Ike's Letters to a Friend, 1941 -1958

Griffith, Robert W.

Published by University Press of Kansas

Griffith, Robert W.
Ike's Letters to a Friend, 1941 -1958.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/84001

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2881429
In early January, Eisenhower sent Swede a reproduction of one of his paintings. He wrote again, two weeks later, but only to bemoan the fact that he had so little time to write. By mid March, when he finally wrote at greater length, he was preoccupied with, among other things, his legislative program, a mild recession, the attempt by Ohio Republican John W. Bricker to win passage of an amendment to the Constitution limiting the president's power to make treaties, the French struggle against the Vietminh in Indochina, and the growing controversy between Joe McCarthy and the Army.

7 January 1954

Dear Swede:

Originally I had no thought of inflicting on my good friends the print that you will find coming to you in the mail. It is a reproduction of what I, with some embarrassment, call a "portrait" of Lincoln. The real reason that I am sending it is because I find myself surrounded only by people who are trying to keep my spirits at an all-time high and who, out of all reason, praise the amateurish effort of which you will now have a copy.
At the very least it brings to you my best wishes for a wonderful year in 1954.

As ever,

26 January 1954

Dear Swede:

The days go by at their accustomed pace, leaving little time for the more pleasurable pursuits of life such as indulging in correspondence with good friends. Even now I can do little more than to tell you again how much I enjoy your letters, and to urge you to write whenever you feel the impulse to do so.

Occasionally I run into old friends of yours who tell me they have been to Chapel Hill for a visit. Each time this occurs I make up my mind to send you a letter telling of the circumstances under which I encountered your friends.

As you now know from the total failure of such reports to reach you, my memory plays me tricks—and by the time I get to the office I am in the midst of politics, economics, education, foreign trade, and cotton and tobacco surpluses.

All of which is merely preliminary to asking that you give my love to Ibby, and of course, my warm regard to yourself.

As ever,

18 March 1954

Dear Swede:

I suddenly realize that too much time had elapsed since I last wrote you an intimate report on the “State of the Union.” I believe I did manage to congratulate you on your (non-existent, but nevertheless numerical) birthday, but it has been months otherwise.

The interval since the opening of this session of Congress has been turbulent, as reported too fully in the papers. The press has harped, or so it seems from this nerve center, on certain demagogic individuals and practices, and exaggerated, out of all proportion in
my opinion, their importance to the nation as a whole. These things, I am convinced, will run their inevitable course—and I refuse to deviate from my declared position, in spite of the urgings of some of my most valued friends and associates in government.

Three things have of this day occupied my time and attention. (I say three, excluding, of course, the inevitable handshaking or button-pushing ceremonies that seem daily and inevitably to intrude on the business of government.)

One of these problems is the recent declaration by the Secretary of Agriculture [Ezra Taft Benson] that as of April first supports for dairy products will be reduced from 90% of parity to 75%. This announcement is in accordance with common sense. It has, however, been widely interpreted as a violation of the principle of gradualism that we have advocated in flexible price supports. This may put us in a hole in establishing our sincerity when we talk of gradualism as a feature of the farm policy. In addition, there is no question that it will somewhat diminish the purchasing power of the people in the dairy producing states, and inevitably add to our burdens there. I personally think the Secretary of Agriculture made a mistake in failing to take smaller bites—though I hasten to add that he did so with my general approval and on his understanding of the law, believing it to be compulsory. The error, if any, was merely in failing to search for some means of acting a bit more gradually, even though we have butter, milk, cheese and all other dairy products flooding the country. In saying this I want to stress, too, that there is no man in government more dedicated and devoted, and more selfless and sincere, than is Ezra Benson.

Another problem of the day and of the past weeks (now successfully concluded as I dictate this around five o’clock) has been the struggle in the House over the Administration’s tax program. You know as well as I the attack the program has been under, and there is no need here to repeat the views I expressed in my television talk on Monday night. But I do want to say that I am firmly convinced that, under existing circumstances, the Administration’s bill is a well thought out program of tax reduction and economic stimulation. It is designed to do the greatest good for the greatest number of our citizens, under domestic and world conditions of this moment. The fact that the bill was successfully pushed through the House was due to the great work done by Charlie Halleck, Joe Martin [Speaker of the House] and a couple of others.
up on the Hill. On this particular issue I found the Administration
had the good solid team work in the House that it should have had
and did not have in certain other matters in the Senate, notably the
"Bricker Amendment."

