted the McCarthy techniques during the Malmedy hearings. A number of German prisoners, who had been convicted and sentenced for killing approximately 150 unarmed American soldiers at the Belgian village of Malmedy during the Battle of the Bulge, accused their United States Army interrogators and prosecutors of beating and torturing them, and tricking them into signing confessions. An Armed Forces Subcommittee, composed of Hunt, Democrat Estes Kefauver of Tennessee and Connecticut Republican Raymond Baldwin, investigated the charges. Senator McCarthy, although he was not a member of the subcommittee, took up the cause of the German prisoners. The chairman, Senator Baldwin, in general, defended the military proceedings, while McCarthy, possibly to endear himself to Wisconsin's large German population and perhaps gain some national headlines, attacked the Army. While never questioning the affidavits of the German prisoners, the Wisconsin Senator accused the American interrogators and prosecutors of lying and demanded they take lie-detector tests. When the subcommittee rejected this idea, McCarthy charged his colleagues were conducting a "whitewash" and stormed out of the proceedings.

Today when I find the junior Senator from Wyoming and the Senator from Connecticut very obviously afraid of the results of a lie-detector test, I can only conclude that I have confirmed all of the things that disturbed me greatly all along, and that was that this committee is not concerned with getting the facts . . .⁹

While the subcommittee ultimately upheld most of the original military verdicts, Baldwin had been so stung by the incident he shortly thereafter seized the opportunity to leave elective politics for a seat on the Connecticut Supreme Court.¹⁰ Although rather subdued throughout the hearings, Sen. Hunt must have been somewhat pained by the encounter.

Sen. McCarthy easily made the transition from defending German prisoners to attacking people he considered communists. Although he had dabbled in the issue before,¹¹ McCarthy's anti-communist campaign really began February 9, 1950, in Wheeling, West Virginia, when he accused the State Department of harboring 205 known communists or party loyalists. On February 20, he took his case to the senate floor and detailed 57 cases of "known" communists in the Department of State—a move which led the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to set up a subcommittee to investigate the charges.¹²

The Democrats on the subcommittee, led by chair-

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man Millard Tydings of Maryland, found McCarthy's charges to be unsubstantiated. The Democratic majority report accused the Wisconsin Senator of conducting a "fraud and hoax" and "perhaps the most nefarious campaign of half-truths and untruth[s] in the history of the Republic."¹³ The Tydings report became an issue in partisan politics, with the Democrats generally supporting it and the Republicans calling the investigation inadequate. Maine Senator Margaret Chase Smith and six other Republican moderates issued a "Declaration of Conscience" acknowledging the communist threat, but also charging that the senate had become a "forum of hate and character assassination sheltered by the shield of congressional immunity."¹⁴ Most moderate Republicans, however, still considered the Tydings report as excessively partisan and resisted the efforts of the Democrats to shift the focus of attention from communism to McCarthy's tactics. With the tacit support of the Republican party, McCarthy continued to speak of "reds" in government, unimpeded by the subcommittee's majority report.¹⁵

The Wisconsin Senator also turned his attention to the 1950 elections, and one in which he was directly involved was John Marshall Butler's successful quest for Tydings' senate seat. McCarthy, "nourishing a desire for revenge," joined Butler in his campaign by giving speeches, financial support and aid in producing campaign literature.¹⁶ The *Washington Times-Herald*, owned by Robert R. McCormick and published by his niece Ruth McCormick Miller, supported Butler and attacked Tydings on the editorial page while also publishing, at a nominal cost, the campaign pamphlet "From the Record," which accused Tydings of conducting a "whitewash" instead of an investigation and listed other unsubstantiated

"facts" about the communist leanings of Tydings and his wife. The Maryland Democrat attempted to counter the "whitewash" charge by pointing out that McCarthy had refused to repeat the charges without the benefit of congressional immunity, but he lost the election after the Butler forces distributed a doctored "composite" picture of Tydings listening intently to Earl Browder, the leader of the United States Communist Party.¹⁷ Two observers concluded that McCarthy and the McCormick press had participated in ". . . the foulest episode in recent American political history . . . [,] approaching Hitler terrorism."¹⁸

McCarthy's distorted anti-communist campaign against Tydings was not an isolated incident in 1950. In Idaho, Senator Glen H. Taylor, who had run for vice-president on Henry Wallace's Progressive Party ticket in 1948, was seeking reelection against Republican hopeful Herman Welker, a Payette attorney. With the aid of the *Idaho Daily Statesman*, a Boise newspaper which had always been critical of Taylor, Welker successfully linked Taylor to the communist cause and defeated the incumbent. The political editor of the *Daily Statesman* conceded that he had purposely ran a campaign "under the direction of my publisher and editor, to destroy a person and that person's philosophy."¹⁹

Such techniques of political campaigning as practiced against Tydings and Taylor worried other senators. Not only did the McCarthyistic tactics frighten senators, but so did the presence of McCarthy. Many believed at the time that McCarthy had defeated Tydings, and by 1953, the Wisconsin Senator had personally taken credit for nearly a dozen victories. Although subsequent research has shown that his senate colleagues exaggerated McCar-

Sen. Welker standing in front of Lincoln statue. Welker was a leader of the group which opposed efforts to censure Sen. McCarthy in 1954.



ty's electoral influence, at the time, it seemed very real.²⁰ Clinton Anderson, Democrat from New Mexico, publicly pondered what use opponents might make of a picture he had once seen of a skinny-dipping colleague.²¹