The third major problem of the day is the increasingly bad
situation in Indo-China. As you know, the Vietminh continue their
assault on Dien Bien Phu, and the situation there becomes in­
creasingly disturbing. I hope the French will have the stamina to
stick it out; because a defeat in that area will inevitably have a
serious psychological effect on the French. I suspect that this
particular attack was launched by the Communists to gain an
advantage to be used at the Geneva Conference. At any rate, it is
just another of the problems that is dumped in my lap—in this
particular case, of course, there is little I can do except to wait it out
and hope for the best.

You must forgive my rambling—but I do find some release
from the tensions of the day in writing in this fashion. It provides
the next best thing to seeing you.

My love to Ibby, and of course, as always, the very best to
yourself,

As ever,

---

The war in Vietnam between the French and the Communist­
led Vietminh had been going on for eight years and was now
nearing its climax in a battle over the isolated French stronghold at
Dien Bien Phu. The French, though Eisenhower does not mention
it here, were appealing for United States intervention and had
received strong support both from Secretary of State John Foster
Dulles and from Vice-President Nixon. Eisenhower himself told a
press conference that Indochina was like a "falling domino" whose
collapse would threaten the entire Pacific basin; Nixon
would tell a meeting of newspaper editors that "we must take the
risk now by putting American boys in"; and the head of the Joint
Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Arthur W. Radford, would put the final
touches on Operation Vulture, a proposed American airstrike at
Dien Bien Phu. The French, however, were not willing to meet Eisenhower's conditions—a clear-cut commitment to independence for the Vietnamese, the “internationalization” of the war, and, implicit in this, a determinative role for the United States in its conduct.

The defeat of the French and the subsequent Geneva settlements provided a framework for peace in Indochina, though on terms that almost everyone recognized would quickly lead to Vietminh control of all of Vietnam. In its efforts to avoid this outcome, the Eisenhower administration would subvert the Geneva agreements and lay the groundwork for the expanded United States commitment that would occur under President's Kennedy and Johnson.

By April the army-McCarthy hearings were playing to a packed audience in the old Senate caucus room and to a national television audience of millions. The army, which had been harassed by McCarthy throughout 1953, had accused the senator of using his office to seek special favors for G. David Schine, a young staff member who had been drafted. McCarthy counterattacked by accusing the army of holding Schine as a “hostage.” The investigation of these charges and countercharges was conducted by the Senate's Subcommittee on Permanent Investigations, McCarthy's own committee, from which the senator had reluctantly stepped down.

Eisenhower was dismayed by the proceedings. As he suggests in this letter, quite typically, he would have much preferred a decorous and orderly investigation by an administrative agency such as the army's inspector general. He nevertheless stuck by his decision not to engage the senator publicly, though he was widely criticized for doing so. Eisenhower did move against McCarthy indirectly and through intermediaries. It would remain for the Senate itself to discipline McCarthy, however, which it did in late 1954 when it voted to censure him.
Personal and Confidential

27 April 1954

Dear Swede:

A few nights ago I made a talk before the American Newspaper Publishers' Association. In the course of the talk I urged the need for better understanding in America of today's domestic and world problems; I likewise urged the need for a greater two-way flow of information between us and nations abroad. I tried to point out that regardless of other means of developing understandings and providing information the most effective vehicle was still the publicity media of the several nations. The consequence of this kind of thinking is that newspapers have a very definite responsibility to our country to inform it accurately and adequately, and that while we must sustain the rights of a free press, it seems clear that the free press must try to promote reader-understanding as well as to cater to reader-interest.

To this talk I have had no adverse reaction from outsiders or laymen; but I have received a number of criticisms from publishers themselves. The central theme of the criticism has been "Why should he attempt to tell us about our business?" Personally I thought I was rather mild in expressing my feelings in the matter, but where I have made any attempt to reply to the friendly publishers who have shared this critical view, I have said only two things—first, "Are you operating a grocery store for immediate profit or do you regard the publishing of a newspaper as partaking of a public service? If the latter is the case, then you certainly assume responsibilities the discharge of which are of great interest to governmental officials."

My second observation has been, "When have you hesitated to tell me how to run my business? Admittedly I am a public servant and therefore subject, in all my public actions, to criticism. But, again, assuming that you do admit that the publishing of a newspaper should be as much a public service as a 'commercial venture' you are also to that degree a public servant and I have a right to criticize you."

Beyond this, I did not, of course, make any sweeping allegations against the American press. Consequently any hurt feelings must be because someone felt that the shoe fit—but uncomfortably.

124
In my last letter I remember that I mentioned Dien Bien Phu. It still holds out and while the situation looked particularly desperate during the past week, there now appears to be a slight improvement and the place may hold on for another week or ten days. The general situation in Southeast Asia, which is rather dramatically epitomized by the Dien Bien Phu battle, is a complicated one that has been a long time developing. It involves many talks on the international level and the frantic desire of the French to remain a world power, but at the same time defeating themselves through their deep divisions and consequent indecisiveness at home.

For more than three years I have been urging upon successive French governments the advisability of finding some way of "internationalizing" the war; such action would be proof to all the world and particularly to the Viet Namese that France's purpose is not colonial in character but is to defeat Communism in the region and to give the natives their freedom. The reply has always been vague, containing references to national prestige, Constitutional limitations, inevitable effects upon the Moroccan and Tunisian peoples, and dissertations on plain political difficulties and battles within the French Parliament. The result has been that the French have failed entirely to produce any enthusiasm on the part of the Vietnamese for participation in the war. (Incidentally, did you ever stop to think that if the British had, in our War of the Revolution, treated as equals the Americans who favored them—whom they called Loyalists and we called Tories—the job of Washington would have been much more difficult, if not impossible. I have read that when the entire colonial forces in the field numbered not more than twenty-five thousand, that there were fifty thousand Americans serving in some capacity with and for the British. Yet no really effective service was rendered by these people because the British persisted in treating them as "colonials and inferiors.")

In any event, any nation that intervenes in a civil war can scarcely expect to win unless the side in whose favor it intervenes possesses a high morale based upon a war purpose or cause in which it believes. The French have used weasel words in promising independence and through this one reason as much as anything else, have suffered reverses that have been really inexcusable.

The British are frightened, I think, by two things. First, they have a morbid obsession that any positive move on the part of the free world may bring upon us World War III. Secondly, they are
desperately concerned about the safety of Hong Kong. For the moment the Chinese Communists are not molesting Hong Kong and the British are fearful that if they should be identified as opponents of the Communists in the Indo-China affair, they might suffer the loss of Hong Kong at any moment. All this is conjecture, but in respect to this particular point, my own view is in almost direct opposition. I personally feel that if the Communists would take a good smacking in Indo-China, they would be more likely to leave Hong Kong severely alone for a long time. Moreover, if a "concert of nations" should undertake to protect Western interests in this critical section of the globe, it would appear that Hong Kong would almost automatically fall within the protected zone.

Just what the outcome will be, of course, is still largely a guess, but in any event I feel that the situation is a shade—but only a shade—brighter than it was a week or so ago.

The McCarthy-Army argument, and its reporting, are close to disgusting. It saddens me that I must feel ashamed for the United States Senate. Other than that, I doubt that I have any opinions on the subject that are greatly different from your own, so I will pass it up for the moment.

One of the features of service life that I miss in this job is an "Inspector General’s" service. Visitors here—usually meaning to be helpful—are quite apt to leave with me a hint that something is wrong here or wrong there, and sometimes these allegations or charges are of a grave nature.

In the Army it was so simple to turn to a properly trained and dedicated group any inspection job ranging from suspected peculation to plain incompetence, and it never occurred to me that a similar or equivalent agency would not be available in the Federal government. But there is no readily available agency to look into hints of this character. Even when they are referred to the interested departments of government, they are very likely to be handled in a rather lackadaisical manner for the simple reason that people are not accustomed to the standards of administrative accounting and responsibility that prevailed in the armed services.

* * *

I had two other subjects—but I stop here in desperation.

* * *

Love to the family.

As ever,
In regard to the development of natural resources, Eisenhower sought to replace what he called an "exclusive dependence on Federal bureaucracy" with "a partnership of state and local communities, private citizens, and the Federal Government, all working together." In practice, this meant a much greater role for the large private utilities. He tried especially hard to arrest the growth of the popular New Deal-spawned Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). The administration's attempt to replace a proposed TVA steam plant with one built by a private utility was abandoned, however, following revelations of conflict of interest in the celebrated Dixon-Yates controversy.

Finally, as this letter makes clear, Eisenhower also favored development, whether public or private, as opposed to the claims of conservationists. The Bureau of Reclamation's proposal to construct a large multipurpose project on the Upper Colorado River was opposed by conservationists because it authorized, among other things, the building of a dam and a reservoir within the Dinosaur National Monument. This particular provision was eventually dropped, however, before Congress completed its final action on the bill in 1956.