As a result of the tactics used against Tydings, the Senate Privileges and Elections Subcommittee investigated the Maryland election. The subcommittee's report recognized the insidious part McCarthy had played in Butler's campaign, and although the subcommittee members left little doubt about their hostile attitudes toward McCarthy's activities, they phrased their report in words upholding senatorial tradition and courtesy, a fact diminishing its immediate impact. The report also failed to suggest any action against Butler and only vaguely referred to measures to deal with such future misdeeds. The Maryland Report was only a slight reproach, and although it would play an important role in McCarthy's eventual censure, the immediate effects were minimal.²²

McCarthy, meanwhile, continued to ignore senatorial courtesy, which in time led the senate to take action against him. Senator William Benton, Democrat from Connecticut, hoped to use the Maryland Report to have McCarthy expelled from the senate, and in August of 1951, asked the Privileges and Election Subcommittee to explore expulsion charges against the Wisconsin Republican. Most senators, seeing little precedent for expulsion and fearing an open fight with McCarthy, hoped to back away from Benton's resolution; unquestioningly some hoped Wisconsin voters would oust McCarthy in the 1952 election, thereby resolving their problem. McCarthy, however, continued on the attack against several colleagues, particularly Thomas Hennings of Missouri, a member of the Elections Subcommittee. McCarthy called upon the Missouri Senator to resign his subcommittee post because a law partner of Hennings had once defended a communist and because Hennings remained as legal counsel for the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, which, according to McCarthy, opposed his anti-communist fight along the same lines as the communist *Daily Worker*.²³ Unable to overlook McCarthy's disregard of senate norms any longer, the subcommittee in late 1951 began investigating Benton's charges.²⁴

The steps taken against McCarthy by the senate amounted to little, however, as he was able to stymie most assaults by attacking his accusers. McCarthy verbally assaulted the subcommittee members, instituted a two-million dollar libel suit against Benton and in April of 1952, introduced Senate Resolution 304, a proposal to investigate Benton's conduct when he served in the State Department. With the defeat of Benton in the 1952 election and McCarthy's own reelection, the hope of forceful action against the troublesome senator dimmed. The subcommittee's report of January, 1953, listed McCarthy's abuses, but did not recommend any specific action against him. He had ridden out the storm, but senate opposi-

tion had begun to form against him and the practices he epitomized.²⁵

While Benton and others waged a direct frontal attack, various senators attempted to halt McCarthy and his abuses indirectly by introducing proposals for structural reform in the senate. In January, 1951, Paul Douglas, Illinois' highly respected senator, suggested that people attacked by a committee be able to insert into the permanent record a letter of rebuttal, to testify on their own behalf, to cross-examine their accusers and to have the right to call supportive witnesses. On behalf of nine other Democrats and eight Republicans, Senator Estes Kefauver sponsored a resolution similar to that of Douglas.²⁶

Sen. Hunt, meanwhile, hoped to halt the broader abuses involved in the tradition of congressional immunity. Hunt had recognized the dangers inherent in such an atmosphere of abuse when he noted in 1951 that ". . . [t]here have been many suicides due to the smearing received either in Committee hearings or from remarks made in the United States Congress."²⁷ Congressional Bill S.782, introduced by Hunt in early 1951, provided "for civil suits against the United States by persons suffering damages as a result of defamations committed by Members of Congress in the course of their official activities."²⁸ Outraged by senatorial attacks on the President, cabinet members and other high officials,²⁹ Hunt cited three particular dangers in an article in the *New York Times Magazine* of June 24, 1951. First, "unscrupulous" legislators, by bringing false charges against government employees, might undermine any confidence the American people had in public servants. Second, a congressman, with no fear of retribution, could verbally attack an individual, thereby giving himself unjustified publicity and possibly becoming a "man to be feared." Third, the person attacked could be placed in double jeopardy, first being tried in the press and Congress, and then possibly in a court of law.³⁰

While Democratic Representative Winfield K. Denton from Indiana sponsored Hunt's bill in the House,³¹ most legislators apparently felt the proposal too extreme, and it failed in Congress. Hunt believed, however, that if certain members of Congress would not abide by the "rules of justice and fair play," then the remaining legislators should take "drastic steps" to control the culpable ones.³² He continued to speak out on this issue, but the needed support never coalesced.³³

Meanwhile, Hunt observed the use of the communist issue in Wyoming when Republican Frank Barrett defeated veteran Democratic Senator Joseph O'Mahoney in the 1952 election. Of course other issues were involved in the campaign, but Barrett used the "red" issue effectively by accusing O'Mahoney of being "part of the Democratic 'Red coddling' and corruption and bungling which had nearly lost the peace after World War II."³⁴ Sen. McCarthy, campaigning in Fremont County, Wyoming, on behalf of Barrett, supported the Republican





Sen. McCarthy and Dwight Eisenhower in 1952 campaigning on the Eisenhower Special.

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candidate's promise to drive the communists out of government. McCarthy's reception clearly distressed Lester Hunt.