On a very different subject, the following letter reveals Eisenhower's strong commitment to the liberal trading policies of the Roosevelt and Truman administrations. He was under strong pressure from protectionists, especially in the conservative wing of his own party, to raise U.S. trade barriers. He resisted these pressures, complaining in his diary that many businessmen were "so concerned with their own particular immediate market and prosperity that they utterly fail to see that the United States cannot continue to live in a world where it must . . . export vast portions of its industrial and agricultural products unless it also imports a sufficiently great amount of foreign products to allow countries to pay for the surpluses they receive from us."
Dear Swede:

For a number of years I have been serving in posts that were considered by the press as possible sources of news. Consequently, I have become used to inaccurate reporting—I think it is not too much to say that, without checking, I believe no story in a newspaper that involves thoughts, ideas or quotations. I do like to read editorials merely to find out what editors are thinking about and what they believe that America is thinking about. Here, too, I am frequently disappointed by the apparent ignorance of the facts underlying some opinion or conviction expressed by the writer.

With your last letter you enclosed an editorial having to do with the dam that is under consideration for construction in Dinosaur National Park. The statement is made that the place will be ruined for use by the public; that its scenic beauty will be forever lost.

Now I have never visited the area and so I don’t want to appear to be as positive of the correctness of the views I express as was the writer of the editorial you sent. But I can’t help wondering whether he bases his own opinion on a personal visit and experience or on what somebody else has said.

In any event, the records show that last year, five hundred Americans visited the affected area. I am not going to try to express this figure in terms of percentage of 160 million people, but if you have time to figure it out, you will not be impressed by its size. I am told that erection of the dam, with the roads leading thereto and the existence on the artificial lake of a reasonable number of suitable boats, will make the area truly accessible to travelers. It is believed that the number of visitors will jump from a figure of five hundred to many thousands, and I am further informed that the lake waters will conceal so little of what is now visible as to be unnoticeable to anyone except a crank. Possibly I am misinformed, but I venture that the reports I have are as accurate as those on which the editorialist based his opinion.

He said the principal purpose of the dam was reclamation. It is not. He even suggested that atomic power would make dams and power projects useless. Someday perhaps they will. But at this
moment such a statement does not appear to me to be very potent as an argument.

As for the man who wrote the high tariff pamphlet, I hear these arguments all the time.

If it were possible to erect barriers against the trade of particular countries and to encourage trade from others, I could certainly favor some high tariffs. But this is not practicable both because of the existence of the "most favored nation clause" in our treaties and because in actual practice it would scarcely be enforceable.

Without going further afield, let us consider for just a moment the case of Mexico. We are her greatest customer; she must sell to us or her standard of living will go markedly down from even the low level at which it now exists. Already in that country there is a strong communist leaning among certain groups. Included among those individuals with such leanings is one of the most popular men in Mexico, ex President [Lázaro] Cárdenas. If we erect barriers against Mexican trade, I know that the possibility of her turning communist would mount rapidly. Our border with Mexico runs from Brownsville to the Pacific Ocean, and it is almost totally unguarded. The "wetback" problem arose out of the fact that we simply cannot provide the means to prevent Mexicans from going back and forth across the border, almost at will. If that country should turn communist, and without considering all the other evil consequences that would follow in the wake of such an event, just think of the job that we would have in closing that border tightly. The financial outlay alone would be colossal.

As of now we do not take too seriously any direct threat from Mexico. She is a weak country. But let her once form a partnership with Moscow and it takes no great imagination at all to see what would happen.

I have taken this one simple example to show that people ignore pertinent facts when they center their attention exclusively upon local matters. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that every domestic problem of any moment must, before it can be properly solved, be examined critically against the background of our international situation. This is what so many of the after dinner speakers forget.

There are a number of things on which we should possibly have higher tariffs than we do now. But the problem may not be solved merely through consideration of local "prosperity" but on
its effect upon practical cooperation among us and our international friends.

Of course I agree with the argument of the author that to throw our gates open now to "free trade" would be disastrous. But I might end this part of my letter by merely saying that anyone whose business and profits depend upon high protective tariffs is not, by any stretch of the imagination, a rugged individualist. He is just as much a kept man as is anyone who lives upon any other form of subsidy from the people of the United States.

Frankly, I think it almost idiotic to attempt any discussion of the tariff in a few paragraphs; the subject is so complex and intricate that the best that can be evolved in a short time is a few expletives, slogans and aphorisms.

When last I wrote to you, I talked something of Indo-China. That battle is now being waged as much in Geneva [where an international conference was taking place] as in the rice paddies of the Red Delta. In neither place are the French doing well. But one bright spot in the picture is that [Pierre] Mendès-France [premier of France] has turned out to be much more of a man than most people predicted. The next few days should determine what we are now up against in that area. I keep in close touch with the situation because I can imagine developments in Geneva that would make me go on the air with explanations to the people.

Congressional leaders still hope to adjourn by July 31st, but I must say that to me the prospects look very bleak. My own feeling is that I want them to go just as quickly as they will give me the great bulk of the program recommended to them for enactment. Already we know that there are certain items on which they won't act at this session or upon which they have acted unfavorably. But they still could make a very brilliant and fine record if they would just get going; and after all, I have to have something to fight about next session.

In the armed services I have been having a struggle with some of the civilian leadership. Whenever there comes up the subject of morale, some of my associates bring up calculations, in terms of percentages, of the disadvantages suffered by the armed services in the matter of pay. The answer they have is to "increase the armed services pay 5%." Such generalizations make me furious. For a long time I have preached such things for the armed services as:
a. Automatic increase in living allowances, based upon proper "norms."
b. Assurance to all career personnel of adequate quarters and, above all, adequate medical care for their dependents, under all circumstances.
c. Adequate survivors' benefits and pensions for dependents—whether active or retired.
d. More stable personnel policies to avoid the incessant moving around of families that now takes place because of some academic idea as to what constitutes a satisfactory "career."

When they get these things done, I am ready to examine the salary scales, but as of now I believe that, except possibly for junior officers, the salary scale is not half as important as the matters I have just mentioned.

You have probably read something in your newspapers about the struggle I am having with the fanatical supporters of TVA. The proposal I have made [to replace a proposed TVA steam plant with one built by private capital] might be challenged on the possible basis of violation of the letter of the law. But I believe that so far as logic and common sense are concerned, the proposal offers a good temporary solution to a problem that grows more difficult day by day. The facts are:

a. TVA is an existing fact, and there should be no disposition to destroy it or damage it.
b. Through TVA, supported in some part at least, by the taxes of the entire country, the Tennessee Valley area has available cheap power. Consequently, industries from other regions are showing a tendency to move into the Tennessee Valley so as to take advantage of these prices for power. Naturally, this arouses a fierce resentment on the part of competing industrialists and all the informed tax payers in other areas.
c. Because of the growing demand for power in the Tennessee region, there is now a shortage which must be supplied from somewhere.
d. The Federal Government, through the Atomic Energy Commission, is a great consumer of TVA power.
e. Consequently, the TVA fanatics assert that the Federal Government has the obligation of supplying this power.
f. Already the power potential of the streams in the region has been developed, and steam plants have been built by the Federal Government to firm up the water power of the dams already
constructed. All further development must be by steam; already one-half of the power being produced is from steam plants.

With these facts at hand, the questions that arise are: "is there any limit to the number of steam plants that the Federal Government should build in the region? Should the Federal Government, having built up the system to its existing extent, now require that the locality provide for itself any additional power that it needs?"

Admittedly, it has been extremely difficult to dig out all the pertinent facts. It is for this reason that, to head TVA, I have been desperately searching for a man who is experienced in hydraulic engineering and who is completely free from any political or ideological bias of any kind. I have finally hit upon a man [Herbert D. Vogel] whose entire life has been spent in the engineering profession and who has never been connected with politics in any way. I shall send his name soon to the Senate. The only instructions I am giving him are that he is to find out the facts and report to me on an objective basis; otherwise, he is merely to run the TVA as honestly and efficiently as he knows how, and make his recommendations to the Congress and to me based upon what he believes to be the best interests of the country.

But in the meantime we have the need for power. And if the Federal Government does not build the requested steam plants (located, incidentally, way out on the periphery of the region, at West Memphis), then the Atomic Energy Commission must purchase its power from private industry or the power shortage will merely grow more aggravated.

This is what I propose.

The reason that no private individual or municipality in the area can now build plants and distribute power, is that all the TVA contracts contain a clause giving to the TVA a monopoly.

It seems a strange thing when, in America, there is bitterly opposed a governmental proposal that seeks no more than practical opportunity in which to take a look to see what we are doing in some of these projects that bring the Federal Government into every facet and phase of our lives.

In permitting the incessant growth of the Federal Government, we have already drifted a long way from the philosophy of Jefferson. While he was not necessarily always right, he did have sense enough to know that if Federal authority should be extended throughout the country, through various subterfuges of corporations, authorities, loans and grants, it would eventually stifle the
individual freedom that our government was designed to protect and preserve.