I remember in the fall of 1952 when the Senator spoke in our county and the gentleman who introduced him put his arm around him and said, "I am beginning to love Joe McCarthy", [sic] and I fear Senator McCarthy made a most favorable impression on the people attending that picnic.³⁵

After the election of Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1952, Sen. Hunt hoped the new president would help undercut McCarthy's bases of support inside the Republican party. Seeing the Wisconsin Senator's star descending, Hunt, in March of 1953, predicted an open break between the Administration and McCarthy.³⁶ Eisenhower, however, fearing McCarthy would only gain additional publicity from such an intraparty fight, adopted a much more passive attitude than Hunt anticipated.³⁷ By March of 1954, Hunt's optimism had faded as he believed it is "hardly to be expected that Eisenhower could control McCarthy even if he took a stand . . . The encouragement that the Senator has received all along from members of his own party is responsible to a great degree for the situation we are now in."³⁸

Some of Hunt's concern over the volatile anti-communist issue may well have sprung from his own political situation. Given the nearly even split in the senate, his seat was almost certain to be hotly contested by the

Republicans in 1954. At the same time, moreover, physical and emotional strain on the 61-year-old senator had begun to mount. In January of 1951, he had had a minor operation, and in 1952, he had had a cyst removed from his side. Following that operation, his hands would swell when he exerted himself physically.³⁹ His brother Clyde's suicide on April 8, 1952, must also have affected Hunt emotionally.⁴⁰

Another stressful period occurred after his son's arrest and conviction on a morals charge. On June 9, 1953, Lester C. Hunt, Jr., the president of the student body at the Episcopal Theological School of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and an activist in the fight against what he believed to be attacks on civil liberties, was arrested in a Washington, D.C., park after agreeing to engage in a homosexual act. Because the charge was only a misdemeanor and his first offense, the police agreed not to prosecute Hunt, Jr., and the young man shortly thereafter went to Cuba, where he worked for the Episcopal Church for the summer. Meanwhile, a friend of Sen. Hunt's in Wyoming apparently received a call from Senator Herman Welker, promising that Hunt, Jr., would not be prosecuted if Hunt himself did not seek reelection.⁴¹

Refusing to be "blackmailed" out of office, Hunt rejected the offer, after which Welker along with Senator Styles Bridges of New Hampshire, Chairman of the

Republican Campaign Committee, and a right-wing Republican newspaper apparently carried through with the threat.⁴² On July 3, three weeks after the Hunt arrest, the McCormick-owned *Washington Times-Herald* printed a story on the incident. At the same time Welker and Bridges seem to have contacted Inspector Roy Blick, Assistant to the Deputy Chief of the Morals Division of the Metropolitan Police Department. The two senators allegedly attempted to pressure Blick into having Hunt, Jr., prosecuted. Disregarding Blick's arguments that normal procedure had been followed in the Hunt case, Welker said he might be obligated to make a speech on the senate floor on the matter. In October, 1953, Hunt's case came to trial.⁴³

Judge John J. Malloy found Lester Hunt, Jr., guilty of soliciting a plainclothes police officer for lewd and immoral purposes, and concluded the trial with the statement that ". . . [t]he charge . . . [was] one of the most degrading that . . . [could] be made against a man."⁴⁴ Instead of filing an appeal, which only would have attracted more publicity, Hunt, Jr., paid the \$100 fine.⁴⁵

Sen. Hunt feared his son's trial would be used against him in his race for reelection. "If the opposition brings this up in the Senate race," he allegedly told Drew Pearson, "I shall withdraw." Hunt also was reported to have told a member of Pearson's staff that he could not bear to face his senate colleagues and might not ever appear on the senate floor again.⁴⁶ Sen. Hunt also felt a good deal of parental guilt. According to Hunt, Jr., "I think my father was very upset and he felt a real guilt about neglect, things like working so hard, not paying attention to me. He thought it might have made a difference. He didn't talk about it much, but it was pretty clear."⁴⁷ Obviously this unhappy event affected Sen. Hunt very deeply.

The fear that his son's incident might be used against him — that the facts "would find their way into every mailbox in Wyoming"⁴⁸ — plus a variety of other problems clearly contributed to an ambivalence Hunt felt about running for reelection. He did not want it to appear as if he had deserted the Democratic party, and yet he would have preferred not to run if a reason could be found to justify that course of action. Writing to Dr. P. M. Cunningham, Hunt stated:

The desire to control the Senate is intense among both the Democrats and Republicans, and I think Bob [Kerr, Democrat from Oklahoma] is right — my Democratic colleagues would not feel as kindly toward me if I were not a candidate as they would if I did try and then was defeated.⁴⁹

A few months later Hunt wrote to Henry Watenpaugh.

Would you be kind enough some time during the month of February to give me your suggestions with reference to running again. I am not looking for encouragement, Henry. Fact of the matter is I would appreciate some discouragement if I could get enough to justify my getting out of the game.⁵⁰

After a period of genuine ambivalence, however,



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Above: Frank Barrett. Below: Styles Bridges.



STYLES BRIDGES PAPERS, NEW ENGLAND COLLEGE

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Hunt announced his decision to seek reelection in April of 1954. Explaining why he chose to run, Hunt wrote:

... as I surveyed the field in Wyoming, I couldn't think of another Democrat that could make the race for the Senate. I could not bring myself to letting down those fine friends, like yourself who have stood by me all through the years.⁵¹

Optimism prevailed as it was believed that even Hunt, Jr.'s, trial, if used, would work to Hunt's advantage.