This whole case reminds me of how much time a President has to spend in resisting pressure groups—each organized to gain for its members some advantage through Federal law or to make it possible for them to dig deep into the Federal treasury. At first blush it would not seem difficult to champion the cause of all the people against any particular segment thereof. But when you add up all the segments that have special interests in some kind of Federal preferment, the picture does not look so rosy. You might try listing them for yourself.

One of the things we need most in this country today is a general rainfall of about two inches over the entire country, and falling softly and gently over a period of about a week. If you can arrange this, you will make some of my troubles far less acute.

Give my love to Ibby and the family.

As ever,

P.S. This is really—in spite of its length—only a miniature of a day’s worries—problems—etc.

D.

By the time that Eisenhower wrote this letter he was deeply involved in the election campaign, to a degree all the more surprising given his repeatedly stated aversion to political campaigning. Despite his efforts, however, the Republicans lost control of both the House and Senate, and for the the next six years, Eisenhower would be compelled to work with a Congress that was organized by the opposition party.

In the following letter, Eisenhower provides a brief rejoinder to those who were charging that he was allowing John Foster Dulles to virtually run foreign affairs. And in his discussion of Earl Warren, whom he had named to the Supreme Court in March, he reveals a stunning misapprehension of both Warren and the civil rights issue. Eisenhower disagreed with the Court’s ruling in the Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, decision and would
later characterize the appointment of Warren as "the biggest damfool mistake I ever made."

23 October 1954

Dear Swede:

Your judgment on the spinning reel coincides exactly with mine. Since 1944 when I first encountered these gadgets in France, I have been the recipient of various types of spinners—I should say one arrives about every sixty days. I leave them to those who like them. For my own fishing, I keep half a dozen fly rods ranging from about 1-½ ounces to 4-½, and I keep three favorite casting rods. I think this combination ought to see me through the fishing seasons left to me.

I skip over your comments on the election campaign. I have appeared before a number of audiences, but I strive to deal only with substantive matters—with fact and logical deduction—while staying out of political bickering.

When you mention Adlai [Stevenson], I again find myself in complete agreement with you, except that I doubt that he is a very dangerous opponent. However, if he should slip into a position of real responsibility, he would represent a great risk for the country.

As to "four-headed" foreign policy, the Democrats never succeeded in keeping people like [Nevada’s Sen. Patrick] McCarran from sounding off when they so chose. So if a Republican Senator lets go once in a while, I don’t know what we can do about it, even though I deplore the misunderstandings they create.

So far as Dulles is concerned, he has never made a serious pronouncement, agreement or proposal without complete and exhaustive consultation with me in advance and, of course, my approval. If your friend Senator [Samuel J.] Ervin [Dem., N.C.] would take the trouble to look up the record, he would see that Nixon belonged in the same school, although he admittedly tries to put his pronouncements into more colorful language.

You are somewhat wrong in your statement, "I know that at one time you contemplated some really drastic action in Indo-
China. What I really attempted to do was to get established in that region the conditions under which I felt the United States could properly intervene to protect its own interests. A proper political foundation for any military action was essential. Since we could not bring it about (though we prodded and argued for almost two years), I gave not even a tentative approval to any plan for massive intervention.

You are right in your conclusion that the European situation looks somewhat better. By no means have I made up my mind finally on Mendès-France. For the moment, I accept your instinctive impression as my own.

As to appointments on the Supreme Court, I think one or two observations are applicable. Your implication seems to be that Governor Warren was a “political” appointment. It was most emphatically not.

That particular vacancy occurred most unexpectedly, and the particular qualifications in the individual that should fill it were something that I studied and lived with for a number of weeks. The Chief Justice has a great many administrative tasks, as well as obvious responsibilities involving personal leadership. Along with this, he must be a statesman and, in my opinion (since I have my share of egotism), I could not do my duty unless I appointed a man whose philosophy of government was somewhat along the lines of my own. All this finally brought me down to Warren, especially as I refused to appoint anyone to the Supreme Court who was over 62 years of age. It seems to me completely futile to try to use a Supreme Court vacancy as a mere reward for long and brilliant service. If I should be succeeded by a New Deal President, a judge who is now 69 or 70 would probably create a vacancy very soon to be filled by the left-wingers. So—it seems to me that prudence demands that I secure relatively young men for any vacancies that may occur. I wish that I could find a number of outstanding jurists in the low 50’s.