Personally, I think that from a political standpoint any effort that Lester's opponents try to make of his unfortunate family experience will not only mitigate against them but will boomerang to the point that they will forever leave their opponent's personal misfortune out of a political campaign.⁵²

Such optimism was apparently justified as Sen. Hunt remained personally popular in his home state. Having never lost an election, and after defeating the incumbent senator in 1948 by over 20,000 votes, his chances in 1954 looked good. Former Wyoming Senator Joseph O'Mahoney observed that "... [r]eports from Wyoming have continued to be very encouraging and I feel confident ... that he will be reelected."⁵³ The results of a statewide poll showed Hunt receiving 54.4 percent of the votes cast.⁵⁴

Despite optimism about his chances in Democratic circles, Hunt was apparently under intense and mounting pressure to reverse his decision. A pro-Hunt legislator, Robert S. Lowe, later charged that Hunt's home and office phones were tapped and his Washington apartment once ransacked, and that his son's trial would be exploited in the campaign if Hunt ran again.⁵⁵ Apparently unable to stand the escalating pressure and harassment, Hunt withdrew from the race in June.⁵⁶ It is unclear what exactly caused Hunt to change his mind so suddenly, but one can surmise that the fear of his son's trial being used against him in a campaign, which would not only reflect poorly on his son but possibly also on what he perceived to be his failure as a father, must have been one factor in his decision.

Not only was Hunt pressured not to run again, but also to resign immediately. If his seat were vacated, Wyoming's Republican governor, C. J. Rogers, could appoint a Republican senator to finish out Hunt's term, thereby giving the Republicans an immediate gain in the hotly contested senate. High level Republican officials tried to buy Hunt off by offering him a \$15,000 per year position on the Federal Tariff Commission⁵⁷ — a practice apparently not uncommon. Leonard W. Hall, Republican National Committee Chairman, admitted this general practice in a letter to White House Chief of Staff Sherman Adams. Being concerned with the possibility of such sensitive negotiations becoming public, which certainly would have embarrassed Hunt, Hall wrote:

... [A] Democrat incumbent would be put in the position of dealing with us behind the leadership of his own party and instead of accomplishing our objective — gaining a close seat in the crucial Congressional fight next November — we would probably end up destroying a Democrat politically who was otherwise friendly.⁵⁸

at experience of a suicide in a family increases the likelihood of other family members committing suicide.”⁷⁰

Sen. Hunt did leave several letters on his desk that morning, but none of these gives any explanation which sheds light on the real reason or reasons. One was to Per Spencer, the president of the Sinclair Oil Company, asking him to help Lester, Jr., find a job. Another was to his wife and was just “an ordinary sort of note,” and the third was to his son, simply saying that it had nothing to do with him.⁷¹ Most of the newspaper reports explained his death by stating that Hunt was despondent over his health. At the Senator’s funeral, the Hunt family learned from Dr. Pearly Cunningham, a dentist from Cheyenne and dental school classmate of Hunt, that the Senator had told him he had leukemia.⁷² While acknowledging the health worries, columnists Drew Pearson and Marquis Childs for the first time wrote articles publicly accusing Welker and Bridges of attempting to “blackmail” Hunt and they linked these activities to the suicide.

Shortly thereafter, Welker and Bridges attempted to refute the Pearson-Childs charges. A conversation was transcribed between Welker, Bridges, Inspector Roy Blick and Kenneth Darnall Wood, a United States Prosecutor. After this conversation Blick signed an affidavit on July 1954, in which he certified and stated:

1. That Senator Bridges of New Hampshire did not

call me to his office to discuss the so-called Hunt case.

2. At no time anywhere did Senator Bridges of New Hampshire or Senator Welker of Idaho hand me an envelope or any papers.

3. At no time and no place did Senator Bridges of New Hampshire or Senator Welker of Idaho say to me or to anyone in my presence: “Inspector, this is your resignation. If you do not prosecute the Hunt boy, your resignation will be accepted immediately.”⁷³

This might be considered unimpeachable proof that Pearson’s allegations were false, but a close textual study of the affidavit reveals that all Blick did was cast doubt upon the specifics of Pearson’s charges, not the charges themselves. Blick never really denied that Welker and Bridges had applied pressure to have Hunt, Jr., prosecuted. He only denied some of the details in the Pearson account. This attempt at vindication is indeed a feeble one and leads one to believe that the general allegations were accurate.⁷⁴

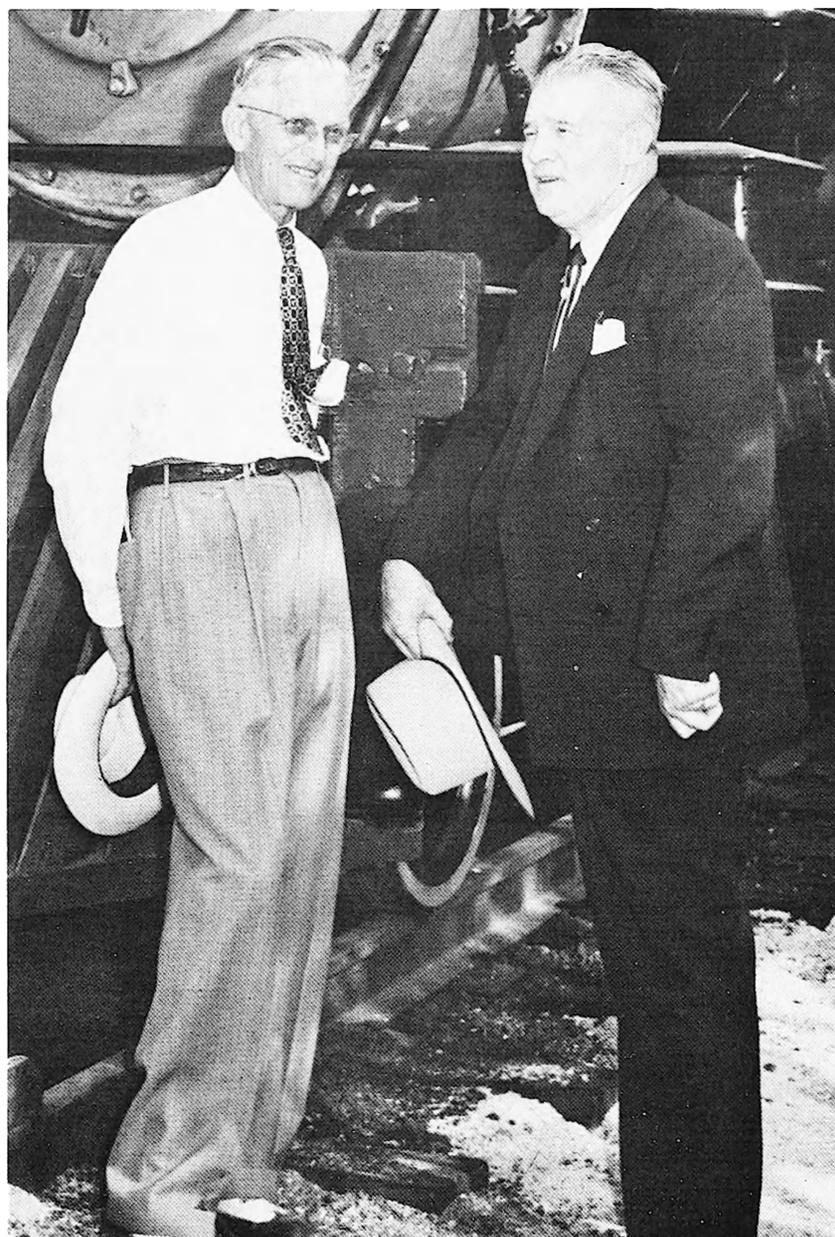
Hunt himself, moreover, had apparently discussed the alleged “blackmail” with a member of Pearson’s staff and several other political friends and relatives. William M. Spencer, a cousin of Sen. Hunt and the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the North American Car Corpora-



*Senators O'Mahoney
and Hunt.*

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Senator Hunt (right) and unidentified man.

tion in Chicago, wrote a scathing letter to Herman Welker after the Idaho Republican eulogized Hunt in the senate.

I was shocked when I read this. It recalled to my mind so vividly my conversation with Senator Hunt a few weeks before he died, wherein he recited in great detail the diabolical part you played following the unfortunate and widely publicized episode in which his son was involved.

Senator Hunt, a close personal friend of mine, told me without reservation the details of the tactics you used in endeavoring to induce him to withdraw from the Senate, or at least not to be a candidate again. It seems apparent that you took every advantage of the misery which the poor fellow was suffering at the time in your endeavor to turn it to political advantage. Such procedure is as low a blow as could be conceived.

I understood, too, from Senator Hunt, that Senator Bridges had been consulted by you and approved of your action in the matter.⁷⁵

Joseph O'Mahoney, who ran for Wyoming's vacant senate seat in 1954 and defeated the Republican nominee, knew of this attempt at keeping Hunt from seeking reelection when he wrote,

As you know, my candidacy this year was not prompted by any personal desire for a return to public life, but because of the peculiar circumstances which existed, namely the tactics employed against Senator Hunt, and the thought that if I did not run the reactionary Republicans might control the Senate by default.⁷⁶