The segregation issue will, I think, become acute or tend to die out according to the character of the procedure orders that the Court will probably issue this winter. My own guess is that they will be very moderate and accord a maximum of initiative to local courts.

Give my love to the family.

As ever,
In the aftermath of the off-year elections, in which the Republicans had lost control of Congress, Eisenhower returned to the question of his candidacy in 1956 and to a general analysis of Republican politics. He makes clear here, as elsewhere, his contempt for Congress and its "demagogues," and his preference for administration over electoral politics. The letter ends with a frothy digression on "greatness."

8 December 1954

Dear Swede:

A new phase of political experience has begun for me. We have now reached the point where we have newspaper and radio argument as to whether or not I could be re-elected if I should be a 1956 candidate.

The effect on the individual (myself) of this argument is to stir up a reaction of "I will show them." Possibly, if I read the papers and listened to the radio as steadily as some others, I would be more influenced by this kind of thing. Actually I regard it as just "sound and fury" that does not raise in my own mind the slightest question as to the wisdom of my decision, long ago communicated to you.

While I don't recall the exact words of that letter [of 24 Dec. 1953], I think I did imply that the only thing that could possibly make me change my mind would be an unforeseen national emergency that might possibly convince me that it was my duty to stay on.

From the reports that come in to me, there appears to be no doubt that the dominant influence in the Democratic Party has come to be the CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations], or at least the CIO and the AFoF [American Federation of Labor] in combination. I am told that labor unions were by far the greatest contributors to the Democrats in the recent campaign, and if you

In view of all this, it would appear that the rift between the Southern and Northern Democrats would widen markedly, but so great is the politician’s thirst for power and personal prestige that philosophical and doctrinal differences are unimportant to partisans seeking office.

We have some splendid Southern Senators—George, Byrd, Robertson, Stennis, Price Daniel, Holland and Russell are examples of the kind of men that we should have in Washington.\footnote{The southern senators to whom Eisenhower referred were Walter F. George and Richard B. Russell of Georgia, Harry Flood Byrd and A. Willis Robertson of Virginia, John C. Stennis of Mississippi, Price Daniel of Texas, and Spessard L. Holland of Florida.} But it is almost amazing to realize that they are of the same political party as the others named above.

Yet this yawning chasm between the two wings of the Democratic Party does not appear to the public to be so formidable or paradoxical as does the much more publicized but less significant division in the Republican Party. In the Republicans you find no extreme leftists. [Wayne L.] Morse [a Republican Senator from Oregon who switched to the Democrats in 1952] deserted—thank goodness! We have what I like to call Progressive Moderates and the Conservative Rightists. However, these two groups often work in unison on important matters, notably national security, taxes, farm legislation, and so on. But our trouble has been that all of our constructive work accomplished through the support of practically every Republican in the Senate and in the House (with help from
Democrats of like convictions) has been overshadowed by the headline value of the McCarthy argument, the TVA filibuster, and the Bricker Amendment debates. These have come to mean "Republicanism" to far too many people.

The average level of ability, dedication and integrity is invariably higher in the Cabinet than it is among the politicians, where we find so many demagogues. The reason is that Cabinet members are selected person by person, normally on the basis of experience, ability, character, and standing in their several communities. This is the way mine were chosen! Others attain office through many means and methods—sometimes they are far from representative of America's best qualities. So it is lucky for a President that he is enabled to associate much more intimately with his own Cabinet than he does with politicians in general.

It is astonishing how infrequently anything of a partisan character is mentioned in the Cabinet; problems are discussed objectively and argument proceeds on the basis of bringing to bear every viewpoint on the specific project. Two of my most trusted advisors were, up until a few years ago, dyed-in-the-wool Southern Democrats. Yet this fact is one that I believe rarely occurs to any of the members of the Cabinet as we try to work out composite solutions for specific problems.

Incidentally, one of these old Democrats but now a Republican—Bob Anderson of Texas—is just about the ablest man that I know anywhere. He would make a splendid President of the United States, and I do hope that he can be sufficiently publicized as a young, vigorous Republican so that he will come to the attention of Republican groups in every state in the union. Another fine man is Herbert Hoover, Jr. In addition there are Dick Nixon, Cabot Lodge, Herb Brownell and Charlie Halleck. Some still believe that Harold Stassen has a political future, but others think he has more or less eliminated himself from serious consideration by the Republican Party as its future standard bearer.