- ment in an orderly, complete and rapid way; That a United Nations Police Force be established in accordance with the original intention of the Charter which shall be superior in size and armament to any forces available to the member nations for the maintenance of civil order; And, finally, that the proposal be permanently in effect and repeatedly offered until it is accepted." This letter was signed by Ralph E. Flanders, Lester C. Hunt, H. Alexander Smith, Walter F. George, Estes Kefauver, Margaret Chase Smith, Robert C. Hendrickson, Charles W. Tobey, Lister Hill, Mike Monroney, Edward J. Thye, A. Willis Robertson, John C. Stennis, Brooks Hays, Laurie Battle, A. S. J. Carnahan, with authorized signatures by James C. Auchincloss, Frances P. Bolton, Walter H. Judd, Christian A. Herter, Robert Hale and John W. Heselton. Letter to the President, February 26, 1951, Official Files, Box 1075, 394-B-Disarmament 1945-April 1951, Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri.
5. Woody, "Senate Career of Lester C. Hunt," p. 31.
 6. One person who feared the communist threat was a 12-year-old girl from Detroit, Michigan. She sent a letter to President Truman in which she wrote: "My dear Mr. Government, if you want to be elected next election do something about the communists. You should get at least a small group of of 100 or 200 men such as army, navy, marines, coast gard's at every water system, phone system, radio system and air port station if you don't the communist government will be telling you when to take a bath." Miss Mary Alyce Dwyer to the President, n.d., Official Files, Box 880, File no. 263 (1948), Truman Papers.
 7. Personal interview with Lester C. Hunt, Jr., Chicago, Illinois, December 29, 1979.
 8. *Ibid.*
 9. United States Congress, Senate, 81st Congress, Committee on Armed Services, *Hearings on Malmady Massacre Investigations* (Washington, 1949), p. 637.
 10. Griffith, *The Politics of Fear*, pp. 20-26; Fried, *Men Against McCarthy*, p. 38; and Richard Rovere, *Senator Joe McCarthy* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1959), pp. 37, 111.
 11. For a detailed account of McCarthy's early use of the communist issue see Michael O'Brien, "The Cedric Parker Case, November 1949," in Griffith and Theoharis, eds., *The Specter*, pp. 226-238.
 12. Griffith, *The Politics of Fear*, pp. 48-60.
 13. Fried, *Men Against McCarthy*, p. 86.
 14. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
 15. *Ibid.*, pp. 58-94.
 16. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
 17. *Ibid.*, pp. 122-153.
 18. Edward and Vera Slaven to William Benton, August 14, 1951, Box 1, Folder 2, William Benton Papers, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.
 19. F. Ross Peterson, "McCarthyism in the Mountains, 1950-1954," in Thomas Alexander, ed., *Essays on the American West, 1974-1975* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1976), pp. 49-54.
 20. The best scholarship on this is Fried, *Men Against McCarthy* and Griffith, *The Politics of Fear*. The conservative Tydings had survived an attempt by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to "purge" him in the 1938 primaries. James T. Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal: The Growth of the Conservative Coalition in Congress, 1933-1939* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), pp. 279-284.
 21. Fried, *Men Against McCarthy*, p. 141.
 22. *Ibid.*, pp. 149-153.
 23. For a more detailed study of Hennings' role see Donald J. Kemper, *Decade of Fear: Senator Hennings and Civil Liberties* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1965), pp. 51-73.
 24. Fried, *Men Against McCarthy*, pp. 198-203.
 25. *Ibid.*, pp. 204-218.
 26. *Ibid.*, pp. 194-195.
 27. Lester C. Hunt to Mr. Bernier, October 22, 1951, Box 14, Lester C. Hunt Papers, Western History Research Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.
 28. United States Congress, Senate, 81st Congress, *A Bill Providing for Civil Suits Against the United States by Persons Suffering Damages as a Result of Defamations Committed by Members of Congress in the Course of Their Official Activities*, Congressional Bill S.782, February 5, 1951.
 29. *Wyoming Eagle*, September 22, 1950.
 30. "Dangers in Congressional Immunity," *New York Times Magazine*, June 24, 1951, Section 6, p. 14.
 31. *New York Times*, January 30, 1951, p. 18.
 32. *New York Times*, December 22, 1950.
 33. In September, 1952, Hunt denounced "McCarthy's Lie Technique" and stated that McCarthy had not found any communists. "He has not, I predict he will not. If you tell a big enough lie and tell it often enough, someone is bound to believe [it]." *Wyoming Eagle*, September 26, 1952. Speaking from a position of respect, the Senator from Wisconsin was believed by many. "Last night I listened to a speech by Senator Joseph McCarthy. Senator McCarthy gave proof that our Ambassador at Large, Philip Jessup has Communistic tendencies. Surely the Senator would not make such a statement unless he had absolute proof that it is the truth." G. C. Hemphill to President Truman, August 23, 1951, Official Files, Box 1757, OF-3371; Truman Papers.
 34. Barton R. Voigt, "Joseph C. O'Mahoney and the 1952 Senate Election in Wyoming." (Master of Arts Thesis, University of Wyoming, 1973), p. 18.
 35. Lester C. Hunt to Wandell Elliott, March 12, 1954, Personal Box, Hunt Papers. Governor Barrett presented McCarthy to the crowd at the Diversion Dam on Sunday, October 12, 1952, saying: "I love, admire and respect him as an outstanding citizen of the United States and as a Senator." *Wyoming State Journal*, October 14, 1952, p. 1. In his speech to the estimated 3,500 listeners, McCarthy called the Democratic party the "Commie-crat" party. "Getting down to cases in the Communism-in-government issue, McCarthy likened hunting Communists to killing skunks, which he recalled as a disagreeable, but necessary, task of his boyhood. In both, 'the worse you smell, the more successful you are,' the fiery Senator said." When McCarthy asked, "Do you want the skunk hunting stopped?" the crowd roared back "No!" "McCarthy closed his speech with another ringing appeal to elect Republican candidates all down the line, and the crowd—obviously in complete agreement all afternoon—shouted and clapped its approval." *Riverton Review*, October 16, 1952, pp. 1, 5.
 36. *Wyoming State Tribune*, March 23, 1953; *Casper Tribune-Herald*, March 24, 1953.
 37. President Eisenhower explained why he did not publicly oppose McCarthy. "As for McCarthy. Only a short-sighted or completely inexperienced individual would urge the use of the office of the Presidency to give an opponent the publicity he so avidly desires. . . . Permit me to say that I think there would be far more progress made against so-called 'McCarthyism' if individuals of an opposing purpose would take it upon themselves to help sustain and promote their own ideals, rather than to wait and wail for a blasting of their pet enemies by someone else. Frankly, in a day when we see journalism far more concerned in so-called human interest, dramatic incidents, and bitter quarrels than it is in promoting constructive understanding of the day's problems, I have no intention whatsoever of helping promote the publicity value of anyone who disagrees with me—demagogue or not!" President Eisenhower to Dr. Milton S. Eisenhower, October 9,