Incidentally, there is one fact pertinent to a second term candidacy that many people seem to have overlooked. It is a tradition in this country that the moment a President publicly announces his determination not to seek re-election, his political influence disappears. From that day onward the leaders of his own party jockey for position in the hope of becoming his successor in the Presidency, while newspapers and the opposing party alike
lose interest in him because of his self elimination from the political future of the country.

Now here is the particular point I bring to your attention. We now have a constitutional amendment prohibiting to any man more than two terms as President. Consequently, any President who is elected for a second term has, on that date, been officially and irrevocably eliminated as a future candidate—and presumably as a real political influence.

The implication of this fact and this assumption is that only the most unusual of circumstances should induce any man to stand a second time for the Presidency.

Not long ago my old friend Winston [Churchill] reached the venerable age of four score. The occasion was made one of celebration throughout the Empire, and our own papers were filled with reminiscent accounts of his experiences and accomplishments. Some of these were, I thought, both reasonable and accurate; others extravagant. In reflecting on some of the statements made, I began in my own mind to arrange in priority of "greatness" the people I have known.

This is an interesting mental exercise because first one is compelled to define for himself the qualities and circumstances that enter into his own evaluations. (I have got the uneasy feeling that I may have talked on this subject to you before. If so, you can skip the next few paragraphs.)

I have long believed that no man can be classed as great unless:

a. He is either so pre-eminent in some broad field of human thought or endeavor as to have earned this classification by common acclaim

or . . .

b. He has, in some position of great responsibility, so discharged his duties as to have left a marked and favorable imprint upon the future of the society or civilization of which he is a part.

Plato would be an example of the first classification; George Washington of the second.

Greatness, of course, does not necessarily mean perfection. But I do think we have to make a distinction between a great man and a great specialist, as, for example, a great general.

Martin Luther was a great man; Napoleon was a great general. Indeed the latter had some of the qualities of a great man, but had obvious and glaring defects.
The qualities we seek in a great man would be vision, integrity, courage, understanding, the power of articulation either in the spoken or the written form, and what we might call profundity of character. The great specialist would be measured, I think, largely by results.

Now Churchill. Unquestionably he is a great politician and a great war leader. In addition, he has displayed many of the qualities of a great man. For my part, I think I would say that he comes nearest to fulfilling the requirements of greatness in any individual that I have met in my lifetime. I have known finer and greater characters, wiser philosophers, more understanding personalities. But they did not achieve prominence either through carrying on duties of great responsibility or through giving to the world new thoughts and ideas of such character as to bring to them by popular acclaim the title of great.

Of course I remember the old proverb that “the prophet is not without honor, save in his own country.” So I think that almost any of us is more likely to call a man great if we have known him only slightly or through casual reading than we are if we have been well acquainted with him personally or studied him too long. Yet three Americans whose lives most of us have studied fairly thoroughly stand up well against all these tests, even though each had his admitted weaknesses. They are Washington, Lincoln and Robert E. Lee. Some would add Jefferson and maybe Wilson.

Of Americans I have known personally, I think that George Marshall possessed more of the qualities of greatness than has any other. [Chancellor Konrad] Adenauer, of Germany, ranks high on my list. And Henry L. Stimson [former secretary of state and war] was another. Among those that the Congress had produced (now I am talking again of those of whom I have read as well as those I have known), I think John Quincy Adams would head my list. In his later years, Arthur [H.] Vandenberg [senator from Michigan] came close, and in his prime I think that Senator [Walter F.] George [Dem., Ga.] likewise did so.

In any event, one is struck by the fact that two centuries have produced but few individuals who we can without any hesitation put into the classification of great. All this is of no interest, but it does give you some understanding of the thoughts that began wandering aimlessly through my mind this morning as I have dictated between appointments. These included an appointment with an official of the Pocket Testament League, the President of
Saint Louis University, a new Minister from the Rumanian People's Republic, and the Ambassador of Honduras.

If there is any association of ideas between the things I have jotted down for you here and the presence of these individuals in my office this morning, I could not possibly trace it or explain it. Maybe you can.

In any event, give my love to the family, and, of course, all the best to yourself.

As ever,

P.S. I hope that my observation about greatness and its scarcity did not sound pessimistic. Long ago I learned to look for caliber or relative size in individuals rather than for perfection. So perhaps it is enough to say that with the principal officials of the Executive Department I am more than pleased. I am highly gratified with their performance and I should say that if today I could without question or confusion change any or all members of this organization, I would not remove more than two or three at the outside. Even in these cases I could not be too sure that a change would be an improvement.