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1953, Ann Whitman Files, Box 3, DDE Diary October 1954 (4), Eisenhower Papers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

- 38. *Laramie Bulletin*, March 25, 1954.
- 39. *New York Times*, January 7, 1951, p. 46; *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 20, 1954, p. 1.
- 40. *Denver Post*, April 8, 1952, p. 1; April 9, 1952, p. 40.
- 41. Letter to author from Mike Manatos, Lester Hunt's Administrative Assistant, April 30, 1980; Excerpt from the Drew Pearson Program, heard at 6:00 p.m. over WABD-TV (NY) and Dumont Television Network, June 20, 1954, Styles Bridges Papers, New England College, Henniker, New Hampshire; Drew Pearson article in *Rawlins Daily Times*, June 23, 1954, p. 2, *Casper Morning Star*, June 22, 1954, p. 8, *Rock Springs Daily Rocket*, June 23, 1954, *Northern Wyoming Daily News*, June 23, 1954, and *Laconia [New Hampshire] Evening Citizen*, June 23, 1954. Later cited as Pearson article, June, 1954.
- 42. People in the 1950s did not view homosexuality with tolerance. Society considered this type of behavior abnormal and a sickness which required medical attention. A 1950 Congressional report examining the employment of homosexuals in government defined a homosexual as a pervert lacking in "moral fiber," who "violate[s] moral codes and laws and the accepted standards of conduct. . . ." Because of their vulnerability to blackmail, homosexuals were seen as prime targets for foreign governments recruiting espionage agents in this country. United States Congress, Senate, 81st Congress, 2nd Session, Subcommittee on Investigations Report submitted to the Committee on expenditures in the Executive Departments, *Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government*, Document No. 241, (1950), pp. 1-8. Homosexuality could also damage a political career. Allen Drury gave an example of this in his 1959 novel, *Advise and Consent*, partially based on Hunt's case. Persons of all political persuasions would consider using it. "Today we received a letter from a purported Army lieutenant claiming he had been picked up in the Wardman Park by McCarthy, gone with him to McCarthy's home, and while the Lieutenant was half drunk, McCarthy committed sodomy. He offered to testify to this effect and said he knew other officers whom McCarthy had picked up. He claims McCarthy promised him a transfer and never got it." Whatever the reason, homosexuality could be used as a weapon. Memorandum from Ralph Mann to William Benton, January 3, 1951, Box 4, Senate Privileges and Election, William Benton Papers. Alger Hiss' defense wanted to discredit Whitaker Chambers by showing him to be a homosexual, among other things, and therefore part of their investigation concentrated on this aspect. However, this defense was not used because it was feared the prosecution would counterattack with allegations of Timothy Hobson's homosexuality. Hobson was Hiss' stepson. Allen Weinstein, *Perjury: The Hiss-Chambers Case*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), pp. 383, 583, and *passim*.
- 43. Pearson article, June, 1954.
- 44. *Washington Times Herald*, October 7, 1954, p. 5.
- 45. Senator Hunt ". . . was sensitive about his political reputation, . . . we were often cautioned that we had to behave in a certain fashion, because it would win you or lose you votes. There was a lot of that going on in our lives, . . ." Interview with Hunt, Jr. "The Trial of Buddy Hunt proved to be a heart-rendering experience for the Senator, . . . because he felt so deeply that it was a reflection upon his family." Letter to author from Mike Manatos, April 30, 1980. The Wyoming papers and their respective counties which carried a story on Lester Hunt, Jr.'s trial are: Albany County - *Laramie Republican Boomerang*; Carbon County - *Rawlins Daily Times*; Laramie County - *Wyoming State Tribune* and *Wyoming Eagle*; Natrona County - *Casper Tribune-Herald* and *Casper Morning Star*; Platte County - *Guernsey*

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- “L. C. Hunt, Senator, Possibilities,” received May 3, 1954, Alpha file on Lester C. Hunt, Eisenhower Papers. One of those listed was for the Tariff Commission, with a yearly salary of \$15,000 for a six-year term.
- Leonard W. Hall to Sherman Adams, June 15, 1954, Records of Leonard W. Hall, Box 84, 24-F Personal #1 1954, Eisenhower Library.
- Casper Tribune-Herald*, June 20, 1954.
- Joseph O’Mahoney to Milton Coffman, July 16, 1954, Box 180 Spindle File, O’Mahoney Papers.
- “Regrets exceedingly at this date to advise you that, due to personal reasons beyond my control, namely health, I am compelled to withdraw my announcement as a candidate for reelection to the United States Senate.” Hunt to J. J. Hickey, Democratic State Central Committee, June 4, 1954, Personal Box, Hunt Papers.
- Wyoming Eagle*, June 22, 1954.
- Denver Post*, June 20, 1954, p. 12.
- “. . . I talked with Doctor Fitzgibbon, who told me of your conversation with him on Saturday, and I can only say that I appreciate and understand your reasons.” Dr. Fitzgibbon was a member of the American Dental Association. Francis J. Garvey to Lester C. Hunt, June 8, 1954, Personal Box, Hunt Papers. Drew Pearson wrote in his diary on June 19, 1954: “About two weeks ago Hunt went out to the Naval Hospital and afterward announced that he was retiring from the Senate because of his health. Actually Dr. Calvert says there’s nothing wrong with his health.” Tyler Abell, ed., *Drew Pearson Diaries, 1949-1959* (New York: Holt, Rinehard and Winston, 1974), p. 323.
- Besides health, another reason given by Hunt was the physical strains that a campaign would entail. “. . . and knowing the rigors of a state wide campaign, I have decided to withdraw from the political scene, and will not be a candidate for re-election.” Lester C. Hunt to L. H. Heyl, June 18, 1954, Personal Box, Hunt Papers. In May, Hunt’s campaign plans had included renting a bus, having it “properly painted” and an organ installed, and then campaigning throughout the state in it. Hunt to Senator Earle Clements, May 25, 1954, Clements Papers.
- T. A. Larson wrote that Senator Hunt was “overwhelmed by personal and political problems.” T. A. Larson, *History of Wyoming*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 572. On Friday, June 18, 1954, Senator McCarthy stated that he was investigating a Democratic senator for “just plain wrongdoing,” not connected with the communist issue. *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 19, 1954, p. 9. Shortly after Hunt’s death, Senator Karl Mundt of South Dakota, a friend of McCarthy, stated that Hunt was “positively” not the man McCarthy had in mind in his earlier statement. *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 20, 1954; *New York Times*, June 20, 1954. Either some people had connected the two events or there was a fear that they might be linked. See Abell, ed., *Drew Pearson’s Diaries*, p. 321.
- A Capitol police guard reported that Senator Hunt on his way to his office “appeared to be in exceptional spirits. . . . [and] commented pleasantly on the weather. . . .” The policeman paid no attention to the rifle as Hunt “frequently carried things into the building from his car.” Memorandum of Private W. Paul Flynn to Office of the Captain, June 19, 1954, Capitol Police Records, Senate Detachment, Washington, D.C. Carl Solberg wrote that “. . . the miasma of intimidation and slander that McCarthyism spread over Washington in the spring of 1954 had everything to do with Hunt’s death. The Grand Inquisition had reached into the Senate and claimed a victim.” Carl Solberg, *Riding High: America in the Cold War* (New York: Mason & Lipscomb-Publishers, 1973), pp. 188-190.
68. Maurice L. Farber, *Theory of Suicide* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1968), p. 17.
69. G. Donald Niswander, Thomas M. Casey, and John A. Humphrey, *A Panorama of Suicide: A Casebook of Psychological Autopsies* (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, 1973), p. xi.
70. David Lester, *Why People Kill Themselves: A Summary of Research Findings on Suicidal Behavior* (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, 1972), p. 26.
71. Hunt, Jr., interview. Senator Estes Kefauver wrote: “He [Hunt] had some sensitivities which caused him to be worried about his son and he took his own life.” Estes Kefauver to Ralph Jerome Woody, July 24, 1963, Judiciary Committee Correspondence—88th Congress Box, Estes Kefauver Papers, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee.
72. Hunt, Jr., interview.
73. Affidavit dated July 9, 1954, and undated transcript. Bridges Papers. An undated note was also found in the Bridges Papers containing Hunt, Jr.’s, address, phone number, date and place of arrest, “arrested soliciting as a queer,” and the phrase “gone to Cuba.” Pearson had wanted to publish the “blackmail” story in December of 1953 - six months prior to Hunt’s death, but Tracy McCracken, influential Wyoming Democratic publisher had “pleaded” with him not to do so. At that time Hunt had told Jack Anderson of Pearson’s staff that publication of the story would cause his wife to “die” from additional agony and embarrassment. Because of the strong objections of Welker and Bridges, Pearson claimed to have had a “whale of a time” getting Bell Syndicate to distribute the column he wrote subsequent to Hunt’s suicide. Abell, ed., *Drew Pearson’s Diaries*, pp. 321-323.
74. Some critics charged that Pearson’s article was only one of his usual attacks against prominent political figures with whom he disagreed politically. For an example of this see Pearson’s treatment of James Forrestal in Jack Anderson and James Boyd, *Confessions of a Muckraker: The Inside Story of Life in Washington During the Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson Years* (New York: Random House, 1979), pp. 122-145. An editorial in the pro-Bridges *Manchester Union Leader* dubbed Pearson’s allegations a pro-communist attack. “This left wing campaign will be directed by a group of Communists, pro-Communists and liberals who make their headquarters in New York City, Washington and other points on the Eastern seaboard. These left wingers are out to destroy any senator who has stood up against Soviet Russia.” *Manchester [New Hampshire] Union Leader*, July 15, 1954, Bridges Papers. This attempt at red-baiting fails in its efforts to explain Pearson’s allegations while completely ignoring the pressure obviously applied on Hunt. Pearson did give Bridges an opportunity to refute the charges by inviting the Senator to write a column on any subject he desired. Bridges, however, refused, saying “. . . that if I had the gift and power to make each of the 850 words a jewel of rhetoric or if you should increase your offer a million fold, there would be no atonement for the damage you have done. *Words once engraved on the human intellect can never be erased by more words or polished gems of thought.* [emphasis added.] Styles Bridges to Drew Pearson, August 16, 1954, Bridges Papers.
75. William M. Spencer to Herman Welker, December 29, 1954, Bridges Papers.
76. Joseph O’Mahoney to J. B. Sullivan, November 17, 1954, Box 183, Correspondence #1, O’Mahoney Papers.